MANAGEMENT THOUGHTS

ASSIGNMENT : QUESTION 3b

<u>USE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THE FIRST RESIDENTIAL TO ANALYSE THE FUNCTIONING OF THE GROUP OF STUDENTS AS A GROUP</u>

NAME : CHEW CHEE FAI

SUBMISSION DATE: 30TH OCTOBER 1998

MBAweb Document Usage Policy

About MBAweb
MBAweb is a virtual community for management learning. It was started by a group of MBA students and graduates who are keen on promoting management learning. If you wish to contribute to this online community please contact MBAweb via electronic mail.

Email : mbaweb@mbaweb.net
Web : http://www.mbaweb.net

Copyright® Virtual Community – A Malaysian online community organizer

Disclaimer
By downloading this document, you hereby acknowledge and agree that MBAweb shall not be held responsible should you be penalized for plagiarism. In addition the names of people, companies and non public information mentioned in the documents has been disguised or in certain cases, fictitious and should not be used as a source for research data. Any duplication of names is purely coincidental and unintended.

MBAweb does not and cannot review the contents posted by users on the MBAweb page and is not responsible for such contents. MBAweb does not represent or endorse the accuracy or reliability of any infromation posted and you hereby acknowledge that any reliance upon such information for any purpose or reason shall be at your sole risk. Any content placed here are not representative of the views of MBAweb.

By downloading the contents, you also acknowledge that the universities or institutions of higher learning to which these documents were submitted as part of the completion of a course do not represent or endorse the accuracy or reliability of it contents posted in MBAweb and you acknowledge that any reliance upon such content for any purpose or reason shall be at your sole risk.
MBAweb will not be liable to any person or entity with respect to any liability, loss or damage caused or alleged to have caused directly or indirectly by the contents published herein.
By downloading these contents you are bounded by the rules and regulations of its usage.

Warning Against Acts of Plagiarism
MBAweb is strongly against acts plagiarism. It is not only unethical, it is a form of cheating. While you are most welcome to download these assignments for your reference, we urge you NOT TO COPY these assignments. That includes copying diagrams, paragraphs, pages or even the entire document. The assignments here are meant to be a guide as to what a good assignment should look like. Lecturers and examiners are very very good at picking up acts of plagiarism and in many cases led to the expulsion of the student. So be forewarned !

What is Plagiarism ?
For your information plagiarism includes taking a piece of writing, words or ideas in part or in whole, that has been copied from someone else and is presented as being your own work. However, quoting parts of it with the appropriate reference is allowed provided there is written consent from the original author.

1.0   Introduction

The objective of this essay is to analyse how the group of 37 students who attended the first residential of the MBA program for group 12 functioned as a group. The residential was held from the 26th to the 30th of June 1998 at the Allson Klana Resort in Seremban, Malaysia.

While conducting the research for this essay, I realised that there is considerable controversy as to what a group is. Just as there is no one definition of the term "group", there is also no universal agreement on what is meant by the term group dynamics (Luthans, 1998). Group theories generally agreed that group processes are complex and that various approaches can be used to explain the functioning of groups. In this essay, I would just discuss the group's stage of development, its cohesiveness, its norms, and how the group communicated, managed conflicts and made decision. Though I acknowledge that this approach may fail to do justice to the complexity of understanding how group 12 functioned at the residential, it cannot be avoided because of word constraints and a lack of objective evaluation tools. It should also be noted that my observations and interpretations of the events described may be subjective and could be distorted by my perceptual biases.

2.0   The Group's Stage Of Development

Before I begin, I think it is important to first briefly describe the stage of development of the group as groups behave differently at different stages of their development (Brown, 1988) and has much influence on the group processes observed. Various theories proposed that groups behave differently at different stages of their development. From the mid - 1960s, it was believed that groups passed through a standard sequence of five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965, as cited by Johnson and Johnson, 1994). However, Robbins (1993), pointed out that studies of more than a dozen field and laboratory task force groups confirmed that groups don't develop in a universal sequence of stages. It takes time for relationships to develop.

I would describe the group at the residential as in its formative stage of development. Uncertainty was at its peak - we were uncertain about the group, its goals, and our place in it. Many of us experienced some tension, anxiety, social unease and stiffness that are associated with getting acquainted with each other. Some were restrained, shy or nervously outspoken, wondering who everyone else is and what it is like spending time together, while others were excited and more confident.

