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STUDY GROUPS, GROUPING CRITERIA AND THE SYNERGY IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AMONG FDP PARTICIPANTS

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ABSTRACT

The application of Tuckman's model in assessing group development fits largely with the experience of the participants. Most of the groups formed as per the instructions from the concerned authority could not come out with fruitful outcome due to various reasons. This includes cheap competition, self-centeredness, immaturity, lack of professionalism, lack of dependence, etc. Subsequent groups conveniently formed based on interest of group members could come out with some meaningful output. Forming a heterogeneous group to derive a hybrid output often finds a disastrous end. This study reveals certain underline concerns while formation of study groups especially in education system. As far as training of executives is concerned, heterogeneity within group would be the best option.

KEYWORDS

Study groups, fdp participants.

INTRODUCTION

ynergy" the word or jargon often spelt in the corporate world (*The combined power of a group of things when they are working together which is greater than the total power achieved by each working separately* - **Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary**). Everyone talks about the additional benefits derived out of team or group work. Most of the educational institution especially those are providing professional education in the country, wanted to make use of this benefit of group effort. This is the quality business organizations look for while acquiring an individual into their organization. Most of the modern organizations value group effort than individual capability. To further this requirement in the labour market and improving the learning in institutions we make study groups, as to execute the curriculum objectives by getting maximum out of group cohesion and sharing. However, in reality it becomes counter productive. Neither they share knowledge nor do they learn the art of working in groups. The reason could be of wrong grouping strategy or competitive mentality of group members or ineffective performance measurement or even the problem with the instructor himself in mooring members on task. Though the desired result not derived, it becomes an integral part of any course or training as a ritual.

The intended study initially chalked out to understand the group development process as propounded by **Bruce Tuckman** in **1965** by using semi-structured interviews and participative observation method. The respondents selected from, among different study groups of Faculty Development Programme (FDP) at one of Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in India. This programme is intended for Management Teachers in India and abroad. The researcher also was one among them. Participants grouped into several groups of four to five in each by the institute based on qualification and experience ensuring heterogeneity within group. Thus, formed were different clusters. Interviewing a few participants after few weeks of commencement of programme, the necessity arose to understand the reason for this indifferent attitude of members in groups, which defeat the very purpose of forming study groups.

AIM OF THE STUDY

1. To identify better grouping criteria to derive intended result (synergy) while grouping students/participants as study groups by understanding group cohesion in different stages of group development.
2. To identify the impediments, which defeat the sole purpose of study groups by analyzing the group development processes based on their formation either formally by the FDP office or informally as convenience, based on special purpose and individual likings

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Work teams, a popular form of job design in organizations; represent one of the major changes in management in recent years. The traditional organizational model in which managers think, supervisors push, and workers work is counterproductive in today's complex and rapidly changing environment (Hitch-cook & Willard, 1995).

As a result, businesses recommend that curriculum and teaching methods be modified to better develop students' cognitive, communication, and interpersonal skills through the use of student groups in the learning process (Kunkel & Shafer, 1997). Most of the management schools in India follow this in principle, aiming at imparting these vital skills to make the student effective as soon as they take up their first job in the corporate world.

Formation of study group may be mostly by formal instructions by the concerned and seldom by informal. Group development processes in both these cases follow similar stages as per Tuckman's hypothesis. Bruce Tuckman (1965) came out with four different stages of group development processes, namely

- Forming,
- Storming,
- Norming,
- Performing and
- Adjourning and transforming.

Forming

In the first stages of team building, the *forming* of the team takes place. The team meets and learns about the opportunity and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks. The forming stage of any team is important because in this stage the members of the team get to know one another and make new friends. This is also a good opportunity to see how each member of the team works as an individual and how he or she responds to pressure.

Storming

Every group will then enter the *storming* stage in which different ideas compete for consideration. The team addresses issues such as what problems they are really supposed to solve, how they will function independently and together and what leadership model they will accept. Team members open up to each other and confront each other's ideas and perspectives.

Norming

At some point, the team may enter the *norming* stage. Team members adjust their behavior to each other as they develop work habits that make teamwork seem more natural and fluid. Team members often work through this stage by agreeing on rules, values, professional behavior, shared methods, working tools and even taboos. During this phase, team members begin to trust each other. Motivation increases as the team gets more acquainted with the project.

