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**The Leadership Challenge**

**Part I**

*Background*

Our group chose option 2 for our project as we thought it would be interesting to work with other McGill students from a very different faculty and combine our skills to create a positive change in our community. We worked with a group of nursing students and assisted them in completing a project they had for a community service class.

The organization that they were working with is called Le Sac a Dos. Le Sac a Dos is a charity organization located on 110 St. Catherine East, Montreal. It strives for the social and economic integration of people living in a situation of homelessness. It provides support to homeless people in a number of ways to achieve this goal. This includes providing lockers where they can store their personal belongings. It also provides postal services to them and has approximately 2000 mailboxes. This gives an address where they can receive mail. It also offers other smaller services like showers and haircuts etc. As part of the reinsertion program it also shows people work opportunities which can help them get more money on their welfare cheques. The facility itself is not too big and does not provide a living space and it mostly has people going in and out just to use the various facilities offered.

The project that the nursing group had planned was to hold a workshop for homeless people who attended le Sac a Dos to give them information on various topics that they thought would be beneficial for them. The topics they wanted to cover were mental health, aggression/drug use, services available for their benefit, and housing opportunities available. To attract people to these workshops they also wanted to add a number of attractions like pizza, drinks, and some simple games at the end with prizes. This required some planning and some money to be raised for the event. They also wanted help with buying the prizes for the games and to look for some good deals on food.

These are the main activities that we helped the nurses with. The first thing we did was to define a reasonable budget for them that would ensure that all their requirements would be met and to ensure that the workshops were as successful as possible. We then worked at raising this money. We decided to host a bake sale as we thought it would have a high profit margin and a member of our team, Evelyne Methot was a skilled baker.

The bake sale was hosted on the 29th of October in Bronfman and McLennan Library. After the bake sale team member took the leftovers from the bake sale and continued to sell them at various locations throughout the city. In the end our fundraising event was a success and we were able to raise $130.

We then turned our attention to trying to make the best of this money and to find good deals on food. We went to Pizza Navona, a Pizza shop just in front of Roddick Gates, and were able to negotiate a deal with them to give a 20% discount on food for the event. We also discussed some good prizes for the games and decided to buy various gift cards that we thought would interest homeless people the most. These included gift cards from Tim Hortons, STM, Provigo and Dollarama.

**Part II**

*Challenges*

In terms of group dynamics, our group was unified in our approach and our vision. We were focused on our task of assisting the nurses, yet that did not shield us from various challenges we faced in our mission. The first arose in the first meeting: there was a lack of specificity with what we intended to do. Our management team had a vague idea for a large event we could throw to generate funds through ticket sales, but we had nothing concrete to present to the nurses. We had failed to apply a principle from the Hansen reading[3]: we had failed to keep our goal simple and concrete. After failing to define and manage our contribution, we found ourselves at the nurses’ beck and call for all manner of errands beyond fundraising for the project, which created a lot of tension between our groups due to unclear expectations on both sides.

Another challenge beyond ambiguity was when we did our fundraising. Our initial plan to hold a bake sale in Bronfman fell through at 11am because we had not registered the food table properly with the MUS. We had only raised about $30 at that point. Armed with trays of cupcakes and containers of cookies, we were forced to leave the management building and quickly find another place to turn our sweets into donations. However, in the spirit of our improv workshop with Rob Nickerson[2], we did not say no to this challenge, we said “yes, and…”. What we ended up doing was setting up a clandestine bake sale in the library cafeteria; taking advantage of security’s blind eye toward our efforts until we raised about $130.

The third main challenge we faced was a culture clash between our management team and our nursing students. Although we eventually negotiated deliverables for our group, there was some disagreement as to how to get what we needed. The nurses advised that we ask for sponsorship from various businesses to cover things we needed for their project, contrasting with our more transactional approach of purchasing our items instead. This reflected a deeper difference in each group’s mental models of how charity organizations acquire things, much like the mental models discussed in the “Power of Framing”[1] reading. This cultural contrast was challenging to navigate at first, but we soon found a middle ground by using a combination of both methods.