3.0   Cohesiveness Of The Group

Group cohesiveness has been variously defined as the degree of attraction group members feel towards one another and toward the group (Beebe and Masterson, 1993), or the degree to which members are attracted to one another and are motivated to stay in the group (Robbins, 1993). Based on these definitions, my observation of the group's cohesion was that it varied at different times. This was similar to Johnson & Johnson's (1994), study of groups. They argued that group cohesion is constantly changing because different members are attracted to the group to different degrees and the same member's attraction to the group will vary at different times.

One explanation for this could be the size of the group. Because of its large size, interaction with all the members was more difficult, as does the ability to maintain a common goal. Not surprising too, the students began forming informal sub-groups or cliques among themselves. The creation of such sub-groups within the main group tends to decrease overall cohesiveness (Robbins, 1993). I agree with Beebe and Masterson's (1993), observation that if the students are free to choose their own sub-groups instead of being assigned to them, a stronger sense of cohesiveness will more likely develop in the group. This could also be the reason why out of the 7 sub-groups assigned by the institute as study groups, non remained unchanged by the end of the residential.

Another explanation could be that there was a lack of a common task goal for the group which requires a high degree of positive interdependence among the students. For example, students could be given group assignments whereby all members will receive the same grade. I noted that even though the focus on work groups has been incorporated into the MBA curricula, the pedagogy was aimed at the individual, as was illustrated by the higher number of individual assignments that the students are required to do throughout the two year program, compared to group assignments. Consequently, people may bring different levels of commitment or concern to the group, thus affecting the overall cohesiveness of the group (Beebe and Masterson, 1993).

4.0 <u>The Group's Norms</u>

Norms are generally defined as the "oughts" of behaviour in a group (Luthans, 1998) and thus are the basis for mutual expectations amongst members (Brown, 1988). As a member of a group, we desire acceptance by the group and are susceptible to conforming to the group's norms. However, as Beebe and Masterson (1993), have pointed out, people are more likely to conform to norms that are not ambiguous. This was what I observed in the group. There was a relatively high degree of conformance to the group's norms that were clear, such as, not smoking in class, members' dressing, members' attitudes towards time, languages used, etc.

There are various explanations for why people conform to norms. Brown (1988), explained that people have a rather general propensity to change our attitudes and behaviour so as to bring them into line with others around us. Festinger and others (cited in Brown, 1988), suggested that three main motivations are at work when people conform to norms: the need to depend on others for information and to test the validity of our own opinions; the achievement of group goals which is facilitated by a uniformity of goals; and the need for approval arising out of not wanting to be seen as different. These explanations could be more so for a group of Malaysian

because, regardless of ethnicity, we generally are group oriented and our spirit of collectivism is often more important than individualism (Asma Abdullah, 1992). At the very least, as Johnson and Johnson, (1994), have suggested, people conform to group norms as it is a requirement for continued membership in the group.

5.0   How The Group Communicated

Groups could not exist without communication. Communication, as Johnson and Johnson (1994), has stated, is the basis for all human interaction and is a prerequisite for every aspect of group functioning. It is also the driving force that moves groups toward their goals (Beebe and Masterson, 1993). However, it is much more than the exchange of words. It is a complex process and in a multi-cultural society like Malaysia, effective communication extends a step further to mean the ability to correctly perceive the cultural nuances accompanying the spoken and unspoken words. Because Malaysia is so culturally diverse, communication is done at three different levels - intracultural, intercultural and cross cultural, each having its own unique code and pattern of interaction (Asma Abdullah, 1992). Hence, this made it even more difficult to draw inferences on how the group communicated from mere observations.

Nevertheless, for a group to be effective, it must facilitate open communication, develop a co-operative group climate and promote equal participation in the communication process (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). Based on these prerequisites used for determining how effective the group communication process was, my inference is that we may not be quite there yet. My inference was based on my observation that members were not participating equally, nor were we very open with our communication. Group discussions were sometimes dominated by a few of the more outspoken members.

One explanation for this could be the group's norm. Norms can have a powerful influence upon communication within the group (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). As

there was a relatively high conformance to the group's norm of "saving face" and maintaining group harmony, giving of frank negative opinions which could undermine harmonious relationships and threaten group solidarity was often avoided. Another explanation could also be because of our cultural norms and expectations. Malaysians are generally not very direct, candid, open nor expressive in communicating feelings and ideas to others (Asma Abdullah, 1992), especially when we hardly know each other at the residential.

