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 is has diverse beginnings which is said to improve innovation and performance while minimizing groupthink (Homan, van Knippenberg, Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2007). Demographically speaking this group are all members of a small-town community whose main focus is in farming. However, only two of eight work in the farming industry and both are seasonal. Of the eight people there are two students, one construction worker/seasonal farmer, one care provider, one commuter to Sacramento, two business owners, and one 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 owner, a man and his wife, are financially secure all other adults live from paycheck to paycheck. Surprisingly, they are all homeowners.

**Group or Team**

Though the team is labeled a group according to Katzenbach and Smith (1993) they would be classified as a team as all members have one goal in mind--the establishment of the new church plant (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Every member of the team is represented in PcC. The senior pastor and his wife, the soundman, youth leader, pastors assistant and lay people are all present. In fact, normally this group of people would be meeting for a bible study but tonight has been taken over by one of the pastors for a “leadership team activity”. After the activity the group will be looking at Ephesians Ch 5 as well as the story of the “good Samaritan” in the bible. The team is set around a table and two people are working together 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 focus’ on group work, teamwork, communication, helping others, problem solutions, and critical thinking. The instruction warned that some group members may become frustrated while others become invigorated. Participation, cooperation and the willingness to put others first is necessary for success. On Thursday August first the group met for their weekly bible study in Colusa California at 7pm in the evening. 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 with out revealing the contents and asked not to open them. The instructions were read aloud by the leader and overseer of the challenge. As soon as the rule was read that there was to be no communication and no gesturing at all the common question of how they were supposed to communicate was asked by several. 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 until the activity was concluded. One thing that was unexpected was the fast talking performed in anticipation of a time when no person would be able to make a sound – as if to talk a lot before the mandatory calm.

**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 stages as presented by Tuckman (1965) are presented including the addition of the adjourning stage which he later added (Tuckman, 1965). The five stages are forming, storming, morning, performing, and adjourning. Each stage represents unique obstacles and advancement.

**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 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 brings an uneasiness, and this caused people to feel different ways. Many people just remain 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. A typical response but it is noted that this was a 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 begin 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 the 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)



Chart 1 – stages of team development

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

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 affect 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 obvious. 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 normal 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 being the best. The goal of the team pulls out front and the feeling of capability overtakes uncertainty. The team becomes more cohesive and members more cooperative (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010).

At this point something a little strange happened. It is not sure whether this was due to submission to present authority or love. Members unconsciously began to look at others puzzles but not randomly. They first choose to complete the pastors wife’s puzzle and then the pastor’s. While it is true that these two represented also the most complete 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 by seeing the most complete puzzle were subconsciously driven to complete it first. In likely hood, it was a mixture of those factors. While the bible instructs to submit to the rule God puts over you (Hebrews 13:17, KJV) and since all were Christians here it would be nice to feel that way.

However reasons may lay elsewhere. The group from a church is structured like a family. According to Soylu (2011) this produces a sense of head of family loyalty that brings in a feeling of security (Soylu, 2011). On the flip side this may be caused by the psychological base needs of individual members. It has be 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 easily forgotten (Savitsky, Medvec, & Gilovich, 1997). According to James and Kendell (1997) this drives us to complete projects. Naturally, searching out projects that take less time and completing them first has it 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 member feel more a part of something greater entity. Most members begin to complete the task at hand, and a feeling of direction and know how replaces feelings of capability. At this point those who are less likely to work to support others begin to be identified as they are in last place (Bauer & Erdogan, 2010).

At this point the attention changes as others began to understand that the only way to finish the task was to finish your neighbors puzzle. Feelings of uncertainty were now gone, and the race was on. All but two where completed. The ones that were not completed offered arguments that their puzzle was obviously cut crooked. They remained satisfied with that solution until the lead vocally revealed which puzzles were completed correctly. Still the participant 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 effect the repeated response that the puzzle was cut crooked breaking the no talking rule. At that time the leader revealed the two that were incorrect. At that point it took less than a minute for the entire task to be complete.

The team would have been stuck and satisfied that they had completed the task. The verbal abuse of the team member when they first stated that the puzzle was cut wrong was enough to satiate the rest of the team. The power that perceived authority played a big role. The effect of perceived authority has been heavily documented since 1963 when Milgram Phd. 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 they had to continue the experiment (Milgram, 1963). Many people proceeded all the way to the highest electrocution setting although they were hearing the supposed anguish of the subject on every perceived electric shock. In reality, there was no electric shock, and the aguish was a pre-taped sound from an actor. In this activity I find it amazing that all were so easily swayed into believing that the puzzle was cut wrong although none of the others were wrong and the perceived authority was a seventh-grade student. In addition, even those with doubt did not affirm themselves until the authority 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 to the need of putting others first. An easy connection 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 Segway into its teaching,

**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 common goals.  Secondly, teams function interdependently. Third, teams are stable.  Fourth, teams have authority.  Lastly, teams operate in a social context.  In this activity the accountability factor was hard to see. First the group pushed to finish the pastorates puzzles first, then the team got hung up with the perceived authority of a seventh grader. However, all teams functioned independently. Each group of two functioned as one unit even when it they changed strategies from completing their own puzzle first to completing others first. Nobody really tried to change teams or hinder someone else’s teams so I would say that they were stable. The fourth one, teams have authority. According to Bauer and Erdogan (2010) teams should possess decision-making power and pursue their goals to the completion of their assignments. For most the teams this was true if one says their assignment 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. 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. After all their puzzle was complete the uncomplete puzzles were someone else’s. This reveals that some may have not adopted their main goal as being the success of the team but reverted back to personal success as being the main goal. In opposition, in the end the entire team 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 others puzzles and not their own. Another barrier was the readiness to distribute authority both perceived and do to loyalty. Loyalty authority caused two of the puzzles to be assemble long before the bulk of the puzzles. Perceived authority caused the group to stall as a whole. These behaviors were studied previously (Soylu, 2011; Zeigarnik, 1927; Savitsky et al., 1997; James & Kendell, 1997; Milgram, 1963). Therefor 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 (1991) study of punctuated equilibrium (Gersick, 1991). This study supports growth spurts over gradual continual progress. There is no doubt that this activity was complete in three sections which the observer labeled the loyal section, the performing section, and the recovery section. In the loyalty section the first two puzzle where complete with in three minutes. In the performing section all but two were completed. In the recovery section, after perceived authority was put aside the other two were completed in a short amount of time. In its entirety the team showed a great level of commitment in that they kept going until the common goal was reached.

**Cohesion**

Since the team had an overseer that was an authority figure greater organization was achieved though solid instruction at the beginning. This establish a common objective and supplied enough freedom that each team could decide their own course of action. Seating people around also help to close the proximity to each other 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. Close seating is a factor that must remain. Working in plain view in a team has the reward of other seeing possible areas where they can help. Something that did not work well was the size of the puzzles. The puzzles were to easily solve this activity may benefit from adding difficulty in the puzzle. Another item that is not recommended is having team leaders who are well loved as members of the team. The loyalty factor biases the results. Something one might take away from this activity is that teams work better when team members count their peers success above their own, beware of the problems of perceived authority and how it might negatively affect reaching a team goal, and growth seems to happen more often than not in spirts rather than gradually. This is a great 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, to not assume that something was created wrong when one’s result is not looking like it should and focus on the main goal and not the personal goal.

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