

## Reflection

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HSP 305

I found it somewhat ironic that our group received Poole's model for group development. Speaking with many others in the class they said that they felt their group followed this model. Katie gave a wonderful illustration of it during her Legacy of Learning presentation. Poole discusses the idea that groups work in three areas: topic, task, and relational. All of these pieces being woven together much like a rope. As our group process developed our group felt that we were working under this theory. Often our meetings had all three aspects; however, after our conflict I started to realize that maybe we had been so caught up in how much we liked the idea of this model that we didn't realize we were not following it. After looking over the models again, I believe our group actually went through multiple models of development. Our orientation phase was similar to that of Tuckman's model – the forming phase (Borchers, 1999). During our forming phase we began learning about each other and about the project. The first two meetings this idea was very apparent. When we were first assigned the group, I was nervous about working with people that in mind who were driving forces. Ashley, Elise and Carri are the get it done type. They find out their task and push to complete it well and quickly. In our first meeting they spoke to this. I feel that Kate and I both were more open to doing what the group consensus was and weren't really concerned about moving too fast or slow. However, I sensed a lot of hesitation from Nikki as she addressed that this was not her preferred style of working. As a group we reassured her that if she felt we were moving

too fast or something was wrong she should bring it up right away and as group we could address it and make appropriate changes. During this meeting Carri was our facilitator. I believe she did an excellent job. She did not dominate our conversation and made sure everyone was heard. Watching her, my view of leadership changed. Carri is often quiet but extremely thoughtful. She asks questions that helped me think deeper about aspects of our project I would have grazed over. She also gives off a sense of equality. It was something about the way she spoke, as if she were addressing the whole group as well as you individually. I had often thought of a leader as someone who talked the loudest and the longest but after watching Carri, I believe a leader is actually the one who actively listens and provides meaningful reflection. Although Carri did a wonderful job of being facilitator, she eventually slipped into the role of scribe.

Meeting two was an interesting meeting. This meeting was held at Ashley's house. We sat down together as a group and no one person was named facilitator but Ashley stepped into this role. She helped us get back on track each time we became very far off topic and made sure to monitor our time. Her role was probably the easiest to pin point; Ashley was our "project manager" (Kahn, 2009, p. 67). "This member organizes and coordinates everyone's efforts, turning strategies into manageable tasks" (Kahn, p. 67). Although there were times when each person played this role, Ashley consistently did. She showed me focus was another part of leadership.

We knew that we would be creating a group for minors. As we started our brainstorming process, we almost instantly came up with the idea to work with at risk youth. It became more difficult as to what sort of group we should do. Ideas were thrown around

and often what would happen is one person would say one thing and others would play off that idea or bring up points as to why it wouldn't work. Something that kept coming up was the idea of doing a mentor program; however we were unsure if that would work as a group. We referred back to the syllabus many times but still had too many questions and ran out of time, so we decided to adjourn until Tuesday. Looking back now, I feel there were a few things we could have done to prevent some of our issues later. After listening to the presentations I think it would have been very helpful for us to set up norms. There were points where I know that I became frustrated, as I didn't feel heard, but I chose not to say anything because I didn't feel like it was a pressing matter. I noticed that I did this often during our group meetings. I let my own feelings pass by as it did not seem to be productive to the group. *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities*, speaks directly about this issue. Kahane discusses his own fear of causing problems, "I hesitated to speak openly because I was afraid that if I said what I was really thinking, the others, would be angry and would distance themselves from me" (2004, p. 64). I share this fear but am slowly learning that to overcome it I must continue to be open with what I feel while still honoring the other person's right to their own thoughts and feelings.

Over our next few meetings, we all took on the role of researcher. We went off to different services within Whatcom County and explored: what was already available, how we could address needs within the community and how we could implement our program. We were slowly starting to build our program and presentation simultaneously. I felt we were ahead of the groups and I was excited that we could really get this together and buff

out the details as we went along. Through this researching process, one person in our group really stuck out as a wealth of information. Kate not only has a lot of life experience living and working with different groups but also has a wide variety of volunteer experience. She was our resource; “This person [the resource] scans the environment and seeks out other outside the team who can provide useful perspectives” (Kahn, 2009, p. 68). She encouraged our group to not only find information on the Internet but to call or interview someone at the agency. Through her knowledge our group deepened our understanding of the issue we were addressing.

