

Enhancing the Student Experience Through the Creation and Use of Authentic and Accessible Conflict Scenarios

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Abstract

Authentic conflict scenarios are an essential basis for learning activities and assessment tasks in the conflict management and resolution field. Authentic scenarios allow students to apply theories and skills to realistic situations, enhancing their learning experiences and workforce readiness. However, finding suitable conflict scenarios for use in teaching and learning is challenging due to **a) Confidentiality**: limiting the types of conflicts that can be used; **b) Evolving resources**: conflicts already in the public eye are often complex and continue to evolve which requires a great deal of effort by educators to update content, restricts the diversity of resources available, and makes it difficult to impartially present all aspects of a conflict in an engaging way; and **c) Lack of engaging resources**: fictitious scenarios are often presented in written text only, failing to provide interactive and engaging resources. In 2016, the James Cook University (JCU) Conflict Management and Resolution (CMR) Program, with the support of a Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) grant, created an authentic and digitally accessible conflict scenario designed to address these challenges and deliver improved learning experiences for postgraduate conflict management and resolution students and educators. This article discusses the value of authentic scenarios to improve postgraduate student experiences and career outcomes in the dispute resolution field, the approach taken by the JCU CMR Program to develop the scenario and presents findings from preliminary feedback from students' and educators' experience using the conflict scenario in postgraduate course work.

I Introduction

Postgraduate coursework students who have a positive university experience are more likely to report higher student engagement, performance, and outcomes.¹ One way of supporting a positive learning experience for postgraduate students is through the use of 'authentic' case scenarios. These are scenarios designed to reflect real life situations in the relevant field of practice according to Gulikers, J., Bastiaens, T. & Kirschner, P., which allows students to apply theories and practice skills relevant to their discipline.² Research suggests that working with authentic case scenarios not only improves students' learning experience, but also increases students' motivation and workforce readiness,³ preparing them for practice in the real world.⁴

The Conflict Management and Resolution (CMR) Program at James Cook University (JCU), a regional university in North Queensland, offers postgraduate study in the multidisciplinary field of conflict studies. The CMR Program focuses on both the theory and practice of conflict management and resolution, and subjects are designed to develop the students' theoretical knowledge and practical skills to support people in conflict. Information obtained through subject evaluations in the JCU CMR Program identified that students find both learning activities and assessment tasks based on conflict scenarios, including case studies and role plays, invaluable in supporting them to achieve core competencies.⁵ Finding, developing, and using appropriate materials however comes with several challenges due to the confidential and evolving nature of conflict management and resolution practices. As most conflicts are managed privately, 'behind closed doors', access to suitable materials that may be used in a classroom environment can be challenging. Given the need to maintain party confidentiality, the use of real-life scenarios is generally restricted to those already in the public eye. The process of identifying publicly accessible conflicts that are both suitably complex and have engaging materials that may be used as learning resources is particularly laborious for lecturers, largely due to the evolving nature of

¹ Crane, L., Kinash, S., Hamlin, G. P., Eckersley, B., Partridge, H., & Bannatyne, A. (2016). *Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience: Good Practice Guide prepared for the learning and Teaching Support Unit*, Australian Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from: <http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com>.

² 'Authentic' case scenarios are designed to reflect real life situations in the relevant field of practice according to Gulikers, J., Bastiaens, T. & Kirschner, P. (2004). *A Five-Dimensional Framework for Authentic Assessment, Educational Technology Research and Development*, 52(3), 69.

³ See for examples; Guilikers, J., Bastiaens, T. & Kirschner, P. (2004). *A Five-Dimensional Framework for Authentic Assessment, Educational Theology Research and Development* 52(3), 68; Herrington, J. and Herrington, A. (2006) *Authentic conditions for authentic assessment: aligning task and assessment*; in A. Bunker & I. Vari (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2006 Annual international Conference of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc (HERDSA): Critical Visions: Thinking, Learning and Researching in Higher Education: Research and Development in Higher Education*, 29, 150; Macquarie University (n.d). *Creating authentic assessment*. Learning & Teaching Centre at Macquarie University, NSW, p1; and, Popil, I. (2011). *Promotion of critical thinking by using case studies as teaching method. Nurse Education Today*, 31(2), 204-207. doi:10.1016/j.nedt.2010.06.002.

⁴ Floyd-Thomas, S. (2010). *Teaching for Conflict Resolution: Metaethical Case Study Analysis as a Teaching Strategy. Teaching theology & religion*, 13(3), 254-259. "Case studies provide a living laboratory in which students can gain insight into traditional tendencies, capabilities, and universalities of a given group. Doing case study analysis can help students develop a critical humanistic approach that accounts for the observable behavior of people, the meaning people assign to their behavior, and the secular and sacred forces that shape those meanings and actions" (p 254).

⁵ The seven (7) core competencies of the JCU CMR Program include the ability to:

1. Evaluate complex conflict and related theories and standards for professional practice in conflict management and resolution.
2. Critically analyse complex conflicts and conflict management systems.
3. Provide specialised advice to assist individuals, groups and organisations to constructively manage conflict.
4. Effectively communicate with, facilitate and support people in personal, group, organisational and cross-cultural conflict.
5. Independently and critically reflect on and assess their own capabilities and performance, and make use of feedback as appropriate, to support personal and professional development.
6. Exercise independent ethical judgment and initiative in conflict management and resolution practice and research.
7. Research, analyse and interpret data from a range of sources relevant to conflict management and resolution.

conflict. Examples include property disputes, custody battles or claims of sexual harassment in the workplace that have been reported on by the media. Each of these types of conflicts may unfold over months, years or even decades and lecturers must ensure that, as new information comes to light, resources are updated. It is also inevitable that students have been exposed to at least some information relating to these conflicts prior to entering the classroom. Therefore it is likely that they have pre-formed opinions or biases which may restrict their perspectives. Furthermore, some students may be emotionally close to or involved, directly or indirectly, in the conflict being used thus impacting lecturers' ability to create a safe and objective learning environment. The types of materials that can be used for learning resources are also restricted making it difficult for lecturers to provide a balanced view of a conflict. For example, there may be an engaging television interview clearly depicting a conflict from one party's perspective however, finding an equally engaging resource to present the other party's perspective can often prove difficult. To circumvent these issues associated with conflicts in the public eye, lecturers frequently use fictitious scenarios, such as role plays, as the basis for learning activities. However, these fictitious conflicts are usually not complex enough to allow for an in-depth application of theories and learning resources are generally limited to text-based materials. To practically address these difficulties, the CMR Program, with the assistance of a Student Service and Amenities Fund (SSAF) grant, developed a fictional conflict scenario designed to reflect a real-life situation that is digitally accessible and can be used across teaching and assessment in multiple subjects. In developing the scenario, the project team had two main objectives; 1) improve learning experiences and work readiness of postgraduate CMR students; and, 2) improve the teaching experience for CMR lecturers.

