

## **Final Reflection**

After reflecting on this module in relation to my learning experiences, my role within the development team project stands out as being significant, while my experiences of the individual tasks have helped me to understand the emotional factors that have shaped my learning journey. In order to aid my reflection on these issues, I have employed Rolfe, Freshwater & Jasper's (2001) approach to critical reflection, utilising their 'What?', 'So what?', 'What next?' format to structure my insights. I will begin with my reflections on the collaborative team project for Assessment 1.

### **What?**

After having been involved in a collaborative group project in the Secure Software Development (SSD) module, I knew that I would be drawn towards playing the role of group lead. I was however keen to learn from my reflections from that module in order to become a more collaborative team member (see Figure 1).

#### ***Figure 1: Extract from SSD reflection (Edge, 2024)***

*Although proud of my leadership skills and the mark we achieved for our design document, I am keen to play more of a supportive role in my next team assignment, encouraging involvement from quieter team members in order to avoid limiting their contributions and applied expertise.*

### **So what?**

My leadership role began, as it did in my last group project, with my instigating initial contact with each group member using the Moodle messaging service to organise our first meeting (see Figure 2). I was however determined not to dominate subsequent group conversations and the assignment in general, keen as well not to take on other members' workloads myself as I had done in the SSD module; I knew that doing so could be seen as domineering. Indeed, studies have shown that overbearing group members can be detrimental to individual members' performance in group tasks (Theobald et al., 2017). I had previously reflected on this tendency to attempt to take too much control of group tasks in the SSD module (see Figure 3).

**Figure 2: initial messages sent on the university's Moodle messaging service**

09:39 **Todd Edge**

Hi Karl.

Hope you're doing OK - nice to see we'll be in the same group again!

Are you available to meet this evening to try to hammer out this group contract? I've tried to add the other group members as contacts to get a message to them; I wish there was an easy way to create a group chat on here!



**Timothy Brayshaw** 10:00

Hi Todd.

10:06 **Todd Edge**

Hi Tim,

Just seeing if everyone in our group is free to meet this evening to quickly hammer out this group contract? I've only just found where it is 😊

Think we were supposed to have submitted by this morning but I've let Doug know that this isn't going to happen, but that we're trying to meet to get it sorted!



**Ben Waters** 09:56

Hi Todd thanks for contacting and reaching out hope you are well and looking forward to the module

10:07 **Todd Edge**

Hi Ben,

No probs - yeah, don't know much about project management but am giving it a go!

Just seeing if everyone in our group is free to meet this evening to quickly hammer out this group contract? I've only just found where it is 😊

Think we were supposed to have submitted by this morning but I've let Doug know that this isn't going to happen, but that we're trying to meet to get it sorted!

**Figure 3: Extract from SSD reflection (Edge, 2024)**

*Subsequent meetings saw roles repeated, and I led conversations towards a discussion of the progress made, before giving my view of what to do next, making the decision to take-over responsibility of the main system class diagram after seeing that the quieter member of the group had not yet produced one. Looking back, it was apparent that the member of the team in question spoke even less during this meeting, and it was perhaps wrong of me to have fully taken responsibility of this task.*

Although I had such reflections in mind, during the first meeting in which we drew up the team contract I insisted that non-performance would be reflected in peer assessment grading for each team member (see Figure 4). Since reflecting on this, I now see this as too harsh a response and, after seeking out advice, feel that I should have suggested that supportive discussions take place in the first instance so that work quality could be addressed in a positive, tactful manner (Kanopy, 2015).

**Figure 4: the team contract**

Team Name: Go-faster Stripes

GOALS: What are our team goals for this project? What do we want to accomplish? What skills do we want to develop or refine?
Produce a set of requirements, a development plan with suitable milestones, proposed deliverables and an estimated cost of the system.
EXPECTATIONS: What do we expect of one another in regard to attendance at meetings, participation, frequency of communication, the quality of work, etc.?
Attend every meeting unless reason given in advance.  Agree to undertake work detailed in meetings to the best of our abilities.
POLICIES & PROCEDURES: What rules can we agree on to help us meet our goals and expectations, such as preparatory tasks, generating ideas, evaluating outcomes?
Make sure work is done before meetings  Google docs, agile board  Share ideas even if it's not your current role
ROLES: Which roles do we need in this project and how do we allocate them? Will there be a project lead? Is there a need to rotate roles?
Project Manager – Tim Product Owner/Requirements Manager (the representative of the customer) - Todd Project Analyst - Ben System/Software Architect – Karl  Review and rotate roles
CONSEQUENCES: How will we address non-performance regarding these goals, expectations, policies and procedures? How do we resolve disagreements?
Non-performance will be reflected in peer review  Disagreements resolved through discussion