Yet another important element in interpersonal communication is the credibility of the sender. In the Malaysian context, credibility may be equated with the sender's authority, status and expertise (Asma Abdullah, 1992). The role of age - as age is often associated with seniority and experience, is also another factor. Therefore, due to our cultural conditioning and acceptance of authority, those who are in higher status or those with the expertise (e.g. the lecturers), are often expected to contribute more in group discussions and brainstorming.

6.0   How The Group Managed Conflicts

Under the best of circumstances, in any situation that involves more than one person, interpersonal differences are bound to arise which may lead to conflict. During the residential, some group work which required the group to resolve conflicts were included. As an example, there was an exercise whereby the group of students were divided into three sub-groups and were told by Dr. Yiannis Gabriel that he has got a mug to give away. The task was to determine who among ourselves will get the mug but the decision has to be unanimous. What emerged from my sub-group was the following:

Regarding the task, some members disagreed on how it should be approached. We were split into those who were uncertain how to begin and those who were eager to start. Members were already approaching the task from different directions. Some were hesitant about the approach, while others were ready to decide what to do.

After much time spent on what I perceived to be trivia, we finally decided one of us will collect the mug and we will take turns to keep it for a month each.

My interpretation of this event was that members did not fully acknowledge nor address conflicts within the group. Some members did challenged each other but then backed off. You can tell there were differences of opinion and that they did not agree. However, in spite of these disagreements, group members eventually gave in to a group decision. There may be several explanations for the way the conflict was managed in the group.

Firstly, as we were relatively new to each other, members were exceedingly polite and were holding back, though subtle messages of disapproval and disagreements were communicated. The group's norms of maintaining group harmony and "saving face" could also have inhibited the expression of conflict, even though it was present under the surface. Yet a more likely explanation could be the very manner we Malaysians handle conflicts. As Asma Abdullah (1992) has observed, there is a tendency for Malaysians to handle conflicts either by reaching a compromise or avoiding it altogether.

7.0   How The Group Made Decisions

As the effectiveness of a decision depends on how effectiveness is defined, I will focus on the how the group made decisions rather than evaluate the effectiveness of our decisions. Using the earlier example (used in conflict), I observed that all three groups could not come to an unanimous decision within the specified time. In my group, there was a pattern of alternating between relatively long period of inertia and dramatic burst of activity. Members spent lot of time in unstructured exploration both as a group and between one student and another. However, when we were made aware of the time left to make the final decision, the debate was very quickly closed and the decision made.

Several factors could have influenced the decision making process observed. One of the factor could be that the process could have been strongly influenced by the social and cultural values of the group members. Many Malaysians still hold the view that decision making should be entrusted to someone based on his age, knowledge and power (Asma Abdullah, 1992). Though all members participated in the discussions, the final decision was that of those who were perceived to have the authority (either age, status or expertise) as their views are not likely to be challenged by those who are relatively "less authoritative". As explained earlier, the way that conflicts were managed in the group could also be another factor in explaining the decision making process.

The lack of group maturity could be yet another factor. According to Johnson and Johnson, (1994), in the maturely functioning group, all members participate and are influenced by each other according to the expertise and information each possess. Unfortunately, group members need time to develop into an effective decision making group. As it was, I believed the group did not have enough time to develop enough maturity to function with full effectiveness.

8.0   Conclusion

It was not easy making sense of how the group of students at the residential functioned as a group. As Johnson and Johnson (1994), have pointed out, different explanations could be applicable to the same event and often, there is more than one plausible explanation. Nevertheless, I hope this essay has provided some insights of how the group functioned, albeit, from my personal perspective.

REFERENCES

Asma Abdullah, (1992), **Understanding The Malaysian Workforce**, Malaysian Institute Of Management

Beebe, S. A., and Masterson, J. T., (1993), **Communicating In Small Groups**, HarperCollins Publishers

Brown, R., (1994), **Group Processes**, Blackwell Publishers

Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, F. P., (1994), **Joining Together**, Allyn and Bacon

Luthans, F., (1998), **Organisational Behaviour**, Irwin McGraw-Hill

Robbins, R. S., (1993), **Organisational Behaviour - Concepts, Controversies, And Applications**, Prectice Hall.