Group Four Group Analysis Project: Prestige Worldwide

Small Group Communication 2230 99

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An Analytical Compilation by

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Introduction

Prestige Worldwide began as a group of students that had never met each other prior to Small Group Communications 2230. At first our tasks seemed overwhelming, we had an entire show’s season to watch and analyze, plus weekly meetings, readings, quizzes, and an auto-analytical group project to do, and that was all on top of feeling the ropes for how each group member works and how we would all work together. In the end, Prestige Worldwide came out on top as an extremely cohesive group and all the overwhelming tasks at hand seemed like a breeze in a group as functional as our own.

Roles

Everyone in our group had a range of roles and they have all changed throughout the course according to our set goals. When we look at how our group started out we see that we all played small bits of roles like opinion seeker or opinion giver. These roles are not very aggressive but are rather passive roles that seek and offer opinions, beliefs, or ideas within discussions (Beebe, Masterson 73). Although these roles were passive they all were very effective for our tasks of watching the survivor episodes.

It seems that we all understood the importance of getting set to go on the coursework so we had little need for any gatekeeper that asked for less active members to offer more contributions. Throughout the whole time Nathan constantly served as an evaluator-critic in order to ensure that our group conclusions were legitimate and sensible. Megan was a very supportive member as an information seeker. In other words, she would verify facts and conclusions that individuals or our group would make during meetings (Beebe, Masterson 73). If we needed information on the course or course material Megan was quick to look for what we
needed in order to make the next move. Our goals changed throughout the semester and we had to start focusing on writing the Survivor Project Paper rather than just watch the episodes, so we took on different roles too.

It was around this point that Andrew came into our group. As a new member he immediately took on the role of the follower. Followers usually go along with suggestions of our group members and serve as good audience members (Beebe, Masterson 74). Then our group came to the conclusion that Elluminate was not satisfying our group communication needs. Jack raised a good idea as an initiator-contributor to solve the problem. Initiator-contributors provide new ideas or approaches to organize a problem to help out the entire group (Beebe, Masterson 73). He suggested that we meet in person for the first time. It actually ended up being a very successful solution to our problem and we continued this procedure for our more important meetings at least twice a month until the end of the semester. Then we were able to start focusing on putting our Survivor Project together. Christina took on a role as a recorder. She kept a notebook on everyone’s role in writing the different parts of the paper. The record became useful when we came together to evaluate the work we were supposed to be doing. Although Christina recorded our tasks, everyone put in an effort to make decisions about what our tasks were. This gave us all a chance to play the compromiser role. The compromiser role resolves conflicts (or in our case, makes decisions) to find acceptable agreements among the group members (Beebe, Masterson 74). So it made it really easy for us to divide the coursework up evenly among the members in order to get going on our tasks. As a recorder Christina became an energizer within our group. In other words, she tried to motivate and stimulate the group to work in order to achieve productivity (Beebe, Masterson 73). It worked too; everyone in the group established their tasks to work on for the next meeting and were able to follow their set tasks very well.
Throughout the entire course it seems that everyone has played their own part in being leaders, followers, or encouragers. A part of the good balance involved self and group observation. As observers we were able to watch the amount of work each one of us did individually and set standards for ourselves to maintain a successful climate in which the entire group could work well.

Although everyone in our group took on individual roles, many of us shared common roles which made our time pass smoothly. At no point was anyone too overbearing or too much of a joker. Although we never had a real leader that made decisions and directed each meeting, we all were able to offer leadership at times when it was needed. This made the workload light so that one leader was not stuck with all the work, but we could all still get equal amounts of individual work done. But the leadership we all offered was kept in check by constant reassurance from group members about conclusions and agreements.

**Norm Emergence**

When stepping back to look at our group norm emergence it looks like we all adopted helpful norms that worked out for the better of the group. Like our book mentions, our norms mainly emerged from experience in previous student groups and were based off of how our group interacted early on (Beebe, Masterson 77). From the start our group allowed Nate to volunteer to be the moderator. This made it easy for everyone in the group to see him as a leader. We all sort of stepped back and let Nate gather the group together and weigh meeting times and commitments. Everyone else in the group countered that norm by giving input and honoring the set meeting times. These norms were not something we agreed on within the group before
meeting, but these were norms based off of assumptions from each of our own previous student group work experiences. At the time we felt the expectations may be a little overwhelming.

Then our norms started to emerge from our interactions at meetings. Since our meetings were online at first it was easy for us to start right on time or within 10 minutes of our planned time. But this was also influenced by our communication methods which we found were important after using Elluminate.

The first couple of meetings we had were met with confusion and frustration about Elluminate. It became very important to communicate clearly and confirm that we were on the same track after the meetings and comfortable with the work we planned. So our group norm of reassurance and constant double-checking was adopted easily thanks to Elluminate and has been utilized throughout our work together making our communication efforts, group cooperation, and group tasks go very smoothly.