Teams in this phase may lose their creativity if the norming behaviors become too strong and begin to stifle healthy dissent and the team begins to exhibit groupthink.

Performing

Some teams will reach the *performing* stage. These high-performing teams are able to function as a unit as they find ways to get the job done smoothly and effectively without inappropriate conflict or the need for external supervision. Team members have become interdependent. By this time, they are motivated and knowledgeable.

Adjourning and Transforming

Tuckman later added a fifth phase, *adjourning*, that involves completing the task and breaking up the team. Others call it the phase for *mourning*.

A team that lasts may transcend to a *transforming* phase of achievement. *Transformational management* can produce major changes in performance through synergy and considered more far-reaching than *transactional management*.

Only two articles reviewed by Tuckman and Jenson (1977) substantially deviated from the four-stage Tuckman model. Dunphy (1968) conducted an empirical study of the development process in self-analytic groups. Dunphy with the help of computer system of content analysis identified six development phases for the group:

1. Maintenance of external normative standards
2. Individual rivalry
3. Aggression
4. Negativism
5. Emotional concerns
6. High affection

Individual rivalry, aggression, and negativism are parallel to Tuckman's second stage, "storming".

Emotional concerns and high affection viewed in terms of 'norming' stage. However, Dunphy's model does not include any stage resembling 'performing'.

Tuckman's 1965 model was a conceptual statement determined by the literature, it is reasonable, therefore, to modify the model to reflect recent literature. The model now stands forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Bruce W. Tuckman, Mary Ann C. Jensen, 1977)

This study mainly attempts at identifying the various tussles and impediments faced by the group during various stages of group development. These difficulties could then be analysed for failure or success of different group in serving the desired purpose.

All faculties agreed that students should have teamwork experience, but many did not know where to start. Some tried incorporating group projects and activities in their courses in the past but were discouraged when teams became dysfunctional or when students complained about sharing team grades with nonperforming team members. In some cases 'poorly designed team work task' washed away the success (Julie Siciliano, 1999)

Stage 1: Forming (Immature group)	Stage 2: Storming (Fractional group)	Stage 3: Norming (Sharing group)	Stage 4: Performing (Effective team)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion • Uncertainty • Assessing situation • Testing ground rules • Feeling out others • Defining goals • Getting acquainted • Establishing rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement over priorities • Struggle for leadership • Tension • Hostility • Clique formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus • Leadership accepted • Trust established • Standards set • New stable roles • Co-operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful performance • Flexible, task roles • Openness • Helpfulness • Delusion, disillusion and acceptance

Key aspects of Tuckman's stages of group development (adapted from Buchanan and Huczynski6)**Sample**

Researcher took sample from the participants of Faculty Development Programme (FDP) one of the IIM in India. There were 38 participants in the programme and entire participants divided into 8 study groups. Heterogeneity and proper balancing of experience and qualification of the participants have been taken into account while formation of these groups by the FDP office. Researcher also one of the members in a group and represents the group as participant observer for data gathering. From every group one participant identified as respondent. The selection made by observing the participants groups and identifying the person who has been acting as a coordinator of the group. Seven respondents identified and the researcher himself was representing the eighth group.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Participative observation and a semi-structured interview schedule incorporated for collecting data. The semi-structured interview schedule developed based on the Bruce Tuckman's stages group development model (1965). The questions asked to get details about various experiences felt by the respondents in different stages of group development, like forming, storming, and norming, performing and adjourning stages. Experience felt by the respondents with respect to the group formed formally by the FDP office and in their convenient groups, which informally formed based on special purpose and their liking, were shared. Researcher did not give any details about the Tuckman's model and only a brief about the intended study gave to the respondents. This improved the originality and quality of data. Since the purpose of study made clear, respondents were giving genuine responses and they assured of the confidentiality. This was vital since the course left with almost 40 days then. Each interview concluded in about 35 to 45 minutes on average.

The respondents' names, time duration and interview details jotted down and subsequently transcripts were developed. Researcher did this by keeping the different development stages in focus.

