

## Introduction

This paper is meant to be an overall reflection of a community service learning project that was completed by a group in *Small Group Communications* class at *Portland Community College* that called itself *Team Awesome*. This group consisted of 5 members: Michael Steppes, Nathan Stewart, Kilsa Naanee, Ian Sanford and me, Ryan B. Chamberlain. Our project was what we considered being meaningful and very successful; we volunteered to provide, cook and serve a free meal to a group of about 75 homeless youths through the non-profit organization located in the heart of the City of Roses called *New Avenues for Youth*. This organization provides up to 200 meals per day to youth in the area that are aged from 14-24 years old and they rely entirely on volunteers and donations to provide these meals. There are paid positions under this organization but they do not provide meals or serve them, their services are utilized elsewhere in this extensive youth center for homeless youths.

The focus of this paper is going to be primarily on the aspects of communication used during the planning, execution and presentation of this project. It will cover many areas of the previously mentioned processes including, but not limited too; the concepts of “group norms,” “individual versus group goals” and “verbal and nonverbal communication.” Also, covered here will be many points related to the relationships in the group and the dynamics of it, including: our conflict sources and resolution styles, our challenges when working together, our strengths and weaknesses, our overall effectiveness and ideas on how things could have been done that would have resulted in a better overall outcome.

### **Textbook Concepts**

When considering group norms, there are several points where our group could have set up more explicit norms to prevent future complications. The group left some implicit norms unmentioned assumedly because everyone thought that it wasn't necessary to mention things like "we need to meet at least 24 hours prior to the presentation to finalize our roles and compile our papers and opinions. Another example of an implicit norm that was broken was that a member of the group showed up in his pajamas. Talk about breaking intrinsic norms! There were many norms that were not explicitly stated that were upheld throughout the project though. One example of an intrinsic norm we had was one that implied that each member of the group had an equal share of time to speak and that each member's opinion held equal weight with the group. This was very much an example of interdependence and cohesion amongst group members.

There were a couple people in our group that clearly had different personal goals than the rest of the members; this noticeably affected their group goals, mostly in a negative manner. It seemed that since certain members were not worried about their grades why would they worry about the rest of the group's grades? This is a clear example of when there was a lack of cohesion and interdependence amongst group members. It was clear when talking to some members of the group that they had less motivation in their life to succeed in this course that other members appeared to possess. This difference in goals led to some members letting down other members of the group when it came to finalizing and practicing our final report and presentation.

It appeared as though there was never quite enough communication between all of the group members. There were some group members that would regularly respond with enough time to accomplish our group goals, but others would wait until it was too late to accomplish anything that was to the standards of the other members. At the beginning of the class, when the group was in “the formation stage” there was no clear case of people not living up to other members standards. As time progressed, apparently, some members started to see that there was a clear pattern of who would be responding in a reasonable amount of time to the questions on issues that were up for discussion on our message board. Also, it was clear after the second group exam that a particular member could not be relied upon for studying any of the relevant information in preparation for our group exams. This caused no conflict in the group until the very last day (which will be discussed later in this paper), surprisingly.

As far as nonverbal communication goes, our group was very verbal in a general sense. There was not much that went unmentioned throughout the project, but there were definitely times when looks were exchanged that symbolized a member’s emotion towards another’s action(s). An example of this is when a member showed up to our introduction to the *New Avenues for Youth* volunteer and donations coordinator, Scott, with a gyro all dripping about his clothes as he was a few minutes late to the meeting. This caused every other member of the group to look toward this member with questioning eyes; no one could understand why he would have been late for this meeting to stop and get a gyro which he would have been extremely rude for eating in front of our host that we were meeting for the first time.

### **Group Dynamics and Relationships**

When there were decisions to be made, the group seemed to handle them very well despite some other problems that appeared to be present. It is not for sure if this was due to us having

similar interests or just getting lucky and finding things that were agreeable to all members. On the other hand, the group did have to narrow our choices down once presented or proposed; the group used brainstorming for the problem proposal assignment to come to an agreement on what type of community service project would suit all members the best.