In a further attempt to be decisive but not domineering, I was keen to discuss key decisions as much as possible, as well as praise group members (see Figure 5 and 6). This likely had a positive effect on members as studies have found that students' perceived level of comfort in group settings is a key influencer on their individual performance, suggesting that praise from group members will positively affect overall team performance (Kochis et al., 2021; Theobald et al., 2017).

Figure 5: an email reply to a suggested course of action

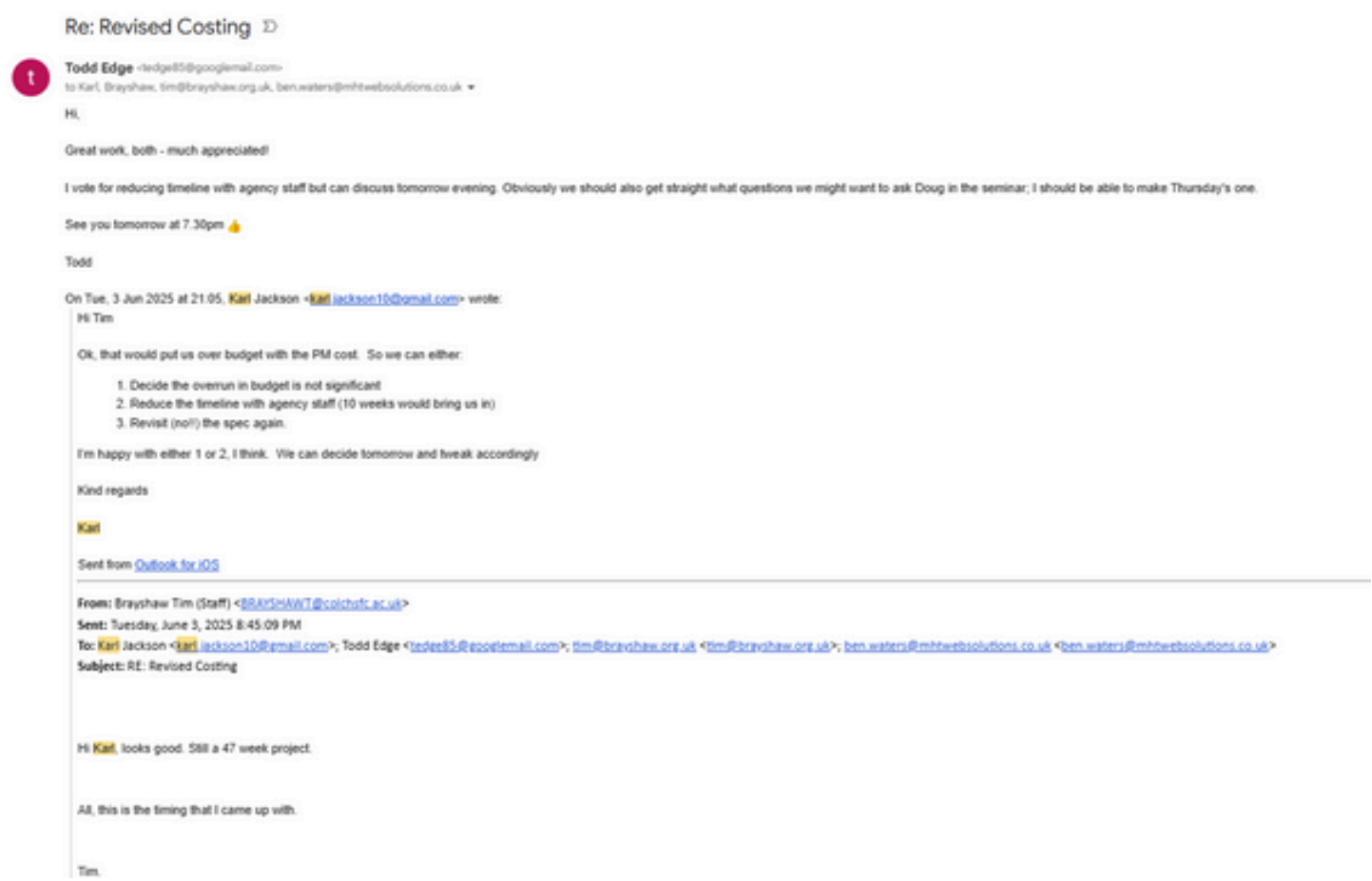


Figure 6: my reply to Tim



### **What Next?**

I feel that I developed my skills as a group leader within this project, seeking to praise members and not dominate. I will seek to repeat these patterns of behaviour in future such projects however I do feel that I could in future go further to soften