This article discusses the educational rationale for developing an authentic conflict scenario, drawing on pedagogical literature relevant to the postgraduate coursework learning experience, with a focus on students undertaking studies in the field of conflict management and resolution. The authors highlight the value in using authentic case scenarios, and explain the process undertaken to develop the case scenario and resources for the CMR Program. The article concludes with a reflection on feedback received from CMR students and lecturers who have engaged with the case scenario and the impact it has had on their learning and teaching experiences.

II Postgraduate Education Landscape

In Australia, enrolments in postgraduate courses increased by 22 per cent from 2004⁶ to 2015, with over 320,000 students enrolled in postgraduate coursework programs in 2015.⁷ Most postgraduate coursework programs are professionally focused and intensive, meaning they are delivered over a short period to meet the needs of the student cohort, which is predominantly made up of working professionals with competing priorities. This profile reflects that of the JCU CMR Program student cohort which is made up predominately of domestic mature-age students studying part time with both work and family commitments.

Delivering subjects that meet the needs and expectations of this diverse cohort requires specific consideration of the postgraduate student experience. Perceived student experience is a key quality indicator for higher education institutions according to reports on postgraduate learning and teaching in Australia.⁸ The 2016 National Research Report led by Bond University on the postgraduate student experience (Engaging PG Students Report) highlights a pressing

⁶ Robinson, B. (2017). *Data Snapshot: Australia has one of the best higher education systems in the world*. Universities Australia, 5.

⁷ Hamilton, J., Thomas, M., Carson, S. & Ellison, E. (2014) *Good Practice Report: Post Graduate Research and Coursework Degrees*. Office for Learning & Teaching, NSW, p1.

⁸ Crane, L., Kinash, S., Bannatyne, A., Judd, M-M., Eckersley, B., Hamlin, G., Partridge, H., Richardson, S., Rolf, H., Udas, K., & Stark, A. (2016). *Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience*. Final report prepared for the Learning and Teaching Support Unit, Australian Department of Education and Training, p14.

need for universities to improve the educational experience for students.⁹ An Australian case study on learning and teaching expectations of postgraduate coursework students conducted by Thomas, Day and Hegarty identified two key areas that educators need to focus on in order to improve student experiences: 1) provide opportunities to apply concepts and theories to real life and career relevant situations, thus increasing workforce readiness and employability; and 2) support flexible study options.¹⁰ The relationship between these two key areas of focus and the use of authentic case scenarios is discussed in more detail below.

A Provide Opportunities to Apply Concepts and Theories to Real Life and Career Relevant Situations, thus Increasing Workforce Readiness and Employability

Postgraduate coursework students reportedly have a strong interest in career development and seek to attain knowledge and develop skills directly relevant to their existing job, or to support a career change.¹¹ These expectations directly align with the Australian Universities Teaching Committee Best Practice Principles for postgraduate curriculum development which state that coursework should facilitate students' acquisition of in-depth knowledge and skills that may be practically applied to the relevant profession or industry.¹² This is based on the understanding that it is through exposure to career relevant experiences and knowledge that students are more likely to have positive career outcomes, either through engaging in gainful employment within their chosen field, or advancing their career using the skills they develop throughout their studies.¹³

The Engaging PG Students Report found that overall, postgraduate coursework students are not satisfied with the career outcomes attained through their studies.¹⁴ These findings suggest that students have inadequate opportunities to apply concepts and theories to real life, career relevant situations during their studies. One of the most effective ways to deliver these experiences is through the use of realistic case scenarios as they promote active learning, allowing students to understand complex issues and situations within the context of their chosen field while providing emotional preparation for the real world. Realistic and authentic case scenarios also assist students to identify problems and increase their range of strategies for problem solving.¹⁵

B Support Flexible Study Options

The average postgraduate coursework student in Australia balances work and family responsibilities with their studies, limiting their capacity to participate in on-campus study during

⁹ See the following for research outcomes specifically relating to dissatisfaction of postgraduate students and educators and the need for improvements: note 8, pp21-30; and, Hamlin, G., Kinash, S., Crane, L., Bannatyne, A., Judd, M-M., Stark, A., Eckersley, B., Partridge, H., & Udas, K. (2016). *National research on the postgraduate student experience: Case presentation on the first-year postgraduate student experience* (volume 1 of 3), p15.

¹⁰ Thomas, I., Day, T. and Hegarty, K. (2014). 'Learning and teaching expectations of coursework postgraduate students: an Australian case-study', *International Journal of Advancement in Education and Social Sciences*, 2(11), 8.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See note 10 and Reid, I., Rennie, L. & Shortland-Jones, B. (2005). *Best practice in professional postgraduate coursework*. Australian Universities Teaching Committee, 82-84.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ 'Career outcomes' refers to students' employability post-graduation this may either relate to advancement within their existing career or opportunities to forge a new career. Refer to research outcomes in Crane, L., Kinash, S., Hamlin, G. P., Eckersley, B., Partridge, H., & Bannatyne, A. (2016). *Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience*. Final report prepared for the Learning and Teaching Support Unit, Australian Department of Education and Training, p10.

