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COM 373
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During class, we were prompted with a tower building activity where our objective was to build the tallest tower with our team out of all the groups. The tower had to be structurally sound enough to hold 3 rolls of quarters. This activity was broken up into two main phases. First, we had to take our materials out of the bag, and in our groups, we had ten minutes to discuss a construction plan while only looking at the materials, but not touching them. Then, we had fifteen minutes to build the tower in our groups. In this essay, I will be analyzing the recordings of the activity for both my tower building group with a tower height of 14 ⅜ inches, and a group that performed worse than us, with a tower height of 12 ¾ inches. For simplicity in my analysis, I will be referring to my group as "my group" and the team that performed lower than us as, "group 2." I will first compare and contrast the tower building between our groups, and I will conclude by discussing what could have improved the result for both of our groups.

First, I will be discussing how the difference in team composition affected both of our performances. My group was made up of four women, while the lower scoring team consisted of four females, and one male, for a total of 5 members. With this, my team had a smaller group size, and a lack of gender diversity. However, I argue these factors played to our advantage and helped us communicate better.

Due to my group's smaller size, we collaborated evenly during the building process, and it was easy for us to get each other's opinions. However, with the group 2's larger size, even by just one person, it can become difficult to communicate effectively with each other and it can quickly become unorganized. Because of this, there is a greater need for a leader in the larger group. According to Lecture 14 from class, leadership is partially made up with status characteristics and personality. These are composed of both diffuse characteristics, which are less effective, and specific characteristics, which are more effective. In the case of our experiment, we are all at the same education level of being an undergraduate com major, so

there are more diffuse characteristics that separate each other than specific characteristics. In group 2, there was a clear leader that emerged during the building process, which was the only male in the group. This makes sense due to his status characteristics of being a white male, who have historically held the most powerful positions. In terms of personality, extraversion plays the biggest roles in leadership emergence (Judge et al., 2002). During the building process, the man in the group was very extroverted, talking to everyone in the group equally, and also freely taking the materials and plotting with them. With the combination of his status characteristics and personality, he was the emerging leader for the group. However, he lacked openness and agreeableness, as he often did not give his teammates an opportunity to speak. I feel this ultimately aided their downfall because having an ineffective leader makes people more reluctant to speak out about their opinions. This can be seen in the other members of the group. While watching their video, I noticed that other group members slowly started sitting away from the tower while the leader got progressively closer, a signifier that he might have been taking too much control over the group. A leader that emerges is not always a leader that is effective, which is demonstrated in group 2's lack of success.

To further my discussion surrounding composition, I will be looking at the differences in interaction process analysis (IPA) between my group and group 2, and how it played a part in leadership. According to Robert F. Bales, Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) is a way of classifying direct, face-to-face, act by act, and a series of ways summarizing and analyzing the resulting data so that they yield useful information. A part of IPA is hierarchy and role specification. This describes the idea that in groups, some people talk more than others, and the most talkative tends to be attended the most. In addition, larger groups are more likely to be dominated by a single individual. In my group, there was not one individual that talked more than others, so we did not run into the issue of not agreeing with a leader, as we were all attended to in the same way. In group 2, the male in the group talked the most, so he dominated

the others in the way that he was the most attended to. In the video, you could see that the other team members would look at him and give him the most of their attention. This led to the formation of a hierarchy in group 2, due to the other team members comparing themselves to the leader of the group. This is detrimental because it makes other team members feel excluded and unimportant.

Next, I will be looking at the different problem-solving procedures and phases of both groups, and how they affected our performance.

To start this discussion, I will be discussing conformity during the building phase in relation to my group and group 2's performance. During lecture 12, we discussed Sherif's experiment. Sherif found that when answering a question that they are unsure about, people will at first have their own random, unique estimate. Then, the estimates converge if each person is able to see and hear each other's answers. So, people converge their answers to conform with each other if they are not sure about their answer. This could definitely be seen in our tower building experiment, and how our towers ended up looking similar to each other. In my group during the building phase, we started to worry about our structure not being secure enough to hold the rolls of quarters. So, we started to look around the room to see how other people were ensuring that their tower was structurally sound. We noticed another group taping their structure to the floor, and thought that with our extra tape, this would be a great idea. So we ended up copying their idea. We then started noticing other groups slowly conforming this tower to this same idea, and at the end of the building process, more than half of the groups had taped their tower to the ground. This is an example of informational influence. However, in group 2's video, I noticed that they did not conform to this idea, and instead they barely utilized their tape. I think this played a role in their poor performance. Had they taken a look around the room, they would have solved the problem of structural integrity and allowed for more time to think about how they could increase the height of their tower instead of the strength.