Some group norms shifted after we completed a task or got past a certain number of meetings. Since the whole first six or seven weeks of the course were dedicated mostly to reading the text and watching survivor episodes our meetings were brief talks to touch base on ideas and progress. Our previous norm felt more rigid with less variation from our set tasks. Once we were comfortable with our projected time allowed to finish the tasks it was easy for individuals to go ahead in watching the episodes or fall behind a little bit. And once our project due date came to be a few weeks ahead our norms shifted to being a little more rigid once again.

We agreed that Elluminate was too frustrating for actual discussion and group work when we were working on an important project, so we found a Caribou to meet at. The new rigid structure within the group ended up being very beneficial rather than overwhelming which we all felt the first time. But this time it became a useful tool that kept everyone on the same page by
working together to reach deadlines and set goals much easier. And still we continued to check and double check group work and agreements. Once our group was meeting in person once a week we found other norms began to emerge rather than simply academic ones.

Now that we were in person we could get to know each other on a personal level rather than as online classmates. Our group norms before we met in person were almost entirely academic. With online discussions and e-mails we only presented necessary information applicable to our coursework. In person communication changed that for us because information could be presented and processed faster than we were able to achieve online. So it was easy to bond over things like sports, public transportation, IHCC, and other course and non-course related work that we would never have considered mentioning on Elluminate.

Overall Prestige Worldwide’s norms emerged based off of turning points and continuous communication throughout the coursework. The norms that did emerge were generally helpful in getting things done within the group even though not all were applicable to the coursework. The social norms we developed made working with each other and communication among group members much easier and lots more interesting than before our social norms developed. I would not see the social norms as a product of distraction but rather as group cohesiveness which became essential to achieve our goals.

**Communication Patterns**

The majority of our group interaction has been through virtual small group communication (Beebe, Masterson 191). Since this is an online class, our group communicates primarily through the internet. We are not always together physically but we are able to communicate with each other through e-mail, live chat, video conferences, and telephone. We use e-mail
frequently to keep all members up to date with what is going on currently with group projects and it is an easy and convenient way to communicate with each other knowing we might not all be on the internet at the same time. Live chat lets us communicate with each other when we are online at the same time and have a question that needs to be answered right away. Our group also communicates with each other through video conference called Elluminate. Video conference allows us all to see, hear, and speak to each other. We are able to see each others’ facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. During the Survivor project, we would call each other to clarify questions we had with the paper and class. Being able to communicate on the phone made things less confusing and able to understand things better because it was more direct. The most efficient form of communication our group uses is face to face. When we meet in person, being able to detect nonverbal messages is much easier such as a nod of the head, smiling, laughing, and direct eye contact helps us to make sure that we are all understanding each other and brings our group closer by getting to know each other better.

One of our group’s communication styles is interpersonal level communication. As we got to know each other, we discovered what makes each of us unique and what we bring to the group as individuals (Beebe, Masterson 37). Respecting each others’ differences opened up the line for better communication and more ideas because we all felt even more comfortable expressing ideas with each other. We got to know each other on more of a personal level and found things we had in common with each other that formed a bond between everyone within the group. By knowing each others’ personalities and behaviors better over time, we know how one another will respond to certain situations during stressful times and if conflict arises.

Our group uses functional theory communication because we try to be as productive as we can when we communicate about group projects (Beebe, Masterson 39). We try to fulfill the
requirement whether it is discussion questions or projects to the best of our ability and communicate well under pressure of deadlines. Listening to each other’s ideas is one of our strengths because we are willing to be open to each others’ ideas and constructive feedback.

One network communication our group used was equal distribution. We all decided on group projects together as a whole (Beebe, Masterson 111-112). There was not just one person in our group making all the decisions, we all contributed equally. We all wanted each others’ input and wanted to make sure that what we were agreeing on was comfortable for everyone. We always tried to include everyone in our group meeting even if someone could not attend. We would always write an “update” email to the members who could not attend weekly meetings letting them know what was discussed in the meeting and anything that we thought would be important for them to be aware of.

**Conflict and Tension Management**

Group projects and dynamics always have some problems. Our group was no different but we did not have too many problems develop throughout the semester. Almost all of our conflict and tension came from the first few weeks of class. Andrew’s starting group did not work well because there was no communication and when groups split up Andrew was put into this group and had to learn the dynamics and norms quickly. The other main conflict and tension was the very beginning trying to connect with the other group members to figure out group meeting times and availability for the group projects. All of this was in the first few weeks of the class. The only other conflict that developed throughout the course was deciding who was going to do what work for each of the group projects and who was going to be responsible for submitting the final copy to the instructor. Both primary and secondary tension was managed
through compromise and collaboration, everyone had a say in how things were going to be done and everyone agreed to the solution that worked the best for everyone (Beebe, Masterson 161-162). There was nobody that just said no and just refused to do something, everyone agreed on the solution.

The primary method used to handle conflict was collaboration because everyone talked about the solution and when something did not work it was not a problem. Rather, it was talked about and solved so that everyone was able to be satisfied removing any tension that had been there before. The beginning conflict with Andrew not having a group and being added to this one was solved by the instructor reassigning groups. Other than that instance all the rest of the conflict and tension was solved through collaboration and compromise by everyone in the group. The first meeting may have been an exception because some people may not have got the time they wanted but if they had any problems the rest of the group never heard about it and it was never a problem. Other than the initial tension of agreeing on a first meeting where there was some unease and wondering of where everyone would fit in the group and how the rest of the group would receive each person, there was not any harmful or overwhelming group tension. The first meeting went smoothly and after all the tension about if the group would work well together we all continued to work together very well.