¹⁵ Popil, I. (2011). Promotion of critical thinking by using case studies as teaching method. *Nurse Education Today*, 31(2), 204-207. doi:10.1016/j.nedt.2010.06.002.

normal working hours.¹⁶ As a result, the number of students seeking flexible or external¹⁷ study options, such as studying part-time or online, continues to increase. Thomas et al identified a pressing need for educators to increase the flexibility and currency of teaching materials in postgraduate curriculums.¹⁸

Digital technology is an integral component of the modern coursework based postgraduate experience and provides an ideal platform to support flexible access to teaching and assessment materials.¹⁹ Postgraduate students also have a clear expectation that technology will play an integral role in their study experience.²⁰ Therefore, designing engaging and digitally accessible materials is an essential consideration when developing new learning and assessment resources for this student cohort.²¹

III The Value of Case Scenarios

Research in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education indicates that assessments based on authentic scenarios improve students learning experiences, motivation and workforce readiness.²² The Australian Universities Teaching Committee and the National Department of Education and Training's Best Practice Principles for curriculum development in professional postgraduate programs include the need to:

- Integrate relevant industry/professional activities into the program;²³
- Engage students as adult learners through all teaching/learning interactions by placing value on their previous experience (e.g. by including activities that give them scope to contribute and apply their own knowledge);²⁴

¹⁶ Robinson, B. (2017). *Data Snapshot: Australia has one of the best higher education systems in the world*. Universities Australia, p12-13. Crane, L., Kinash, S., Hamlin, G. P., Eckersley, B., Partridge, H., & Bannatyne, A. (2016). *Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience*. Final report prepared for the Learning and Teaching Support Unit, Australian Department of Education and Training, p14. Hamlin, G., Kinash, S., Crane, L., Bannatyne, A., Judd, M-M., Stark, A., Eckersley, B., Partridge, H., & Udas, K. (2016). *National research on the postgraduate student experience: Case presentation on the first-year postgraduate student experience* (volume 1 of 3), p22.

¹⁷ The term 'external' refers to students who choose to study off-campus accessing all teaching and assessment materials online.

¹⁸ Thomas, I., Day, T. and Hegarty, K. (2014) 'Learning and teaching expectations of coursework postgraduate students: an Australian case-study', *International Journal of Advancement in Education and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 4.

¹⁹ Henderson, M., Finger, G. & Selwyn, N. (2016). What's used and what's useful? Exploring digital technology use (s) among taught postgraduate students. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 17(3), 242.

²⁰ Gosper, M., Malfoy, J. & McKenzie, J. (2013). Students experiences and expectations of technologies: An Australian study designed to inform planning and development decisions. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*. 29 (2), 276-277. Henderson, M., Finger, G. & Selwyn, N. (2016). What's used and what's useful? Exploring digital technology use (s) among taught postgraduate students. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 17(3) 242.

²¹ Crane et al recommend educators 'maximise the potential of the Learning Management System (LMS) to engage postgraduate students and extend their learning'. See Crane, L., Kinash, S., Hamlin, G. P., Eckersley, B., Partridge, H., & Bannatyne, A. (2016). *Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience: Good Practice Guide prepared for the learning and Teaching Support Unit*, Australian Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from: <http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com>.

²² See for examples; Guilkders, J., Bastiaens, T. & Kirschner, P. (2004). A Five-Dimensional Framework for Authentic Assessment, *Educational Theology Research and Development* 52(3), 68; and, Herrington, J. and Herrington, A. (2006) Authentic conditions for authentic assessment: aligning task and assessment. In A. Bunker & I. Vari (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2006 Annual international Conference of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc (HERDSA): Critical Visions: Thinking, Learning and Researching in Higher Education: Research and Development in Higher Education*, 29, p150. Macquarie University (n.d). Creating authentic assessment. Learning & Teaching Centre at Macquarie University, NSW, p1, Popil, I. (2011). Promotion of critical thinking by using case studies as teaching method. *Nurse Education Today*, 31(2), 204-207. doi:10.1016/j.nedt.2010.06.002.

²³ Reid, I., Rennie, L. & Shortland-Jones, B. (2005). *Best practice in professional postgraduate coursework*, Australian Universities Teaching Committee, p.82.

²⁴ Ibid

- Support a mode of delivery that utilises technology to engage and extend student learning and ensure suitable access and flexible study options for students;²⁵ and
- Design ‘project-based work’ that is directly applicable to the workforce.²⁶

In practice based fields, such as conflict management and resolution, the use of case scenarios that are based on realistic situations; supported by engaging resources; designed to enable students to apply relevant theories and skills; and, provide opportunities for students to assess their learning, are proven to have great pedagogical benefits.²⁷ Regardless of whether conflict management and resolution students choose to pursue a career as a conflict or dispute resolution practitioner (e.g. professional coaches, mediators, facilitators, negotiators etc) or apply their new skills to support career progression within their industry (e.g. as senior leaders or in an organisational capability and development role), JCU CMR Program graduates are required to demonstrate a set of core competencies²⁸ that can best be demonstrated through the practical application of theory to realistic scenarios.

Customised authentic scenarios provide the flexibility to create new or alter existing resources in response to the changing needs of students and ensure they can be made available for students to access at their convenience.²⁹ Research into learning preferences indicates that many students find video lectures, diagrams, images and animations more useful than engaging with the written or spoken word.³⁰ Therefore, creating a broad range of materials that meet a variety of learning styles is important when designing scenarios.

Traditionally, educators in the JCU CMR Program have included real life conflict scenarios in their teaching and assessment tasks across the program. While this approach has allowed students to apply theories and skills to real life conflicts, the use of scenarios that are in the public eye presents a number of challenges as previously highlighted. These challenges include: limitations of conflicts that can be used due to confidentiality; lack of engaging resources; the ongoing need to update teaching resources as conflicts evolve; and, potential for students to have a preformed bias.

