

# Analysis summary of the movie 12 angry men using group dynamics

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College Introduction This paper is a summary of the dynamics of the group of jurors in the movie 12 Angry Men. The movie is a story of 12 jurors in a 1957 New York jury room deliberating on a case of a young Latin man who is on trial for the murder of his father. The law requires a unanimous decision and a guilty sentence would mean the death penalty. The setting is a room boiling in the summer heat with no air-conditioning except for a small fan and some windows. As the temperature rises the intensity of the situation begins to unfold. The story line provides examples of: persuasive leadership, social influence and group development amongst adversity and diversity.

### Relational Characteristics of Group Dynamics

#### Group Formation

When the group of jurors first meet during the orientation phase, they are chatting, making jokes and talking about a random list of things such as their jobs and things they could be doing instead of being in a jury room. The orientation phase is characteristic of acquaintance, positive attitudes on similarities and clarity. At this stage, the group is only creating opinions, nothing intense. (Robbins, 1974, para 4). There is a general feeling for most of the jurors that this will be a quick case, nothing intense. However when the foreman of the jury; juror number one takes an initial vote the tone is set for a long drawn process and the development of the group dynamics. In the initial vote eleven jurors have already declared the defendant is guilty. Only Juror number eight votes “ not guilty” on the grounds of reasonable doubt. It is never easy to be part of the minority because it goes against our natural desire to be accepted (Johnson, 2007, p. 153). Out of this minority, the true leader begins to emerge and group formation begins. Positioning of power

becomes apparent as the jurors biases, backgrounds and personalities begin to unfold.

### Social Influence

The jury's deliberation begins when the first vote is taken. Several jurors observe others voting and they raise their hands. It is only juror number eight who has the courage to stand alone and has strong convictions that the defendant is not guilty beyond reasonable doubt. Questions arise as they begin to examine the different parts of the testimony. These testimonies were not initially considered in the first vote. Normative influence by juror eight begins to revert from guilty to not guilty. Through the process, personalities unfold and the pressure of social influence is clear among the jurors. Team members have to create a new social identity and forfeit their own in order for a team to be built. (Levi, 2014, p. 245). Throughout the process, a team is formed steadily. Some members work in unity while others remain defiant.

### Roles in a Group

At first, the only clear role was the foreman who is charged as a gate keeper. His duties include; initiation and collection of the votes. The rest of the jurors develop roles based on their background and personalities as they establish their positions within the group. A team is developed through organization of roles for members, skill set and resources, establishing relationships within the group and creating an environment that encourages performance (Levi, 2014, p. 328). Juror eight takes on the role of information seeking and encouraging the other jurors toward a fact-finding process collaborating testimonies. The group begins a storming phase of discovery via processing

and examination of the testimonies. There are power struggles amongst different jurors heavily influenced by each individual's background and diversity. Diversity problems are caused by differences in power rather than expected psychological issues (Levi, 2014, p. 245). The power struggles begin with juror number three, a wet blanket and a bully who hasn't seen his own son in two years. This is a man who has deep family issues of rejection from his son. Juror three's frustration and self-righteousness makes him drop out, virtually holding out, uninfluenced right up until the end. Juror eight draws out juror three who shows us how easy it is to shout out a claim that he does not mean due to anger. This solidifying the evidence in favor of the defendant. Juror number two is a timid man, for the most part, a follower. He in the end poses a question regarding the angle of knife. Juror number four is a serious man who advocates practical reasoning. He is convinced with the help of juror nine's encouragement to think about the witness who wouldn't wear her glasses. Juror five was born and lived in the slums just like the boy on trial. His background makes him the expert on the angle and use of a switchblade. Juror six is happy he's not at work but leery of a not guilty verdict. He is angry with juror nine and even threatens physical repercussions. Juror seven is more concerned about the timing of getting to his ballgame. In the end, he switches to a not guilty verdict simply as a means to end the deliberation. Juror eight is a persuasive, charismatic man with an analytical mind. This gives him the ability to engage the other jurors by asking questions, listening and developing a case for reasonable doubt. Juror nine is the eldest of the group. He was the first man to stand with juror eight in a not guilty vote. It is juror number nine who is first to notice the

