Group Assessment Beginning Stage

Paper One

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Assessment of Beginning Stage of Development

**Introduction**

The beginning stage of group development is the formative stage that defines the group and provides the foundation for success. This paper discusses the difficulties that arise at the beginning stages of groups. A group can quickly become dysfunctional if the facilitator is not continually assessing the group and engaging in measures to address the dysfunction. The group discussed experienced a negative bond in the third session and became very dysfunctional. The following session addressed what transpired in the previous session as well as defining a new plan of action for the group. The following will explain what occurred within the group, why it happened, and how it can be changed.

**Assessment**

The groups first session began as a task group. This allowed the group to have a clear and concise expectation on the members’ roles and norms. During the planning process we mostly identified with Systems Theory; although we utilized different aspects of several other theories. We had clear and specific goals which we approached with step by step precision and our goal could be measured by determining whether or not we completed it. This is indicative of Learning Theory, however the focus was not on the individual but as the group as a whole. Members observed how to participate with the group and were encouraged and praised when they shared. This way of learning acceptable group behavior is indicative of Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p 60). We also utilized techniques from Systems Theory regarding how to handle instrumental problems through asking for and giving opinions, information, and suggestions (Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p 57). The planning process of the group ran smoothly however once we entered the beginning phase our norms disintegrated and roles
were tested. The third session showed evidence of the individual members being affected by the group force. Once a few of the members adopted negative roles the rest of the group chose to adopt a hindering role as well. The influence of group force is recognized by Systems Theory. This negative approach to the session made it difficult for the group to maintain a connected, unified existence. Toseland and Rivas state that groups struggle “to maintain themselves as entities when confronted with conflicts” (Toseland & Rivas, p 59). This was evident in the disruption of established norms.

**Group Dynamics**

The Groups’ communication patterns evolved through each session. The first session used a free floating communication pattern (Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p 74). Utilizing the free floating pattern allowed for each member to take responsibility and offer their input when they desired. This worked well since the goal was determining the type of group. In the second session the round robin approach was used. Each member was expected to state their role and desire for the group. Since every member was expected to participate taking turns and moving around the circle helped reach the goal set for that session. The third session, which was the first treatment session, utilized a maypole communication pattern. This was ineffective in reaching the goal of getting to know each other and build group unity. The communication style limited member to member interaction and therefore separated the members from the commonality of the group. In the fourth session, round robin communication style was dominant, although free flowing was used in that each member was encouraged to acknowledge and address when they could relate to another member. Using this combination allowed for the communication to have structure so members understood when they were expected to speak, but also allowed for connections to be made between members. Through these communication styles Eric, the group facilitator, was
able to encourage bonds between the members as well as creating a positive feedback and support for members who were experiencing similar issues.

The group’s goals varied from session to session. During the planning phase the goal was to define and come to a consensus on the direction of the group. This included determining the group name, topics that would be addressed, and the type of treatment offered. This part was fairly easy and offered minimal conflict. Once the group arrived at the approach-avoidance phase in the third session, the past established roles and norms were abolished (Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p 91). The group lacked a defined goal at this point. Due to this, the session was uncomfortable, tense, and did not accomplish the main goal of stress relief. The following session began by re-stating the group’s purpose and goals. This allowed the group to re-focus on the true purpose of the group.

The group norms established at the first session of voluntary participation, respect, safe circle (no verbal or physical attacking), and no cell phones disappeared at the third session. Members in session three made snide remarks to other members, two members had cell phones out, members talked out of turn and four of the members were not participating fully. At the beginning of the fourth session Eric, the facilitator, addressed the negative outcome of the last session and reestablished the group rules and norms set up during the first session of the group. This was helpful in realigning the members with the purpose of the group. However, one member, Tiffany, still refused to participate with the group’s activities.

Due to the lack of positive norms the cohesiveness of the group unraveled. The group started off as individuals working together to reach a goal and in the third session that became individuals focused on their own goals with little to no regard for the group agenda. Negative
bonds occurred which is a form of cohesion, however it was very unproductive. During the fourth session Eric, the facilitator, used different communication styles and encouragement to create unification and support. By the end of this session the level of cohesiveness was greater than the third with the exception of one member, Tiffany, who was having difficulty fitting in.

