Group Development and Growth (Reflections)

course: BEC930

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Our diverse group (“Group 3”) consisted of the following individuals: Adel Abdollahzadeh, Muthanna Al-khishali, Min yi Chen, Emily De luca, Mohammad Kiani, Sarmad Kiani. Vahidreza Yousefi and myself. The diversity in our group was helpful because individuals were each eager to bridge any apparent differences, which was leveraged to make light work. If I had to characterize my collaborative work experience in this course in a word, it would be “smooth.” By “smooth” I mean relatively uneventful and free of conflict (no irony here: our project was on conflict management). Whether the group dynamic was healthy or whether there was a bit too much groupthink at play, each of us was quite accommodating and did their share of work. But I think the main reason our group worked so well is that we had a thoughtful, hard-working and organized leader in Min-yi Chen. She was doing a lot behind the scenes in terms of editing and focusing our efforts, in addition to planning how we should approach our assignment at a high level.

From my records, the chronology of our group’s events proceeds roughly as follows. The first major occurrence was the appointment of our leader. This was followed by an initial planning phase for Assignment 1, culminating in the presentation (and subsequent discussion) of a work breakdown and schedule. There was not much in the way of revision of the initial plan except to accommodate time constraints on the part of certain group members. We had a series of presentations by individual group members concerning their assigned work, in which some feedback was offered. I was hoping for a group “assignment completion” celebration involving substantial quantities of alcohol (many of us teach at the same campus), but some of our group members do not drink, so I was left to drink alone [which I enjoyed along with a sushi platter and Netflix; I also managed to send my resume to various other workplaces where individuals are not required to take courses against their will, and managed to eke out one interview, in fact; still waiting to hear back].

Our group’s first significant event occurred when Min was appointed leader. She did not ask for the leadership, and seemed somewhat reluctant at first. But you can tell that Min is a proactive person; she was one of two people in the group who posted an initial greeting on our group’s discussion forum. The other person was me, incidentally; with such little participation in these introductions, I began to feel quite lonely (Murthy, 2017). My self-pity was thankfully interrupted by an inspired post by Vahid Yousefi who unilaterally declared Min-yi as our leader. There was a certain disingenuous quality to Vahid’s post, that made me think about his character, if perhaps he was self-serving (Engleberg & Wynne, 2017). I imagined that he is an ingratiating sort of person, flattering Min in order to persuade her to do a lot of hard work for a lazy team (Martin & Wilson, 2012). Or, if he isn’t that sort of person, perhaps his post was done half-jokingly--- I thought, “Shouldn’t something like this be brought to a vote?” But, being somewhat familiar with Persian culture, I felt his post was actually done seriously [therefore, he *is* likely an ingratiating sort of person, and incidentally, here is a great joke taken from *Persian Letters*, which I think captures the seriousness of many of the Iranian immigrants I have met and worked with: An Iranian, an American, and a German die and go to hell. They each get permission to call home. The American is charged $1000 for his call, the German is charged $2000 for his call, but it only costs the Iranian $1 dollar to reach home. The American and the German ask why the Iranian was charged so little. They are told, "He made a local call."]. However, it occurred to me that voting would only slow things down (and no offense to you, course instructor, but I really need to get through these courses as quickly as possible), and knowing Min myself (since we both coordinate at Lambton College in Toronto), I realized that she would make a great leader. With no opposing posts and what was a grand display of accommodating styles of working, Min became our de facto leader. Vahid, I’m sure, was able to sleep well knowing Min would be at the helm.

For our first assignment, we had some discussion of preferred topics. Quite soon after the topic of “Conflict Management” was selected, Min posted with suggested outlines and, a bit afterwards, work schedules. There was some asynchronous discussion via the forum back and forth, and each member then set out to complete their assigned tasks. My task had to do with forming Conclusions and creating Case Studies. My primary interaction throughout this process was with Min. I received some feedback from Vahid and Sarmad, as I recall, but otherwise had very little discussion with other group members. Most, if not all, of our interactions were done asynchoronously. We had meetings at work, but no one brought up this class. It felt like *Fight Club*: we couldn’t talk about it and we couldn’t talk about it.

My interactions with Min were helpful and substantial. I drafted conclusions that were a bit more distilled than she liked, so she edited out certain parts. For example, my first draft asserted that consensus is a higher goal than compromise with respect to conflict management. Admittedly, it was a slight departure from the slides prepared by my colleagues. However, their material felt pedestrian to me, about which I did not raise as an issue. I have a fairly rigorous academic background and I have found that in-depth critical discussions (like the ones suggested in our Engleberg text) are rarely productive in my current professional context. It’s fine. I have let go of the need--- drinking helps. At any rate, Min did a great job of editing down the material so that coherent project emerged, without any edges. As one predisposed to edginess, I was mildly disappointed, but not disappointed enough to make a fuss.

**References/Readings**

Engleberg, I. N., & Wynne, D.R. (2016). *Working in Groups: Communication Principles and Strategies*, Seventh Edition. NY, NY: Pearson

Murthy, V. (2017). “Work and the loneliness epidemic.” *Harvard Business Review*. September 2017

Martin, D. D., & Wilson, J. L. (2012). “Apple-Polishers, Ass-Kissers and Suck-Ups: Towards a Sociology of Ingratiation.” *The Qualitative Report*, 17(34), 1-19. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol17/iss34/1>