Katherine Toll | Work Samples Spring 2019

1. In-Residence Three Reflection – Leading Collaboration *Artifact*

I was glad I had the opportunity to reflect on our collaboration exercises with Leslie because I was especially troubled by our class's overall performance with the Varsity Four activity. I would have hoped we perform better for a group of people in a graduate program for communications, but it was an incredibly frustrating experience for me, not to mention Jennifer Heiser. I was surprised by how little I knew about working on a team with a hearing-impaired person – especially a large team like we experienced in the Varsity Four exercise. Jennifer and I are friends and we interact often, so I made it a point to get better educated, but clearly I have barely scratched the surface. It did not occur to me she was struggling with all of us talking at once. Even after she (repeatedly) asked us not to – we continued to do it, which indicates the lack of awareness on all our parts.

LO4: Apply communication-centered scholarship in order to strengthen communication effectiveness.

LO5: Critically analyze messages.

D3: Choose to communicate with ethical intention and evaluate the ethical elements of any communication situation.

Key Words: Communication, teamwork, learning impaired, collaboration, Varsity Four

1. In Residence Three Reflection Post

Let me start by noting I am an Organizational Change Management Consultant who lives and dies by helping teams' function as teams, so all of the information was timely and helpful.

Question #1

I have three big take-aways – the first is the "talking stick" or, in our case, the mints. I have participated on teams who used this technique and it makes a difference – but it does demand a certain level of patience on everyone's part. Leon's quick thinking was brilliant and while a simple tactic, it is one I forget to use. Secondly, the ABCs (Affect, Behavior, and Cognition) are also pertinent when helping teams understand what a good team member looks like. Lastly, the biases, especially bias one, "Teams overvalue common information" registered with me. I love the "no repeat" rule. I suspect the next time I set that as a ground rule my meetings will stay on point and generate better ideas and solutions…faster.

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Question #2

Hackman's comment, "I have no question that a team can generate magic. But don't count on it" (2009, p. 100) resonated with me. One would hope that after completing readings on teamwork, we would have done a better job of avoiding the typical traps. Yet in our first workshop the "leaders" were the ones who were the first to talk. And, the tallest, which I know sounds ridiculous, but does hold a grain of truth. Admittedly, I don't work well in situations involving a large group of people where a tight start/start time is imposed. But, I think that's the point, right? No one really does unless well-educated in how to best work in those environments.

My "Fire in the Sky" team was far more successful, and we would have been whether we did that exercise before, or after Varsity Four. I spend my days having only partial information, so I am used to the "no assumption" rule as well as accustomed to polling people on the information they have and capturing it (white board, PPT slide, etc.) for everyone to see and evaluate. Plus, my team members were all women who were open to sharing information and walking away from their pre-discussion choice when presented with new facts and information. Perhaps, not

politically correct, but some men* dig their heels in and are less willing to abandon their initial point of view, even after learning new information.

#end

2. Leading Collaboration

Week One Discussion Post – When Teams Can't Decide *Artifact*

The following is a discussion post I did for *Leading Collaboration* in response to the article, *When Teams Can't Decide*. I enjoyed the assignment because it made me articulate the elements needed to run a productive meeting, especially if the reason for the meeting is to reach a decision. Based on the reading we needed to identity what steps should be taken before the meeting and what steps were needed during the meeting. We have all sat through endless meetings that go around in circles, but never produce a result, so I found this to helpful to my day-to-day work, and I also like the pragmatic approach I took for the assignment. We all know the things *we should do* to run a successful meeting, but it is all too easy to forget.

LO1: Articulate connections between the interdisciplinary field of communications and central themes and managing complexity, collaborative leadership, and elegant communication.

LO2: Demonstrate the ability to assess complex organizational environments and achieve communication goals.

D04: Be equipped to influence change.

Key Words: Decision-making, productivity, efficiency, successful meetings, facilitation skills

Discussion Post: When Teams Can't Decide

Based on the reading, and your own experiences: what are some concrete things you can do to set your team up to make high quality decisions - what things should you do (a) when scheduling team meetings and (b) when facilitating meetings?

Disclaimer: As many of you know, I am a Business Consultant, so I'm drafting my recommendations as if this were a client meeting.

