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### Group Involvement: Cohesion & Tensions through Collaboration

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Group Involvement: Cohesion & Tensions through Collaboration

*Abstract*

The importance of teamwork and group involvement is essential not only in school to complete a common goal, but employers need to know that you have cooperation skills and the ability to collaborate with others in a diverse setting effectively. As my roommates and I arrived from different parts of California into a rural small county called Humboldt, we all came for the environment, but perhaps for distinctively altered reasons. We looked to develop improved relationships as well as group communication within the confines of our living space. Additionally, the goal was to maintain and manage a clean environment within our dorm room. For some of us, it's the first time living alone without our parents, however, we don't have them to clean up after ourselves anymore. Even though we each have our separate rooms, sharing and cleaning the kitchen, as well as the bathrooms, have already created certain tensions within our group.

The purpose of this research is to investigate how individuals within the collegiate academic level form relationships amongst their roommates. We are all different in our personal characteristics, however, the end goal is to maintain and manage a clean environment. With each passing day, we learn more from each other whether it's flaws, skills, or strengths. We, in a sense, are forced to live with each other. Getting to know my roommates has been interesting. Each person is different and unique in their way. To co-exist in tranquility and create a safe space, we need to understand the importance of roles. We all need each other to do task chores because it will make for a suitable environment. Each person within our confines has their own particular set of skill sets that are brought to the table which help make living effortless.

### *Literature Review*

When arriving at the campus dorms, the only aspect about moving in was wondering who and how my roommates will be. These would become the people I spent my year here in Arcata. Getting to know my roommates was amicable, as no one wanted to overstep and create tension. Everyone was genuinely sincere as we were getting situated and comfortable with the dorm. There is a process of getting to know someone and that takes time. Educational Psychologist Bruce Tuckman created Tuckman's Group Development Model, which classifies four different groups: forming, storming, norming, and performing (Tuckman & Jensen, 1997).

In the first stage, forming began when we first met on move-in day. We began to get to know each other. Everyone was polite but also cautious as no one wanted to create any tension. Food and help were always being offered; however, our shared goal seemed evident. We needed to maintain and manage a clean kitchen as well as the living room.

Storming is where members compete for status and openly disagree with each other. Once the ice was broken amongst us, we had already agreed upon our goal; however, every individual set their own establishing roles. Over the first two months, we had gotten to know each other quite a bit, but now we're more comfortable expressing what we believe is the right way. Instead of being disrespectful, we are all now comfortable enough to provide constructive criticism to ensure the message went across courteously. This promotes a healthy living environment, which is ideal for managing those secondary tensions within our personal spaces. For example, if someone is doing something incorrectly, then intervene and explain a better option.

Norming is essentially resolving conflicts by establishing rules. After becoming comfortable with each other, we were able to call each other out respectfully. Setting regulations and norms weren't an issue amongst us four.

In the fourth stage, performing, is when members assume their functional roles and follow the norms productively. In this instance, we were all working efficiently, cleaning and storing everything before our power went out in Humboldt County.

Everyone was working together as if it were fluid machines running, and as a result, we had a spotless dorm room. It looked just as clean as when we first moved in because we devoted time to plan and discuss what needed to be done, solve the problems, and achieve the common goal. We remained focused on completing the task at hand which was to clean and prepare for a few days of no electricity.

Lastly, Adjourning is the fifth and final stage. This occurs when members disengage and relinquish responsibilities because the task is complete. In this scenario, once the prepping and cleaning were finished, we realized how clean the kitchen floor was. Acknowledging how much better it looks took some relief away, and every individual made considerable contributions. Afterward, we all went back to our rooms and used all the electricity before the blackout shut down the city lights.

Living in College Creek is the preferred destination to live on campus; it comes at a steep price per year. Although we live together as a small group, everyone has their own set of friends and personal dilemmas in life. It can be challenging to balance life as a college student independently; however, the emotions within small groups can be affected by what happens outside of the group. Since we are all full-time students, living in the same conditions, we can better understand each other because we share the same stresses as students. "Shared effect may also serve to prevent group dissolution by facilitating the development of bonds between group members" (Spoor & Kelly, 2004). Integrating cohesively in small groups is vital to get to know others. Of course, living together will help with that. As students, we seek purpose in finding what we want to be. It's in our nature as humans to seek communication. Having my roommates as friends are beneficial towards the goal of keeping a clean environment.

Within a group, each person has a particular role to play. Whether it's less significant than another, it's still imperative to function as an effective group. It's not solely what you do for the group, but rather what's expected from you as an individual within a group. Understanding how a group works is just as important as doing the absolute best on a task or project.

Often, students who live independently, away from their parents, tend to disregard how roles are essential for collaborative work. According to Garth Harris & Dennis Bristow, they emphasize the importance of setting plans to be efficient. "Group members indicated that developing a semester-long plan, including a schedule/timeline for task accomplishments, improved group communication, and task progress. However, some groups learned that with flexibility comes the responsibility to collectively monitor and regulate the progress through continuous communication via emailing and texting" (Harris & Bristow, 2016). Always being aware of a task's progress and task chores such as cleaning are crucial. For example, taking out the trash before it stinks up the entire dorm is one person's responsibility; however, not doing so can affect everyone's well being. The little things can prove vital in the effort to achieve our group end goal.

