Group Processes Reflection

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Group work can be challenging in good and bad ways. In the past, my experiences have not always turned out so great. Usually when it is a class project, the group focuses on their grades and just getting the work done rather than seeing it as learning experience. With that, the group work is unbalanced between peers, there are different levels of engagement and not every person’s ideas are heard. This quarter, we had the opportunity to learn more about why group dynamics are that way. Although I learned more about group processes and about my own group in this class, every process and every group is different.

Small group systems carry many patterns. Although each individual has unique assets to bring to the group, there is often a similar pattern from each member within group decisions. There are many factors that contribute to decisions that can influence the group’s level of commitment to the decision. Sometimes factors such as interest, energy level, and time commitment play a role in whether that team member is going to conform to a decision or suggest an alternative or counterpoint.  Also, personality types play a role in how decisions are made, counterpoints are brought up, and how people come to agreements. When considering all the dynamics that play into a group, there are a lot of perspectives to consider. When the group is larger than two or three people, it is easier to conform to the majority decision. “In this context we will also attempt to show that the quality of group decisions tends to follow the degree from the degree to which basic motivational and information processing systems in groups match the environmental/situational constraints surrounding the decision.” (Levine, 2013) Our decisions were highly influenced on our environment, time constraints, and energy and motivation for the project. Although we were generally on the same level of engagement, our group members were quick to agree to anything and then we would implement a plan right away.

I was always aware of my group involvement and the patterns that formed within groups of individuals. Learning about group theories and studies has put my own experiences of group work into perspective. Group sizes really influence the dynamics and productivity of the group. Depending on the tasks at hand, large groups can be beneficial given the workload, and small groups can tackle very detailed projects. With this project, our group was just big enough that we had to be aware of our actions and give everyone an equal chance to participate. It is easy to fall behind with this size of a group, especially when trying to consider everyone’s project ideas. I found myself having to fight for a chance to speak or get my point across because our group made quick decisions. We had a leader in our group who stepped in when nobody else spoke, however towards the end she took over and did not consider my ideas. As a leader, it is easy to fall into the role of thinking you have to do all the work. When you get in that mindset and develop expectations for people’s participation, it is challenging to come out of the role and let someone else in. Once we made our decisions, our group became set on those ideas. Although we gave each other the opportunity to bring new ideas, they were never truly considered. With this project however, I was fine with the majority decision and did the work that we decided to do.

Within our group, our interactions throughout the quarter were generally brief and to the point. In a class setting, knowing we had an end goal and a grade to receive, we generally stuck to regular meetings that would help get our assignments done. However, we often changed our mind on our subjects or project ideas. My own interactions with my group were positive. We all understood that we have busy lives outside of class and respected each other’s time and commitment to the group project. Having the opportunity to get to know people in a smaller group was very rewarding and productive. Given our time together, we were able to connect on a more personal level and tried to incorporate that within our class assignments. Although we did not all become best friends, we all had the opportunity to participate and share amongst each other. Through our group meetings and discussions, we were able to break down our large group barriers and become more open to each other about ideas and our ability to speak freely.

We had a difficult time coming up with a project idea throughout the quarter. People within our group would introduce an idea that we would try to elaborate on, and every week we would show up to our group with no new material or research done. The most significant change was when we decided to change our topic for our final presentation. With only a couple weeks left in the quarter we decided that our original topic was not working. Our first topic was group theories and we were going to form our own theory. After we realized that this idea did not spark enough interest among my peers, we came up with the idea of group ceremonies and rituals. We quickly changed gears, split up into categories, and did our research. It was the perfect opportunity for our group to present last within our class. It was a perfect sending forth ceremony and community building activity to end the year with our peers. Fortunately, everyone was very excited about this idea and had a positive attitude towards doing the work. Our group met and divided our roles and we each did our part of the project. There was a slight complication the last week where none of our PowerPoint’s went through in canvas. I tried to send it to my group member so she could copy and paste it into her own PowerPoint and it did not get through to her. When we showed up for our last class I did not realize that she did not get the slides from me until another group member brought it up. Luckily we did not need the PowerPoint to do our presentation and we all looked at our individual slides to present our chosen topics on ceremonies.

The group dynamics remained consistent throughout the quarter. Everybody seemed to be engaged at the same level. We could easily read each other’s moods and could tell when it was time to bring new ideas or end the meeting for the day. My group members were very honest when they could not handle an assignment or knew they would not be able to make a meeting. With that, we were able to work around each other’s schedules and also be honest about what we wanted to do. Given that we relied on each other to communicate and be truthful with each other, we also trusted each other to get the work done. We each played our own roles within the group and we trusted one another to continue those roles within our small group meetings. Those roles were not ever broken, as our group remained consistent with our interactions and workload throughout each week. As a group, we faced a large challenge of staying engaged in the material. We had a very hard time figuring out a topic and finding a balance of what work we wanted to do. As a collective, we figured out when something was not working or when it was time for a new approach when we became disengaged. It was a challenge to find a balance between five people, their schedules, topics of interest, and level of interest and find a happy medium for everyone to come together and express their opinions. We found a way to respect each other’s differences and validate each other’s feelings and experiences through this process.

Covering the theories of group processes and the psychology of group dynamics, it is very easy to see the patterns within groups and why groups interact the way they do. I noticed the themes of mindfulness, the illusion of agreement, and the entire idea of the power of groups (Briskin & Erikson, 2009). Groups have tendencies to conform because it is faster and efficient for getting work done. However, when this becomes a habit or expectation it is not always productive.  Often times people within groups do not speak out when they are opposed. “While the emergence of collective wisdom is often signaled by an enveloping silence of deeper knowing and connection, the emergency of collective folly is often signaled by different, an agitated silence where words are suppressed in fear or resignation.” One of the biggest challenges in this class was being able to be comfortable enough to share your own opinions and experiences in fear of being hurt, disagreeing with someone, or not being understood by others. Over the last quarter, there has been a shift in the dynamics in the room. People have gone from being silenced to being able to share openly. There is still fear behind sharing, but there was more of an opportunity to share and willingness for the class to listen.

I will be honest and say that my roles were minimal within this group. I did the work I was suppose to do and showed up at every meeting. However I did not always speak up about my own ideas or if I had a question. At the beginning of the quarter I noticed a power difference throughout the group. Every person in the group easily agreed with what ideas were brought up that nobody else brought any other ideas to the table. I tried various times to try to incorporate my own ideas and I was often interrupted or my ideas were not acknowledged because we were already set on something else. I had some ideas for ceremony activities that I wanted to do and was not even able to finish sharing my idea before other people in the group moved on to another topic. However, I understand that we all play different roles and at that point I was happy enough with our group project that it was not necessary to add another activity. I could see other group members also seeing my role as partial to the group. At this point I did what I could, finished my work, and respected my group and their lives outside the group. Our final presentation went well and we got the opportunity to connect with our classmates on a more personal level. The ceremony presentation, “I am” activity, and group singing really put everything into perspective. This class finally had the opportunity to fight through our barriers and connect as human beings. Every person has their own struggles they are going through, and by being able to share our experiences, we came come together as a community with respect and vulnerability. Without this class, these conversations never would have happened and we would not have had the chance to get to know each other the way we did this quarter.

References

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