Team Building

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The team chosen for this project is from a new church plant in Colusa, California called Praise Chapel of Colusa (PCC). PCC has diverse beginnings, which is said to improve innovation and performance while minimizing groupthink (Homan, van Knippenberg, Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2007). Demographically speaking the group is representative of a small-town community whose primary focus is farming. However, only two of eight workers are in the farming industry, and both are seasonal workers. Of the eight people, there are two students, one construction worker and seasonal farmer, one care provider, one commuter to Sacramento, two business owners, and one working in farm supply. Three of the eight live in another city and commute to church functions. Categorizing the group by gender, there are three males and five females. Materially, only the business owners, a man and his wife, are financially secure, all other adults live from paycheck to paycheck. Surprisingly, they are all homeowners but the observer.

**Group or Team**

The group is labeled a team according to Katzenbach and Smith (1993), as all members have one goal in mind--the establishment of the new church plant (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Every member of the team is a representative in PCC. The senior pastor and his wife, the soundman, youth leader, pastors assistant, and laypeople are all present. In fact, usually, this group of people would be meeting for a bible study, but the night has been taken over by one of the pastors for a “leadership team activity.” After the activity, the group looked at Ephesians Ch 5 as well as the story of the “Good Samaritan” in the bible. The team is seated around a table in groups of two with the senior pastor being an outlier and working alone.

**The Activity**

The activity chosen was the Broken Squares activity (Broken, 2019). In this activity, the focus is on group work, teamwork, communication, helping others, problem solutions, and critical thinking. The instructions warned that some group members might become frustrated while others become invigorated. Participation, cooperation, and the willingness to put others first are necessary for success. On Thursday, August first, the group met for their weekly bible study in Colusa, California at 7pm. Typically, a study guide was used with questions and answers presented after a reading. On this night, however, the leadership had something else in mind. All the members of the group were asked to sit around a table and were divided into five groups. As there was an odd number of people, the senior pastor made up a single person group. Each group was handed a manila business envelope without revealing the contents and asked not to open them. The instructions were read aloud by the leader and overseer of the challenge. When the rule was understood that there was to be no communication and no gesturing at all a single common question was presented by many – the question of how they were supposed to communicate. The leader offered no explanation. Instead, the leader asked if anyone had to use the restroom or get a drink as there was to be no dismissal from the table either until the activity was concluded. Unexpectantly, fast-talking ensued being performed in anticipation of a time when no person would be able to make a sound – as if talking a lot before the mandatory calm would somehow make the time easier.

**Stages of Team Development**

A brief definition of the five stages of team development is necessary for clarity of how this team advanced through the activity. The five steps, as presented by Tuckman (1965), are given, including the addition of the adjourning stage, which he later added (Tuckman, 1965).

The five stages are forming, storming, morning, performing, and adjourning. Each step represents unique obstacles and advancement.



Chart 1 – stages of team development

Retrieved from Organizational behavior. Section 9.2, by T. Bauer, 2010, New York, NY: Flat World Knowledge, Inc.

**Forming.** In the forming stage, the team members come together many times for the first time. On the other hand, members may already know each other; in either case, people may feel formality, anxiety, guardedness, and uncertainty. As a result, there is a broad range of reactions; some may be ultra-polite while others are avoidant or confrontational; still, others may be quiet and observant (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010). Basically, people at this time are trying to figure out the rules.

In this group, the people have been working together and studying together for over a year. However, the lack of information brought an uneasiness, and this caused people to feel different ways. Many people just remained silent due to the uncertainty of what was going on. This further brought on some sort of attentiveness, as people were looking to hear any hint of what was going on. This is typical response; however, it is noted that this was the general response as soon as people were seated, and before permission to begin was given.

**Storming.** Members of each team begin to focus less on keeping their guard up and begin to test the boundaries of the rules. Members start to discover their influence, and they often try to excerpt power and establish their role in the group differentiating themselves rather than seeking common ground (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010). This can be a problem for this type of activity as the Broken Squares activity depends on selflessness for success. In this activity one is not able to take another members piece, nor are they able to ask, motion or gesture in any way for the puzzle piece they need but are dependent on the goodwill of a member looking at their puzzle on their own and provide any assistance by graciously giving their puzzle piece without being asked and expecting nothing in return (Broken, 2019).