suggested consequences for non-performance; here I will suggest the use of supportive discussions in favour of strict peer assessment repercussions, especially considering the extenuating personal circumstances that one of our team members experienced which meant that they were unable to complete some of the tasks to the best of their abilities.

I will now reflect on my individual contributions throughout this module.

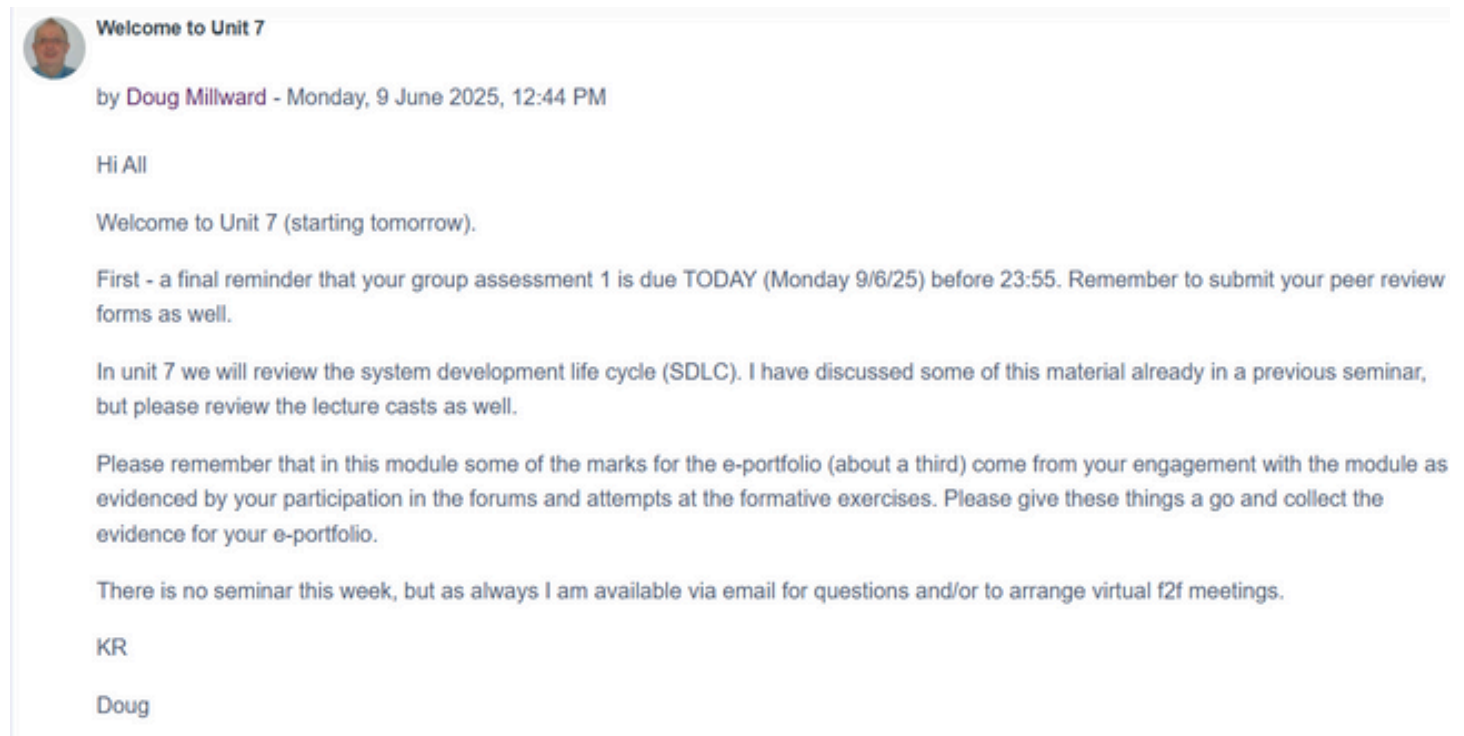
### **What?**

Within this module, I enjoyed completing tasks and I tried to complete at least one portfolio task for each module, as well as take part in each stage of the collaborative discussion tasks. I did however find it difficult to attend seminars and experienced some frustration following a lack of involvement from other students in the collaborative discussions, which limited my levels of engagement at times.

