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Analysis of Group Behaviors

LIS 650: Leadership and Management in Information Organizations

Team MacGregor was ultimately a successful team, and produced work that each member of the team was proud of. Like any group, there were challenging dynamics at times that required explanation and negotiation, as well as compromise. A diagnosis of the team's dynamics and performance can serve as a useful case study in examining classroom-based working groups and as a way to outline larger concepts in management and motivation.

Introduction

The team was made up of six members of the Spring 2020 Leadership & Management in Information Organizations class, as assembled by the class professor, Dr. Julia Hersberger. In contrast to standard classroom group creation, Dr. Hersberger specifically chose the members of the class based on their results on two personality assessment tests, the Keirsey Temperament Sorter and the Kingdomality Personal Preference Profile. The group members' results were reported in class, and are included below.

Pseudonym*	Keirsey	Kingdomality
Tabitha	ISFJ	Shepherd
Rhoda	ENXJ	White Knight
Alexis	INFJ	Dreamer Minstrel
Dexter	INTJ	Benevolent Ruler
Melissa	ISFJ	Shepherd
Kristen	INFJ	Dreamer Minstrel

*Group members' names have been changed in order to conceal their identities.

After group formation, the group was given the opportunity to meet without being aware of the ultimate assignment, a decision made by Dr. Hersberger to give the groups

time to get to know each other without immediately drilling down to a task-focused discussion. The assignment as eventually revealed was to conduct a rigorous analysis of a fictionalized librarian and her dysfunctional workplace. The final product was to include a formal Case Study, as well as a less-formal Memo to the librarian in question.

Group Development

Gordon (2001) describes two types of group development, Progressive Group Development and Punctuated Equilibrium Group Development. Progressive development is defined as a step-by-step process by which groups move through five stages of development, with a task activity to be done and then a group process that develops in order to complete the task. These stages are informally named Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Adjourning. Gordon asserts that "an effective group deals with the challenges and issues of each stage and then moves through the next stage" (Gordon, pp.154-155). The alternate model of group development described is Punctuated Equilibrium. A much more chaotic model, Punctuated Equilibrium suggests that groups begin a project performing their original behaviors and then have a transition period in which new behaviors are created, and then the group performs those new behaviors in order to effectively complete their assignment.

Examining Team MacGregor's performance in the Progressive model reveals several points at which effectiveness suffered. As the group entered the Forming stage once the assignment was provided, there was a great deal of discussion about both the overall project ("What exactly do we need to do?") as well as digressions into specific details of the case as presented, like the librarian's cluttered office, the names of the characters in the case. Gordon notes that groups without established leadership can lack organization at this phase (Gordon 2001), and this was the case for Team MacGregor. No member of the group was ready or willing to step into a leadership role, and so questions about the ultimate direction of the team went unanswered at first.

The team began moving into the Storming stage of the project when discussion turned to what tools and methods the group would collaborate. A Google Doc was created, and it was suggested that members could just add any relevant information to the document as they saw fit, in order to keep everything centrally located. This was a juncture where intragroup conflict could have improved the group's efficiency. Conflict is not necessarily a negative thing. One positive outcome of conflict is that it breaks stagnation and clears the air, allowing for other viewpoints and ideas to surface (Hersberger 2020). As the project progressed, several members of the team had difficulty finding, and organizing information within the "dumping ground" approach of the single document. No alternate organizational structures were suggested, and no

concerns about the suggested course of action were voiced. It could be that no one had alternate suggestions or concerns, but it is also likely that group members did not yet feel comfortable disagreeing with another member's suggestion, and without formal leadership there was no structure to seek out alternate viewpoints. A positive development at this stage of group development was the decision that each member would contribute text to the case study using a particular color. By the end of the project, the document was full of intermixed colors, with several group members noting in the final meeting that the mix of colors really indicated the way the group worked together.

The Norming stage was challenging for this group in several ways. The first challenge was that the discussion that began in the Forming stage around the final format of the report began to overwhelm group meetings and discussions. While some participants were content to continue contributing material to the document with the understanding that the final form would be driven by the material, others expressed fairly strong opinions that they needed to have a model to work towards in order to contribute to the project. As Gordon notes, this is an important aspect of group development. "Ideally, the members resolve their differences after an open exchange of relevant information and opinions and begin to act as a cohesive group." (Gordon, p.155) The other struggle was the difficulty mentioned above, where the single document used for organizing information was challenging for some members to navigate and use. This confusion ended up exacerbating the problem above. In order to provide a model for the final product, one member added an outline-style framework to the document based on a previous, similar case study that they had worked on. Unfortunately this just added to the difficulty in navigating and organizing the document.

The group ended up moving into the Storming phase of the project by working together to develop a new norm for organizing and creating information. The draft case study that was being developed in the single organizing document was moved to a new "clean copy" file, without any of the assembled supplementary information and without the multiple colors denoting who made what contributions. This served to streamline and focus the group's work, and made progress much quicker, and seemed to allow members to take more ownership of the final document as a whole, reorganizing sections and adding new ones. Several members took general ownership of the "memo" portion of the final product and developed it together, while others straightened out the case study. Work progressed quickly from this point forward, as the new norm seemed to energize and encourage the group members. The only question surrounding this change was if it could have been made sooner, had there been a stronger leadership element in the group.

As a class assignment group, the Adjourning phase of the process was not complicated, but demonstrated hallmarks of group cohesiveness. First, after the assignment had been submitted and graded, the group informally gathered to discuss their grade and what they thought of the assessment. Secondly, and more importantly, every member of the group expressed that they felt that they did not contribute their fair share of the final product. This demonstrates strong levels of equity, and based on equity theory, suggests that all members of the group were contributing at a high level. Equity theory explains that individuals want to contribute fairly, and that they behave in ways that bring their contributions in line with their rewards. If rewards in this circumstance are the contributions of the other members of the group, it stands to reason that if, during the project, members felt that their rewards exceeded their contributions, they must have been behaving in a way to maximize those contributions (Hersberger 2020).

Roles

Gordon also discusses the importance of the roles that group members play within the group. She divides roles into three categories: Task roles that focus on completing tasks, Maintenance roles that build and support the group as a whole, and Individual roles that do not actually contribute to group development because they prioritize the individual over the group. Looking at Team MacGregor from this perspective, it reinforces the assessment that the group struggled at completing tasks initially, but was a well-built group that eventually developed into an efficient and cohesive team.

Pseudonym*	Task Role(s)	Maintenance Roles(s)	Individual Role(s)
Tabitha	Info Giver	Encourager, Standard Setter	
Rhoda	Info Seeker	Encourager	Dominator
Alexis	Info Seeker	Follower, Harmonizer	Avoider
Dexter	Agenda Setter	Encourager	
Melissa		Follower, Harmonizer	
Kristen		Follower	

*Group members' names have been changed in order to conceal their identities.

Summary

Obviously, as a class project, there was a didactic element to the nature of this group's formation and task, but in a practical sense, the major advantage of having a group undertake this type of advisory case study is clearly the synergy that is created when multiple people examine a situation from multiple perspectives. Bringing their own experiences and education to bear on the problem means a vital diversity of responses are more likely. Additionally, having different sets of "eyes" on the project means that the group is more likely to catch details than any individual would be. For Team MacGregor, the cohesiveness and camaraderie were also strengths, and once that cohesiveness had been built to a certain level, the team was able to define and redefine practices and norms to successfully complete their project.

References

Gordon, J.R. (2001). *Organization behavior: a diagnostic approach* (7th ed). Prentice- Hall.

Hersberger, J. (2020). Lectures in *Leadership and management in information organizations.*