

## Group Development & Dynamics: Ours and Others

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## **Performing**

We are a unit of individuals, and parts to a whole. Individuals have specific needs to function well, as does a group: an enormously important part to group functionality is the health and equity of its individuals. Therefore, a healthy group performs only with healthy individuals, working together honestly and diligently.

Like any healthy organism, our group underwent stages of change. We noticed a dramatic increase in idea sharing and constructive feedback after our initial session outside of class; many of us felt that our initial hesitance was, as Louis put it, for fear of treading on each other's toes. This is very true: our first common goal was to work well together and not frustrate or offend anyone. This rapidly passed, however. Tara believes that having already known each other prior to being in a group together, we already had established a basic level of trust. As we began dividing the work and having small assignments for ourselves to do, our trust level increased because of the reliability of our group members. "A beginning level of trust causes people to be more willing to share information. The more information they share, the more trust is developed among members." This leads to better goal setting and problem solving which leads to more productivity and positive results for the group (Hughes, 2004). Melina agreed completely; it is through giving trust that we are better able to receive it. Having all walked out onto the precipice together, we began to formulate a common goal that was not centered around walking on egg shells: it was centered on identifying a group and learning how to construct it effectively. Amber pointed out that building trust can be difficult, depending on the environment and the individuals who are present. However, it is necessary "for authentic learning and working together productively," (Hughes and Grace, 2011). Our trust was built, as the Johari Window expresses it,

“by opening our windows to others, and by allowing others to open the windows to ourselves.” (Hughes & Grace, 2011) In order to have a trusting relationship with others and to work effectively in a small group, we needed to be open with ourselves and be held reliable for other individual’s trust in us. If we don’t trust them, their trust in us isn’t as reliable, leading to a much less successful team.

During each meeting we are always sure to surround ourselves with gracious space, in order to guarantee deep conversation. To us, this space is outside the classroom, sitting around a table at Zoe’s. Our group’s gracious space is used as a “ container for [our] conversation [and allows us to]... share the stresses and mistakes and raise issues without having negative consequences” (Hughes & Grace, 2011). Though creating our gracious space, Kahn’s ideas also became very clear when informing us that “once you act as if it is okay to be honest, and others respond accordingly, you actually create safe-enough places to continue to be honest” (Kahn, 2009). Knowing that honesty was accepted in our gracious space, we began to allow ourselves to feel more comfortable with voicing our thoughts.

Our learning outcome of being able to facilitate a small group successfully was easily met—we tried on different hats, and while still operating with “what works best”, we also had a chance to see ourselves in different roles. Practicing these variations of self in regard to a small group is vital to knowing small group dynamics. It is much easier to understand a role if you have played it. In order to reach the final step of group development and perform effectively, it was necessary that our group have success in the previous stages. The stages are connected and can have a positive or negative effect on each other. Luckily for our group, we started off in a good place and were able to build off that initial stage of forming. We all came together for the reason of

creating a group for a population of our choosing. Our group chose to create a group for foster children because it was a population we all had an interest in helping. As discussed in Wheatley's text, we were all working for a common good. "It's easy to feel hopeful about people after one of these experiences. But when we serve others, we gain more than hope. We gain energy" (2002). We gained the energy from starting out working towards a common goal and common good for our population. Combined with the trust we were beginning to establish, our storming stage went smoothly because we were able to share and consider each other's ideas in our discussions with respect and honesty. This carried on into norming where we could delegate responsibilities to one another and communicate openly about our roles and what we needed to accomplish. With the positivity and success that our group had consistently throughout forming, storming and norming, we were able to perform at our best.

To be a successful group and achieve common goals, there are a number of characteristics each group member should obtain. Honesty, challenge, and trust are all important factors of working in a team effectively. "The initial structures that you need to create are of three general types—ways to divide and integrate work, to coordinate and communicate, and to make decisions" (Kahn, 2009, p. 47). In order to do so, we must be honest and trust our group members with roles that are assigned, completing what is planned, and believing that each member will participate in their share of the group work. There are many challenges that will come up within working in groups, such as working around each person's schedule, incorporating each member's ideas, and dividing the workload evenly among one another. These were all skills that Group 3 was capable of doing right after we were assigned into our group. I believed that our group worked very well together, in regards to being able to rely on each member to complete their part of the project or assignment.

Our roles were defined yet malleable: all of us are able to perform the duties of each, though of course we naturally gravitated toward the ones that suited us best. Tara was an active participant and often a facilitator because of her organization, while still being an excellent observer because of her listening skills. Amber and Kristen are clearly able to lead, and their input was always valuable and respected; they took more of an observer role simply because they were pressed for time given their busy schedules and internship that was directly before we all were scheduled to meet. Tina was an observer, and vital in that she sees *everything*. Tina is able to watch, break down ideas, and input when she felt it was valuable: when Tina talks, everyone listens—it's not too frequently we get to hear what's in her head, so when she gives you the opportunity to, you *listen* because it's gold. Louis was an observer with unique and enormously useful ideas. He was always ready to jump in wherever needed. Melina was a leader and facilitator, and worked at listening as a challenge. It was enormously helpful to her to have such an intelligent and committed group—it was easier to step back from a more aggressive leader role when it was obvious that the group functioned beautifully with minor facilitation.

Tuckman's theory of group dynamics definitely provided a framework for our group. Being able to learn about the group theory concurrently while working in an actual group was a great way to be able to put into practice what we were learning. And this is where our idea came from: practice as a form of learning, facilitation as a form of practice. Because we were operating in roles we were learning about, it made the population we were planning a group for even more real. How would this group function? Who would lead it? What was the point? Learning about group facilitation was something that created a realistic perspective to group dynamics and creating something tangible, workable, and real.

A vital part to creating identity within our group (as individuals and a small group) was getting to know each other's true colors. It helped to understand how we would work together as a group. Directly after completing the true colors exercise, our small group came together and we discussed our results and how accurately we felt they related to that individual. This helped to build and strengthen our relationships and also provided insight to each personality, making it a little clearer what group dynamic our shoes would fill. Throughout this discussion we learned our group had at least one of each color and a couple with the same. This was found to be beneficial as it provides each type of insight and perception while giving the other members a chance to learn, grow, and experience a new diversity.

This group has been, without a doubt, a poster-child for how effective and cohesive groups can be, given the right tools and similar goals.