clumps on the woman's nose. The woman's testimony said she saw the murder. How could she see without her glasses? Juror number ten is an antagonist and a bigot continually referring to the defendant as "one of them". Juror number eleven is an immigrant who has great faith in the American democratic justice system. Juror number twelve is an advertising executive; the clown in the group. He tries to sell to the people his gimmicks and stories. In the end, he is socially influenced by the other jurors' votes.

### Team Culture

The culture or norms of this group was established early in the discussions.

For purposes of this paper the leader should have been the foreman.

However, this individual does not do a good job of establishing precedence.

This is because, individual jurors are left in an argument; some even on the verge of physical involvement.

The norms and cultures of a team are often developed through pattern (Johnson, 2007). A team operates according to the behavioral patterns exhibited from the beginning; they determine the future of a team. (Schein, 1992). Leaders in a team develop the culture and if done early, it becomes easier to change perspectives. (Levi, 2014, p. 264).

Several times during the course of the outburst, it was left up to individuals and collective members to stand up and take control; in some instances literally hold someone back. In the conclusion, it is juror number eight who changes the culture of the team and provides the goal for this team of jurors.

### Task Characteristics and Group Dynamics

#### Goals

The goal of the jury is to come up with a unanimous verdict: guilty or not guilty. Unfortunately some members of the jury are more focused on their own agendas rather than focusing on the task of a fair verdict. Juror seven is more interested in getting done in time for the ballgame. Another juror wants the defendant to be guilty because he was prejudiced. Another juror projects his own issues with his son into the agenda with a guilty verdict. Hidden agendas speak loud on the conflicting issues in a group's goals (Levi, 2014, p. 50). Juror number eight is not going for the easy way out. His emphasis on being the true morally upright man, is to find a verdict and to ensure it is within unreasonable doubt. Reasonable doubt is the law and the direction the court provided.

#### Communication

Juror number eight's not guilty vote creates conflict within the group and cliques. If a group acts in separation rather than in cooperation, communication breaks down (Levi, 204, p. 28). The group is focused on getting the task done quickly. Juror eight begins the storming process; setting the challenge for the others to revisit the facts and cross examine it. What was missing? Did the facts make sense? How was the neighbor able to see across the train tracks without her glasses? How did the downstairs neighbor hear the boy yell while the trains were coming through? How was the stab wound created from a downward motion with a switchblade? A switchblade is handled in a whole different angle than a regular knife. Juror number eight encourages communication by asking these questions which encourage thought processes and fact finding.

#### Conflict

Many of the jurors want to stick to what they had already decided at first or their own biased ideas, prejudices and opinions. Juror number eight challenges the facts and makes them reason and question the accuracy of the facts. This creates conflict and fighting amongst the jurors as juror number eight leads them down the path of discovery around testimonies and facts which do not make sense. Conflict can be both positive and negative; it may build a team to exploration of ideas or damage communication (Levi, 2014, p. 128). Although there are negative effects such as outbursts and threats during the problem solving process, the end result is a positive effect. The group of jurors come together and vote as one. They make the decision to spare an innocent life.

### Decision Making

An agreed approach requires discussion within a team until all members accept it (Levi, 2014, p. 167). While reevaluating the facts, juror number eight wisely asks for an anonymous vote and gives the other jurors an opportunity to vote without ridicule. As time goes on, the voting is done outright to ensure everyone can see the votes of verdict. Social influences again come into play as jurors feel more comfortable voting when they recognize it is with the majority. Primarily, people make decisions based on quality, speed and acceptance or support (Levi, 2014, p. 168). Throughout this paper information is introduced evidencing the group's ability to breakdown the different testimonies by re-enacting the scenes to determine how factual the data is. An example is the testimony of the older gentleman with the lame leg which he drags along as he walks. Through juror number eight's reenactment, it is apparent there was no way this witness could have

made it to the stairway in 15 seconds to see the defendant running away.

