

KATALONIA – DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL ACUITY

ABSTRACT

Developed as a mixed mode activity, KATALONIA is a team-based task-focused experience-based opportunity for students to review their capabilities and align them with present and future work and goals. Participants work in small teams to document in a formal and highly structured format their response to a 'Request for Tender' for provision of Trainer Training programs to deliver adult learning programs in a government department in a fictional developing country ('Katalonia'). They create and adopt the perspective of a professional consulting organization. Team members collaboratively define and individually adopt assigned 'roles' identified as essential to such an entity and important for winning the tender. Teams make a formal presentation to an Assessment Panel of Experts who are not known to the students.

KEYWORDS

Simulation; Immersive learning; Reflective practice; Professional Development; Project Management; Adult learning

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AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

KATALONIA assigns participants to a team (number of teams determined by class size with a minimum of 3 teams required) representing staff of a fictional consulting firm. Each team works best with five to seven members; therefore the minimum number of players is 15. Multiple groups - each of 15-20 participants - can be managed online.

KATALONIA can be used with adult educators, managers, learning and development specialists and both undergraduate and post graduate students. It is most effective in academic contexts where the intent is to generate a 'reality-based' experience of working to deadlines, defining individual and team responsibilities, researching client needs and context, developing appropriate responses to ill-defined but potentially rewarding work goals etc.



The fictional nation of Katalonia

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Participants learn to re-define and locate their present (and possible future) capabilities within current work-related contexts. There are opportunities for appreciating how differing skills, knowledge and values can be combined to create effective team approaches to complex tasks. They gain insights into the importance of understanding how personal values, work conditions, legal and physical requirements and 'bottom line' financial objectives all influence the eventual nature of learning design and shape appropriate responses to unfamiliar work-based needs.

The knowledge focus of KATALONIA is the development of skills based learning programs for staff nominated for appointment as Learning and Development specialists in a Government Department in a foreign country where different cultural, religious, and economic conditions apply. This scenario can be varied to suit quite diverse contexts. Essential elements are i) use of multiple teams all representing variants of one stakeholder group with competing/collaborative values and priorities; ii) focus on internal team-based negotiated collaboration to achieve externally driven goals; iii) understanding the nature of the specified context and its particular needs; iv) managing the complexity of applying current skills and knowledge in an unknown and unfamiliar context and set of requirements.

TIME AND SETTING

KATALONIA- as presently managed - involves three blocks of face-to-face team work and variable amounts (determined by the teams in their planning phase) of online interaction. As presently constructed for blended delivery, KATALONIA requires a minimum of about 20 hours of team activity (allocated over a semester). It can be adapted for any Learning Management System (LMS). The face-to-face activity requires a room with a flat floor and easily moveable furniture, as well as break-out spaces for small team work. Adaptation for fully online delivery may be possible.

RESOURCES

- The original KATALONIA materials are available from elyssebeth.leigh@uts.edu.au or kate.collier@uts.edu.au. At present the online version is situated within the LMS at UTS. Access is available on request.
- Minimum online support requirements are discussion board and document exchange facilities, synchronous and asynchronous chat and email. It is useful to keep in mind that KATALONIA evolved from an activity using face-to-face role play.
- For the face to face sessions, allow enough space for both small and large group activity. The formal presentation of proposals and debriefing can occur at both the level of team groups and whole class.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The resource kit contains a modified version of an actual call for tenders. It includes a detailed profile of the fictional country of Katalonia, complete with map. Documents in the kit are very specific in regard to what is required but deliberately less than fully helpful in guiding the teams. That is, they are no more than the usual set of complex documents provided to consultants.

Each team takes its own path; working out how to allocate tasks, complete the sequences of activities within the given time frames while staying focused as a team.

Teams arrange their own schedule of meetings between attendance periods and refine their understanding and expression of their stated goals, including preparation a complete set of tender documents and a formal presentation to the Review Panel.

DEBRIEFING

KATALONIA creates a quite stressful environment in which the external goal of achieving on time completion of the tasks is counter-balanced by the strength of the team (or otherwise). The debriefing process focuses on a range of professional development concepts, including teamwork; learning together; learning about other cultures and teaching/learning goals and purposes; developing understanding of how to identify and meet client needs from a distance; how to prepare budgets and project plans and training programs - and how to be prepared for the unexpected.

FACILITATOR EXPERIENCE

The facilitator must remain separate from the process – avoiding giving answers to questions about the mysterious KATALONIA. At the beginning of the process, groups may have quite different levels of awareness about the complexity of their task. Because of this the facilitator may need to ask (but **never** answer) guiding questions. As the teams develop answers to these hypothetical questions they develop appropriate directions for their team and project development. Such questions are used sparingly and only when it is clear that a group is losing track of their goals and purposes or are stuck on minor issues. A good eye for timing and a strong sense of equity is also important. Knowledge of the subject content is vital to assess the viability of proposed decisions and funding requests, and in this regard KATALONIA can be adjusted to address a number of content areas.

REUSABILITY

The KATALONIA role play can be customised to suit a variety of contexts in which multiple parties must learn to negotiate agreement among objective, and/or emotionally charged, differences in perspectives and desired goals.

REFERENCES

Leigh, E. (2003). *A practitioner researcher perspective on facilitating an open, infinite, chaordic simulation*. <http://adt.lib.uts.edu.au/public/adt-NTSM20040831.172032/> Ed D, University of Technology, Sydney