

Self-assessment on group work



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The End or The Beginning?

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Introduction

This module has served as a reminder that I should not give up on group interaction. I need to embrace the dynamics so I can be a better manager, leader and group member. We have learned about the significance of groups and that a large part of our professional life fundamentally relies on our group interaction skills. Improving group interaction skills can be very satisfying to all group members and advance the business organizational model as well. There are also some significant difficulties and hurdles intertwined with small group interaction. This makes groups a crucial focus for study, examination and action. The goal of this summary paper is to identify key concepts or topics that we have discussed, examine why we study group interaction, a self-analysis of our ability, and a discussion on how group OL313 is functioning.

Topic 1 Discussion – Background factors

The first subject I want to discuss is background factors. By definition, background factors are attributes that existed prior to the groups formation and will probably endure after the group no longer exists. Some relevant background factors include personalities, age, health and values. Personality is one of the most important background factors in small group interaction (Tubbs, 2009). I am a member of a modification proposal working group and attend monthly meetings for my organization. In this working group, we

discuss issues and the perceived failures of the modification proposal process. The normal attendees from the Tinker AFB location include both government and civilian employees who were purposely selected by the working groups senior member and government manager. There are various subject matter experts who also attend based on leaderships selected topics and questions.

I was directed to attend and support this working group as I have been anointed the subject matter expert for these issues. My office has the responsibility to receive the modification proposals from the initiator and insure approval in a timely manner. Often this is not as easy as it appears. The working group chairperson is one of the high-ranking government employees in our building. Questions are asked at the meetings and the answers are not listened to. These processes are documented by the Air Force and there is very specific guidance detailed in the instructions. It is my observation that the chairperson has a need to control or influence the process to the point that it is interfering with the outcomes of the group.

Due to my perceptions of the chairperson and the group in general, this meeting is basically a time killer for me. I continue to provide information as requested but I no longer have the patience to deal with the point counter point discussions which keep the process moving in a circle. There have been interactions with other group members who have noticed that there is a difference in my attitude when I attend this meeting. I would say I need to do a better job of camouflaging my attitude while attending this meeting. I don't believe I can bypass my attitude without engaging the source.

Personality appears to be the most relevant background factor in this situation. It appears that the chairperson has trained themselves to look for opportunities for improvement without regard for the documented process. I was trained to follow the documented process for repeatable, sustained results. I have conceded that the documented processes may be too restrictive for our purpose, but there is also a process to seek relief from said restriction. Situationally, I have determined that this could be a personality issue, at least on my part. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a popular method of measuring personality, revealed that I demonstrated a high tendency towards introversion. Some of the ways introverts are described include, more reserved, like to be alone and more focused.

I have learned, that although I don't see this as my fault, I have been a contributing factor to the problem or issue at hand. I have been a hindrance to the working groups goal of resolving the modification proposal issues. I have set a personal goal to try and resolve this conflict. I may not be able to fix a problem within a working group but I should be able to control my actions and set an example to follow.

Topic 2 Discussion – Circumstance and Structure

I work in a windowless building but the technology used in some of our conference rooms is our window to the world of the B-2 bomber. Normally the atmosphere of the building I work in feels restricting. A dreary place where the atmosphere never changes. The conference rooms however, are very well maintained and tastefully decorated. It gives off a good vibe when you attend meetings in these conference rooms and I believe it effects the way people act and react to the information discussed in these venues.

The meetings that I normally participate in take place in three large, well maintained conference rooms located throughout the building. There are normally several large rectangular tables set up in a horseshoe design and the chairs are very comfortable. The horseshoe layout allows dignitaries or the head of the meeting to sit at the head of the table. This position allows all participants to view the leader of the meeting. Due to the number of personnel, there is an overflow area established on both sides of the tables.

One large advantage we utilize in our conference rooms is the ability to video teleconference (VTC) between geographically separated units. The attendees can view each locations speaker if they share the same equipment architecture. The conference rooms also have the capability to push briefing slides, normally power point, across multiple locations and that ability allows all participants to share data. I enjoy the capability to observe the VTC briefers as they provide their information to the group. It helps me remember that they are people like me, and not just another voice with a tasker or an assignment. The VTC capabilities also help to reduce travel expenses that would otherwise be accepted as the normal cost of doing business.

