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# Choose Your Own Collaboration: An Adventure in Academic Time and Space

Alke Gröppel-Wegener, Eleanor Johnston and Lydia Bales

- Collaboration can be chaotic, random and unpredictable, which makes it rich, because it potentially extends your individual expertise, skills and abilities through combining them with others.
- Collaboration is also difficult to plan and rarely a straightforward linear process.
- This case study allows readers to reflect on this process by taking on the role of a university librarian in a choose-your-own-adventure style piece.
- The reader (YOU!) is presented with a number of choices and paths, and it is up to you to decide which route to take.
- Note that some options are randomized (e.g. flip a coin or throw a dice) to represent the importance of chance in any real life situation and reflect the nature of the collaborative process. But in contrast to real life, you can start again to change your fate.

## Introduction and Rationale

The process of collaboration is usually complex, and rich, and can be very emotional – potentially ranging from utter frustration to seemingly unlimited joy. The richness and plurality of this experience make it difficult to describe collaboration in a way that replicates the emotional experience itself and to reflect upon it. No matter how you try to tell the story, you will always have to go through a process of reduction and simplification to try to bring a certain point across. When we, as colleagues, collaborated across the divide of ‘the academics’ and ‘the library support staff’ at our university, we decided to examine and reflect on our experiences of working together. We considered this supercomplexity and the emotional implications both of participating in collaboration and of reflecting on it as important factors – aspects that are hard to find in the traditional academic literature. Because really, you need to

experience it to get a sense of what happened. The prescriptive structure of academic papers, such as peer-reviewed journals or research reports, are familiar to (academic) readers, but we wanted to achieve more than those constraining genres allow. We wanted to take you – our readers – on a journey, a quest, where you experience similar emotions and thoughts as us, when we engaged in our processes as collaborators. We did not just want you to read it, we wanted you to be able to engage with it at another level, and be able to also be subject to the feeling of not quite being in control of both process and outcomes, as other people's decisions and random events end up having a big impact on these.

This chapter was inspired by a virtual escape room project that was started during the first lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was a way to rethink content delivery and collaboration, as we were not able to meet in person. It inspired us to really consider how we interact with academic materials and communicate with each other, as well as engage with a larger/broader audience – something we wanted to continue in the consideration of this collaboration. Just as the escape room collaboration gave us a fun work project to look forward to, the writing of this chapter did as well, and we hope that you will have fun reading it, as well as taking it as an opportunity to reflect on how you collaborate with colleagues and who you collaborate with, and how you could improve your practice.

We chose the *Choose your own Adventure* format to put you into our shoes and ask you to make the sort of decisions we practically made in creating this online escape room. We hope to illustrate how collaboration is essential to success and what the steps are to achieve a truly collaborative and constructive team effort. All along our collaborative journey, there were points where the objective would fall out of sight, or where the support and motivation to create something together were missing. Luckily, we were able to come together and produce an outcome that we were happy with, but it is these detours that inform the structure of this chapter, which we hope may add to the audience's understanding of the complex business of collaboration.

It may seem that not writing a text in a traditional manner is frivolous – an easy way out or showing a lack of academic or theoretical rigour. Be assured that research has gone into this, as we considered not only our own experiences and reflections of designing the virtual escape room and of other collaborations we were part of, with each other and in other contexts, but also previous literature on collaboration. This informed strands and paths within the adventure you might encounter as a reader, but it (purposefully) is not presented in the traditional form of in-text citations and references (although these are still included if you wish to explore further). The chosen format meant a different approach to creating the content – not linear but branching, considering all the potential paths to take and the possible effects of each of those decisions. That brought a refreshing challenge to us as academic authors, as we felt empowered to step off the structured path of a traditional chapter or article, but it also provides an adventure for the reader.

As authors, the paths we set allowed us to consider what decisions others could take and what improvements we could make in future collaborations. Colleagues, lecturers and staff within the library were willing to test the paths of the chapter. This feedback

gave us the opportunity to improve our future collaborative practice as we developed the chapter itself. Indeed, we found that the format provided us with a fantastic opportunity to reflect on our own practice and how we can become better educators and collaborators. It opened a discussion of what collaborative practice is and how it can be successfully facilitated. It spurred our curiosity to look at research findings and related literature, helping us understand the broader context and each other's points of view – the realization of how different the university system works for people who work in different parts of it, even if they are at the same institution! We hope it will do the same for our readers, that it will bring a new perspective to you.

