

THE UNBEATEN PATH

ABSTRACT

This online role play provides learners with an opportunity to work as an ad hoc team to address a number of Project Management tasks in regard to deciding the future of a proposed walking path in an otherwise area of untouched bushland.

Participants work in small groups to develop the persona of one of five project team members who are responsible for deciding the nature, extent, surface etc of the pathway. Standard Project Management documents are provided for each of XX cycles. The teams are initially collaborative to create a 'position statement' for their persona and then meet – either online or face to face – to agree the next steps in the project.

Keywords

*project management,
team work,
negotiation*

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DESCRIPTION

The action begins with distribution of the “Lake Eagleclaw” newsletter, which announces the commencement of the project and names the project team members. Participants are then advised of their assigned ‘team/persona’ and given access to the relevant role-related information. A timetable is established for completion of the whole project and due dates for meetings are announced at this time. The scenario emphasises such issues as the impact of differing stakeholder needs, the importance of establishing and maintaining good documentation and negotiation skills in achieving desired/intended outcomes. Participants must work collaboratively to create their committee member ‘persona’ and then learn to negotiate and collaborate as they work to achieve the committee deadlines. The role play is structured in such a way that participants can play one cycle or up to five. There is scope for in-depth practice with a set of Project Management documents relevant to the ‘start-up’ phase of a new project.

AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

This role play needs at least 10 players –two participants for each of five stakeholder roles. It can accommodate up to 20 players with ease, however if the group is larger than 20 it is probably best to run two versions of the role play rather than crowding the teams.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Project Management combines people and processes for the purpose of achieving clearly defined goals. While the phases of a project follow a reasonably ‘common sense’ routine, the process involves use of an array of documents to construct and guide the actions needed to achieve the goal. This role play guides the participants through the sequence for good documentation and meeting procedures, as well as emphasising the importance of good team work and negotiations skills. Participants engage with an apparently ‘simple’ task via teamwork and negotiation and then encounter various barriers and personal interactions that make success more complex, and demand close attention to both the ‘people’ and the ‘process’ issues.

TIME AND SETTING

The Unbeaten Path was designed for academic courses introducing Project Management capabilities and processes. It is therefore suitable for either later year undergraduate or post-graduate classes. It is constructed in five parts, and each one normally requires about two weeks of collaborative time to ensure the relevant forms are completed and the teams are ready for the negotiation phases. Thus the role play can be run in parallel with a normal semester course – with each phase beginning at approximately the time it is covered in lectures or tutorials. For a shorter experience participants can do

The EagleClaw Newsletter



only the “Start Up Phase’ (week 1) and then debrief the experience in relation to the teamwork component and/or the documentation.

RESOURCES

The documents for each stakeholder/role are available as PDF files. There is a series of newsletters and memos for the client as well as all the relevant Project Management documents. For the facilitator there are documents outlining the sequence of actions and providing supporting information for guiding the overall learning process.

Technical resources involve use of a Learning Management System (LMS) or some form of Web 2.0 site (e.g. a ‘ning’ or a ‘wiki’ based site) to enable downloading of documents and provide support for online communication. If the intent is to have it as an entirely online role play the support site should also provide a robust chat facility and preferably a ‘virtual classroom’ facility as well.

At present this role play is platform independent – but it can be set up using almost any form of role play support platform.



Concept images of the 5 ‘personas’ in The Unbeaten Path

ASSESSMENT

There is no pre-set assessment regime yet created for the role play, as its uses can be so varied. However, there are a number of ways the learning can be assessed – and at this time the specific choices are left up to the academic using the role play. Possible options include assessment of the quality of the initial documents and then the final ones presented after meetings of the stakeholder/roles. Written assessment can include use of reflective essay outlining individual’s views on the experience and naming –with evidence – what they have learned.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The Unbeaten Path uses team based learning, documentation resources and a time bounded task to guide participants through the accepted phases of routine Project Management activity.

Participants begin by reviewing their assigned role, connecting with team members, working out their combined strategy for ‘being’ their assigned person, and developing an approach to representing that person in online – or face to face – meetings.

Beliefs and values about collaborative activity can be tested out, communication strategies and work collaboration capabilities can be assessed as well as understanding and use of standard Project Management documents.

REUSABILITY

At present this role play is only suitable for reuse where participants have completed one module (week one of the role play) and are then able to complete the process at a later point. As it is Project Management specific it suits a wide range of learning contexts where participants will benefit from gaining an understanding of the phases and roles and responsibilities associated with routine Project Management.

If the topic area – construction of a nature reserve trail – is not suitable to a given audience it is feasible to rewrite the document to suit a different context while holding the PM documents and roles in place.

Project update – week 2



Bald eagle nest found on trail site