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Small Group Theory- take home final

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Thirteen individuals appeared in the classroom in Weller with open minds about a Small Group Theory class on August 25, 2009. I was one of those individuals. After looking through the room, I realized I did not know many people fairly well and became a little nervous; knowing that the whole semester would be spent with a group that I could not choose.

Looking back on everything now, I realized this experience was good for me. We seemed to have a strong start and a strong finish, but there were some rough patches along the way, but what does not kill me will only make me stronger, right? Although some situations would have been better if they were avoided completely, I think we all learned a great deal, especially about the different personalities of people and how to handle those situations. We may not have become the best of friends, but we were a team for four whole months.

A) Group three: Marc McPhillips, Shelley Hermann, Sarah Schmitt, Hannah Denk, and Andrew Kowalewsky. Once our names were on the board, I think people began to form stereotypes about the groups and the members. Even though we worked together all semester, those stereotypes still apply today, at the end of the semester, either because they were confirmed or our group never took the time to actually bond and get to know each other, personally, I believe it is the later. Our group was defined as having five members (9) who will be working together all semester on different projects (9), typically meeting and communicating in class (7-8), all of these characteristics are directly observable (pages 7-10). Anyone could see these

characteristics, but our true group identity rests in the indirectly observable characteristics (pages 10-14). All members of our group are independent (10), so that would be one boundary we knew we would have to overcome in order to succeed. Our norms (11) came through building our group goals for the semester, but now that the semester is over, I believe some members saw the creating of goals just another assignment, instead of something to focus on and work towards during the semester. One norm that seemed to have developed early was to just get the job done. Through structural patterns (12) we began talking; relational talk (13) was used so we could all know a little more about each other and problem solving talk (12) was used so we could complete our first task, come up with a group name, mascot, and goals.

Now, I do not think much has changed since those first two class periods. Most of our communicating was done in class, although expanded some through electronic mail (23). We were a work group (16) and that is all we ever were. We were put into this group for our small group theory class and we had to work together. Personally, if we did not have to work in groups or were able to choose our groups, I do not think we would have had the same group, therefore making our work group something we all "had" to do.

Symbolic Convergence Theory and the Process of Consciousness-Raising (pages 47-55). Consciousness-Raising is a type of group talk (13). A group builds pride and motivation through consciousness-raising. When we decided our team name was going to be the Three-Ring Circus and our mascot is a juggler, I felt like this was going to be a great semester. We were in stage one of this theory: self-realization of a new identity (49-50). We established our credentials. However, the next class period we had a surprise, another group member was added to our group, Jacob Schafer. I want us to almost say this put us in stage two of the symbolic convergence theory, but we had not fully completed stage one. Group Identity through

Polarization (51) is stage two. In this stage the laughter and storytelling disappears, and it definitely did. Jacob had not been apart of our group when we first formed and came up with our name and mascot, but he seemed to take over. Later, after he dropped the class, I had been informed he thought this was going to be a class he could slack off in and get an easy A, and that is exactly what he tried to do when he took control of our group, do the least amount of work and meeting possible. We were in stage two for a very long time, and we did not make progress until Jacob dropped the class and we did the mid-semester exercise where everyone was able to talk. There was a little bit of discussion on Blackboard that occurred, but not many group members took it seriously.

        C) Looking back from previous wall posts and comments, during week four I observed that we all had different personalities, a lot of which is caused by different experiences and past history (179). Shelley later commented on my post saying she agreed with me in that our group does really well with teamwork. I never said in my post that I thought our group was doing well, I actually think at that time I was beginning to become frustrated because that was while we were working on our senior-friendly computer. I think members were getting a sense of false hope, and some people believed it more than others did. Interpersonal communication deals with relationships between people and among groups and how that plays out. We did not have a lot of interpersonal communication as relationship building (170-171). Now that the semester is over, I do not know much more about my group members than I did at the beginning of the semester. We did not really have any interpersonal communication as expression or sharing (169-170) until after our senior-friendly computer project. People held in their thoughts and feelings, I being one of them, in hopes things would work out on their own and we could pull through.

This lack of communication about thoughts and feelings, and members being afraid to speak up because they thought they would be the odd one out caused groupthink (273-277), and our grade definitely showed. When we got our grade for the project, I knew why we got that grade. Some members, however, were still under the impression that our project was the best and no more research or time could have been done to improve what we did. I think the main symptom that caused groupthink was the illusion of unanimity: silence is seen as consent. Jacob, taking charge and wanted to have an easy class, did not really care what others thought and maybe did not realize we all had different personalities. I began to worry when Jacob was supposed to research other competitors and said he found nothing, and in five minutes of researching it, I found two competitors.