Scheduling Team Meetings

For the love of God, set a realistic agenda and provide pre-reads to attendees prior (at least seven days) to the meeting:

1. Select a meeting room with the desired layout, technology, and collateral (white boards, flip charts, etc.)
2. Allow enough time for each agenda topic; if need be, schedule a series of meetings
3. Ensure all team members are available and can attend the meeting
4. Circulate the agenda, or attach it to the meeting invitation; include the objective of the meeting, ground rules, and pertinent definitions
5. Circulate any prep material or pre-reads at least seven days prior to meeting
6. If at all possible, have the attendees in the same place
7. If that's not possible, conduct the meeting via Skype, Teams, Zoom, etc., so everyone can see and be seen
8. Test the technology in the room prior to meeting; always have extra adapters, batteries, dry erase, and regular markers
9. Secure snacks for the meeting – completely serious on this one; hangry people are not productive people (you can quote me on that)

Facilitating Team Meetings

Don't assume anyone read the pre-read, or remembers why they're attending the meeting.

1. Briefly review the objective of the meeting, ground rules, and pertinent definitions (e.g., growth = profit, headcount neutral = no new hires, but people can shift to other areas if necessary)
2. Introduce the decision-making process that will be used (e.g., nominal group making technique, weighted preferences, etc.)
3. As noted in our reading, "Keep discussion of the desired outcome distinct from the discussion about how to achieve it" (Frisch, 2008, p. 123).

4. Use a parking lot when people move off-topic to capture ideas, comments, etc.
5. Make sure everyone is heard, even the more introverted people – I use index cards all the time; instead of talking, they write an idea or proposed solution and we gather and record them
6. Ensure all ideas/options are captured before moving to the evaluation phase
7. When evaluating ideas, use the "fence or wall" test noted in Frisch's article (2008, p. 123).
8. Be mindful of the timing for agenda topics, but don't be a slave to it; you may need to revise the agenda on the fly, but (hopefully) you have a follow-up meeting scheduled
9. Prior to adjourning, recap the outcomes, next steps, and if need be – verbal commitments from attendees

#end

3. Leading Collaboration – Project Red Reflection *Artifact*

The Project Red Exercise appeared to me as train wreck waiting to happen. It was a complicated activity and involved the whole cohort, plus we needed to use Slack to facilitate the discussion, which made it that much harder. Ultimately, we ended up faring better than I anticipated. The experience started out a little bumpy when my task-force got confused about our roles, but we prevailed and were able to complete the first step. Then we moved on to the grand finale, which played out far better than I imagined. We assigned spokespeople (as you will see) so it streamlined the communication and moved us to a decision at a more efficient rate without losing effectiveness. All and all, I was pleased with the work we accomplished.

LO2: Demonstrate the ability to assess complex organizational environments and achieve communication goals.

LO3: Address complex challenges by collaboratively leading teams across disciplines, distances, and sectors.

D2: Utilize communication to embrace complexity and difference.

D4: Be equipped to influence change.

Key Words: Project Red, collaboration, complex communication, Slack, effective

3. Project Red: Reflection Exercise

1. *This week's activity placed you in a large cross-functional team of teams. You not only had to lead internally within your functional team, but you had to lead across. Describe a leadership behavior that was helpful to the team of teams? What was the situation in your group at the time, what was the behavior, and why/how was it helpful to the team of teams?*

Our taskforce appointed spokespeople for each team which I found very helpful; the other team members were on the Slack channel, but there for moral support. It helped streamline our communication, so 12 people weren't tripping over each other. Adam also set up a google spreadsheet, so each team could enter their data before we convened. We had the same reference point, which brought objectivity to the discussion. We all arrived at the table with the best interests of the taskforce front and center and everyone was open to hearing different perspectives. We could not rely only on the numbers because there were additional facts not all teams were privy to, so it was through the exchange of information, expertise, and data review we were able to make the best decision possible. Psychological safety is pretty much a given with this group, however as a cohort we had a conflict earlier in the week on how to handle a specific issue, so I was a bit wary when we came together for this assignment, however it was not an issue. Everyone was focused on the mission at hand. I was also impressed with our team's patience in tracking down some missing information; after all it was a Saturday morning and everyone needed/wanted to move on with their day, but everyone remained engaged and supportive. Personally, I did not think the missing data would sway our decision much as did a few others in the group, but it appeared important for one of our members, so (uncharacteristically for me) I hung in there until we resolved it.