We hope you don't just read this once – depending on your choices and chance this might end up a very short read indeed – but rather that you reflect on your journey, retrace your steps and also consider what you would have done differently. You could be reminded of a different experience from that which we put forward, and we welcome that. In a way we are putting forward options that we thought of as typical, but really, they are meant as starting points for reflection and discussion. We hope that it will also encourage you to challenge assumptions of the traditional ways of doing things within academia, whether that be researching or teaching or any other role you might have.

Interested in going on this adventure? – start reading Section 1.

Not quite your bag? – find the next chapter in this edited collection.

## The Adventure

### 1

'I just came across the idea of a virtual escape room on Twitter, and thought this might work really well to test students on their library skills ... is that something that already exists? Or if not, would you be interested in helping me build something like that?' You look again at the email that just popped up in your inbox from Alex, a young colleague who recently joined the library team. A virtual escape room for the library?

- You immediately hate the idea – go to section **68**
- You are intrigued, but not really sure what an escape room is, even less the 'virtual' part – go to section **61**
- You love the idea and definitely want to be part of this – go to section **38**

### 2

Based on the research you have already done on virtual escape rooms, you compose an email laying out the potential benefits for the students and send it to your line manager.

- Either – go to section **50**
- Or – go to section **79**

**3**

You start emailing back and forth about your ideas for the virtual escape room, but progress is quite slow. Whenever you do meet, you all have a great time, but you notice that the discussion of the actual escape room project becomes less and less. At some point Alex takes you to one side saying how disappointed they are that you haven't really gotten anything together.

- Do you want to try to establish clearer rules to restart the project – go to section **69**
- Have you sort of lost interest in the project yourself – go to section **16**

**4**

Over the next two days you get replies from your colleagues, but seemingly only other librarians are up for it. No matter, you set up a meeting so that you can introduce Alex to your new team.

- Go to section **58**

**5**

You agree to send out the link to each of the subject areas you promote and to advertise it on the university pages, as well as promoting it via the library social media channels. You also each agree to host the link on your subject support pages. Flip a coin.

- If it's heads – go to section **76**
- If it's tails – go to section **62**

**6**

Over the next two days, a number of academics get back to you! Three academics want to help create the rooms. This is amazing! They are clearly up for making time for this project and can contribute subject experience from across the entire university. Set up a meeting so that you and Alex can get to know your new team.

- Go to section **14**

**7**

As it turns out, everybody is completely fine with arranging regular online meetings, so you do just that and can now press on with coming up with some objectives for your virtual escape room.

- Go to section **63**

**8**

Now that you know a bit more about the virtual escape room idea ...

- You want to continue with the project – go to section **38**
- You need to do more research – go to section **39**
- You decide that this isn't really for you – go to section **75**

**9**

You come clean at the next meeting, telling the team that you are struggling making this work. Some others say that they are not surprised, because they have had trouble with this software in the past, and they admit how happy they were when you volunteered for this task ... Somebody suggests you share your screen, and you figure the steps out together. While it takes a while, the team really helps make sense of the instructions and you manage to put the content into the file.

- Go to section **80**

**10**

Somebody in the team volunteers for this task and by the next meeting they have shared a file that includes all the room content you had come up with.

- Go to section **80**

**11**

Most members of the team seem to prefer communicating via email, as well as having the occasional meeting in the burrito bar or down the pub.

- You agree with this strategy – go to section **18**
- You think maybe you need a more structured approach – go to section **47**

**12**

You get stuck in a colleague's room. How embarrassing! And also, if you get stuck, how likely is it that students can solve this?

- Go to section **67**

**13**

Over the next two days, you don't hear back from anybody. Even though you double-check, and the message really did go out and it really did include the right spelling of

your email address. A few days later you have received a few apologies and even some induction requests, which you ‘share’ with Alex.

- Do you try a more personal approach and get in touch with some of the academics you know? – go to section **22**
- Clearly the academics are not interested or too busy, so you and Alex will have to go it alone – go to section **57**

#### **14**

You arrive at your meeting, but not everyone shows up ... Maybe the other’s interest in the project wasn’t that great after all? A bit disheartened, you suggest making a start when you get an email from one of the academics saying that they were embarrassed to admit that they went to the old site of the library ... another one didn’t find the right room (although it sounds like at least they were in the right building). Maybe you’ve been here so long you didn’t consider where other people work and just assumed they would be as familiar with the location as you are. Does choosing the library as a meeting venue make this a library-led project rather than a true collaboration?