During the last five years, I have noticed that people tend to sit in the same locations when attending meetings in these conference rooms. I also sit in the same locations depending on the meeting content and my role during the meeting. There are meetings when I am required to brief information to the group and it's during those meetings when I sit at the table. That seat is as close to the VTC camera as possible so I am off camera to the group, but located near a microphone so I can be heard. Another meeting I attend puts

me more in a support role and I try to sit away from the table, but close enough to the briefer to assist with questions or clarifications. These perceived seating assignments appear to be accepted as the norm by all attendees. I have needed to sit in other locations than my normal place and there have been times when the meeting chair did not think I was in attendance.

The size of the group does have an impact on discussion. Smaller groups, less than ten, appear to be more relaxed and willing to facilitate the exchange of ideas or speak up when required. The larger groups, to include the offsite attendees, lose focus on the discussion topic and start sidebar conversations. These sidebar conversations can be very distracting and limit the exchange of ideas and reasoned answers to topics at hand. I personally think I perform better in the smaller groups and need their feedback to help my performance. The larger groups are a challenge for me as I don't always know who the players are and how they normally function. It appears or feels as if there is no cohesion or unity.

The communication network that I see demonstrated during these meetings, using our wonderful VTC system, is *the wheel*. In this case the leader is viewed as the central person, or hub of the wheel and all communication and comments must pass through the hub or leader (Tubbs, 2009). The leader of the meeting is in control of the technology and responses are restricted to the leader of the meeting. The other offsite users appear to manage their meeting in the same fashion. I think it works very well in preventing people talking over one another while using the technology. The ability to have productive meetings is related to many different factors. From the setup of

the conference room tables to your territorial seat at the meeting, these influences can contribute or impede the group's ability to operate. Some organizations have grown very adept at the use of this technology and I feel that its use provides everyone with more feedback on the items discussed. Although it appears our leadership is using a restrictive communication network described as the wheel, it seems to work well for the groups using this technology.

Why Study Group Interaction

At the basic level interaction is simply communication. Small group interaction is the process by which three or more members of a group communicate, verbally and non-verbally, to influence one another (Tubbs, 2009). Why does an organization or individual need to educate themselves about interaction? The answer appears to be straight forward in that almost every business requires some form of interaction or communication. For that communication to be successful, it requires certain skills and capabilities. The continued study of communication will refine your skills and competencies which, in turn, will allow you the opportunity to become a more effective manager, leader and team member. This knowledge can save the organization time and limit expenditures.

Self-Analysis

The first thing that comes to mind is how much time has passed since I have been in a classroom. The experience has initiated a reassessment of my abilities as a student, learner and team member. As a student, I realize I need to improve my study skills and practice interaction daily. After retiring from the military, I intentionally sought out employment that would limit

interaction. I did not want to be in leadership or management as I did not want to have that responsibility again. As I have progressed through the current company, I require those skills once more if I hope to be promoted. My ability to learn has not changed and for that I am thankful. But knowledge application has suffered.

This course has shed light on some communication issues I am experiencing at work and that identification has led me to a new goal. That goal is to participate in the process through interaction and communication. I'm not sure if I can reverse any of the negative interaction trends I have noticed, but I am sure I want to be a person that contributes, not a person that detracts from the group goals. Once I wrapped my head around what the professor expected and the teaching style, I enjoyed the class. I am a slow starter with new information but my interest in the subject matter increased with each week of instruction.

Group OL313

Another module down and the group is that much closer to completing the objective of a college degree. I don't presume to know what the rest of the class thinks but I for one am very comfortable being part of this group. The fact the most of us have either had military experience or have worked close to the military complex seems to be the one thing we all share; other than being human I mean. I do not recall one instance where we had an issue within the group. As the oldest member of the group, I have faced technology challenges during instruction. Everyone in OL313 has helped or offered to help me sort out those issues. There have been several in our group who appear to have shown a marked improvement in communicating

and interacting. It has been a pleasure to witness those changes for the better. I appreciate working with a group of this caliber and look forward to the few months we have remaining in this program.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have briefly discussed the background factor of personality and that it is the one of most important factors to small group interaction. Personalities exist prior to group formation and will likely remain the same after dissolution. The topic of structure was addressed with discussion centered on seating arrangements and technology. A brief self-analysis of my skills and where I think I need to go from here; as well as some thoughts on why we need to study small group interaction. And finally, I closed with analysis if how I think the OL313 group is performing.

References

Tubbs, S. L. (2009). *A Systems Approach to Small Group Interaction*. New York: McGraw-Hill.