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Go Team Fayol!

Analysis of Group Behaviors of Team Fayol in LIS 650

# Introduction

When teachers assign a group assignment for a class, there is always the inevitable groan from the students. Generally, students do not enjoy group projects because of the codependency on classmates that one may or may not get along with. Even when groups are created by the students themselves, there is always a difficulty of coordinate schedules and trying not to get distracted by other things. Essentially, the teacher wants the students to gain a better understanding of collaboration with others, good time management and planning, effective communication skills, and the ability to remain flexible when depending upon other people. The goal of attempting to mimic real world situations in a short time frame makes it difficult and stressful for students who may not realize the goal and skills acquired through group projects.

Cross-functioning temporary groups do exist in real world but usually in the time frame of a year, rather than a little over a month (Gordon, p 179). Upon the assignment of the Sunshine University Engineering Library case study, Team Fayol started on its temporary group assignment to address the problems and offer plausible solutions to the individual, Penny, and group behaviors of the rest of the staff. At first, the task appeared daunting as so many problems needed to be addressed in such a short time frame but Team Fayol worked together, with a few difficulties along the way, to come up with a viable solution. Overall, Team Fayol completed the task per its deadline and proposed good solid prescriptions for the problem as well as ways of evaluating the success or failure of the prescriptions without too many unexpected problems.

# Individual and Group Behaviors

## Group Cohesion and Compatibility

Team Fayol was a well-matched team with compatible group members and a decent amount of similarities to make working together a pleasant experience. In retrospect, the Keirsey personality test results could have aided the group leader (Hope Alwine) in assigning roles for the project rather than leaving role determination up to the individual group members. The results revealed certain aspects of everyone’s personality that would have been very helpful if given the right amount of encouragement by the leader. Even without the Keirsey personality test input, the group worked well together during live meetings, producing a good result.

Two problems occurred in regards to group cohesion: one, the group lacked motivation to fully explore methods to efficiently work together and second, there was little time spent on forming relationships that could have greatly benefited the group at large. School group projects do not leave a lot of time for having coffee and making those mental connections about a person that contributes to highlighting advantageous attributes that could benefit the project. Since group projects in school are so short, usually not extending past a month, students are not inclined to fully explore the range of knowledge they are supposed to be learning about. There is little motivation beyond getting a good grade, making the result to be the bare minimum, enough to get the grade desired.

## Roles and Goals

In the initial meeting, there was a section of the agenda addressing the assigning of roles. The group leader asked for input on what the strengths of the individual was, for example, if a person is very good at taking notes and outline, they should include those skills in the live meeting. The leader was trying to avoid assigning roles as the project was not meant to be divided up but rather a collaborative effort. There was an error in the group leader's perception, specifically the halo effect, that all individual members were in the same class, receiving the same information in lectures, and reading the same assigned readings, therefore, everyone would be on the same page when it came to assigning roles. Gordon, in Chapter 6, describes the different types of roles within a group, including task roles, maintenance roles, and individual roles (Gordon, p 188). The purpose was to determine these roles early in the project and focusing on the strengths of the group, the project could get done with little to no problems.

Due to confusion on the assigning of roles (more namely, identifying individual strengths and weaknesses), Team Fayol moved forward without the roles being defined which led to more problems later. The second goal of the first live meeting was to determine the goals of the group so there was a clear plan in which the group would follow. The framework was a set of Google Documents for each stage of the diagnostic process (description, diagnosis, prescription, and evaluation), with the goal of each person contributes to each document. The informal goal set by the leader that everyone should contribute led to many problems, mostly a lot of confusion on what exactly each member was supposed to do. Informal goals refer to goals that are not explicitly recorded anywhere and group members are supposed to imply what needs to be done (Gordon, p 186). In the live meeting, the leader did try to solidify the purpose of the goals but it was misunderstood, therefore it did not help anyone.

# Communication

When you’re a kid, a popular game to play is “telephone” when one person comes up with a phrase and then it is whispered in the next person’s ear and down the line until it returns to the first. Usually, it is rather comical as what is originally is distorted in many bizarre ways by the time it reaches the end. Team Fayol had its fair share of communication issues, partly because of the virtual communication component but in the end, the message got through to come up with a final product. The main mode of communication was through Google Hangouts, both chatting and non-video calls, and Google Docs with a splash of email chains.

## The Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Communication

Dr. Moniz points out in his chapter on Communication for librarian management, email can be very useful as well as damaging when it comes to virtual communication. He suggests to keep emails concise and succinct, use appropriate subject lines, and be careful with how you sculpt the text (i.e., using bullet points in far easier to read than a paragraph) (Moniz). The group was very good at the concise email sending but there were problems with rules of communication such as using a liaison to send out emails and use carbon copy rather than bombarding the professor with emails from individual group members. Another problem was the losing of electronic resources from emails (“I didn’t get that email” or “I don’t have access to that document”) and rather than addressing the problem with the group leader, it was common to wait until the audio meeting to bring it up. There were miscommunication errors all over the place between the document, email, and our meetings.