In hindsight, we should have been more explicit from the beginning about the scope of our project and we should have verbalized our assumptions; particularly with how we would achieve what we promised. Related to the scope of the project, we would have identified ourselves more as supporters than the sole providers of fundraising to keep expectations realistic. We often found ourselves promising more than we could realistically deliver, so we would have liked to underpromise and overdeliver if we had the opportunity to do this project again.

*Triumphs*

Despite our obstacles, there were still a fair number of successes that we achieved. The first was our bake sale. After we were shut down because of an incorrect table booking, things looked very dark for us. We decided to go to McLennan library because it was raining outside and we did not want to ruin the baked goods. There we planned our next move; or rather our next move came to us. As we were sitting at our table, one by one people started to come over and ask if they could purchase some of our cupcakes and cookies. Suddenly an idea flashed: why not hold the bake sale in the library? Although technically not allowed by the library rules, we were able to raise a significant amount of money over the three hours before security strongly hinted we should leave before they got in trouble for accommodating us. It was one of our greatest triumphs in the project. The issue of what to do after being shut down in Bronfman also embodied a “wicked” problem like ones from the Pacanowsky[4] reading. There was no clear answer in sight and it required all of our expertise. We did not really know how we would overcome getting shut down in Bronfman, but by keeping an open mind and framing the problem in a concrete way, we were able to succeed.

The second main triumph was when our management group negotiated specific deliverables with our nursing students at a joint meeting held after the bake sale. There had been significant communication problems and tensions were running high. This meeting would decide the future of the entire project. After discussing minor details about the nurses’ plan for their end of the project, we shifted the meeting’s focus to establishing specific things we could offer so that everyone’s expectations would be clear. We negotiated a realistic set of deliverables that everyone agreed were fair and valuable: gift cards, STM passes, a pizza deal, and coffee for one of the workshops that the nurses were holding. It was an enormous success. The fact that we were able to create a specific set of deliverables was one of the greatest triumphs of the entire project. The ambiguity had taken such a toll on morale and inter-group cohesion but then clear communication made everything right. This was an example of collaboration in the same vein as the Shipper & Manz reading[5], in which both of our groups came together to create a win-win situation for all parties.

*Frustrations*

Regarding frustrations during the project, our team encountered communications issues with the nursing group. From the beginning, there was ambiguity concerning the main objectives and the steps necessary to reach them. There was a lack of cohesion between both teams due to each of them striving for different achievements. At first, our team endeavoured to fundraise but neglected to communicate our projections and timelines to the other team. We were preoccupied to achieve our own goals and forgot about the bigger picture. According to Hansen’s reading[3], we failed at redefining success to attain shared goals and find common ground among us who had different ambitions and agendas. The nursing group interpreted this mistake as a lack of commitment of our team, which impaired the development of trust within the team as a whole.

Furthermore, the nursing students would also miscommunicate their expectations and impose new deliverables last minute. In terms of leadership style, they were more advocating than inquiring and sometimes would even adopt an aggressive tone, which triggered negative emotions among team members. The stress level was high and led to group conflict. At that point, our moods and productivity would be negatively impacted and we had to find new ways of working together by fostering collaboration. The situation allowed leadership from different team members who dealt with the crisis that required a high level of self-regulation. In the same spirit of Nahavandi’s reading[6], we needed leaders to keep the group orderly and focused and make sense out of this undesirable situation. Instead of perpetuating the conflict, our team found the ability to redirect these disruptive impulses and moods and find the right direction to take.

Looking back, we should have emphasized on face-to-face interaction, as it is vital for proper collaboration and cohesion of a team. Our team encountered the limits of virtual communication, which increased misunderstandings. We would have benefited from exchanging ideas, building lasting motivation and resolving disputes in person instead of online. It is easier to agree on goals and to share a vision when meeting in person.