*Team Awesome* generally used a vote and a majority consensus to figure out what to do when there was conflict between members. It was a time during a group test, when the group had the most conflict; it was over two choices for an answer to a specific question. We eventually went with what the group had come to a majority consensus on; it was one person for one answer and four people for the other answer. In this case, the group used a “majority rules” consensus in which I was actually the one who had to realize that we were amidst a substantive conflict and that I needed to accommodate the group when a clear decision could not be made in the time allotted.

The group also had some procedural conflicts that were poorly resolved by using the conflict resolution style presented by our text, *Working in Groups (pp)* as “compromise style conflict resolution.” When members either didn’t have time to come to a meeting or check the message board that was being using, the group ended up compromising and settling for a very short, last-minute meeting that resulted in both sides of the situation getting something that they didn’t want; the people that didn’t want to meet, still had to come to class early to meet or stay late while the members that were trying to meet with time to deal with issues appropriately had to deal with the results that could be achieved by waiting to the last minute to collaborate.

Some of the groups primary challenges include the fact that only three members were willing to meet up at all before the day of the presentation to discuss or practice our paper/presentation.

This was the final meeting, but this challenge of getting people to communicate frequently regarding group work was constantly a problem. Often this problem went unmentioned.

Another challenge the group faced was when a member of the group was responsible for the "Research & Data" section of the paper, so that member had to try to use everyone else's "annotated bibliographies," to try to report all the research performed for the project. This was impossible as one member, in particular, did not even provide titles of the things he quoted, his references included addresses and phone number, he put no effort into the group after we volunteered, he didn't respond to a single question that the group was asking each other to try to finalize our paper and prepare our presentation. He totally let us down for the large portion of our points.

The group's weaknesses seemed to be in verbal communication. We had a message board set up that we used to store files and communicate privately with the entire group throughout the whole semester. On this message board, we organized papers, scheduled meetings, took polls and many other things through the progression of this project. The amount of time that should have been spent on this message board by each group member, each week was not being spent by all members. This caused several problems throughout the semester; therefore, it would be considered our biggest weakness.

Our strength was the ability to not have a leader, this being said; it was also somewhat of a weakness apparently. If we had had a leader for this project I think that people would have had to come to meetings that were scheduled, whether or not they responded to the message boards. If people didn't do their assignments there would have been consequences. This probably would have been beneficial to our group since we had some less-than responsible members amongst us.

It still worked out alright in the end and the conflict resolution went without pause in most situations without the presence of an appointed leader.

There were several changes that could have been made to enhance our group experience as well as put out a more professional final result. One particular change that should have been made was to the paper we turned in. I was aware and unable to site some of the stuff out of the research and data section because one group member was unreachable and failed to do his part entirely (when speaking of the presentation and final paper).

My overall evaluation of the group project was that it was a really good plan and a successful service to the community in which we all participated and gained some good experience with theories and concepts that pertained directly to the subject of this course. Other than that, it is somewhat upsetting to see the lack of cohesion and interdependence of our group for the final compilation and presentation and hope it doesn't bring my grade down as many members did try to get a response from our group after the volunteering and set up a "compilation/practice presentation meeting."

## **Conclusion**

This has truly been a learning experience. I really do not enjoy this kind of school-work and this class really reminded me why. I enjoyed learning all of the information from the class, I enjoyed doing the community service/volunteering, I enjoyed being around people; on the other hand I did not enjoy the group work. I like to work alone and converge as a team to come to a final collaboration. That is precisely what we tried to do as a group for this project; the problem is that not everyone did their work to the same standards as the rest of the group. I cannot pinpoint why this is, but it is what happened. I am truly disappointed in the way the final

collaboration turned out. I expect things a certain way when I turn in papers, correct. I do not turn in “rough drafts” for final papers, when the instructions say “professionally bound” I expect us to get it professionally bound. These are the reasons that I despise group work; they are the same reasons that I learned a lot in this class and desperately needed to take this to get some helpful hints for when I enter the workforce.