You decide to reconvene to the pub – everybody knows where that is ...

- Go to section **58**

#### **15**

Hi Alex, on the topic of asking some of the academics to collaborate with us: I’m just reading this piece, which fits in nicely: ‘We should resist the temptation of adopting stereotypical depictions that contrast the monkish habits of sole-author book-publishing humanities scholars with the assumed sociability of multi-authored article-publishing scientists’ (Lewis et al., 2012, p.694 – in case you are interested). In the same way it’s probably not healthy for us to assume that the academics won’t want to work with us ‘lowly librarians’. There must be so much pressure on them with all the bids they have to write on top of all the teaching and admin ... but maybe some of them really want to join this project. So, we should give them the opportunity to take part. What do you think would be best, to send out a message for everybody on the university intranet, or shall we each make a list of the lecturers we work with and approach them?

- Either – go to section **26**
- Or – go to section **19**

#### **16**

You realize that this project is going nowhere, but hey, the loyalty card for the burrito bar wouldn’t have filled up all by itself, and you did start a regular evening at the pub with some nice colleagues. This should surely count as a collaborative effort!

The End.

**17**

You have an email exchange with Alex and you both agree on a deadline and make a plan of how much time you can spend on it every week. Then you forward this carefully considered breakdown to your line manager, emphasizing the relatively short time you'll spend on it (only one hour per week each), the deadline (it'll be ready for the students coming back in September) and potential benefits (student engagement, but also showing the library team off as innovative). Clearly you did a great job, because you immediately get a positive response and now can crack on.

- Go to section **45**

**18**

Throw a dice

- If you throw anything from 1 to 5 – go to section **3**
- If you throw a 6 – go to section **41**

**19**

The next morning you receive a reply from Alex. 'Hi, in a way I think it would be better to approach people we know, but because I am so new, I don't really know anybody yet. Do you think you have enough contacts to make this work?'

- Go to section **22**

**20**

As you open the last paper you want to read before finally deciding whether to actually commit to this project or not, you realize it was written by X and some collaborators discussing the very successful virtual escape room project they designed and implemented at your university. Unfortunately, you missed taking part in it, because you were too busy reading about the theory. It's interesting that you seemed to prefer reading about the project rather than actually collaborating with people ...

The End.

**21**

You take Alex out for a pint and explain to them that at your institution the academics really just work on their own stuff and that you can't really think of anybody who would even get back to you if approached. Some of the frustrations of being considered a 'supporter' rather than a collaborator on equal footing might slip out, too. For example, librarians never really get funding to do any research ... It's a long night but you end up bonding over an involved comparison of the advantages of real ale versus cocktails.



- Are you Team Cocktail? – go to section 57
- Are you Team Real Ale? – go to section 78

## 22

Hi Alex, I really think the personal approach is the way to go – I know of some really committed academics and library staff who I think will put in the time and effort – and have amazing individual expertise that we can utilise. I don't want to pester staff who are already super busy. Why don't I put together a message and see whether any of those 'usual suspects' would be up for helping us? I know an excellent tutor in animation who I am sure could come up with some amazing scenarios ....

You compose some emails to the people you think are likely to be up for this, sit back and wait ... and flip a coin

- If it is heads – go to section 4
- If it is tails – go to section 6

## 23

At your next meeting you all agree that you think that your virtual escape room is now finished. Yay! You are all really proud of what you have achieved. The next step, of course, is to put it out there and encourage students to actually play it (and hopefully learn something).

- If your team was of librarians only – go to section 5
- If your team consisted of both librarians and academics – go to section 37

## 24

You end up with a list that is very specific to the subjects of the academics in your team ... and it quickly becomes so specific that it doesn't feel like a collaboration anymore.

- Do you just leave the academics to do it themselves, after all they each know what the students actually need – go to section 53
- Do you suggest taking a step back and trying to find a way to make it more generally applicable – go to section 32

## 25

Hi Alex, thanks for sending that paper over. Really interesting stuff. The issue of considering the environment that Mattesich identified really chimed with

me. I think he means the institution's history of previous collaborations and political and social issues at work inside an institution are important. I am sure your experience of working in a University Library will be fascinating compared with mine, so maybe we can have a chat about those previous experiences? Fancy meeting for a cup of tea and having a chat about this?

- Go to section **35**

## **26**

The next morning you receive a reply from Alex.