**Part III**

*Justin*

Justin took a very important part in the Project. He showed a lot of enthusiasm and dynamism from the first day. This excitement was crucial as this was a semester long project and it is very easy to leave everything to the last minute. Thanks to Justin we started early and met with the Nursing Group as soon as we could. Justin took the role of group leader in this first phase of the project by setting the first meetings with the Nurses and creating a Facebook page for both our group and a combined page for both groups.

However, Justin’s enthusiasm got him a little bit carried away sometimes. He had many good ideas but also many unrealistic projects that would have cost us an important amount of money. However Justin stayed very open to criticism and took into account every suggestion. This enabled the group to start on a positive and dynamic mindset.

Justin also showed this open-mindedness at our third meeting with the Nursing group. After much conflict and miscommunication with some Nurses, we decided to meet in order to finally be all on the same page. He was able to listen carefully to what the Nursing group wanted from us and evaluate the possible solutions to the issues we faced. Justin could improve on his communication skills though, as many communication issues came from poorly explained opposite views and misunderstanding between him and a Nursing student; creating some tensions between the two groups.

*Evelyne*

Evelyne was more quiet than Justin but she always intervened with quality arguments and ideas. She was a great group member: setting up meetings, showing up to these meetings in time, keeping everyone updated on the advancement of the project. Evelyne’s biggest contribution was for the fundraising event. She put in a lot of effort by baking dozens of cupcakes and cookies for our bake sale. Evelyne volunteered to put in a lot of time for the fundraising event which was our biggest contribution of this project. And this ended up to be a great success.

Evelyne was also an effective follower when the situation called for it, embodying many of the “Star Follower” traits described in Rethinking Followership[7]. These included offering constructive criticism along with Elliott when considering Justin’s initial concept for a large club event to raise funds. She brought her critical thinking and energy with her to the project and it was very much appreciated. Evelyne also helped to keep motivation high within our group. After tensions were running high between Justin and a member of the nursing team, she helped console him and remind him that the rest of the team supported him and also felt the nurses were being unreasonable. This helped keep our team together in hard times.

*Ammar*

Ammar played a major role in the project, especially in the beginning where he took the lead on contacting the nurses and helping to build and maintain rapport with them from the first meeting. His calm and centered style of communication helped balance some of the louder personalities on the team, particularly in meetings: he often took great notes of each meeting which were helpful later on and helped organize and keep the group on track.

In terms of things he could improve on, Ammar had quality ideas for our group in the later stages of the project; we would have loved to hear more of them in the beginning. However, it is understandable to be a bit hesitant when doing a project within a different faculty, so that could be a factor. Regardless, he was a valuable member of the team and took initiative to secure gift cards at the nurses’ request before we negotiated that as part of a larger set of deliverables with them.

*Elliott*

Elliott was a useful member to the group, bringing a sense of realism and diplomacy that came in handy, especially between our group and the nursing group. He advocated for a more realistic, achievable fundraising plan than a club event with Justin: outlining reasons why our effort would be better served on a more reliable, less risky plan. He was able to do this constructively, embodying one of the main traits of a Star Follower[7], which is to offer constructive criticism of plans. This helped our group succeed. Elliott’s finesse with communication was also useful in resolving disputes with the nursing students, often intervening to come to Justin’s defense in discussions with them. As a slightly less outspoken member of the group than Justin, he was often able to be a mediator and helped to defuse tension between the management and nursing teams.

For areas Elliott could improve on, greater communication would be appreciated. Toward the end of the project, it turned out that Elliott had not yet handed in some of the deliverables to the nurses, raising some concerns for them. This project illustrated the importance of communication and the pitfalls that come when meaning is not crystal clear, so being more explicit about his work could serve Elliott well in the future.

*Team Overall*

Despite how challenging our situation was at times, one glowing triumph for our team was that we always had a sense of cohesion. This was likely because we were so focused on trying to navigate our project with the nurses that it was clear the only way we would succeed was together. This is strongly related to the external competition criterion in Hansen’s “Lever 1: Unify People”[3], where our focus was to be a unified group to maintain the nurses’ trust. For many of us, our management group was an anchor that we could hold on to when things were rough with the nurses.