There were some people who tried to motion and gesture in this step. The leader had started a stopwatch at the time of the “go” command. The noted effect of the displayed stopwatch seemed to present itself in an increased spirit of competition. Some members made it a goal in their minds to be completed first, though not said, the observed behavior was apparent. The leader had to verbally reiterate that there was to be not gesturing or talking at all on more than one occasion before those members began to quietly settle down into a healthy state.

**Norming.** According to Bauer and Erdogan (2010), this is the stage when members feel elated. Members become much more committed to each other rather than seeking to be the best. The goal of the team pulls out in front, and the feeling of capability overtakes uncertainty. The group becomes more cohesive, and group members more cooperative (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010).

At this point, something a little strange happened. It is not clear whether this was due to submission to the presence of authority or love. Members unconsciously began to look at other puzzles but not randomly. They first chose to complete the pastor's wife’s puzzle and then the pastor’s. While it is true that these two also represented the most completed puzzles on the table, it is hard to know at this point if the team chose to finish these puzzles first out of respect or were subconsciously driven to finish the most completed puzzle first. In likelihood, it was a mixture of both factors. While the bible instructs to submit to the rule God puts over one (Hebrews 13:17, KJV) and since all were Christians here, it would be nice to feel they were just good Christians. However, the true reasons may lay elsewhere. Church groups are structured like a family. According to Soylu (2011), a feeling of security is produces by ones loyalty to the head of a family. In contrast, this may be caused by the psychological base needs of the individual members. It has been shown that leaving a project undone creates a type of tormenting retained memory (Zeigarnik, 1927). In contrast, memories of completing a task are pleasurable and quickly forgotten (Savitsky, Medvec, & Gilovich, 1997). According to James and Kendell (1997), this drives people to complete projects. Naturally, searching out projects that take less time, and completing them first has quicker psychological reward (James & Kendell, 1997).

**Performing.** Driven by a sense of shared vision and unity, the team moves into high gear. Members are more interdependent and proceed at individual paces. Team spirit begins to overtake as members feel more a part of significant entity. Most members start to complete the task at hand, and a feeling of direction and experience replaces feelings of capability. At this point, those who are less likely to work to support others begin to be identified as they fall behind (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010).

This is where the attention changes as others began to understand that the only way to finish the task is to finish their neighbors' puzzle. Feelings of uncertainty are now gone, and the race is on. All but two puzzles were completed. The ones that were not completed offered arguments that their puzzle was obviously cut crooked. They remained satisfied with that explanation until the lead vocally revealed which puzzles were completed correctly. Still, the participants looked on with blank stares until the leader vocally affirmed that their two puzzles were not correct. First, the leader asked the question, “does that look right to you?” This effected the repeated response that the puzzle was cut crooked thus breaking the no talking rule. At that time, the leader revealed the two that were incorrect. It took less than a minute for the entire task to be completed once this point was reached.

The team would have been stuck and satisfied that they had completed the task accepting that the puzzle was miscut. The verbal acclimation of the team member stating that the puzzle was cut wrong was enough to satiate the rest of the team. The power of perceived authority played a significant role. The effect of recognized authority has been heavily documented since 1963 when Milgram found that all he had to do to force a participant to continue doing something that they knew was harmful to the subject was to have someone in a doctors robe in the same room saying that the experiment must continue (Milgram, 1963). To mankind’s shame, many people proceeded all the way to the highest electrocution setting, although they heard the supposed anguish of the subject on every perceived electric shock. In reality, there was no electric shock, and the agony was a pre-taped sound from an actor. In this activity, it was amazing that all were so easily swayed into believing that the puzzle was cut wrong although none of the other puzzles were wrong and the perceived authority was a seventh-grade student. In addition, even those with doubt did not affirm themselves until the power was no longer accepted, at which time they vocalized their doubts breaking the rules once again.

**Adjourning.** This section was overshadowed by the biblical connection. It translated to the topic of putting others first appropriately. A secure connection is drawn from the golden rule in the bible to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Putting others before oneself is at the heart of solid Christian teaching and this activity made a great segue into its teaching since this was at the heart of the activity as well.