Moniz discusses how traditional ways of communicating such as face-to-face meetings have advantages over virtual communication in the individual’s ability to decipher messages better with more context such as non-verbal communication. Through traditional communication, non-verbal communication contains a plethora of information to the receiving party, including gestures, movements, material things, time, space and body language to contribute to the clarification or confusion of the encoded message (Gordon, p 221). Without the ability to psychically see one another, Team Fayol eliminated a vital component of communication, that could have been beneficial.

Using Google as the main hub for communication seemed like the better system to use and it was easier to use than WebEx but there were some shortcomings that proved harmful to our process. The key to using Google was the ability to edit documents simultaneously while in an audio call and chat. One problem was Using Google Hangouts prevented the ability to record meetings, which could have been very beneficial as all group members would have the recording to refer to.

## Active Listening

Active listening refers to always being present when engaging with other people. "In the simplest sense, active listening boils down to one thing: be there" (Moniz). Active listening plays a big role in virtual communication as it is easy to become distracted by other activities while in the meeting. The temptations of other things, especially since Team Fayol was only doing audio and not video, were apparent and people had the ability to leave the conversation. Sometimes it was necessary as the group leader was at work and needed to leave to assist students and other patrons, missing out on vital components of the meeting. Without the ability to record the meetings and no designated note taker, active listening was paramount to the success of the project. Video conferencing can have very rich media in the ability to see people, as nonverbal communication can come into play, and can keep active listening present (Gordon).

## Information Overload

A major concern that occurred throughout the project was the feeling of being overwhelmed by so much information being passed between parties. Information overload or underload occurs when too much or too little information is given and the receiving party cannot comprehend it (Gordon p 223). Gordon notes that when it comes to electronic mail and messaging systems, information overload or underload can occur because it is easier to pass information back and forth, therefore flooding people with information (Gordon, p 223). Some insights for managers to avoid information overload and underload would have been very helpful to use during the project including: changing the physical setting, filtering or screening devices to improve access to information, installing technical devices, and to train the users with such devices (Gordon, p 223-224). The last two did not apply to Team Fayol, but the group leader did attempt to filter the information coming in through the Google Docs by eliminating the creation of multiple documents, trying to control the flow of information between group members. One problem with Google Docs is people kept creating new documents because of confusion of what to do with ones already created, making the entire group have at least 3 documents pertaining to the same topic. Better communication and a better file sharing program may have benefited Team Fayol.

The goal of the Google Doc was to let every contribute but rather than keeping it concise, Team Fayol had members contributed pages upon pages of information and other members were then confused as to what part they were to play as a contribution. Throughout the entire project, there were emails sent by all group members stating "I don't understand what I'm supposed to be doing." Initially, it was determined that Team Fayol was over analyzing the assignment and needed to rein back to simplify the process. When it was simplified to addressing three main problems, the project went a lot smoother after that.

## Feedback

Team Fayol eventually got into a rhythm with feedback – at first, it was limited as emails were exchanged but mostly whatever was concerning group members would wait until the live meetings. Feedback refers to “the process of using information about outputs to modify inputs to gain more desirable outcomes” (Gordon, p 555). A recurring issue was the constant changing of the documents, even after the team had solidified its acceptance during the live meaning. It was more of a matter of perception as members had their own view of how the assignment should look and then, having editing access, simply changed the document per their own views. Eventually, after addressing the issue in a live meeting, the group devised a system naturally where in the live meeting, members would determine who would work on the document and others were welcome to come and help through the chat feature. Two members came up with a very effective system where one would type the information in accordance to the group’s discussion in the live meeting and then the other would follow behind, editing and making the message more concise. The natural formation of teams for feedback purposes created avenues towards success for Team Fayol.

# Leadership

The group leader attempted to use democratic and resonant leadership techniques throughout the project. Democratic leadership style built resonance through the listening and considering other’s input and participating to gain trust and commitment (Goleman, p 55). Later, it was determined that a commanding leadership style should have been used in the beginning and then digressing into the democratic leadership style. This would have made sure the goals were established and members had a firm grasp of their purpose within the group.

The group leader tried doing participating in the first part of the assignment, with low task assignment and high relationship as to gain the best of each member, giving them room to speak up and contribute to the project. As the project progressed, the leader moved to more telling behavior which proved harmful to the process because of frustration with the lack of progress. Telling behavior removes the leader from the relationship aspect and moves to a more dictator method. Finally, the leader reevaluating her actions and returned to a participating role within the group. In the end, it was better to work as a cohesive unit rather than having a strong leadership presence, once everyone was on the same page. In the beginning, a strong leadership role was needed to gain the particulars on what needed to happen and then relax into the participating leadership style (Gordon, pg 264).

# Conclusion

While Team Fayol may have experienced a fair amount of stress and frustration during the project, their final product produced good results. There was a lot of bumbling around blindly at first, but as clarification occurred, it was easier to fall into step with one another. The biggest obstacle was to overcome miscommunication and information overload and while it caused stress and frustration, the group finally reached a good communication system. The group leader could have done much better in the beginning with defining the goals and roles of each member, working on an outline of what needed to happen for success. The case study revealed that principles of management can be applied even to very short projects and good results can be produced from virtual communication and well-defined goals.

References

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