The climate of the group evolved in a few ways. First, the group was accepting of each member and gave each voice the same authority. Then the group separated and became quite intent on adopting hindering roles. The hindering roles present were withdrawn, uncooperative, and degrader (Porteus). These roles were demonstrated through moving oneself away from the group, physically leaving the group, refusing to participate, checking cell phones, and several members showed closed body posture. Lastly, the group was attempting to regain the acceptance of each other and having equal voice. It was during this last session that it was apparent that Tiffany did not feel accepted, supported, or equal to the other members. This interaction caused tension. Unfortunately since the remaining members were interacting with each other and building bonds, Tiffany was then left out. This caused tension to then be directed at her further removing her from the group. Tiffany stated that she was just being quiet but her body language and tone with the few words that she spoke indicated her dissatisfaction with the direction and leadership of the group. Eric the facilitator became flustered while attempting to calm the situation and validate Tiffany’s feelings. His face turned red and he had difficulty formulating his words.

The group culture has not yet been thoroughly defined. The group does share the belief in the value of education since we are all students. Deeper core beliefs have not been explored or presented during group. This area should expand and evolve as the group norms become apparent and members feel free to share on a deeper level.
Impressions

As a group we have been struggling to identify with each other and the main purpose of our group. We have witnessed the ease in which group members will adopt hindering roles when left unchecked by the group leader. The group leader plays a crucial role in assisting the group to fulfill its main purpose. Due to this, the group leader needs to be aware of the group as a whole as well as the individuals within the group. During the third session when hindering roles were adopted by the majority of the group the facilitator was not able to assess the group’s condition at the start of the session. If at the beginning of the session the first negative statement was addressed and then a positive direction was encouraged the remaining members might not have adopted negative roles as well. This was a prime lesson in what happens when negativity within a group is left unchecked.

During the fourth session the facilitator worked hard to remain on task yet still encourage group interaction and sharing. Tiffany however was still left out of the group. This could have to do with a lack of diversity in the group or the fact that Tiffany is the only African American and there could be a culture clash in the way that members communicate with each other. The group is improving and each session the facilitators are able to learn from past facilitators mistakes. The presence of improvement shows the importance of utilizing different communication styles, immediately addressing negative remarks, redirecting the group to stay on task, and continuously assessing how the group is working or not working together. With a greater focus on the goal and utilizing collective leadership skills our group will continue to improve.
Plan of Action

During the beginning stage of development groups display a “strong reliance on the leader” (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2012, p 102). Therefore in order to change negative group behavior the facilitator must use skills to engage and promote a positive outcome. In order to provide the group with a focus the rules and norms of the group need to be addressed at the beginning of each session. This allows for the group to begin with the group’s purpose at the forefront. Toseland and Rivas state that “one of the major roles of the leader is to empower members so that they are willing participants in the planned change process” (Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p 101). Allowing a moment for members to come together and address any issues or positive results from the last session will empower and promote participation. Furthermore using a democratic group process promotes members feeling “freer and more willing to make suggestions” (Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p 101).

The facilitator will address any negative remarks or hindering roles that are spoken or becoming apparent. To address this, the facilitator will need to use Cueing or Blocking to guide group interactions as well as response skills to tactfully navigate the group (Toseland & Rivas, 20012, p 114). In addition, the facilitator needs to utilize coaching to “encourage members to try a new behavior” (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2012, p 117). Other necessary skills include reframing and redefining to help the members view the issue from multiple perspectives.

In order to interact effectively the facilitator requires the ability to use multiple communication styles. By utilizing different communication styles the facilitator can maintain conversation and member to member interaction. This will encourage cohesion by creating an inclusive environment.
In order to bring Tiffany into the group the facilitator should schedule a time to speak with her outside of the group. This meeting’s goal should be to discover Tiffany’s purpose for attending the group and what obstacles she is experiencing within the group. Understanding why Tiffany is experiencing difficulties with the group will help with creating a plan for the next group session. This will hopefully lead to the creation of a cohesive group that will support each other in the quest of stress management.

Conclusion

The group is still in the formative stage; because of this the role of the facilitator is extremely important for designing the operation of the group. During this stage the facilitator needs to be highly aware of changing moods, tension, and attitudes within the group. If an individual’s reaction is affecting the group the facilitator needs to act quickly to stop negative bonds and prevent members from adopting hindering roles. This requires the facilitator to be knowledgeable about communication styles, influencing behavior, assessments, and the purpose of the group. If the facilitator is able to utilize these skills and create a flexible plan for the group that allows for needed changes, the group will have a greater chance for success.
References

