

# Network Session Report

2024

## A Quest for Interdisciplinarity

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### Session synopsis

When first we came up with a Dungeons and Dragons inspired board game to form the basis of our network session, we were unsure how it would be received by the attendees to the conference. However, we were not the only game inspired session of the week, in fact, there were two other network session either based upon a game, or around the roles of gaming as scientific tool. We think this was an excellent opportunity to discuss alternative methods of science communication.

Before the event had started, our session was having an impact on the event. By providing character cards for each attendee to wear on their badge, people could easily identify each other's disciplines, making impromptu networking easier, more light-hearted, and less daunting. The simple but effective designs were gender and age non-specific, ensuring they were relatable to as many people as possible.

Although some might think that a niche fantasy game would appeal mostly to one target group and leave out the majority, our ideas attract more than just those starting their scientific careers and role-playing game enthusiasts. Our network session was attended by a diverse audience of 72 people, over 10% of the total attendance list for the conference. Attendants fully engaged in the game and really took on the challenge of putting themselves in the shoes of researchers from a different discipline.

We have listed below the key aspects of the game and its benefits.

### Character/discipline choice

Each player picked a discipline, either their own or one of their choosing. We encouraged participants to put themselves in the mindset of that discipline and how they would tackle the game. We think this a key skill in interdisciplinary work, being able to consider differing epistemologies and priorities within a team. Each discipline had a different effect on the board and the score, and teams were also rewarded for having a diverse range of disciplines. Highlighting the benefits of working in an interdisciplinary fashion.

### Scoring

Scores were generated by placing development tokens on different areas of the map. Each area would have a positive or negative impact on one of the four scoring criteria. Ecological health, food security, economic benefit, and social wellbeing. Four key areas of effective fisheries management, but these areas naturally have parallels across other areas of marine science and beyond. This was the key part of the game, as it forced players to discuss the strategic overview of the map i.e., how to balance the trade-offs of developing certain areas, following specific sets of core values, as well as the priorities of different disciplines.

### Networking

The premise of the game was that the board is tackled as a team, so while we did crown an overall winning team, each board strongly encouraged teamwork. Gaming is an excellent mechanism for lowering anxieties and facilitating more natural networking.

**Slido results (12 respondents)**

*What discipline did you pick?*

Equal numbers of players picked social scientist or fisheries scientist, our most chosen disciplines. Biologists and data scientists were joint second, followed by oceanographer, engineer, and policy makers.

*Did you pick a discipline other than your own?*

60% of our respondents did not pick their own discipline.

*How would you describe your experience of this interdisciplinary quest?*

Players found the game fun and engaging and thought it was a good way to meet new people. It was also raised that role playing is effective for dialogue.

*How did the game highlight the importance of interdisciplinarity to you?*

The main theme from these responses was the importance of dialogue and communication. And that the more options presented to the group the harder they found it to come up with a consensus.

*Do you see other uses for the game to promote interdisciplinarity, and if so what?*

In addition to introducing the topic of interdisciplinarity and as a networking tool, participants had ideas on how to develop the game further and use it more widely with policy and stakeholders as well as scientists.

**General feedback from attendees**

Throughout the course of the conference, we were approached multiple times to discuss applications for the game and generally provide positive feedback on their experience. Of note, policy makers have expressed interest in the game for use in workshops with various stakeholders.

**Conclusion**

Personally, we think the session was fantastic and a huge success. There is clearly an appetite within the ICES community for novel ways of communicating scientific principles. The rules of games are also designed to be quickly understood and applied by a wide range of abilities, experience, and backgrounds. Formulating complex ideas or tackling problems in the form of a game can make it much more accessible to a wider audience, and build stronger relationships in the process.

Moving forward, we hope to modify the games for more specific purposes, such as stakeholder engagement, early outreach, and outside-the-box thinking for sustainable development strategies. Taking feedback and lessons learned from the session and holding future online sessions. In addition, the game was formulated, graphically designed, and facilitated by early-career scientists, which we believe is an excellent example of the empowerment and integration of early-career scientists within the wider and more diverse ICES community. It also encourages the development of skills different from those we use in our everyday work routine, contributing to the advancement of scientific boundaries beyond marine science training and approaches, and aiding in the discovery of new science communication pathways.