MSOD 614 Trio learning group Formation Proposal

Bryan Clifton

Amanda Perkey

Alejandro Virchez

**INTRODUCTION**

During our free night at Pajaro, we experienced a unique scenario that will serve as a reference point for our proposed intervention. Some members of the group naturally took charge and proposed activities for the group, while others were comfortable to sit back and see what the group preferred to do. Others felt uncomfortable with the process from the beginning. The goal for our intervention is to build upon this experience, utilize the parts that worked well and modify the areas that did not serve the purpose of the group.

**GOAL OF INTERVENTION:**

The goal of our intervention is to create a psychologically safe space where all voices are heard before we begin the churning and group formation process. To have a safe space, trust must be present among the group members.

**OUR PROPOSED INTERVENTION:**

**Establish a Safe Environment**

For the past 100 days, our cohort has communicated virtually through webinars, conference calls, and Yammer posts. As we reconnect in person, our sense of community needs time to settle and adjust based on how the cohort and each individual as grown since we departed Pajaro a few months ago.

The first part of our intervention focuses on using activities as a facilitation tool to help communicate a safe environment and help us reflect on the larger purpose of the program, what each member hopes to learn through this experience, and how learning groups help facilitate our learning. An essential part of this process is establishing a safe environment and allowing for trust to be present in the group.

Trust flourishes when people exhibit their vulnerability to others without knowing what may result (Rousseau 1998). This is what we are asking from the group. We need to establish and communicate a sense of trust and collectively accept that we are on a journey with an unknown outcome. Collectively, we must tap into our Wise Self and bring the best versions of our self to this process.

Our first activity is a group check-in. Through this activity, we will hear from each member of the group and see how each person is feeling.

The purpose of this activity is to generate a psychologically safe environment and generate vulnerability-based trust between the cohort members (Lencioni 2005). Once the group has completed this exercise, we will transition to discuss and determine our cohorts purpose.

This will start with a time of journaling and self-reflection.We will all be given a period of time to answer these questions in our journals:

* Why are we here?
* What is your understanding of the purpose of these learning groups?
* What are your specific interests about the groups?
* What do you want to get out of the group? Goal of the groups?

From there we will go around until each person has shared and fill in large sheets of paper to make our thoughts a permanent reminder of our cohort purpose. Ideally this becomes a mission statement in nature that is carried with the community for the duration of the program and beyond. The cohort purpose is essential and requires full attention, intention, and your Wise Self.

As a community, answering a key set of questions will help us clarify and define our cohort purpose and the purpose of the learning groups. They are support systems to help each person learn as much as they can through the program. The groups are not competing against one another, but rather seeking to provide a strong learning experience for the other 34 members of the cohort. With a clear purpose of what we collectively want to learn through this process, we are able to determine how to structure the formation process of learning groups.

**Setting up group norms**

We have learned from our individual experiences and from key researchers Cummings, Worley, Morgan, Schein that norms play important roles in group dynamics. Norms help get things done within the group, they help with group cooperation and coordination of goals and tasks. In the presentation from MSOD 613 Group 3, they concluded “The manner in which norms show up in society depends upon the nature of the environment, the origin and founding principles of the norm and the way in which individuals learn and internalize the norms of their environment. Changing assumptions about a norm requires significant shifts in culture” ([MSOD 613 Group 3 Presentation](http://normsdynamics-msodpiprime.weebly.com/about.html)).

The norms that are established through the previous exercises for safe environment and our time together as a cohort will support the overall goal to encourage the churning process to evolve until the community as a whole and the individual learning groups find the right balance within each group. As a community there will be be many factors and types of norms that show up during this process - moral, aesthetic, cultural, personal, social, etc.  Ideally, with the foundation of the safe environment, the trust between members and the clear purpose for the learning groups, we can align each individual to stay within the norms.

Our way of recalling group norms is through verbal reminders such as:

* Accept the "churning" process and allow it to flow naturally
* Know when to stop, take a break to assess to find the right balance
* Communicate, remember the art of humble inquiry
* Remember to spin your chakras and stay in touch with your wise self

As stated in the Key Points About Norms by MSOD 613 Group 3 “norms emerge from individual’s interactions and are meant to represent a solution to the problem of attaining and maintaining social order. Some who deviates from a norm can face sanctions and repercussions.” If conflict arises, as a community we will decide how to address and communicate openly with the member(s) to allow each individual to re-enter a mindset of safety & trust to support the cohort and community purpose. As a function of group dynamics, group norms change with the individuals, interactions and environment. Each learning group will need the right mix of skill, personality and intuitive feeling (SPINE) of balance among the members in their learning group to support one another throughout the program. Following the notion that groups are “epigenetic”, then each stage builds on the success of the preceding one. It is then important to ensure that each stage develops appropriately - in this case establishing a safe environment and group norms, prior to moving into group formation.