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

All of the interview transcripts read by the researcher and coded as per the stages of group development model of Tuckman. Five category headings generated from the data and under these; all of the data accounted for. As per the model a good distinct stages said to have 'emerged' from the data. However, in some responses certain stages either by- passed or did not reach at all. Coding strictly made in adherence with the Tuckman's model and it was exactly matching barring few. Responses about both the formal and convenient groups grouped under the same category headings to distinguish the responses based on the grouping norms that are formally by FDP office and informally as convenience.

FINDINGS

Data from interviews of seven respondents from each group along with the participative observation made by the researcher about the group he belongs to and of other seven groups in general outlined below. Responses structured within Tuckman's framework, and illustrated by verbatim quotes as far as possible. The framework includes the fifth stage of development too that is *adjourning*, which was subsequently included by Tuckman in his original framework based on a detailed review.

'Forming'

The study groups formed by the FDP office on the second day of commencing the programme. The next day onwards, groups were supposed to make group presentations.

Observation: Group 'A' Respondent (five members): I felt that it was an opportunity to understand different things from a group having drawn from a diverse academic background. However, except two none was taking interest to read or share their knowledge. Nevertheless, they were very much interested to gather information from others who share. Some members in the group were not even interested to respond to the pressure. After few days, they were literally withdrawn from the group meeting. They often come out with silly excuses such as some minor health issues. The group reduced to only three members after about three weeks who were representing the group in the class.

As far convenient group is concerned (four members), we were able to manage at satisfactory level though there were some hiccups.

One of the main problems of formal grouping identified by a respondent as the indifferent wavelength of group members:

Excerpt: Group B (five members): "... I think people are not in the same wavelength. Only few people work. It is like 20-80 kind of functioning. Most of them argue to prove their knowledge and to show of their supremacy in the domain. One member is withdrawn from the group activity within the first week itself...sharing is not at all happening."

"....Convenient group formed for specific task is functioning well. We have better understanding in our convenient group. But our formal group meets only when there is a task to be done collectively in the class and the instructor is strict and task is of highly interdependent".

One respondent commended, as people do not listen any one:

Excerpt: Group C (five members): "... Initially our group was highly interactive. However, the problem is that no body listen any one. Every body has their own opinion. Someone do not prepare, come, and ask for details. This kills others time. No sharing is happening and people are highly competitive. One is like a child asking silly doubts and by clarifying his doubts others' time is getting wasted."

"....There is hundred percentage coordination exists in our convenient group. This is formed for doing research which is a part of the FDP."

People are highly egoistic and self-centered:

Excerpt: Group D (five members): "...One of our group members is highly egoistic and left the group before the first meeting itself. Our group is not active. The one with fair knowledge about various subjects do not come at all for the group discussion.

However, he is having all the answer in the class, which goes to his individual credit. He never shares unless specifically called for. Most of them have their individual agenda, which they do not want to sacrifice for the group. Most of the cases it is 20 -80 kind of functioning; only few contribute."

".....Convenience group formed thinking of continuing cooperation and upholding expertise in different field are also functioning because of few individuals."

A senior member in a group has categorized this group behavior as reflexive:

Excerpt: Group E (five members): ".....Some of them are not really interested at all and some are egoistic. Members show reflexive behavior. In convenient group most of the work is done by me alone and other give only moral support and some execution."

Someone considered this kind of behavior is the outcome of immaturity of people:

Excerpt: Group F (five members): "...People are not matured enough to be in this profession of teaching. This way of grouping is not at all fruitful. The purpose totally defeated".

"....We formed our informal group not based on any criteria but those who could not enter into any of the group have already been formed, came together and formed a so called convenient group. Its functioning is also ... not fruitful. This is functioning as on 20- 80 *pareto* principle".

Since majority of group members are from the same state, there is no scope of diversity- one opinioned.

Excerpt: Group G (four members): "...Absolutely no scope for diversity because three of us are from the same state." In Convenient group also fifty percent of group members are only working."

Excerpt: Group H (four members): ".....Our group is functioning well. We have formed our convenient group for doing specific task, strictly based on the mutual benefits."