Besides working together in our group, Elise, Nikki and myself had been having training on the weekends for our internships. During this time we had gotten to know each other on a more personal level. In class, we were discussing conflict and I happened to be sitting a few seats away from Nikki. I noticed that her body language was somewhat closed off, and even heard her make a few comments. I figured I would approach her after class and see what was going on. Our group time came and we all headed down to the room we had been using. As soon as we sat down, Elise brought it up that she had become aware that there was an issue in our group and suggested that we take time to talk about it before we began our meeting. Nikki then opened up about how she was feeling regarding our project. I was very surprised and unsure what to do about how she was feeling. We tried to talk about it for a little while and finally had to dismiss, as everyone needed time to process. Elise has a sensitivity to other's needs that is very unique. I got a chance to discuss with her a little bit of what happened prior to her bringing this issue up to the group. She told me that she had talked to Nikki one on one before presenting it to the

group and they had talked about some of the things she had been feeling. Elise's natural intuition helped her find her role in our group. She was our process facilitator; "the process facilitator assumes the role of making sure that necessary conversations – about levels of participation and engagement, avoidance or engagement of conflict... -- are raised during meetings" (Kahn, 2009, p.66). However, even with the discussion prior, Elise was very surprised at how deep these feelings ran for Nikki.

As I walked away I discussed what had just happened with Carri. I felt upset that Nikki had not brought this issue up to the group sooner; especially as it seemed she felt very strongly about it. As part of my personal boundaries I try my best to not carry issues outside the place they are happening. This in was an issue that would be discussed in our group, so I was once again surprised when I received a call from Elise regarding a post on Blackboard. The first time I read through the post I was somewhat offended by pieces of what were said; however, I made a decision to reread it. The second time I read it, I really tried to look at it from Nikki's perspective and what her intentions behind her words were. Because I had gotten to know her a little bit more during our training, I realized that much of what she had said was probably meant to be sarcastic and reading it through my personal lens only I might not have caught that fact.

Tubb's stage regarding conflict fits our group well. "Conflict is a necessary part of a group's development. Conflict allows the group to evaluate ideas and it helps the group avoid conformity and groupthink" (Borchers, 1999). I believe that our group had fall into groupthink. Nikki, had her own lens on the situation and I'm not sure if she did not share it with us or if she tried and we did not hear her; regardless, she had the courage to

challenge the mindset that we – being Carri, Kate, Ashley, Elise and myself – were all working under. Nikki showed me what it takes to be an initiator.

“Even among friends, starting a conversation can take courage. But conversation also gives us courage... we become wiser about when to use our courage. As we learn from each other’s experiences and interpretations, we see the issue in richer detail” (Wheatley, 2009, p.30).

Although I still don’t agree with Nikki’s timing or her choice of action; I believe her perspective challenged our group to reexamine our program in a new way.

Meeting seven was our attempt to resolve our conflict. Up until this point my role had fluctuated. I had – in my opinion – stepped into roles that needed filling. At this point I was in an interesting position. In addition, to being Nikki’s group member; I also share a practicum site with her. I was experiencing dual relationship. I had to choose my words and action carefully. At this time in our group, I became somewhat of an observer while in-group but also tried to talk to each person individually as to how they were feeling outside of the group. Through doing this I had discussed with Nikki that she was having an issue with the word “equip” in our mission statement. During meeting seven I stepped outside of my comfort zone and tried to facilitate a discussion regarding our word choice – giving the possible solution of changing the word to “empower.” Unfortunately, we could not come to a consensus and so the word remained “equip.” I left the meeting disappointed that I could not get our group to come together on this. I had hoped that if everyone could stand behind our mission statement we might be able to find common ground so we could continue.

At the next meeting, I apologized for bring up the subject and explained my reasoning for doing so. Again this was out of my comfort zone. I tend not to like to admit that I may have made a mistake. My group was supportive and understanding, thanking me for the effort. I had unknowingly taught myself another piece of leadership, taking responsibility for one's actions – right or wrong.

Our next stage of group development again comes from Tuckman; the performing stage (Borchers, 1999). This is representative of our presentation. As we prepared for it, there was a lot of tension as to how we would show our unresolved conflict. The second to last meeting before we were to present, Ashley gave the idea to do a confessional style performance. We agreed that this was the best option and moved into the Fisher's reinforcement stage, "In this stage, group members bolster their final decision by using supportive verbal and nonverbal communication" (Borchers, 1999). The reinforcement stage was very apparent as we each waited to face the class. We had struggled as a group but as we paced the hall we offered each other words of encouragement and laughed together. It seems funny to say but our group seemed to leave all of the hardship we had in the hallway. We choose not to do anything special for our group ending.

Reflecting back on this past quarter, I realized that I had unknowingly woven each of the learning outcomes into my personal system. I had demonstrated that I could facilitate a small group. I discovered what my personal view on leadership was and what it meant to be a leader by observing my fellow group mates. Through my work on our program and listening to the others presentations, I furthered my understanding of how Human Services professionals deliver services to clients – using small group techniques. I

believe the most important thing I learned was that conflict is a stage in developing a group. Conflict is not what anyone wants; however, it does have a place in developing relationships. I take pride in the fact that although our group was unable to move past the conflict, I do not feel it changes my bond or feelings toward anyone in the group. I feel I leave this quarter knowing that I do not have to be a set role within the group and how valuable each persons voice and perspective is to the group dynamic.



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