2. *Describe the leadership structure in your group. Did one person or several lead the group? Was leadership pretty stable or were there shifts in who took responsibility for leadership? Was leadership a smooth process in the group, were leadership "claims" granted by others in the group, or was there any jockeying for position? Were there times when there was a leadership gap in your group where no one stepped up?*

We had a shifting leadership structure, but it was a stable one – one member of our task force managed the logistics (which was a feat on its own) and for the actual Slack exchange, we had another team member lead the dialogue, but somewhat by default because he set up the google spreadsheet for us. Personally, I needed to rely heavily on him and my team members who have a better grip on the data and its interpretation. I have dyscalculia (sort of the math equivalent of dyslexia) so I struggle taking in a lot of new data quickly. I need time with it because at first glance it is one big mash-up of numbers, which have no rhyme or reason to them. Even after I catch-up I like to have my interpretation validated. I felt more than confident with the approach we took as a task-force.

Interestingly, I feel like my sub-team struggled more. We did not consider the numbers as much aside from water output and population size. We also assumed our factors seven and eight were the same things which they were, but that was miss on our part (and on mine) because I did not bring it up. I also suspect my sub-team mates got frustrated with me at a point (all caps were used in a response) because I was confused about terms – team versus taskforce. We had four google docs to submit – I had done mine individually (one); came together with my sub-team mates (two), but they used the team and taskforce interchangeably, so I got confused on what step we were on. They clearly had a point of view, so I had to trust them even though I thought we might be doing it incorrectly.

As it turns out, they were confused as well. Adam circulated the google spreadsheet after we completed step two – when I reviewed the spreadsheet, I realized I needed their individual data, so I entered as much as I could and asked them each to enter their individual information. This is when they realized they had skipped step one. I had texted the request and got responses from both, but when I reviewed the spreadsheet an hour before our taskforce meeting, one of my team members had not entered her information. I texted her again, but no response. As it turns out – this became the infamous "missing data" we had to track down. I am still unclear as to the breakdown in communication, so I need to follow-up with her. She properly simply forgot to enter it, but I ended up feeling as if I was blamed for not clearly communicating.

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4. Current Issues in Law, Technology, and Strategy – The Skyscraper Video *Artifact*

I loved this assignment because we needed to apply strategies, we were learning in class to a mock presentation in which we were to persuade a group of community members who were opposed to building a skyscraper in our town. Professor Morris provided us with a list of strategies the first week of class, so we were to use those as ideas; and perhaps even combine a few of them. In any event, one of the strategies is the "strategy of definition", which focuses on taking issue with a term or definition critical to the case. The supposed skyscraper was a mere 50 stories tall. That is not a skyscraper; skyscrapers are considered to have a least 100 stories, so I was able to deflect the whole notion of skyscraper. Don't be ridiculous! This was a building that was bringing commerce, culture, and education to our community. How could we not allow it to be built?

LO4: Apply communication-centered scholarship in order to strengthen communication effectiveness.

LO6: Create and deliver elegant messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context.

D2: Utilize communication to embrace complexity and difference.

Key Words: Strategy, skyscraper, influence, persuade, community affairs

4. The Skyscraper

Arc Video:

https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/91852/external_tools/21449

#end

5. Current Issues in Law, Technology, and Strategy – Final Project Video *Artifact*

I personally liked my final paper better than the video summary, but I got a better grade, so here it is! The final paper and video summary were to focus on using the strategies we learned over the course to advocate on behalf of a cause for which we feel strongly. I was on in the middle of drafting my capstone, which is also a deliverable for my consulting firm and part of my annual performance review (APR). I personally think it is some of the best work I have done to date, but it is not my firm's status quo. However, considering we do not have any kind of employee on-boarding, who is to say what the right approach is? In any event, I used this assignment to draft and practice the presentation I will make to my senior leadership team when we are ready to introduce the completed program. The Organizational Change Management (OCM) on-boarding program and playbook have not been constructed in a vacuum. I have a team of three other firm members who have previewed its components throughout the development of it, not to mention a disciplined framework provided to me by MSC, so I feel comfortable I am heading in the right direction.

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5. Current Issues in Law, Technology, and Strategy Final Project – Video Summary

Arc Video

https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/91852/external_tools/21449

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