Hi, I totally think we should be asking as many academics as possible – I'm new and really want to find out who may reply – I've literally no idea! Could we ask comms to add a message onto our staff intranet and weekly newsletter asking for volunteers? I think we should ask for people who'd like to contribute in the long term – in so far as creating the escape rooms and adding their expertise, in terms of their subject knowledge. I currently don't really know that much about the subjects outside my school, so I am intrigued to hear what resources they want to highlight and push to their students. I suspect there will be loads of things I have never even heard of! What do you think? Best, Alex.

- If you agree – go to section **44**
- If you disagree – go to section **22**

## **27**

Flip a coin

- If it's heads – go to section **82**
- If it's tails – go to section **10**

## **28**

Everybody in the group seems to agree – one even remarks how strange it is that while you are all librarians, some of your work is still so specifically different depending on what subject you are working with, that it is easy to forget what the basics are that most students will need! With this new focus on your collaboration the next meeting is filled with good ideas that would work for most, if not all, of the students at the university.

- Go to section **49**

**29**

The instructions you have work like a dream, and you are happy to make a good contribution to the team – you had been wondering whether you were actually pulling your weight.

- Go to section **80**

**30**

Hi there, so funny that you mentioned maybe doing some research on collaboration, because I have started doing just that! I came across a short paper by Mattesich that is well worth checking out – you can find it here (<https://shelterforce.org/2003/05/01/can-this-collaboration-be-saved/>). He basically identified 20 factors that significantly contribute to the success of a collaborative group, so maybe these could be helpful when going forward. Best, Alex

- Go to section **25**

**31**

You easily go through all of them – this is great, you basically feel that you have a really solid draft already.

- Go to section **67**

**32**

At your next meeting you have a great discussion about the different topics you could include in your virtual escape room, specifically building something that would work for as many students as possible. You agree to make this not about a library induction, but rather as a refresher for returning students, but to link some resources in a ‘Help’ section that would allow students to look up how to do something and make sure they won’t get stuck in rooms. One of the things you realize is that you and your academic colleagues are using different terminologies for some things – no wonder that students can be confused when different members of staff use different terms! – so you decide to definitely include something on academic jargon. But what also comes up is that some subjects use different referencing systems and ask the students to use different resources – these are things you could not really cover in a generic escape room. How do you proceed?

- You try to find a way to also include some subject-specific info – go to section **77**
- You decide to only include information that would be useful to students of all subjects and get rid of anything too specific – go to section **52**

**33**

Now that you have some good content, you'll need to think a bit more about how to actually deliver this – how can you turn it into a virtual escape room (especially considering that you don't have a technical wizard on your team who could build a professional website)?

When looking at examples, you find some simple ones that just seem to use a Form format – a bit of text (and sometimes an image) that ends in a multiple-choice question. But that seems a bit basic. One of your teammates finds instructions written by Dr Emma Thirkell that explain how to build a virtual escape room using OneNote – and after everybody on the team has read that, you all agree to give that a try.

- If your team thinks one person should be in charge of building the web version – go to section **27**
- If your team decides to all work on a shared file – go to section **65**

**34**

You receive an email from one of your testers: 'Hi there, I tested out your escape room. I think the concept is great, but I got stuck in a room for 40 minutes and could not progress with the rest of the puzzle. I think students might find this too difficult and it maybe needs a rethink.' You discuss this with the team and come to the following conclusion:

- You are all confused how someone could get stuck in that room which includes a really basic puzzle and decide to ignore the feedback as you know that the students will understand it – go to section **64**
- You appreciate the feedback but feel you shouldn't change things just based on one opinion – go to section **46**
- You can see you need to look at this again – go to section **71**

**35**

You meet Alex for a cup of tea and have a chat about the institutional collaboration environment. And one of the important things is that you tell them all about their new colleagues. During the conversation you really try to highlight the strengths of some of the amazing academics and support staff in your institution, in order to build trust in this community for Alex, as a relatively new colleague. You also plan to make sure that you'll meet up with as many colleagues interested in the virtual escape room project as possible, so that these important links can be made and everybody can get to know the individual skills people bring to the project as well as be able to define the intentions of a newly formed group.

- Go to section **15**

**36**

You get a short reply from your line manager sarcastically remarking that you obviously don't have enough work if you want to take part in what can surely only be considered a gimmick.