We use group regulation to address specific dysfunctions and improve on the collaboration process. Creating a group message or a google doc is a useful tool that can be used to regulate groups; however, the technology can be detrimental because it can be ignored. Using face-to-face meetings should be primary because it provides raw, real-time interactions.

We are a coed suite room. We have two ladies and two gentlemen within our living confines. Gender roles play a significant factor in achieving the end goal, maintaining a clean environment while maintaining and managing a clean environment within our dorm room. Everyone does their part in cleaning up after themselves. On occasion, we have a rotation where we'll have a member clean the entire living room area. "Gender-specific assumptions are the creation of gender inequality, which has implications for group interactions. The interactions of men and women changed when placed in mixed-sex" (Berson & Berson, 1995). We don't have to do specific tasks because of our gender. Everyone can do the same tasks to maintain our goal as the semester comes to an end. We see our group members every day, and everyone has equal input since we don't have a designated leader. We are all leaders.

Being slightly older than the rest of my colleagues, I've been responsible for regulating the group to maintain our kitchen and living room. Since I am older than the rest of my colleagues, I've been responsible for regulating the group tasks. The oldest in the room is an authority figure by guiding my roommates towards our goal, enforcing and checking for a clean common area. "Collaborative selection of a group leader was an effective tool for monitoring group progress towards a shared goal/task. Those leaders helped the group restructure the group plan and timelines when necessary and keep the group on task" (Harris & Bristow, 2016). When the group deviates from its course to achieve the main goal, it's paramount to have someone that can get the topic or tasks back on track—having someone who sits atop the others provides structure instead of having everyone trying to take charge. Since being the oldest in our room, I have naturally been selected for the role. We continuously learn to become mature adults. Leading and following is essentially an approach that derives from solving problematic issues. Working in groups that have a structure where its members contribute to the group goals would be ideal to be part of.

As a group, the need to coordinate a plan to achieve its goal must agree upon before moving forward. "It may have emerged as a solution that specific group coordination is beneficial towards the goal. Arguably, the individual fitness would be enhanced by living in groups with effective leadership" (Van Vugt, 2008). Everyone in our living space can contribute to the goal, do their part. However, sometimes having an absolute leader who dictates decision making is what's needed.

An individual's personal goals must be balanced with those of the groups to be an effective group. At the beginning of the year, each person has their agendas, resulting in working against the group. "For group decision making, suggested that the process split into an individual preparation phase ending with an initial decision and a group discussion phase in which additional information is exchanged" (Sassenberg, 2014). Within our group, there are four individuals, and everyone has an opinion. As a group, we determine if that is the best course of action after considering the information presented. "It was predicted that pursuing individual goals in a prevention focus leads to

a stronger evaluation bias than pursuing the same type of goals in a promotion focus or pursuing the goals to perform well as a group with either a promotion or a prevention focus" (Sassenberg, 2014). In our dorm room, it brought up the idea that we should have rotations for our chores. Since we were all present in our dorm room at the time, after looking around and realizing the needed maintenance, we all agreed it was a great plan. It all starts with one individual to bring an idea to the table. If the concept works with pursuing our goal while developing improved relationships as a group, it will benefit living.

Creating a stronger bond with my roommates and seeing each other every day created a pathway to communicate in other ways than just saying hello. "Increased effort is an important mediator of the group goal effect when simple to a moderately complex task is involved" (Weldon & Pradhan, 1991). Since our relationships continue to grow and develop, our efforts for each other will be there to achieve our common goals. Ensuring we continue to keep our rotations running like fluid machines, we must maintain our goal in a clean environment. We maintain our periodical assessments as a way to check our progress over time.

We are all full-time students, and we are always busy with something. Solving simple issues around the house is still a tedious task. When sharing the load with the other group members makes it more efficient. "Collaborating effectively, problem-solving, effective communication, knowing how to access the information they need, being flexible, being easy to adapt, taking responsibility, taking the initiative, sustaining their inner motivations" (Toroman & Karadag, 2018). We aren't always in the mood to clean because of our overloaded schedules. Cleaning is not required every day, but being adaptable to specific situations to pursue the goal is imperative.

To build a more robust and more diverse group setting that can have a positive influence on others, expanding connections by meeting others across different locations can achieve a compatible environment. In an article, *Overcoming cross-cultural group work tensions: mixed student perspectives on the role of social relationships*, Jenna Mittelmeier explains how social tensions in cross-cultural group work and social

relationships can positively impact the transition experience for a student. Whether it is a transfer student or a first-year student, making connections plays a substantial role. Being present or needing inclusion is decisive when working collaboratively within a group. "Cross-cultural group work provides several benefits to students, such as the development of key graduate employability skills" (Denson & Zhang, 2010).

