Module Guide
Governance

In this module, you will manage a set of common pool resources with your cohort. This will provide you with a sandbox for experimenting with innovative governance infrastructure, in the form of technology and group processes. It's also a chance to explore how you as an individual can diagnose patterns or problems unfolding in a group, and plan and use strategies to resolve them.

You'll get the chance to make and judge unconventional proposals, develop and enforce policies, assign and inhabit roles, resolve conflicts, and reflect on the opportunities and challenges of collaboration.

Overview

With the support of the faculty, the cohort will have the opportunity to co-design and operate parts of Newspeak House for the coming year.

This comprises many valuable resources; a centrally located facility with a variety of flexible spaces that can be used for living, working, and events of all kinds, an established brand well known to many communities and networks in the UK and internationally, and the organisation of the cohort itself.

Here are some examples of the things that you will have the opportunity to attempt:

- design and organise many kinds of public events, e.g. lectures, receptions, roundtables, socials
- design and organise internal events for the cohort, e.g. reading groups, project demos, outings
- schedule and manage the guestroom to host overnight guests, e.g. visiting scholars
- engage with external stakeholders, e.g. guests, communities, alumni, faculty, other institutions
- decide and enforce who has access to the space at different times
- collect donations and manage a shared budget

- design and operate a system to organise physical books and other resources
- procure and apportion food, drink, stationery, and other consumables
- co-design and implement a Newspeak House branded website
- manage and moderate digital channels created by the cohort
- collaborate on coursework and your own projects
- document and publicise your activities

The cohort is invited to organise itself to propose, develop, and iterate appropriate governance and meta-governance infrastructures, such as policy development processes, mediation processes, roles, currencies, courts, metrics, forums, legislatures, and markets.

While this may seem overengineered for a system of this scale, you may be surprised at how quickly complex and interlocking governance problems will arise, and what you can learn by applying different infrastructures.

Participation

The governance module is necessarily a group process in which individuals participate, for the purpose of learning about group dynamics and governance. *Participation does not mean that you must do what other members of the group want or even agree; only that you engage with it.* Nobody can force you to do something that you do not want to do. If you don't want to participate in something, you can not take part, but you're encouraged to make an effort to articulate your reasons and advance alternative proposals.

Interfaces

Participants in this module are granted specific rights by the college:

Cohort Contact Details

This is a list of the 2024 cohort's names and emails.
https://github.com/nwspk/common-pool-resources-2024/blob/main/cohort.csv
Members of the cohort may make pull requests to add or amend details.

Newspeak House Access Register

This register is the list of individuals that have the right to fobs that open the front door of Newspeak House: https://github.com/nwspk/common-pool-resources/blob/main/access.csv.
This list is governed by the dean. Members of the cohort may make pull requests, which will not be unreasonably withheld. Fobs may be collected by appointment from the dean.

Donations

Newspeak House has an electronic donation box, the proceeds from which will be forwarded to the payment details in the following file:
https://github.com/nwspk/common-pool-resources/blob/main/account.csv
Members of the cohort may make pull requests to amend these details.

Guestroom Key

Newspeak House has a room assigned for the use of guests. The key to this room is kept by the dean and is available on request by any member of the cohort. If it is lost, there is a £20 fee to replace it.

Cohort Email

The email address cohort@newspeak.house forwards to all of the emails in
https://github.com/nwspk/common-pool-resources-2024/blob/main/cohort.csv

URL

The url 2024.newspeak.house will be controlled by the cohort. We have set up a repository which is served by GitHub on that domain name and can easily be changed.
https://github.com/nwspk/2024.newspeak.house

Newspeak House Events Calendar

Members of the cohort may request events hosted at Newspeak House to be listed on newspeak.house/events. Please contact the dean via WhatsApp or Signal 07796955572 to discuss.

Newspeak Hall

Members of the cohort may ask to book Newspeak Hall.
📄 Newspeak House Guide to Newspeak Hall
Please contact the dean via WhatsApp or Signal 07796955572 for availability and to discuss your event.
Events are typically scheduled 4-5 weeks in advance, and preference is given to events that align with the mission of Newspeak House.

Newspeak House Classroom

Members of the cohort may ask to book the Newspeak House Classroom.
📄 Guide to the Newspeak House Classroom
Please contact the dean via WhatsApp or Signal 07796955572 for availability and to discuss your event.

Ration Club Registrations

Newspeak House hosts a community dinner every Wednesday evening. Registrations can be seen here:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16t4_tnpThY8FSLTcTpjxKI-M7HFhV1ivmnWh3UaKPaM

Signage

The house is full of open collaborative documents - blackboards and noticeboards!
You should take full advantage of these as governance infrastructure.

Repairs and Works

Minor Works

For small household repairs or adjustments, any member of the cohort may make a request directly to the Facilities Manager, Declan Pattison, via WhatsApp: +44 7952 471894

Major Works

For larger projects that may require a substantial cost or disruption, please contact the dean via WhatsApp or Signal 07796955572 to discuss.

Advice

This is not a straightforward task, and governance contains many open problems. The library and the faculty are there to help you explore the vast landscape of different approaches.