**Decision Making**

Throughout the semester Prestige Worldwide faced decision making with a pretty good dynamic. As a group we generally always referred to the syllabus and based our decision making and task splitting on the development of a fair formula. By coming to a consensus as a group we always remained focused on the goal and always applied emphasis on the areas of agreement. At
the beginning of the semester we were placed in Group # 5 and subtly told to get acquainted with each other. We struggled at first trying to get a meeting time established which enlightened us; now we know time management is very important in decision making.

First big decision was The Survivor Project and how to deal with it. We naturally molded into the five elements. After assessing the situation we chose season fourteen, after this we immediately took time management into account and figured out the episode assignments for each week. The goal was to write an analysis paper including the individual and group profiles of members on the show. After getting involved in some of the first episodes of Survivor Fiji we started identifying and analyzing the different traits amongst the tribe members, which would enhance group discussion at our Sunday meetings. Just weeks after starting the season we acquired a new group member, Andrew, with hearing the news of the new addition to Prestige Worldwide, as a group we discussed the necessary steps to getting Andrew up to speed. By doing this I feel that we made Andrew feel welcome, and not to be felt as a “minority” (Beebe, Masterson 210). Andrew transitioned quickly into the group and provided input almost immediately.

During group meetings we kept most of our decision making in consensual form, and really had no obstacles to face. Group meetings included Andrew, Christina, Megan, Jack, and myself (Nate); during the meetings we assessed the situation, identified goals and several alternatives, along with applying the positive and negative consequences to the alternatives. After applying the “Elements of Group Decision Making” (Beebe, Masterson 209), we selected the appropriate alternative and made a decision. Group meetings on Eluminate were pretty easy going and brief; all members encouraged participation, and established clear and reasonable goals. Throughout the semester we as a group established the necessity to have face to face
meetings which would provide the group with a more hands on approach for production purposes. The hands on meetings were highly beneficial for compiling information for group projects such as the Survivor Project, and the upcoming Group Analysis Project.

**Group Fantasy**

Our text book states that, “according to symbolic convergence theory, the group develops a unique identity through the sharing of fantasies or stories. A feeling of cohesiveness is likely to increase as group member share stories and other group story, thus creating a bond among group members and the revelation of common fantasies (Beebe, Masterson 42).” One of the fantasies that emerged during our group interaction was that since the beginning we have been the most cohesive group that seems to exist in this class. All this is thanks to our meeting in person at a Caribou to discuss the class and sometimes share a cup of coffee. There was a lot of evidence that emerged during our meetings. The most prominent evidence to us was our grades; this fantasy brought us together as a group to try to achieve the maximum grade possible in this class. Also we have had fantasies that we are the best group that exists no matter what. We started this course being complete strangers and now we are a cohesive group and we have accomplished our group projects. During our time as a group several things changed throughout. One of them was the addition of a new member, Andrew. He brought new ideas to our group and quickly became comfortable as a member. This event made us change our vision and rethink our strategies to make Andrew welcome and part of our group. A group’s fantasies may change from one group to another. In our case thanks to our coffee meetings we became better friends and a more cohesive group. Our entire group was working toward the same goal which involved a really good grade. It also helped to become more sociable with the others and to distribute the
work equally between all the members of our group. Although fantasy can elevate cohesiveness in a group it also can develop themes that can trigger a chain of stories – some that are related to the group’s task and some that are off-task “storytelling” can have a negative effect on the group’s productivity (Beebe, Masterson 236). For example, our group sometimes has fantasized to long and our final product or image has been of less quality for all the storytelling. Some of the time, we were just better off limiting our fantasizing and storytelling so we could get our set tasks finished.

**Change in the Group**

Prestige Worldwide had a few signs of change throughout the semester. After group meetings started to develop, the comfort level amongst group members developed as well. Each group member began the class with a “mutuality of concern” (Beebe, Masterson 58) already established. Everyone chooses their classes with the intent of earning a good grade, and meeting course requirements. So with that challenge behind us we think this naturally developed interpersonal relationships as interaction progressed.

Formation over time would show certain elements of “Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing” (Beebe, Masterson 65). In the forming process there was uncertainty of the class and each other, so members evolve to the storming stage and establish their goals and needs. This would have been the early process of establishing every group member’s availability for group meetings. Norming would then play its role and get all our group members aware of one another and the sacrifices that needed to be made for the group and its effectiveness. Prestige Worldwide did a great job from the beginning by remaining consistent with communication and created a good agenda which prepared us for the performing stage. With group norms established
and a solid agenda Prestige Worldwide overall performed very well. As a group we received a close to perfect grade on the Survivor Project which boosted our overall confidence in each other, and group in general.

Prestige Worldwide had changes over time that proved to be beneficial. The efficiency of our group and ability to stay focused on the task at hand was remarkable. We communicated effectively with each other and got along well. Overall each member will leave this group with a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment.