**WORK GROUP CULMINATION PAPER**

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HSP 305 Small Group Systems

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Throughout Junior Core, we have discussed systems and how they relate to us. Starting with our personal systems in HSP 301, our class focused on the Micro-, Meso-, Exo-, and Macro-systems that made up who we were and who we wanted to be. During HSP 303, we focused more on interpersonal systems. That is, how we communicate to others and how we interpret their communication with us (which, as we learned, can cause quite a bit of conflict that needs resolving if taken too far). As part of the final stretch of our year together, we spent the last few weeks in HSP 305 learning about small group systems and how our personal identity and our interactions with others affects the groups we belong to.

The role of different types of groups overall is, in my opinion, to allow for the fullest potential growth in each individual that is part of those groups. Of course, naturally each group type has its own purpose, as well. Dyads, as we learned in HSP 303 (Interpersonal Systems), are the smallest group, made up of two individuals. This type of group focuses on a *very* specific, structured task that a two-person group can accomplish with ease. A small group focuses on a larger picture with many more tasks involved. Small groups also include ad-hoc groups, which act much the same as a dyad, but with more individuals helping to accomplish the task(s). As our syllabi for this quarter states, ad-hocs are used to maximize use of time. Finally, there is the larger group, called the “Learning Community.” I like to think of the Learning Community as a way of comparing and contrasting the smaller groups within. Having such a community allows individuals to learn basic ideas together, but then take different approaches to explaining each thing, thereby increasing the learning potential (Korsmo, 2013).

Now, I will discuss how my engagement in my work group supported my learning of group systems. In truth, it is not easy for me to explain this development. I will still do my best to pinpoint specific examples, however. To begin, as I mentioned in my Dyad paper,” Developing Interpersonal Skills through a Dyadic Relationship” (Milne, 2013), I came in to this class with a lack of feeling accomplished in a small group due to having poor communication with my partner. That changed, however, when I was placed with Celia, Gio, April, Crystal, Kim, and Olivia. Having such a relaxed, but charismatic group, allowed me to expand my understanding of how to engage small groups. The first activity that allowed me to start understanding such a concept was the “Mission ~~Im~~Possible” that we were assigned to complete. Because there no leadership had developed at this point, and because we hadn’t quite entered into any of the stages of group development, it was quite a messy first activity. We didn’t know what to say because we were not yet able to read each other’s body language. Eventually, however, we did begin the stages of group development. In 1977, Bruce Tuckman developed these stages and called them Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing (Chimera, 2001). Our class also learned a fifth stage: Adjourning. Forming is just as it sounds; it is the stage at which the group’s identity is formed. Storming is a stage that can occur, repeatedly, at any point during a group’s existence. This stage involves conflict, both good and bad, and the inevitable conflict resolution. Norming is when group habits and rituals are solidified. Performing represents the group at its highest point—unaffected by conflict and seamless in performance (Chimera, 2001). Adjourning represents the termination of a group, whether it is because the goals were or were not accomplished, and it is time to move on to other groups. I realize my initial statement about a “messy first activity”. That makes it seem as though we hadn’t started any of the stages at that point. However, that “mess” was actually our group *storming* through our *formation*. Later on, it came time for our group to split into ad-hocs. I believe the ad-hocs were the detrimental piece that allowed me to fully comprehend group systems. This is because, ad-hocs are a group within a group. At this stage, we were engaged in *norming*. I was able to step up at this point and promote strategies for communication within our group. Since I hadn’t had the best experience last quarter, I really wanted to make it happen this time around. So, with my suggestion, we created a Facebook group, several GoogleDocs, and exchanged phone numbers and email addresses. Communication is detrimental to group systems, because, without it, there would be no group, just individuals in a constant state of storming. Adjourning is our next stage as a group, and it may be a long way out for some of us and an easier transition for others. I like to think that I straddle the fence on that one—I both am ready to engage in new groups and put the project behind me, but, at the same time, have developed many rituals with my group members that will be difficult to break. I suppose time will tell in that regard.

As I explained in my Work Group Assessment, each of my partners took on a leadership role in their own way. In particular, Olivia, April, Kim, and Crystal stepped up. Olivia and April stepped up early on during our forming stage—Olivia, as a facilitator/note taker and April as a great time manager. They continued those roles through the entirety of our project. I would consider them *reverent* leaders, because they took charge immediately and the rest of the group simply followed along. Kim stepped up when she felt potentials for storming (for example, when all the groups were afraid of overlapping with each other) and helped us work through them so that they were healthy experiences instead of destructive. Crystal stepped up throughout the project, but especially at the end when we were lacking motivation. She helped us see areas of our group system that we hadn’t been aware of (for example, when we were trying to find what to talk about for our final presentation, she had a lot to say about storming). To me, Kim and Crystal were *emergent* leaders because they showed vast understanding in their particular areas, but were not necessarily forceful with becoming actual leaders. We as a group gave them those positions because we wanted them to be able to express their knowledge to us more freely. In the end, however, even with my partners’ attempts to push our laid-back group, I believe there was no true leadership. No individual was above another. Of course, as my group had explained in the past, being laid-back had its pros and cons. One could almost say our “lack of storming” was, in itself, a form of storming. Because nothing was pushing us to be efficient or do a better job. Also, though I stated that I believe no individual was above one another, sometimes I felt like Olivia spoke for us and put words in our mouths without checking with us first (for example, as the “spokesperson” during class). It made me uncomfortable because I would have explained our group differently, but I was happy that someone was at least speaking up (instead of being quiet like myself and the rest of the group). Then, I have to wonder, where did I lead? Did I support others in the process? I like to think that I lead in certain areas of organization. For example, I was listening to everyone’s confusion over how to accomplish everything in our project, especially once we separated into ad-hocs, and so I suggested making the various media pages to store information and communicate. I also lead the charge in my own ad-hoc to divide all the work evenly in our areas of interest so that each of us had a voice. In this way, I displayed an affliliative leadership (Korsmo, 2013).

Now that the quarter is over, I it is interesting to think about how my engagement in this assignment (being part of a work group) might influence the ways in which I operate in groups in the future. For one, I will continue to be forthright with my suggestions to help make the groups I am a part of be more cohesive. I will also be able to communicate them in ways that are not combative and leave room for other’s input (as we learned last quarter). Those are very positive things I will be taking from this experience. However, at the same time, I have to admit that, due to the norming of a laid-back attitude this quarter, I might not engage as much as I should. Just participating in helping the structure, not the content, does not help the group in the end. Content is an area I always struggle in. Yes, I can help organize information that already exists, but I still have a hard time inputting new information to help the group’s progression.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed this last quarter. In fact, I’ve enjoyed the entire year. I have a little over three months to forget everything, but hopefully I will take this with me: struggle is not always a negative thing; you just need to have the courage and the confidence to pull yourself up from it; because, when you overcome struggle, you reach a point higher than where you were before. Bring on the struggle!

Works Cited

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