However, here are some things to bear in mind:

Conflict Is Not Abuse

Interpersonal conflicts may arise that cause you to feel uncomfortable or upset. While undesirable, these experiences are a natural part of organising and therefore may occur even in well functioning groups. This does not mean it is your personal problem for you to deal with alone. You may talk to others (students, faculty, the chaplain, anyone else) as you try to figure out what is happening and what to do about it. The study of governance is the study of conflict management, and your advanced modules will provide you with many techniques to resolve these situations or avoid them altogether.

While there may be anger or hurt feelings, nobody is meant to come to serious harm. Obviously anything that would constitute a legal offence (for example physical assault or intimidation) is not tolerated within the module, and external authorities will get involved. If you witness something like this, do not hesitate to contact the dean or another faculty member immediately.

Sarah Schulman (2016), [Conflict Is Not Abuse](#)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict_theories

Structure & Agency

With a group of this size it is very tempting to imagine that bringing everyone together in one room and "hashing everything out" is a good way to organise yourselves. In practice you will find that this fails for many reasons, not least that it will be impossible to ever get everyone together at the same time. More sophisticated techniques are required.

I advise you against trying to organise in-person meetings with the explicit expectation that everyone will attend. You should also structure meetings beyond simply an agenda of what is to be discussed. Likewise, setting up a single group chat for everything is tempting, but strongly discouraged. They cannot support detailed conversation and gives a false impression that everyone sees and responds to instant messages with the same cadence, which will lead to many problems over time.

Furthermore, it might seem intuitive and fair to treat every member of the group identically. The allure of a uniform approach is that it appears to bypass biases and offers a simple framework for decisions. However, such unreflective egalitarianism can be regressive, inadvertently perpetuating issues rather than resolving them. People have diverse needs and capacities, and avoiding unnecessarily flat structures and recognizing specific roles can lead to more nuanced and effective outcomes. An example of this is recognising that a flat rota is a regressive structure.

Jo Freeman (1970-71), [The Tyranny of Structurelessness](#)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structure_and_agency

Levels

Ostrom proposes that group decision-making works in parallel at distinct levels, and if discussions are not had at the correct level then they tend to fail:

Operational: day-to-day decisions and actions taken within an institution or system, how rules are implemented and followed in practice.

Collective-Choice: decisions about the rules that will govern operational activities, where policies and procedures are created or modified.

Constitutional: determining who is eligible to participate in collective-choice decisions and how the rules for making collective-choice decisions will be crafted.

Meta-Constitutional: the fundamental principles that shape how constitutional rules are determined, the overarching framework within which all other levels operate.

Elinor Ostrom (2005), p59 [Understanding Institutional Diversity](#)

Digital Feudalism

Members of the cohort will likely create (many!) digital spaces for this module. Most platforms by default give powerful administrative rights to their creators, who can - intentionally or unintentionally - make policy or design choices that reflect their personal values, biases, or interests, significantly shaping the behavioural norms of the space. Try and stay aware of who holds administrative rights to the spaces you are using, and remember that you are free to create alternatives.

Nathan Schneider (2021), [Admins, Mods, and Benevolent Dictators for Life: The Implicit Feudalism of Online Communities](#)

Exit, Voice, and Loyalty

The *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* model provides a useful lens for understanding group dynamics:

- **Exit** refers to members choosing to disengage from the group—by reducing participation, withdrawing from activities, or leaving entirely—when they are dissatisfied with how the group is being organised or run.

- **Voice** captures the ways members express concerns, propose changes, or challenge decisions in an effort to improve the group from within. Voice can take many forms, including open discussion, feedback processes, or structured deliberation.

- **Loyalty** affects the balance between exit and voice. Members who feel a strong sense of belonging or commitment to the group are more likely to use voice before considering exit, investing energy in reform rather than departure.

By observing how individuals navigate these options, facilitators can better understand what supports an engaged, adaptive community where members feel both empowered to contribute.

Albert Hirschman (1970), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exit,_Voice,_and_Loyalty

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exit,_Voice,_and_Loyalty_Model#Exit,_Voice,_Loyalty,_Neglect_Model

Empiricism

A compelling way of proposing policies is through the lens of evidence and experimentation.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evidence-based_policy

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design_of_experiments

https://bilder.buecher.de/zusatz/20/20959/20959142_vorw_1.pdf

Rules

https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/How_to_Do_Things_with_Rules.html?id=NHUv-wpDSRkC&redir_esc=y

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_and_Other_Laws_of_Cyberspace

https://nyupress.org/9780814799727/the-state-of-play/

Complexity & Systems

https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollbook/book/9781035309726/9781035309726.xml

https://systems-thinkers.org/resources/resource/the_systems_bible_the_beginners_guide_to_systems_large_and_small_3rd_editio

https://medium.com/civic-tech-thoughts-from-joshdata/so-you-want-to-reform-democracy-7f3b1ef10597

Social Choice Theory & Mechanism Design

https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-choice

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mechanism_design

Automation

In this course you'll need to create and edit software systems. There's no way that you can become an adept software developer in a summer or even a year, but that's also no reason to give up on this skillset - you can do a lot with only a little knowledge, and even experienced engineers are constantly learning.

Intro to python: https://automatetheboringstuff.com

Low-code Automation platform: https://n8n.io (there are many others!)