- If you try to persuade them – go to section **2**
- If you decide to work on this anyway, even if you might have to do it outside of your work hours – go to section **45** to commit to the project straight away.

**37**

You and all your librarian colleagues make sure that the virtual escape room link gets promoted and advertised on the library website, as well as via the library social media channels. Your academic colleagues start using the link as a refresher activity for their students, as well as telling their colleagues about it.

In fact, the outcomes of this collaboration build to something so popular that most students do the escape room at least once while they are students, and they send back some amazing feedback. You are inundated by requests to talk about not the escape room itself, but rather about collaborating with academic colleagues – good thing you managed to get some on the team, because you don't think the project would have been as successful if you had ended up as an insular team.

The End.

**38**

You'll need clearance from your line manager, so you write them a short email to explain the potential collaboration and ask whether you can take some of your time to take part in it.

- If you are reading this in the am – go to section **36**
- If you are reading this in the pm – go to section **55**

**39**

You decide to do your own research on escape rooms. Start by reading Taraldsen, Haara, Lysne, Jensen and Jenssen's 2020 'A review on use of escape rooms in education – touching the void' from *Education Inquiry*.

- Go to section **48**

**40**

The team replies with most members wanting regularly timetabled online meetings. This is exactly what you wanted to hear. You feel that you are naturally falling into

the leadership role, but maybe this is something to further discuss with colleagues, so you set up a first meeting to discuss roles and responsibilities. During that meeting everybody seems happy for you to facilitate the project and you are able to agree on a time for regular meetings.

- Go to section **63**

#### **41**

Most people in the team seem fine with you scheduling regular online meetings, but it turns out that they don't really have the time, as you hardly ever have the whole team at these meetings. So, most of the work gets stuck with you and Alex, but at least you have some collaborative input.

- Go to section **63**

#### **42**

One person gets back to you stating they only joined the group to support their school and cannot be doing something generic for different students, so they drop out. You plough on ahead with a reduced team, but although the loss of a team member has affected morale a bit, you are able to rally and come up with some unique room ideas that would work for most, if not all, of the students at the university.

- Go to section **49**

#### **43**

As you continue to work on turning the library induction into a series of rooms for your project, it becomes clear that the academics become somewhat disenchanted by the project, after all they are not librarians and don't know the ins-and-outs of your subject material that well, which is ironic, because they tend to know their subjects in so much detail. But not the library approach ... so it really seems to be the librarians that contribute most. But at least you have some reliable testers for your puzzles. (Although you sometimes wonder why you did approach them to collaborate since now they bring so little to the project.)

- Go to section **49**

#### **44**

You email the comms peeps and put the message out there, Here's hoping!  
This 'choice' is not yours ... flip a coin!

- If it is heads – go to section **6**
- If it is tails – go to section **13**

**45**

After you replied to Alex that you are on board, they get back to you asking whether you maybe should ask other people as well to make it a larger collaboration. Maybe trying to get some of the academics that you support on board might not be a bad idea? On the other hand, they always seem to write their own stuff, so would they be interested in this little project, that is more teaching than research focused – and then not necessarily fit with their subject either?

- You dismiss the idea of approaching academics, because in your experience they work alone (or with each other) – go to section **21**
- You agree that you should at least try to get some academics on board – go to section **15**

**46**

The team agrees that it would be helpful to know if more people find this particular room difficult, so you reply to the email thanking your colleague for the feedback and particularly look out for mentions of this room from your other testers.

- Either – go to section **70**
- Or – go to section **71**

**47**

While it is certainly useful to spend some time in social situations with people, you have a hunch that in order to achieve a goal, it can be helpful to set time aside in a more formal setting. While you are trying to find a way to diplomatically communicate this in an email, you all receive a reply from Alex.

Dear team, I'm so excited that you are all interested in collaborating to put together a virtual escape room. However, I'm a bit worried about doing this just via email and the occasional meeting in the pub. As you know I am still fairly new to my role, and there is so much going on at the moment, that I'm afraid that if our working processes are too fuzzy, they might get lost. Having set times for meetings will also increase my motivation to get tasks done on time! Would you maybe reconsider scheduling regular meetings? It would really help me out!

You're glad at least one person agrees with you!

- If your first name is up to four letters long – go to section **7**
- If your first name is five or longer – go to section **41**

**48**

- If you feel you have done enough research and want to join the project – go to section **38**
- If you feel you have done enough research, but don't want to join the project – go to section **75**
- If you feel you need to do some more research – go to section **73**

**49**

Now that you have agreed on what topics your rooms will have, you allocate each room to a member of the team and let them come up with content and puzzle(s) for it. Before your next meeting everybody shares the content and puzzles; they have drafted to give everybody else the time to go through them before you get together.