**Group Forming**

We believe that the learning group forming process is an opportunity for all of us to immerse into group dynamics and process consultation. We recognize that in this process we will be playing a dual role being be both clients and helpers. As it is crucial to taken into consideration all of the cohort members concerns, we will follow a whole system approach. The power of the whole-system approach lies not so much in the management sponsorship but in the high engagement and involvement of the organization (Block 2000).

Our proposal for the learning group formation is based on Richard Wallen’s problem solving Model (Schein 1999).

Our process has 3 phases, each one of them with different stages:

Phase 1: Define the process facilitator

Phase 2: Define the group forming framework

Phase 3: Align the learning groups

**1. Define the process facilitator**

The group forming process will need a process facilitator that will be responsible for conducting the group through a series of activities while promoting participation, clarifying and elaborating on the group ideas, summarizing conversations and sustaining the safe environment for the right conversations to emerge. As we are taking a whole system approach, the facilitator will have to become neutral to the conversation giving up their right to influence any decision for the sake of the process.

We suggest a 3 step process to define the process facilitator:

1.1 Ask to the group who is interested in being the facilitator.

-If there is only one candidate skip to step 1.3, If we have two or more persons interested in the process go to step 1.2.

1.2 The group of candidates will have a conversation to align their interests and build consensus on who will be the best facilitator for the group.

1.3 The facilitator will introduce himself/herself to the group.

**Phase 2. Define the group forming framework**

Once the group has a facilitator, the group will start the process to define the best approach to group formation. This process has 3 steps:

2.1 Problem formulation: As we know, our outcome is to define our learning groups, but we will need to have a deeper understanding of what our problem is. The facilitator should then inquire about any feelings or incidents that the group has experienced in the previous stages of the process, until the problem is defined.

2.2 Brainstorm possible ways to act: The purpose of this step is to generate proposals for action. In order to get all the possible solutions. Each participant will have a limited time to write down a proposal and post it on a wall.

2.3 Pros & Cons: After the brainstorm, the group will go through each of the proposals and evaluate pros & cons. The group then should agree on what proposal they are going to use. The ideal method for reaching the final decision in this phase would be unanimous consent or consensus, but we are aware that it all depends on the given time. If time is restrictive, we propose to make the decision by majority rule.

**Phase 3. Align the learning groups**

The goal of this phase is to form groups and get feedback from each of the groups until we reach the final consensus. The facilitator should lead a process to ensure that the group is really solving the problem stated.

3.1 Taking action- The group will have to determine what are the next steps and who is responsible for forming the initial groups aligned to the selected framework. The initial set of groups will then be formed.

3.2 Evaluating outcomes- Once the initial groups are formed each of them will have time to have an alignment conversation to asses the elected framework and understand if there are any new concerns or issues that need to be taken into consideration. The facilitator then will inquire about the concerns and the group will reframe the groups if needed. This process will continue until the group reaches a final consensus.

**RECAP**

The final decision is made when all groups are comfortable with their learning group. This may sound utopian in nature, but without a group consensus, we might run into further issues down the line. At the conclusion of the group formation process if we maintained a safe space for all voices and we allow each member to be fully present through the process and final groups we have accomplished the goal of our proposal.

As three of the members of the cohort & learning group formation we will each have challenges to overcome with the proposed process:

Alejandro: I will be challenged to stay calm and try not to lead the process. I'm used to lead this type of interventions, I'm also very participative in this type of sessions and I think that I influence the group decisions regularly. In this intervention I will try to stay open to the group and very present on what is happening to me.

Bryan: My default tendency is to take charge and lead when uncertainty is present. I feel comfortable leading and directing if needed. My primary challenge will be to allow the cohort to effectively manage itself and use my wise self to see what the group collectively needs.

Amanda: I will be challenged to not regress into myself when conflict arises, when I am feeling uncertain or feeling “left out.” My pattern is to become quiet and observe the room. I’ll need to make sure to maintain my wise self and speak up when appropriate and not take this experience personally or to heart and remember the cohort purpose and learning group goal.

REFERENCES

Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S., & Camerer, C. (1998). NOT SO DIFFERENT AFTER ALL: A CROSS-DISCIPLINE VIEW OF TRUST. *Academy Of Management Review*, *23*(3), 393-404. doi:10.5465/AMR.1998.926617

Lencioni, P. (2005). *Overcoming the five dysfunctions of a team: a field guide for leaders, managers, and facilitators*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[Block, P. (2000). *Flawless consulting a guide to getting your expertise used* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.](http://www.bibme.org/)

Schein, E. (1999). Process Consultation Revisited: Building the Helping Relationship.

Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

["About - norms in group dynamics." *norms in group dynamics*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Jan. 2014. <http://normsdynamics-msodpiprime.weebly.com/about.html>.](http://www.bibme.org/)