IV The “Passadora Conflict” Scenario

The design and development of an authentic and digitally accessible conflict scenario and supporting learning resources was undertaken by a multidisciplinary team made up of CMR academics and practitioners as well as the JCU Business Online team. The scenario and supporting resources were developed over a period of eight (8) months and involved five (5) key stages:

A Establish Design Principles

To ensure the scenario met the needs and expectations of students and educators, a set of design principles were established. The design principles required that all resources must be:

- Realistic for students living, working and studying in the Australian tropics;

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Crane, L., Kinash, S., Hamlin, G. P., Eckersley, B., Partridge, H., & Bannatyne, A., (2016). *Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience: Good Practice Guide to Support the Postgraduate Student Experience 2016* prepared for the Learning and Teaching Support Unit, Australian Department of Education and Training, pp13-15.

²⁷ Floyd-Thomas, S. (2010). Teaching for Conflict Resolution: Metaethical Case Study Analysis as a Teaching Strategy. *Teaching theology & religion*, 13(3), 254-259. “Case studies provide a living laboratory in which students can gain insight into traditional tendencies, capabilities, and universalities of a given group. Doing case study analysis can help students develop a critical humanistic approach that accounts for the observable behavior of people, the meaning people assign to their behavior, and the secular and sacred forces that shape those meanings and actions” (p 254).

²⁸ See note 5.

²⁹ Reid, I., Rennie, L. & Shortland-Jones, B. (2005). *Best practice in professional postgraduate coursework*. Australian Universities Teaching Committee, 82-84 identifies ‘mode of deliver utilizes technology in a way that ensures suitable access and flexible study options for the target group’ as one of the criteria for best practice pedagogy.

³⁰ Ibid.

- Supported by a variety of engaging resources that allow students to gather information about the scenario and its parties;
- Designed to be flexible and accessible to all students, regardless of their location or study mode;
- Support discussion through online communities or face-to-face groups; and
- Have enough depth and breadth to maintain students' interest, challenge their perspectives, and support reflective practice.

B Identify a Suitable Conflict Situation

A review of conflicts that had occurred over the past decade across Northern Australia was undertaken to gain an understanding of the types of conflicts that would provide the complexity and interest required to engage students. Based on the findings from this review, an authentic conflict scenario was created called the "Passadora Conflict". This conflict scenario centres around the fictitious town of Passadora located on the Far North Queensland (FNQ) coastline, which has been identified as an area for 'future growth' as part of a broader government 20-year development plan for FNQ. The Passadora scenario involves the engagement of a property development group 'Jacora' to design and implement a large residential development project in the town. Initially, most residents are enthusiastic about the development and potential social and economic benefits for their town. However, the mood in Passadora changes when the developers' initial design is released showing plans to construct a 100-hectare man-made island off the coast of Passadora as the location for residential properties, shops, docks to moor small boats and other services. The town is quickly divided in supporters and opponents of the project, and an Action Group is formed by residents concerned about the potential impact to the environment, culture of the community, and value of existing properties.

C Develop the Scenario

The first step in developing the scenario was to create a one-page conflict summary which described the conflict situation as discussed above and introduced key characters and events. Bright's Conflict Mapping Chart (the "Chart"),³¹ was then used as a framework to develop the detailed scenario based on the conflict situation. This Chart has been used in the JCU CMR Program for several years as a learning tool for teaching students how to analyse complex conflicts. The Chart considers conflicts in a holistic manner taking into consideration the range of parties involved in the conflict and their roles, contextual factors, the history of the conflict, and dynamics as it unfolds.³² The various components of the Chart helped to ensure that each aspect of the conflict was fully developed. In the Passadora scenario, conflict occurs on several levels, including interpersonal, organizational, and community conflict. For example, on the interpersonal level, the scenario considers issues between local business owners with opposing views regarding the development, as well as a dispute at a local cricket club triggered by the decision to engage a national property developer rather than a local developer. On the community level, the scenario considers the broader conflict between Jacora and the Action Group, as well as the conflict between those Passadora residents who support the development and those who oppose it. Having a multi-level conflict scenario was important so that the scenario could be used in several subjects, because some subjects in the CMR Program take a focus on interpersonal conflict, while others look at conflict in organisations or communities.

³¹ Bright, S. (n.d.) The Conflict Mapping Chart. Retrieved from http://www.cmsupport.org/ConflictMapping/ConflictMappingChart_ShayBright.pdf.

³² Ibid. Bright's Conflict Mapping Chart is a tool that provides the structure to systematically analyse a conflict. There are six main components: conflict parties; conflict history; conflict context; party orientation; conflict dynamics and conflict intervention.

D Creating the Resources

Based on the Passadora conflict scenario, the project team created a list of potential resources designed to introduce information regarding various aspects of the scenario. The resources were developed in consultation with the educators responsible for the subjects involved in the project. Resources include radio and television interviews with conflict parties, news articles, and television news bulletins. **Error! Reference source not found.** below provides a complete list of resources created to date:

Table 1
Summary of resources created for the Passadora Conflict

Resource type	Description	Format	Length
Conflict Map	<i>Detailed conflict map based on Bright's Conflict Mapping Chart</i>	Word/PDF	8,600 words
Conflict overview	<i>One-page overview of the Passadora Conflict</i>	Word/PDF	765 words
Newspaper article	<i>Overarching article regarding the conflict</i>	Word/PDF	855 words
Newspaper article	<i>Local business dispute in Passadora</i>	Word/PDF	975 words
Television interview	<i>TV interview with members of the Action Group (Primary Party A)</i>	MP4 (video)	5:05 mins
Radio interview	<i>Radio interview on Northern FM with CEO of Jacora (Primary Party B)</i>	MP3	7:05 mins
Radio interview	<i>Transcript from radio interview with the CEO of Jacora (Party B)</i>	Word/PDF	1,164 words
Newspaper article	<i>Chinese investment in FNQ development plan (context)</i>	Word/PDF	229 words
Newspaper article	<i>Housing shortage in FNQ (context)</i>	Word/PDF	311 words
Newspaper article	<i>"Tree sit" to stop construction (conflict escalation)</i>	Word/PDF	285 words
Newspaper article	<i>Cheap imported building materials used in property development (conflict context)</i>	Word/PDF	434 words
News bulletin	<i>Transcript from ABC News bulletin regarding the first community forum</i>	Word/PDF	385 words
News bulletin	<i>Transcript from ABC News bulletin regarding the second community forum</i>	Word/PDF	484 words
Policy – Code of Conduct	<i>Cairns Brothers Cricket Club – Code of Behaviour and Conduct</i>	Word/PDF	591 words
Critical Incident Report	<i>Formal report to the Board of Directors describing the altercation at the Cricket Club's annual display match</i>	Word/PDF	2,741 words
Client Intake Form	<i>Family dispute involving members of the Passadora community</i>	Word/PDF	967 words
Map	<i>Map of Passadora in relation to Cairns and Wigaloo and highlighting the island development zone</i>	Word/PDF	N/A
Map	<i>Map of Frangipani in relation to Townsville</i>	Word/PDF	N/A