Throw a dice.

- If you throw a 1 or 2 – go to section **31**
- If you throw a 3 or 4 – go to section **59**
- If you throw a 5 or 6 – go to section **12**

**50**

Unfortunately, your line manager is not convinced and not prepared to make some time in your workload. However, you decide to work on this anyway, even if you might have to do it outside of your work hours.

- Go to section **45**

**51**

You receive a message from Alex that admits that while they really enjoyed meeting all the new people, they are a bit nervous when it comes to going forward with a collaboration. It sounds like they had some really bad experiences of working with others as part of their education ... You reply:

Hi Alex. I understand your hesitations, collaborations always seem tricky to get right. But I'm glad you invited me to do this project with you and that you are part of this process. It is worth stepping back and thinking about this, especially if you are a bit nervous about the whole thing. I did a unit on collaboration recently as part of some CPD, so I've been reading quite a bit about this, and that was really helpful. But, to be honest, not as helpful as actually working with people! I really believe that the membership and 'who's who' of a group are key to our success. As members we need to understand how this collaboration will benefit us and help us



to accomplish our personal goals. I think I'll learn a lot from others and be able to be part of creating something entirely new.

- If you want to check out some of the reading, check section 83, and then continue by going to section 72.

## 52

At your next meeting you take the preliminary list of room subjects and go through them one by one discussing with the whole team whether each is targeted at all students, or just at a specific subject. You keep only the ones that are for everybody and get rid of the others. This results in a much leaner list, so immediately the project becomes less daunting – you had had a lot of room ideas before.

- Go to section 49

## 53

The project moves forward.

A few months into the work, you talk to Alex and reflect on how much more comprehensive what is being produced now is, but also that there is no real collaboration anymore. Everybody is working on their own subject-specific rooms, and it will be difficult to turn them into one coherent experience for the students. But then maybe this isn't necessary anyway, because none of the students will want to do all the different rooms anyway – why learn about approaches to the approaches to the library that aren't linked to their subject area, after all? So really what you are all producing are not one massive virtual escape room, but rather everybody is building their own for their own subject.

While Alex is, of course, happy to have inspired this flurry of activities, the sharing of skills and collaboration that you were both hoping for unfortunately hasn't happened. But in the end you both have built some generic rooms, which your colleagues seem keen to build as introductory sections into their subject-specific rooms, so at least the work was not for nothing.

The End.

## 54

While the instructions seem really clear, you quickly realize that you are clearly struggling with this.

- If you share your difficulties with the team at the next meeting – go to section 9
- If you are too embarrassed to let the team know (after you volunteered for the task) and instead find some OneNote training – go to section 56

**55**

You get a reply from your line manager asking you to explain why you should spend your time on developing something you have no experience of and that might not even work in supporting students. What do you think is the biggest problem for your line manager?

- They don't know what a virtual escape room is, and need to be made aware of the potential benefits – go to section 2
- They are not sure how much time this will take away from your other duties – go to section 17

**56**

Luckily the university offers training in all sorts of software, so you manage to sign up to a OneNote session, and after that it is all much clearer, and you manage to put the content into a file.

- Go to section 80

**57**

The two of you start working on your virtual escape room alone. You put a lot of work into building something that is as useful as possible from a librarian's point of view, and are really proud of the result once it goes live.

Unfortunately, not many students ever play it (although you always point them to it in any sessions you do with them). A few years later you ask one of the lecturers you work with about their opinion on the virtual escape room and they say that they did try to play it once, but the things that were asked for were so obscure they seemed not really targeted at their students, so they never promoted it any further. In fact, they themselves got stuck in the third room, so never finished it! Maybe, in hindsight, collaborating with somebody from the academic side would not have been such a bad idea?

The End.

**58**

In order to make this exchange of experiences a bit less formal, you decide to meet for a pub quiz. Playing as a team in an informal environment allows you to get to know each other better, and the time between rounds is taken up by sharing skills, knowledge and experiences. You are able to discover some complementary skills that will come in really handy for working on the virtual escape room – and any other future projects.

- Go to section 51

**59**

You find all the rooms challenging, but in a good way, and with a few tweaks you think you have a good draft.

