

Reflection on hot topics the way I contributed to group activity

I have reflected on being part of a group making a series of videos on the Covid-19 pandemic for the Hot Topics module. For the purpose of this reflection I have used Kolb's cycle of reflection (Kolb, 2015).

Experience

When I learned that making a group video was a component of the Hot Topics module, I considered that one of the easiest tasks in terms of university study should be the formation of a group. Finding and becoming part of a group then deciding on an appropriate topical news item to discuss and present sequentially didn't concern me in any way. Finding a group to join, or forming one proved problematic, however. This was principally because I am not particularly close to any other members of the cohort. I socialise with a handful of other students whilst physically in university, mainly over coffee in the Cwad or elsewhere, but outside of university I have little contact with any fellow students although I am connected through LinkedIn and as 'friends' on Facebook with a few. This is something which has happened almost organically, possible due to me having missed lectures due to grandchild care responsibilities. As in any large group situation, smaller enclaves were developed and bonds have formed over time. In terms of alliances, I naturally gravitated toward the few people I know best, if not that well. As deadlines loomed, I realised with some degree of panic that I was neither part of a group, nor had much prospect of becoming part of one. I posted an appeal on the student café which felt a bit like online dating, but no response was forthcoming. I decided a more straightforward approach was needed so approached a fellow student that I know was part of a group. I raised the group membership issue and the prospect of me joining. The response was delayed, though the subject of climate change had been agreed, as there seemed sufficient time, and no pandemic on the horizon. Eventually however, after some weeks and following exchanges via social media, I was formally accepted on to a group and was added to the WhatsApp collective as proof of this membership. However, this was after it became clear that it had been 'forgotten' that I was to join the group. I felt quite positive over the use of Whatsapp as I am familiar with this application.

It had already been decided that climate change be the subject of the video presentations, but on joining the Whatsapp group I found the topic was changed perhaps not surprisingly, to the Covid-19 Pandemic. I duly complied without protest although I had undertaken some research on climate change.

Closing of the campus meant there could be no face to face meetings therefore all communication was done via Whatsapp, which I found could be excluding. In addition, I found that some group norms had already been established, in the way communications were phrased, for example, and at least one clique had formed. I also sensed the forming of a hierarchy within the group. Personally, I tended, in the beginning at least, to be reserved and post messages only when I felt appropriate.

My thoughts

I realise that at the beginning I did not have a strong voice within the group and felt an outsider. Being the late comer and not a 'native' of the group I found some group norms had already established which is a normal part of group development (Tuckman, 1965). I also thought that as the oldest in the group my voice might have less value and been diminished voice (Molden *et al.* 2009).

This is probably due to my age I am the oldest in the group although the others are also mature. It also may have been my 'need to affiliate' (McClelland, 1961) wanting to fit in and not risk my participation. As I had become the metaphoric fifth wheel, I felt I had to be easy and not difficult and accept decisions which were made. I feel I was carried along with the others, and was unable to challenge or discuss other options as I was grateful to be included in a group. I found being a member of the group was important to me, but felt I was incidental to it. However, this did not make me uncomfortable as I have worked as part of and with groups over many years and understand how team roles evolve (Myers-

Briggs and Myers, 1995). I understood the position and the order of things therefore went along with it adopting normative conformity to be accepted as a member (Yu and Sun, 2013). However, I found that as deadlines loomed the energy within the group increased and I found more of my voice and that my voice had more influence.

Analysis

My feeling of exclusion was a mood and scene setter for my activity and involvement in the group; shaping my overall experience and contribution to the group. I wanted to be a part of the group, a member that people would appreciate but who did not upset the current balance of team roles. The likelihood was that I was self-excluding and transferring my expectations on to the group. There were, I am certain, internal factors which affected the way I felt within the group and the outcome became a self-fulfilling prophecy, as I did not push myself forward which could have been interpreted by the other group members as a lack of interest.

I realise my thoughts with regard to the communications on WhatsApp were due to my having become de-skilled in working with groups. My experience of groups has largely been in face to face meetings and similar physical social meetings.

Making Changes

On reflection I would be more proactive in finding or forming a group as I left things quite late. I found that joining a group where norms and internal group relations had already been established was quite excluding and, at times, I felt quite isolated and demotivated. I would also be more aware of commonalities, such as the use of emoji's which I dislike, but noticed later, were an important part of communications between members. I would also be more open to understanding that past roles are no precursor to current role expectations.

References:

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