Each resource was developed to align directly with the learning outcomes for each subject. As all subjects included in the project are taught in both blended³³ and external³⁴ mode, resources were designed to be used in both a classroom and online environments. The JCU Business Online team was engaged to assist with the creation of resources and embed them in the JCU online learning platform.

E Introduction into the Curriculum

In 2017 the scenario and resources were integrated into learning activities and assessment tasks for two core subjects, *Conflict Analysis* and *Conflict Resolution Processes* and one elective subject, *Conflict Management and Engagement*, in the CMR Program. As all three subjects are available to students enrolled in the program, two of which are compulsory as core subjects, careful consideration was given to which resources would be made available for each subject and at what point in the semester. When introducing the scenario into a subject two foundational resources, a one-page overview of the conflict and an overarching newspaper article, were provided online to convey key background information to students, whether they were being introduced to the scenario for the first time or refamiliarising themselves following completion of one of the other subjects. Additional resources created specifically for each subject were then integrated into the lessons plans to support learning activities, such as role plays, group activities and discussions; as well as assessment tasks such as quizzes, short answer tests and online discussion forums. Given the scenario and resources remain the same, consideration was given to design of assessment tasks to limit the risk of plagiarism both within current and future student cohorts.

To gain insight into the impact of the Passadora case scenario on the students learning experiences, the project team sought feedback from students who participated in the subject *Conflict Analysis* in 2017 and 2018.

V Student's Learning Experience With The Passadora Case Scenario

All students who completed *Conflict Analysis* in 2017 and 2018 were invited to participate in a survey³⁵ designed to assess their experience with the Passadora Conflict scenario and resources. The students were asked questions such as 'How realistic or authentic did you find the conflict?', 'How engaging were the scenario resources?' and 'How beneficial was it to have the resources available online?'. Students were asked to provide their opinion on whether the scenario enhanced their learning experiences, particularly in relation to applying concepts taught in the subject, understanding how theories may be applied to real life conflicts, and developing skills that could be applied to their current job or prospective career. Students were also invited to provide feedback on how the scenario and resources may be improved. In addition to the survey, student feedback on the case scenario was gained through Teaching and Subject evaluations in 2017 and 2018.

Surveys were distributed to 25 students of which 11 submitted complete responses thus providing a 44 per cent response rate. **Error! Reference source not found.** provides a summary of survey participants across the student cohort.

³³ Blended learning is a term used to define courses designed to be delivered using a combination of online and face-to-face delivery modes, see Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) (2012). *Blended Learning: A synthesis of research findings in Victorian education 2006-2011. Ultraset and Digital Learning Branch*, DEECD, Melbourne, Victoria. See also McGee, P. & Reis, A. (2012). *Blended course design: A synthesis of best practices. Journal of Asynchronous Learning networks*, 16 (4), 7-22.

³⁴ 'External' mode refers to online course delivery only.

³⁵ The approach for distributing the survey and questions were approved by the JCU Ethics Committee via a formal application prior to the research being undertaken.

Table 2
Summary of participants involved in the student experience survey

Conflict Analysis students	2017	2018	TOTAL
Total student cohort	10	15	25
Survey participants	5	6	11
Participants as a % of total cohort	50%	40%	44%

Based on the outcomes from this preliminary research, students indicated that they saw great benefits in working with the case scenario, as evidenced by the following comment(s):

“The Passadora Conflict [scenario] has been a fascinating case study that has allowed me to be able to draw from current events and apply them to the discussion forums. The case study has also provided the opportunity to reflect as a practitioner to utilise the readings we were given each week and apply them in a practical way to the case study by providing recommendations with how to respond to, analyse and intervene in the conflict.” (Student A, 2017).

Student E, 2017 describes their experience applying Moore’s Circle of Conflict³⁶, a complex conflict analysis tool, to the scenario as follows: “... *application of the circle of conflict to the Passadora conflict scenario was one of the best experiences I have ever had as a student*” (Student E, 2017). Thus, indicating that the scenario allowed the student to directly apply theories taught in the subject.

The following section provides a summary of the survey outcomes identifying the benefits and areas for opportunities or challenges.

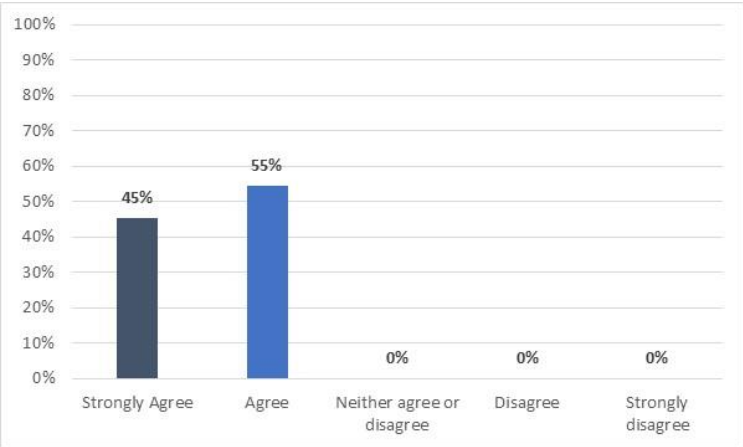
A The Scenario Allowed Students to Develop Skills and Understand Theories Applicable to their Jobs.