- Go to section **67**

**60**

The group gets together and decides that your aim is to create a virtual escape room for returning students that tests and refreshes their skills in using basic library skills. All the team members then put forward ideas for different rooms and what sort of puzzles you could include, so there are a lot of possibilities on the table. However, you realize that while you are all librarians, you all support different subject areas and are concerned with slightly different issues – and whenever there is a discussion, there is a lot of allegiance to the different subject areas.

- You decide to raise this issue in order to create something that is more generic and can be used by the maximum number of students – go to section **66**
- You think that if your colleagues feel they need to include a lot of subject-specific information, then clearly this is what should be done – go to section **53**

**61**

You reply to Alex asking for more information, and soon get the following reply:

Hi there, so glad that you are intrigued. I'm not a huge expert either, but recently at the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education Conference 2021 there were two sessions and a poster talking about this, so it is definitely already being done in HE. The main idea is to present engagement through puzzles and a story, so that the learners are actively exploring. The 2017 EscapED article by Samantha Clarke and colleagues seems to be a key text – you can check this out here: <http://journal.seriousgamessociety.org/index.php/IJSG/article/view/180> for more info. So overall this is a development of the whole gamification in education trend – making stuff more accessible and engaging by introducing a playful (and possibly also competitive) dimension. What do you think? Worth a try?

- Go to section **8**

**62**

Different members of the team seem to get different responses – from no responses at all, to academics who seem to love this initiative and send their students to the link every year. One or two of them even get in touch with you to ask whether you could help them build something similar that is more subject specific.

Maybe there is a new collaboration on the horizon.

The End.

**63**

The group is throwing out some ideas for what to put into the different rooms.

- Does your team consist of only librarians? – go to section **60**
- Does your team consist of both librarians and academics? – go to section **81**

**64**

You risk not changing the activity and choose to send the virtual escape room out to students as is. However, as it turns out, quite a few students do end up getting stuck at that point, give up and give this library initiative bad feedback because they got so frustrated as they were not able to complete the room. Maybe in the future you need to be more careful to take feedback into consideration.

The End.

**65**

Alex volunteers to start a file and then shares it with everybody. After some small hiccups about making sure that everybody has editing permissions, this seems to work well and team members are adding their room content by the next meeting.

- Go to section **80**

**66**

You send out an email:

Dear team, Thanks for the last meeting, I think we came up with some really good ideas. However, I am conscious that we are veering a bit towards the subject specific. I am concerned this might mean we lose some students because it becomes a more subject focused exercise rather than the more basic induction/ refresher that we had agreed on. I think in order to make this as useful to as many students as possible, we should think of more 'generic' ideas for our next meeting.

Flip a coin.

- If it's heads – go to section **42**
- If it's tails – go to section **40**

**67**

At your next meeting you all swap feedback regarding the rooms. Some clearly need to be made easier ... You also realize that while you have a lot of variety in your rooms, there is also a certain lack of cohesion, for example, the passwords that are the solutions are all in different formats, some just seemingly random letters, some numbers, some a combination of the two. In order to not overcomplicate things, you agree on a consistent format – each room should lead to a five-letter word – and brainstorm which passwords you could use. Then everybody tweaks ‘their’ room based on the feedback.

- Go to section 33

**68**

Hi Alex, I don’t think we have anything like it, and to be honest, I don’t think this would work. After all, the students are here to learn and not to play silly games, I really don’t like the idea of dressing everything up as ‘fun’ activities ... And I really don’t have the time for extra work at the moment. Best wishes

You sign off and send your reply, happy that this is not one of the things you will have to collaborate on!

The End.

**69**

You arrange an ad hoc meeting for everyone and review the progress you have made on this project (not much). Then you and Alex convince the rest of the team to start scheduling regular online meetings.

- If your first name is up to four letters long – go to section 7
- If your first name is five or longer – go to section 41

**70**

The other feedback you got indicates that most testers did complete the room in question and that it didn’t take them particularly long. So, it seems like some have found the room too hard and some found it fine (and one person when asked states they found it too easy). You decide as a team to keep the puzzle the same but adjust some of the instructions to make it more clear what you want the players to do. You also make sure that there is enough information in the Help section to allow people who get unstuck if necessary.

- Go to section 23

**71**

Once you start looking at the feedback properly, and also getting back to some of the testers to ask them about this room particularly, it becomes clear that this room gave pretty much everybody some difficulties, so you take this feedback on board and completely redesign that puzzle. You then send the new puzzle out for 'retesting', and this time it gets positive feedback.