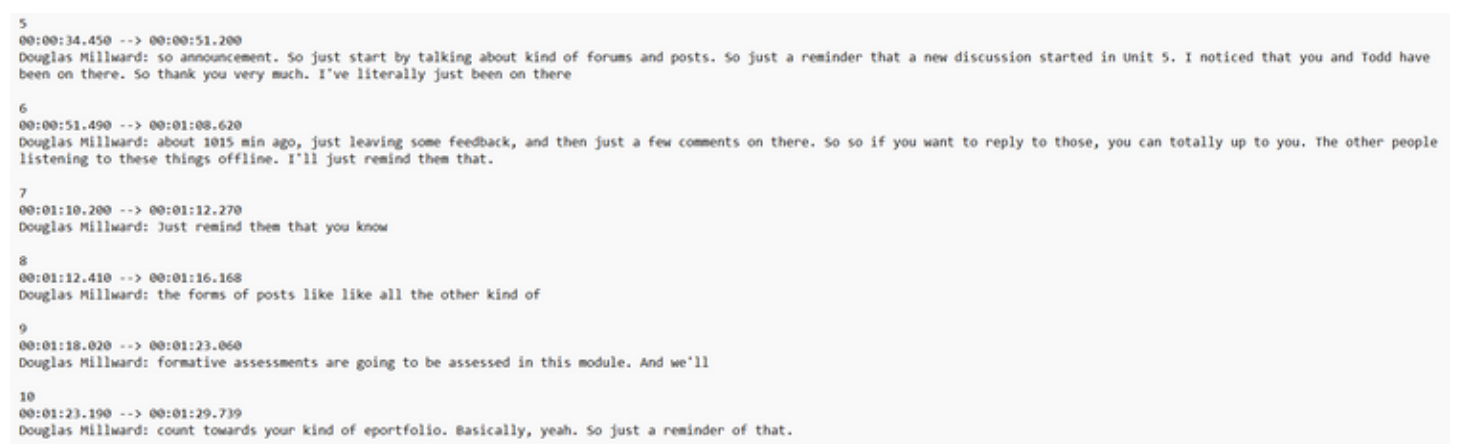
### **So What?**

Watson, Fulton & Ketron (2024) suggest that active online student forums can create a sense of inclusion and belonging between fellow students – important qualities that should be sustained in order to motivate the engagement of online students. To this end, the course tutor did attempt to promote such discussions through module and seminar announcements (see Figures 7 & 8) as well through his own participation in the forums. However, participation from peers was still limited and, despite a positive experience in the collaborative task, I did find that this drop-off in group participation tasks reduced my feelings of inclusion and group belonging, consistent with Watson, Fulton & Ketron's (2024) findings.

**Figure 7: Email from course tutor to remind students to participate in forum discussions**



**Figure 8: Seminar transcript showing additional reminder to students to participate in forum discussions**



Although research has found that academic achievement does play an important role in motivating online students (Shapiro et al., 2017; Watson, Fulton & Ketron, 2024; Ferrer et al., 2022), Shapiro et al. (2017) found that a desire to simply learn and acquire more knowledge was by far the most influential motivator to student engagement. As seen in Figures 7 & 8, although the module tutor did try, multiple times, to drive up participation in collaborative discussions, the reasons cited for this engagement were

its benefit to students' overall grades for the module. I wonder if such prompts would prove to be more successful if the reasons for engagement with the forums were cited as being beneficial to students' understanding of the module content.

### **What next?**

Through the end of module survey, I will feedback my ideas regarding tutors emphasising the importance of the discussion forums to developing knowledge. Furthermore, to overcome my reduced sense of group inclusion and belonging due to a lack of peer participation in the online discussion forums, I could seek to foster more online discussion in the Student Lounge forum; broaching less formal discussion topics such as time and commitment factors - that have been seen to be a common barrier to student engagement in online learning (Shapiro et al., 2017; Watson, Fulton & Ketron, 2024) - could bind the group more and facilitate a sense of belonging that was personally lacking, while hopefully encouraging more formal academic discussion in the module forums.

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