All survey participants (100 per cent) indicated that working with the scenario allowed them to develop skills and understand theories that could be directly applied to their current or prospective career (see **Figure 1** below) with one student commenting:

“[the scenario]... provided me with the knowledge to systematically define and consider conflict contextually which has greatly improved my ability to contribute positively to conflict resolution and further identify and understand different strategies amongst parties I deal with regularly in my job.” (Student D, 2017).

³⁶ This refers to Christopher Moore’s Circle of Conflict. See Moore, C (2003), *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*. 3rd ed, Jossey Bass, New York, p 66.

Figure 1
Responses to the statement “Working with this scenario allowed me to develop skills and understand theories that can be applied to my current job or prospective career”

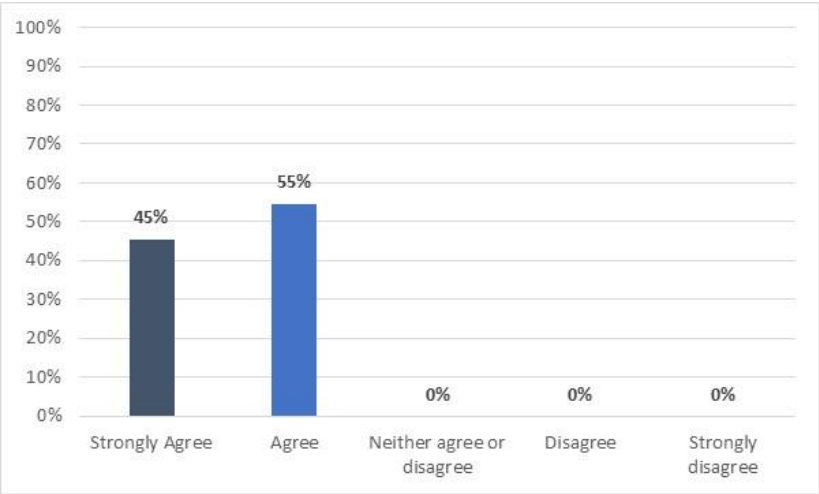


B The Scenario Supported Students to Better Understand how to Analyse Real-Life Conflicts.

All participants agreed or strongly agreed that the scenario helped them to better understand how to analyse real life conflicts (see **Figure 2** below). As an example, one student explained:

“...the Passadora conflict provided a great opportunity to put into practice what I had learnt. I enjoyed the assignments and in particular they highlighted for me the complexity of trying to identify underlying interests and values and effectively communicate with people in conflict.” (Student F, 2017).

Figure 2
Responses to the statement “Working with a specific conflict scenario assisted me to better understand how to analyse real life conflict”



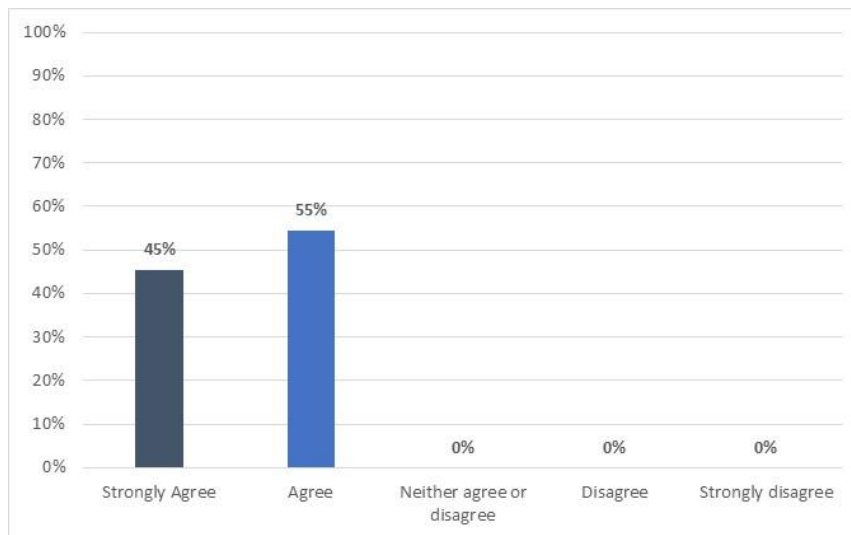
C The Resources Assisted Students to Understand and Apply Concepts Taught

All participants (100 per cent) agreed that the resources assisted them to understand and apply concepts taught throughout the subject (see **Figure 3** below), as evidenced by the following comments:

“Over time in this subject I have increased my knowledge in dealing with conflict.....I particularly found working through the Passadora Conflict [scenario] useful in putting into practice the knowledge and concepts I was learning about.” (Student B, 2017).

“Interactions with the discussion board enabled me to see what the other students identified in the conflict scenario Passadora and in particular reanalyse some aspects that I may not have thought about or missed all together.” (Student C, 2017).

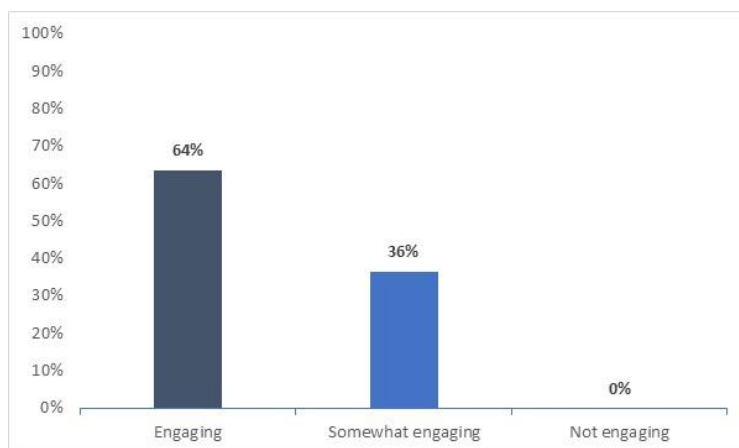
Figure 3
Responses to the statement “The resources assisted me to understand and apply the concepts taught in the subject”



D The Scenario and Supporting Resources were Engaging, but Improvements could be Made

All participants thought that the scenario and its resources were at least somewhat engaging. However, while about two thirds of the participants found the scenario engaging about one third found it only somewhat engaging (see **Figure 4** below), indicating further opportunities to improve and expand on existing resources.