'Storming'

Observation: Most of the groups have split into convenient group at this stage. This was mainly due to the freedom given by some of the faculty members to choose partners of own choice for doing projects under particular subjects. The bonding of the groups members were further weekend. In most of the teams, one of the responsible participants was acting as a coordinator. They met only for preparing a particular subject, mainly due to the nature of faculty member. They do hear everything but do not share the anything, but surprisingly in class they were used to come out with excellent points. This is the outcome come of cheap competition due to "grade"- this kills the sole purpose of study groups. I heard one of the group members saying, "There is not a grading for this why you don't tell the topic of yours?" This was the revelation for me. In an occasion, one of my group members told me about the attitude of participants with respect to the grading and not sharing the information known to them.

Excerpt: Group B: "... No body was ready to meet in groups; every body is busy in their individual task. Finally I took initiative to inform every one regarding the discussion time and venue.....Still half the people attend the meeting that to only for few subject where faculty member is strict or they find it difficult to understand by themselves."

Excerpt: Group C: "...Still few members were taking advantage by putting entire responsibility on the shoulder of person who takes initiatives for organizing the meeting. We have no one as a coordinator some one would inform and we sit for few minutes to discuss some points to survive. But in convenient group we meet regularly."

'Norming'

It anticipated by members of the group that might not develop into a functioning group.

Observation: In general, most of the groups had limited achievements due to lack of consensus and competitive mentality. Members meet under instruction from the coordinator or on general information for very few minutes and discuss to the point so that presentation could be if asked by the faculty member. No healthy discussion was taking place. No sharing was happening and only half of the group members used to be there in most of the team.

Excerpt: Group B: "... People from different discipline have different interest and they concentrate on their area of interest and are in the group only for the sake."

'Performing'

Observation: Team members were interdependent only when the task and faculty member is tough. Only for that, particular subject members sit together not otherwise.

Excerpt: Group D: We sit in groups only for a particular subject. Because the member of faculty may call any of the group to present and he is too tough but good learning takes place."

Excerpt: Group F: "...We used to allot the task of preparing power point to one of the participant, he then comes and discusses it in groups, but in convenient group the work is really getting progress. There too only few members are doing the major task"

'Adjourning and Transforming'

General statement of the groups:

The general opinion is that the formal groups formed by the FDP office not at all functioning effectively. Anyhow, the groups find its end as soon the interdependence among the group gets over, that purely based on toughness of tasks and the attitude of instructor. Nevertheless, the convenient groups activity would continue even after the completion of course, at least until probable publication of one article based on certain research work carried out as a part of course work.

DISCUSSION

The application of Tuckman's model fits largely with experience of the participants. At forming state groups were identified lots of identity crisis. The main problem was identified was the self-centered nature of individuals in the group. People do not want to waste their 'valuable' time for the common good, but only for the individual 'grade'. The height of immaturity had seen all through the courses in few participants.

In the storming stage too, consensus had not achieved. Only few members were actively participating. Most of them split in to convenient group. This was due the flexibility offered by some of the faculty member.

Norming stage experienced highly task-oriented cooperation. The sharing was not taking place. Very few discussions had actually happened only to address ten minutes of presentation in the class if asked for. Groupthink was not at all happening.

Groups even allot task to some individual, he then discuss it with other interested team members in about ten to fifteen minutes. This was the mode of operandi in almost all the group in the performing stage of group development.

Group formed as convenient relatively performed better and they would even probably find some fruitful outcome by way of some publication or other.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the actual happenings in the study groups. This is a revelation for every faculty member who groups the students in to various study groups by ensuring heterogeneity among the group. Heterogeneous grouping is an excellent idea only when one should be able to identify and fix the contribution of individual member while grading. Otherwise, the sharing will not take place. The entire world is now talking about importance of cooperation. However, effectiveness of learning in-group in professional education is solely depending upon the capacity of member of faculty and grading criteria. This study made it evident that the sharing of knowledge is hardly taking place in the group. This defeats the very purpose of grouping. Convenient groups were performing better in comparison with the formal study groups. We should now decide what should the grouping criteria by which we can ensure anticipated the outcome of the group, that the SYNERGY.

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