**Part IV**

The main activity that we were focused on throughout this project was making sure that the workshops that the nurses had planned were as successful as possible. Our objective was not only to support their project but also to provide them with managerial and leadership skills that we have acquired in this class. With limited knowledge in fundraising and little experience in group projects, the Nursing group was very enthusiastic in receiving help from management students in this important semester-long project that they were invested in. But in the end, this project wasn’t for either of us: its objective was to have a positive impact in the everyday lives of the Homeless people that are part of the organisation Le Sac A Dos. The end goal was to provide them with entertaining workshops that would teach them valuable and general tips to live better on a day-to-day basis.

To achieve this objective we focused on raising enough money through our fundraising event and then making sure that the money was used as efficiently as possible.

Our main goal was to have a noticeable positive impact on the project and the Montreal community in numerous quantitative (raising money) and qualitative ways (support functions).

First, the nursing group had no real experience with fundraising or organizing events and we were able to help them schedule events and make profit out of them. We even did some fundraising ourselves and raised a considerable amount of money for the workshop ($130 from a single bake sale). This was important for the Nursing group as they needed to raise enough money to provide free food for all the Homeless people that decided to attend the workshop. The food provided was the main selling point to promote the event. This fundraising really marked the start of this project and a solid collaboration with the Nurses after many misunderstandings. Through our help with budgeting, fundraising, obtaining gift cards, and finding food deals for them, we were able to ease their burden as they seemed to be overwhelmed by the work they had. We took over the fundraising responsibilities and this had an important impact on our relationship with the Nurses and for the project’s success.

The fundraising also represented a very important turning point in the relationship of our two groups. Before the fundraising we were having serious miscommunication issues with the Nursing Group. There was also important misunderstanding concerning the objectives. After raising money (which they needed the most) thanks to our bake sale, the Nursing group understood that we were serious about this project and this installed a basis of trust between our groups. From this point on, negotiations were smoother and communication was clearer.

Looking at the whole project as a whole, we believe that the final workshop was able to make a positive difference in society. Throughout this project we noticed that we needed to provide the Homeless with an extrinsic motivation to attend the workshops. The free food provided at the workshop did that job perfectly and attracted many. However we soon realized that this project was much more than just an “educational” workshop for the Homeless . What they ended up valuing the most wasn’t the food and warm coffee that they received but the attention they got from it. One of the hardest parts of being Homeless isn’t the cold, lack or food or a roof, but the loneliness and feeling of exclusion by the society in which they live. Many feel like they are just left out and abandoned by society. Therefore the care and attention that the workshop conducted and organisations such as Le Sac A Dos provide have a considerable positive impact on their lives by making them feel more included in society. The workshops covered topics of mental health, aggression/drug use, services available for their benefit, and housing opportunities available for the homeless. A lot of the people who attended the workshops don’t get access to information like this and it was the hope of the nursing students that such information will give the homeless people the information they would need to improve their situation.

The people who attended the workshops benefitted greatly from the information that they got from them and were very eager to participate and a lot of them filled out a short survey after. The free food and gift cards offered put a big smile on everyone's faces. Overall, they seemed overjoyed by the whole workshop and it appeared that they were happy to feel included in the society. It was suggested to the nurses by them to hold similar events at other homeless shelters as well.

The great satisfaction of everyone that showed up and participated in the workshop was a great success for both our teams. It was important to see that our efforts leadership and collaboration efforts were for a great cause and that the results came out extremely positive.

Le Sac A Dos’ main purpose is to provide Homeless people with a secure address where they can receive their mail to facilitate reinsertion. However they have a limited number of mailboxes and space available. All the available mailboxes are already being used. Therefore raising awareness for Le Sac A Dos was not a priority for this project. Our Recommendation for Le Sac A Dos would be to continue organising and hosting workshops. Since the organisation’s main objective is facilitating reinsertion, these workshops are exactly what it needs: educate the Homeless on simple life and health tips in order to give them the tools to get back on their feet.

And of course we recommend Le Sac A Dos to attract more investors and expand the available space. This could also be done by opening a new office in another part of the city.

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