- Go to section **23**

**72**

Alex seems to be more confident in going forward with a collaboration now but seems to be happier if you start to get the ball rolling properly. Thinking back to the Mattesich article, you realize it is important for the group to decide on roles, responsibilities and purpose, so you decide to kick things off by sending an email to everybody asking for ideas on how best to get together and how often to catch up.

Throw a dice.

- If you throw an odd number – go to section **40**
- If you throw an even number – go to section **11**

**73**

You continue your own research on escape rooms, gamification, play in learning, game-based learning, active learning and other key words that come to mind.

Roll a dice.

- If you roll 1 – go to section **20**
- If you roll 2–6 – go to section **48**

**74**

Hi Alex, I'm sorry, I was probably just feeling a bit negative the other night. You make some great points, without reaching out to other people we would lose all that experience and perspective that is beyond us – I think it is a great idea to get academics and support staff from across the whole university involved. Especially since I think that us librarians sometimes feel a bit 'outside' the traditional research at universities – we just don't have the subject expertise that people reach out to. Well, not in the same way academics do anyway. It's just that sometimes I feel like I am really not being taken seriously by that 'other side' and it is so frustrating. Maybe there is some research on collaboration we could do in order to get this right?

- Go to section **30**

75

You write a polite email back to Alex letting them know that this isn't really your thing, and you don't want to collaborate on this, but wish them good luck with it.

The End.

76

While the link is heavily promoted and hosted across the library website, there seems to be a real lack of buy-in – maybe because you don't have any academics on the team to promote it to their students directly? So, while your collaboration was a success, maybe a less insular approach would have come up with a more popular project.

The End.

77

At your next meeting you have a look at all the different room ideas you have, and sort them into two piles – the ones that would be useful for all students, and the ones that are more subject specific. You decide to definitely keep the ones useful for all students. The rooms that include information that is really targeted at only one subject are more problematic. Specific resources for each subject, for example, don't make sense to share, but the academics on your team argue that they are going to be very useful indeed. You decide that the players should be able to choose between them, and that you could start with making rooms for the subjects the members of your team teach, but then provide some instructions on how to build new ones based on different subject, so that other subject teams can build their own in future to include in this resource. The academics from each subject volunteer to take a lead on 'their' subject room(s).

- Go to section 49

78

In the next few days, you get an email from Alex.

Thank you for the great evening the other day. Really fun to go out and socialise a bit. And I totally understand where you are coming from, it is sometimes hard to tell whether academics are actually interested in working with us, or whether they just see us as people they can get to cover a session if they need a day off or just don't feel like teaching the reference systems! However, at my previous institution I had some really good relationships with some and they were great to work with. So maybe we would be missing a trick here if we don't at least try to get some on board – after all, collaboration is really a social activity that takes place within institutional contexts. I've just read this piece by Bozeman and some other people from 2001 where they say the important thing about collaboration is that

it includes the researchers' tacit knowledge, craft knowledge and know-how – and academics might differ from ours, so let's get in touch with some and see what they say. Maybe one or two are really up for it? Could you recommend some that you have worked well within the past, maybe?

- You are not convinced and insist you go it alone – go to section 57
- You see their point, after all you don't really lose anything by asking – go to section 22
- You're unsure – maybe a bit of research on collaboration would help? – go to section 74

## 79

You receive a favourable response and can now go ahead and start planning.

- Go to section 45

## 80

Now that you have a draft of your virtual escape room that the team is happy with, you decide that it is time to ask some people from outside of the team to test it. You ask everybody on the team to send the link to the escape room out to three to five people and ask them to playtest it for you and send some feedback before your next meeting.

- Go to section 34

## 81

You meet as a group and start thinking about the topics you could make the individual rooms about. You and Alex come prepared with what the standard library induction teaches – surely that would be a great starting point? However, one of your academic colleagues suggests making a list of the issues that students seem to often struggle with. How do you decide to proceed as a team?

- You stick with the standard library induction, after all that is tried and tested – go to section 43
- You ask your academic colleagues to make the suggested list and focus on those issues – go to section 24
- You all make lists to then discuss together – go to section 32

## 82

You decide to volunteer for this task; you've always wanted to do a bit more in OneNote.

- If you have experience working with OneNote – go to section 29
- If you don't really have experience working with OneNote – go to section 54



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