Another example would be the woman who claims to have seen the stabbing yet it was in the night and she wasn't wearing her glasses as pointed out by juror number nine. The discussion takes time and it isn't quick but the overwhelming evidence is convincing and factual enough. Finally, even the one who holds out and differs from the group votes not guilty.

### Motivation and Outcomes

#### Team Building

The jurors begin to identify the problems with the prosecution as well as the internal issues through communication among the group. Solving a problem begins with identifying the problem and analyzing it; problems may come from outside the objective, inside or from communication. (Levi, 2014, p. 334). The jurors work from development to storming phase of problem solving and they are able to build trust and cohesion. Although it takes a lot longer for some of the jurors to buy into the norming phase, the end result is an effective performance. The decision made is also justified with facts and information prior to adjourning. As the jury moves through the phases of development, progress can be measured based on voting. There are changes made through different insights provided during the discussions. The use of visual tools such as the actual knife, the identical knife, the drawing of the apartment layout and the reenactments provide visually objective sources.

#### Motivation

Early in the process, the group of jurors are motivated to come to a quick guilty verdict due to a variety of reasons. As the group investigates deeper into the aspects of the case, the motives change. At the onset, some jurors



are hanging around cracking jokes and they seem disinterested. Working hard motivates a team's effort and reduces individual effort further (Levi, 2014, p 61). Motives change and jurors project onto the defendant their own prejudices, life situations and lack of empathy. Juror number eight eventually spurs the majority to revisit the case and draw a verdict beyond reasonable doubt. The motivation then becomes the truth.

### Evaluation

As the examination and fact finding efforts of the jurors unfold, it is evident juror number eight is the catalyst and the motivation to implement the fact finding processes. The outcome of this process ends up being a complete reverse of the initial decision of the 11 angry jurors. Process evaluation and outcome evaluation are important in examining the implementation of a solution (Levi, 2014, p. 211). The true leader in the group is juror number eight who leads the group in the process and enables them to understand and re-evaluate their original decisions. Listening becomes a skill they all learn in the jury room. Through a series of development and voting, juror eight lets juror three know that he stands alone in a different verdict.

### Conclusion

The movie 12 Angry Men provides a classic setting to evaluation of group dynamics. The story begins with a group of strangers set out to perform a specific purpose. The group transitions through the phases of group development; forming, norming, storming, performing and adjournment. These are the five stages involved in group development (Levi, 2014, p. 43). Through the process, the jurors encounter social influence from within. Juror number eight becomes the knowledge seeker, influencing the group's

decision making through fact finding and deductive processes. The leadership of juror number eight is intentional and persuading to even Juror number three. Juror number three is a case study of an aggressive blocker. "The Aggressor may work in many ways such as deflating the status of others, expressing disapproval of the values, acts or feelings of others, attacking the group or the problem it is working on, joking aggressively, or showing envy toward another's contribution by trying to take credit for it". "The Blocker tends to be negative and stubbornly resistant, disagreeing and opposing beyond reason, and attempting to maintain or bring back an issue after the group has rejected or by-passed it"(Course handout).

The roles in the group shift sufficiently through influence to allow the jury to come together and realize their common goal of a verdict. The communication processes encouraged by juror number eight enhance the decision making process; not necessarily to overcome conflict but to establish norms and work through the differences. The team building encourages the motive change; from making a quick decision to making the right decision. As stated in the evaluation above it is a complete reversal of the decision of eleven guilty verdicts to twelve not guilty verdicts. 12 Angry Men is a classic study of group dynamics and team building as well as a strong case for emergence of leadership qualities and social influence in the face of diversity and conflict.

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