Next, I will be analyzing the planning phases of both groups. In my group, when the okay to start planning was given, we started by saying all of our ideas out loud, and we would all reply by saying whether it was a good idea, or whether there was a better way to approach the tower. At first, we were only concerned about height. Everyone in my group talked about how much they needed the extra credit point, so we all wanted to have the tallest tower. We talked about how we could fold papers and stack cups to get height, but we pivoted once we felt the weight of a roll of quarters. The rolls were a lot heavier than we expected, so we started to struggle with how we would handle the structural integrity. Our initial plan going into the building phase was to use both cups for the base so we have more surface area as a foundation. After about five minutes of planning, we had a game plan with our plan of action, and we started to sit around waiting for the building process to begin. We explained that sometimes too much planning time can be detrimental, because it can cause you to overthink your design and end up not having a solid plan going into the building process. So, once we had a good idea, we decided to stop and wait until the building process began. In group 2's recording, I found their planning process to be a bit different. All of the group members were not very responsive when a new idea was presented. Instead of giving feedback and/or opinions, team members were often hit with, "yeah," or a slight head nod. This was disadvantageous when the transition from planning to building happened because they did not flesh out a solid plan, so they did not start building right away. They were still asking each other questions when the building process began, which left them less time to discern the problem about the height of their tower. Ultimately, their lack of effective and responsive communication during the planning process led group 2 to a lackluster performance.

Both my group and group 2's towers did not win the competition for the tallest, and there was definitely room for improvement in both of our performances.

My group did not face any conflict during the activity, but we did encounter some struggles. The biggest struggle that my group faced was how to respond to our teammate's ideas that we did not agree with, or think were a good idea. Most of the time, instead of responding, we would simply smile and nod, and pivot our attention to the next idea, not agreeing or disagreeing with the poor idea that was presented. This can cause some team members to feel less valued and less included, and could harm their commitment to the activity. Looking at their Interactive Process Analysis (IPA) that was presented in Lecture 13, showing passive rejection is an example of a negative socio-emotional act. This is how we reacted to ideas during the activity, so it harmed our team solidarity. According to IPA, the best way we can have resolved this conflict would be to suggest tweaks to their idea and give our true opinion about their idea. These are examples of positive socio-emotional acts and would have shown all team members that their ideas are valued.

Based on their recording, group 2 did not have any outspoken conflict, but there was visible tension between the emerging leader and the rest of the group. The workload was not even within all team members, as the leader was grabbing materials and proposing ideas, not giving others a chance to also grab the materials and voice their opinion. The leader was outspoken and extroverted, and it created a visible hierarchy between all groupmates. To resolve this struggle, the emerging leader should take on different personality attributes. According to the personality attributes of an effective leader that was brought up in Lecture 14, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness are the most important attributes for an effective leader to have. Given that the emerging leader was already extroverted, he needs to exemplify better listening skills to his teammates in order to make them respect him. This would have improved their workflow.

My group had solid communication and worked well together. To achieve a taller tower in the future, I would recommend for us to be more stingy about where we place our cups because

they give us more height and more structural integrity. We placed both of our big cups at the base, and I think this left us with minimal supplies that we could use to build height. In addition, I would recommend that we spend less time worrying about the structural integrity of the tower because there were other groups whose towers were less wobbly than ours, and were still able to hold the rolls of quarters.

To improve their performance in the future, I would recommend for group 2 to elect a leader prior to the building process. Choosing a leader ahead of the construction phase will establish a clear hierarchy within the team, fostering respect and efficient coordination during the tower-building process. This designated leader can streamline decision-making, delegate tasks effectively, and serve as a unifying force, ensuring that the team operates cohesively towards their shared goal of constructing a successful tower. Due to group 2's larger group size, they would benefit more from an effective leader.

References

Liao, W. (2023, November 6). *Lecture 12: Conformity*. Group Communication.

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