Figure 4
Responses to the question “How engaging did you find the resources?”

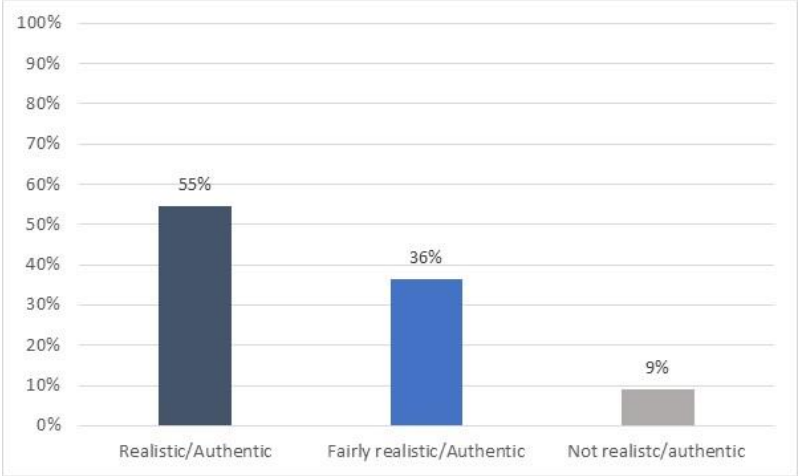


E The Scenario was Fairly Realistic

Over 90 per cent of participants found the scenario realistic or fairly realistic (see **Figure 5** below) however opinions on the level of authenticity varied. One student commented “*I thought the scenario was great, and very realistic. It is a very probable scenario. I may have even Googled*

*Passadora in the first week and became confused when I couldn't find it.*³⁷ Whilst another, stated 'You can't get all the detail and complexity of something like this conflict into a few mock-up news reports. But in reality, there'd be more interpersonal politics being played out that would affect the dynamics of the groups.'³⁸

Figure 5
Responses to the question “How realistic/authentic did you find the Passadora conflict?”



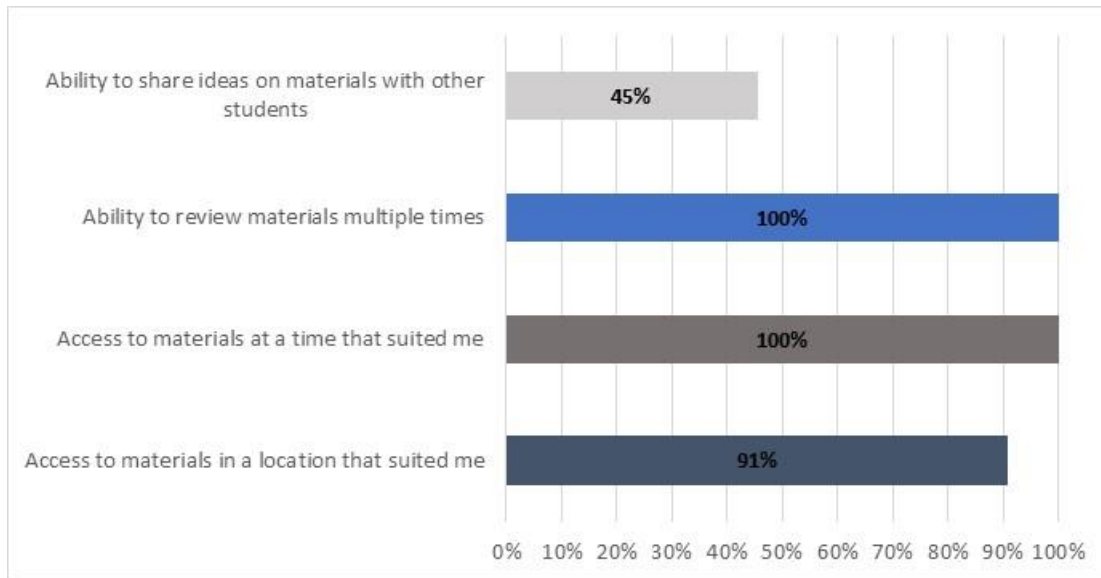
When asked what would make the scenario more realistic, students suggested that further background information on key parties coupled with additional resources that focused on parties positions and interests would add to the authenticity.

F It was Convenient to Have Access To Digital Resources

When asked about the benefits of having digitally accessible resources, all participants appreciated having access to materials at a time that suited them and having the opportunity to review materials multiple times (see **Figure 6** below).

³⁷ Comment from 2017 Conflict Analysis student.
³⁸ Ibid.

Figure 6
Responses to the question “In your opinion, what were the benefits of having the scenario and resources available online?”



Further feedback provided by one external student suggests that the Passadora scenario supports a positive learning environment, as the associated teaching with the scenario encouraged online student engagement and supported deepening the students understanding of conflict analysis, *“I also appreciated following a local case study (the Passadora conflict) throughout the subject and applying different information or views to the case to determine the different perspectives associated with conflict analysis. I felt this subject’s delivery model assisted my learning greatly, particularly considering its online status. It facilitated significant exchange with other external students in addition to the lecturer.”* (Student G, 2017).

VI Opportunities for Improvement Based on Student Feedback

Analysis of students’ responses identified three (3) key areas for improvement. Firstly, create new resources aimed at providing more detailed background information on the key parties, such as additional further interviews, or meeting minutes. Secondly, create new resources that give more detailed information about the town of Passadora such as a Wikipedia page or similar. Thirdly, increase the complexity of the scenario, for example through the creation of new parties and issues, to further assist students to apply some of the more complex conflict analysis theories and tools such as Moore’s Circle of Conflict³⁹ and Dugan’s nested paradigm⁴⁰.

VII Educator’ Experience with the Passadora Case Scenario

Four educators have used the case scenario for teaching in three subjects of the CMR Program.⁴¹ At the end of a subject, each educator engaged in a structured reflection to examine the benefits and shortcomings of the case scenario, as well as identify suggestions for the development of further resources and other improvements.

³⁹ This refers to Christopher Moore’s Circle of Conflict. See Moore, C (2003), *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*. 3rd ed, Jossey Bass, New York, p 66.