Due to the lack of communication, our group suffered. I think if our group had built closer interpersonal relationships, we would be more comfortable speaking up, and expressing opinions, which half way occurred when we did the mid-semester project, although some members still remained silent, they were comfortable with going along with the flow. Our conflict finally worked out. I think things started getting better when Jacob dropped the class; I know I was more comfortable without him apart of our group. Shelley took over the vocal task leader role, but her absence towards the end of the semester for trips rather created the need for another task leader, so I almost moved into that position for our final project. One benefit to both of us being able to lead was mastering time (303). We set group meetings in advance to work on projects like our lip sync and final project and we created an agenda as to what we wanted to accomplish at each meeting. One benefit of our final project to was assigning everyone something different to research and inform the rest of our group about, so participation was regulated (304).

D) Solving our conflict led to the development of leadership. Shelley emerged as the leader the first week of classes. She is very vocal, but she followed the trait approach (206-207). When deciding our group name and how we all would fit in, we each represented different aspects of a circus that best fit our personalities and how we would relate and help the group. Then Jacob came and he used a power approach (207-210). Having power is very strong, and the way Jacob related to the group made others afraid to speak up against what he was saying. He had power, but he used it in a negative way. The book says "because leadership includes influencing and controlling group members in the direction of the group's goals, it is important to understand the concept of power as one of the means by which a leader can exert influence on the group" (207-208). Jacob had power, but he did not use it to influence us to stick with our goals, he used it to do the least amount of work and meeting possible. Jacob was strong in leadership in task domain (224), but he just did not want to spend a large amount of time on the tasks. When Shelley became the leader after Jacob left, she focused on leadership in task domain and leadership in the procedural domain (225). When I had to take over, I tried to implement both of those, as well as leadership in interpersonal domain (228). I had been a part of another group for a whole semester project and was the leader of that group and we worked really well together because we were task oriented, but we also spent time getting to know one another and making sure everyone was happy.

Frequently played roles in small groups include task leader, social-emotional leader, tension releaser, information provider, central negative, questioner, silent observer, active listener, and recorder (240-242). Roles began to emerge right away; however, I do not think people realized their role until we came to this chapter in the book, and our mid-semester project. Shelley was our task leader, I became the social-emotional leader once I realized that is what we

lacked and where I could step in and help the group the best, Sarah became the central negative, especially after the Blackboard post after our senior-friendly computer project, Sarah was also the questioner, Mark and Andy switched off between the silent observer and the active listener, and I was also the recorder. I personally think we lacked a tension releaser (239). The tension releaser is someone who can make the group laugh when it needs a laugh, and I think this is something we lacked, which may have caused the mood of our group to be stressed, but lacking this role did not cause the demise of the Three-Ring Circus. Our personalities definitely affected what roles people performed. Marc and Andy were typically quiet, even when we went through the mid-semester project, and they were just going along with the group. Shelley, being so vocal and extraverted, almost automatically made her the task leader. However, if I was in a different group with people who were more introverted, I would have felt comfortable being the task leader, so instead, I had to fill other roles. The book says the recorder often has low status attached to it (241). We all talked about this statement and disagreed with it; taking notes during class and recording what we talk about and decide upon is very important, and one reason why I took this role is to ensure that everything was written down.

Overall, if I could change something that occurred in my group, would be to avoid groupthink and everything that went with our senior-friendly computer presentation. It was a very stressful time to go through and I became very frustrated, and actually considered dropping the class. However, going through that situation makes me realize I do not want to go through it again and will avoid it at all costs. One thing I wish is that I would be more comfortable vocalizing my thoughts sometimes, but this also depends on the members of my group and what role I have. Working with this group all semester made me realize a few things: 1) roles of groups and how to fill other roles when needed, 2) ways to work with people and personality

differences, and 3) avoiding groupthink at all costs is definitely a benefit to me and the group as a whole. I feel I work well with groups, although group projects are not my favorite. Group projects mean I have to trust others that they will do adequate research and want an A as much as I do. Looking at my two semester long group projects, I had different roles in each. For small group theory I was the social-emotional leader and the recorder, something new to me. In marketing, I was the task leader, the social-emotional leader, and the recorder. Being the task leader almost made it easier for me to fill the role of the social-emotional leader as well, which I think was very important because I did not want to come across as too controlling.