Communicating and understanding your group members' positive and negative skill sets is fundamental for making an area for agreement. In our dorm room, working in collaboration is necessary because one individual shouldn't have to do everything. Having an efficient collaborative relationship with the other members by sharing personal perspectives and ideologies can serve as the foundation for opening up with others around campus. Expanding connections and meeting others around campus gives the confidence to be introduced to new individuals.

Working in groups not only improves socialization between students, but it also allows them to focus on the bigger picture. Participating in a group requires members to be mutually respectful and to listen actively. *In Student Collaboration in Group Work: Inclusion as Participation*, Karin Forslund Frykedal and Eva Hammar Chiriac describe how inclusion in the education realm is a process to adapt to all students as interdependent individuals. "inclusion is relational in its application, it, therefore, must be understood in the context and process in which it appears" (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2018). In our dorm room, members are accountable for their tasks and the groups' primary goal. This allows each member to take a certain level of responsibility for the entirety of our collaborative work, such as cleaning processes. The inclusion of all members gave us the ability to distribute the workload amongst us evenly. Day by day, everyone that participates gives a sense of feedback, whether it's a comment about not wanting to take out the trash or cleaning the kitchen. Precise input from our members can allow us to evaluate our processes. Perhaps we need to improve them, but the fact remains that we need to increase our level of efficiency.

We are all young adults trying to find our purpose, whether it's while we're in college or graduate. Being those young adults, we must collaborate with those closest

to us and create norms that will benefit the entire group. "The social cognitive perspective of self-regulated learning particularly emphasizes the interactions among influences of personal beliefs, behaviors, and environments" (Wang & Hong, 2018). The reason for coming to college is to become independent and become individuals who can better control their own beliefs and behavior influence. Those who are more independent tend to have improved attitudes to develop better results. I believe those who are more independent set the tone for the rest of the members. If we maintain our productive behaviors, we will be able to achieve our goal in the end.

### *Observations*

Over time, we began to open up and understand each other's personal beliefs slowly. The need for inclusion jumped-started the process to pursue our goal, allowing our group to divide the workload evenly. All members needed to adapt to others to live in an environment where we feel wanted. Sharing our personal experiences while cleaning the common area opened the gateway for us to feel connected. Frykedal & Chiriac stated that the process of inclusion must be understood as it appears. We are college students trying to survive to see the end of the semester.

Knowing that everyone was willing to be included in task chores made it a smooth first semester. However, there were moments throughout the term where it was cluttered. As soon as we walked into the common area, we walked straight out because it was dirty. We all have busy schedules. Therefore, we did not always have time to clean. When we did, everyone contributed to the task goals, which improved socialization between our group.

We all want to find our purpose and be the best version of ourselves here at Humboldt State. We were forced to live together, but we decided to work cohesively together for the greater good of our end goal. In trying to keep and maintain a clean common area throughout the semester, Wang stated that self-regulated learning helps with interactions and behaviors when in an environment. Being able to control personal behavior allowed our group to interact accordingly proved vital.

It created a supportive environment that prevented us from acting out negatively. Since we've barely met at the beginning of the term, self-regulating shined a light on other opportunities where other members could contribute without critique. It let them do things their way and clean their way, which contributed to our group goal. I've noticed improved communication skills between the group, such as stating what's on our minds without judgment. We became a family in the end while pursuing our goal to maintain a clean common area.

Over time, we began to slowly open up to each other and understand personal belief ideologies, in the sense of how we operate. I know as students, we each have our responsibilities and maintain busy schedules. Therefore, leaving our household a bit disordered is understandable. Having open face-to-face dialogue to discuss what needs to be done is more efficient than using technology.

Observing how we, as a small group, interact with each other has been impressive over the semester. In the beginning, the norms created weren't emphasized until we gradually saw our living space in disarray. Coming back home from class exhausted after long days at the library added more stress to maintaining a clean environment for some. Therefore, the task roles became much emphasized after the first month of school.

We discussed rotations with cleaning the kitchen, more so the dishes. So far, everyone seems to be washing their dishes and maintaining a decently clean environment in the common area, which is progress from when we first moved in. We came together to make our group goal a priority within each individual's daily lives. Progress was made developing improved relationships with all my roommates, and as a result, so has our group communication.

### *Conclusion*

This study can help demonstrate an improved understanding of how small group dynamics work while living with group members. The group development model breaks down the required steps to develop cohesive relationships, creating stronger

interactions. This initiates the process of getting to know someone in escalating the friendship. It's essential to understand how we function in small groups and how we persist in productivity throughout the semester. In becoming these young adults, we learned the complex issues of integrating random students and putting them in a living space.

In the end, each member had a significant role in achieving the group goal. Each individual isn't worth the same as the full product, emphasizing that each member was essential in helping the group achieve its goal. We looked to develop improved relationships as well as group communication within the confines of our living space. Additionally, the goal is to maintain and manage a clean environment within our dorm room. More independent people tend to have improved attitudes to develop better results. Staying aware of what the group needs is an important skill, but recognizing obstacles and developing a plan to overcome the problem at hand is crucial. Therefore, I believe this research will remain beneficial for those in small groups living in the dorms.

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