⁴⁰ This refers to Marie Dugan’s nested theory of conflict. See Dugan, M (1996). *A Nested Theory of Conflict. A Leadership Journal: Women in Leadership – Sharing the Vision*. Vol 1. July 1996.

⁴¹ Three of these educators were part of the team that developed the case scenario and its resources and are also the authors of this article. The collection of educators’ reflections was approved by the JCU Ethics Committee via a formal application.

All four educators commented that it was easy to make any of the existing resources available to both internal and external students through the JCU learning platform Blackboard, which allowed for a fair learning experience for all students regardless of their mode of enrolment. Furthermore, the educators found the conflict and its resources to be fun to work with and engaging for the students. In the view of the educators, the complexity of the characters and events that had been created as part of the scenario were enough to work with in the assigned three subjects. Furthermore, the range of resource types (articles, news clip, radio interview) that had been created allowed educators to analyse the conflict from various angles, which lies at the heart of some of the subjects (e.g. in one subject, students analyse communication in conflict and the educator had the opportunity to include an analysis of the tone of voice and language used in the radio clip that was created for the scenario).

In their reflections, educators highlighted various benefits of using the case scenario for teaching in their subjects. For example, in their reflections two educators specifically appreciated that they were in control of the information provided. Being in control meant that the educators could manage the complexity of the scenario by providing information on a restricted number of parties and events as the educators saw fit for their subject. Regulating the complexity of the conflict situation allowed educators to focus student's efforts on understanding and applying conflict concepts and theories without having to continuously help students to first '*get their heads around*' a range of different conflicts situations and characters.

Educators valued the fictional case scenario for the fact that no student was emotionally close to, or involved in the conflict, which enabled a safe, objective space to work in. Students could explore the conflict in a way that distanced them from pre-existing biases, and anxieties that may accompany real-life debates. The educators also appreciated that having a fictitious scenario reduced opportunity for plagiarism, since students could not search information about the conflict online and copy from other sources. In one subject, focusing on the application of different conflict resolution processes to a conflict context, the scenario resources have been created broadly enough that multiple processes could be appropriate as an intervention. The assessment therefore requires students to focus on research that supports their arguments as to the 'best fit' of a process. Allowing for the possibility of multiple responses ensures assignments are highly individualised and reduces the possibility for plagiarism.

Finally, all educators highlighted that using the case scenario meant a significant reduction of effort and time required to prepare and amend learning resources from year to year. Updating learning materials each year usually involves the sourcing or updating of suitable real-life current conflict scenarios, identification of useful resources that provide information about the conflict, and identifying/updating materials to demonstrate key learning outcomes. As the Passadora Scenario is not 'evolving' there is no need to spend time researching and updating for the next subject offering.

VIII Opportunities For Improvement Based on Educator Feedback

All four educators suggested expanding on the suite of resources to improve the learning experience in the subjects that already make use of the scenario. Furthermore, additional characters and events could be created, which would both increase the complexity of the scenario and ensure that the scenario could be used in other CMR subjects. For example, it was suggested that some characters of different cultures would both enrich the Passadora story overall and make the scenario applicable to the subject Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution.

All educators pointed out that most resources were written materials. While written materials are cheaper to create and easier to amend if required, additional resources in formats other than text, such as video and audio clips, maps, photos, diagrams, etc, would cater to different learning styles of students. Several educators suggested the development of practical exercises such as role plays for various subjects (e.g. role plays to be used in the subjects Negotiation, Mediation, Facilitation, Conferencing, and Conflict Coaching).

One educator pointed out that a shortcoming of using a fictitious case scenario was that students did not get to practice researching information about the conflict, since they were provided with all relevant resources. Furthermore, the point was made that all existing resources contained “correct” and relatively well-written information. Therefore, the educator worried that students would not learn to distinguish biased and badly researched resources, which is an essential competence, particularly in times of “fake news”. Therefore, students would need to be exposed to biased and low-quality resources about the scenario, or students would need to be provided with other learning opportunities to research information about a real-life conflict and to evaluate the quality of a source.

Finally, one educator highlighted the need to sufficiently inform future educators in the program about how they could use the scenario in different ways in their subjects. For example, a short guide to the learning materials could be created with a list of key points, questions, and elements of conflict theory that each material can be used to discuss. It was also considered that a seminar for educators could be held to discuss how they can use the scenario in different ways.

IX Limitations on Student and Educator Feedback

As the scenario was first introduced into the curriculum in 2017, the number of students and educators who have engaged with the resources is limited. Whilst analysis to date indicates promising trends in relation to experiences across both populations, it will be important to continue to gather data over the coming years. Also, given the size of the CMR Program, the volume of individuals involved in the study was limited despite the sample sized being large in relation to the overall student population.

X Conclusion

This article discussed the value of using authentic case scenarios in postgraduate coursework and explained the process of developing a holistic conflict case scenario for teaching and assessment in the JCU CMR program. Feedback from postgraduate coursework students and educators shows that the Passadora Conflict is positively contributing to students’ university experience. Designed to be a unique and authentic conflict scenario, the Passadora Conflict has been customised to cater to diverse learning styles and can be used for both face-to-face and online delivery. There are multiple benefits for both students and educators to have an authentic, fictitious conflict scenario in teaching, learning, and assessment. As demonstrated through student survey results and student comments, working with the Passadora Conflict scenario has assisted students to understand and apply conflict theories, to develop conflict analysis skills, and appreciate how these skills and knowledge could apply to their current job or prospective career, thus better preparing students to become effective practitioners in the real world.⁴² While these findings are based on preliminary feedback only, the JCU CMR Program will continue to monitor student experiences in relation to the scenario and resources, and invest in the enhancement of existing materials, as well as the creation of new supporting materials.

⁴² Herrington, J. and Herrington, A. (2006) Authentic conditions for authentic assessment: aligning task and assessment. In A. Bunker & I. Vari (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2006 Annual international Conference of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc (HERDSA): Critical Visions: Thinking, Learning and Researching in Higher Education: Research and Development in Higher Education*, 29, pp150.