**Characteristics of the Team**

The following are the Five Characteristics of a Team taken from Bauer and Erdogan (2010): First, teams are accountable for achieving specific shared goals.  Secondly, teams function interdependently. Third, groups are stable.  Fourth, teams have authority.  Lastly, units operate in a social context.  In this activity, the accountability factor was hard to see. First, the group pushed to finish the pastor’s puzzles first, and then the team was derailed with the perceived authority of a seventh grader. However, all sides functioned independently. Each group of two worked as one unit even when they changed strategies from completing their own puzzle first to completing others first. Nobody really tried to change teams or hinder someone else’s team, so it is believed that groups were stable. In the fourth one, teams have authority, according to Bauer and Erdogan (2010), organizations should possess decision-making power and pursue their goals to the completion of their assignments. For most the teams this was true if their considered designation was the completion of their own puzzle, but it was not. The goal was the completion of all the puzzles. While all puzzles were completed, the entire group was stalled by the perceived authority presented by one group member. The idea of the goal being the completion of each individual puzzle may have supported the stall of the group. Those that had complete puzzles in front of them may have already received some psychological reward for their puzzle being completed, which made it acceptable that the main goal had not been reached or by compromising the outcome enough to accept that the main goal was completed. After all, their puzzle was complete; the incomplete puzzles were someone else’s. This reveals that some may not have adopted their primary goal as being the success of the team but reverted back to personal success as being the primary goal. In opposition, in the end, the entire squad rejoiced when the main task was completed.

**Barriers**

This paper has covered several of the barriers that this team experienced during the activity. It was difficult for many to remain silent; in addition, it took a while before people started focusing on another’s puzzle and not their own. Another barrier was the readiness to distribute authority, both perceived and due to loyalty. Loyalty too authority caused two of the puzzles to be assembled long before the bulk of the puzzles. Recognized authority caused the group to stall as a whole. These behaviors were studied previously (James & Kendell, 1997; Milgram, 1963; Savitsky et al., 1997; Soylu, 2011; Zeigarnik, 1927). Therefore, it is not surprising to find them in a study of teamwork activities. What is surprising is the extent to which they are found.

**Strengths**

Note that the puzzles were all completed within ten minutes from the time the stopwatch was started. However, the rate in which they were completed shows evidence to support the cyclical model drawn from the behavioral scientist Gersick’s study of punctuated equilibrium (Gersick, 1991). This study supports growth spurts in leu of gradual, continual progress. It is further noted that this activity was completed in three sections which the observer labeled the loyal section, the performing section, and the recovery section. In the loyalty section, the first two puzzles were completed within three minutes. In the performing section, all but two were completed. In the recovery section, after the perceived authority was put aside, the other two were completed in a very short amount of time. In its entirety, the team showed an exceptional level of commitment in that they kept going until the common goal was reached. This commitment is counted as a strength.

**Cohesion**

Since the team had an overseer who was an authority figure, a more significant organizational approach was achieved through the solid instruction at the beginning. This established a common objective and supplied enough freedom that each team could decide their own course of action. Seating people around a table also helped to close the proximity of each member building familiarity. All members were treated with dignity and respect, demonstrating value for all. The communication factor was nonexistent as part of the activity. Because of this, communication is not measured as a factor of cohesion.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Most of this activity worked very well. This is partly due to the close seating arrangement. Intimate seating is a factor that must remain. Working in plain view in a team has the reward of others seeing possible areas where they can help. Something that did not work well was the size of the puzzles. The puzzles were to quickly solved. This activity may benefit from adding difficulty into the puzzles. Another item that is not recommended is having team leaders who are well-loved or respected as team leaders as part of the group as the loyalty factor biases the results. Something one might learn from this activity is that teams work better when team members count their peers' success above their own, to be aware of the problems of perceived authority and how they might negatively affect the reaching of a team goal, and growth seems to happen more often than not in spirts rather than gradually. This is an excellent lesson as most have been trained that slow and steady wins the race. The recommendation to this group is to do not break the rules, not to assume that something was created wrong when one’s result is not looking like it should and focus on the main goal and not personal achievement.

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