ORGL 500: Team Building
Reflection Paper

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First and foremost, I would like to express my appreciation for the time and work put into creating and executing this class. As someone who has executed workshops for many years, I know it can be complicated. There's also an element, at least for me, where it can be a bit nerve wracking about whether or not it will work out. So I appreciate everything the team did to ensure that we all were able to experience how to build teams, not just by lectures, but by being put through the activities and attempting to build our own team in the virtual space. I would like to continue my work virtually, so this experience gave me confidence that I will be able to adapt my facilitation style to the virtual world.

Our team in the class were all willing participants. Because of that, we were able to encourage vulnerability early. However, as we discussed, we wouldn't necessarily be able to do that with our coworkers. I appreciated the reminder that while what we were doing could all be transferred to our workplaces, we do need to be conscientious that it won't be a perfect transfer. While it may seem silly to call this out, I think that oftentimes we attend trainings or other events where we have the opportunity to learn, and we think that it's easy to apply it exactly as we learned it. But in reality, we need to make adjustments for the people we are working with. As a Driver, per Merrill and Reid's (1981) Styles Inventory (as provided in Blackboard), I am prone to wanting to execute quickly and efficiently, even when it comes to team building. Therefore, it was really helpful for me be reminded that the work we did in our immersion can't be applied exactly as is. I will need to do the work to understand my company's culture and the individuals that I work with, and adapt the activities to what might work for us.

Early on in the immersion I asked a question that, in my own way, was my way of being vulnerable. I asked, specifically the facilitators, but really anyone who has experience, how do we handle vulnerability for people with trauma? Some folks might be able to open up early, while others might open up a lot. Therefore, I wanted some advice about what is a good way to handle either situation so that we don't discourage vulnerability from both those who have experienced trauma and those who have not. Additionally, how do we create a space where those who do choose to be vulnerable early do not feel negatively judged? I was happy to hear that one of the easiest ways to make vulnerability okay for those who have experiences that are often not publicly shared was by thanking them for sharing. I saw it in practice in our immersion and some of my fellow students and the facilitators shared examples from their own experiences where they had success creating safe environments by using gratitude.

I've worked in tech for fifteen years. One of the common ways that managers suggest teams get through storming is by eating together or going for drinks. Keswin's *Rituals Roadmap* (2021) has entire chapter devoted to how eating together helps build camaraderie. However, I have not seen that work for all people nor all teams. It often creates in-groups and out-groups, with those who can participate in the extra curricula joining the in-group and those who can't being relegated to the out-group. I was happy to learn in our immersion that team building must be more thoughtful than simply shared experiences. That while rituals, going through a difficult experience together, or solving a problem together can aid in the path to performing, we have to be more intentional

than simply expecting the experience itself to get the team there. Debriefing after each activity was essential to our learning, but also to our ability to reflect on what went well and what didn't go well within our shared experience. As a facilitator, I now realize that I need to <u>help</u> teams get to a place where they are performing rather than simply expecting that the activity itself will be enough to generate a thread. I especially took note of the questions I could ask or prompts I could use such as "I know what that means to me, I'm curious about what it means to you" and "Have you seen this occur with your team?"

Expanding on the topic of intention, one of the core ideas that I learned in our immersion was the intention that leaders have to put work into building teams. I've joined many teams in the past where the team has been expected to navigate the five stages of team creation themselves (Tuckman's model: Fight right! 2010). However, as a leader, it is vital that I help the team foster connection before we actually try to build trust and certainly before we try to solve problems as a team. Peter Block (2013) says in his video *Touchy Feely Crap* that teams need to spend time "talking about what [they] are doing together," or the result isn't "going to be worth anything". The resources, particularly the examples shared from Michelle Cummings, were invaluable. But again, the part that held real meaning for me, was making the connection that part of my role as a leader or facilitator is to help the team identify ways to take what they do in a workshop back to their work as a team.

We learned in Lencioni's *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2002) that the absence of trust sets the tone for the other dysfunctions. He says "Team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust." Brene Brown (2015) states that two foundations of trust are accountability and integrity, defining those as a willingness to own mistakes and choosing courage over comfort. Learning those definitions and then hearing in our immersion that there is some universal difficulty in building trust with managers three levels up, was quite satisfying. In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team,* Kathryn states that the leadership team has to put their leadership team first before their teams of direct reports (Lencioni 2002). Having grown up (both as a human and in my career) without a ton of mentorship, learning that the experience I have had is not unique was meaningful. I will now both recalibrate my expectations of my relationships with senior leaders as well as utilize the tools I have learned to help strengthen the trust we can build. I've always thought of myself as an equal, but I now understand that without taking the time to make connections with senior leaders, they will not be willing to own mistakes or choose courage over comfort with someone not on their immediate leadership team.

Finally, the last big take away for me from the class was the value of conflict in team building. I have always looked at conflict as a source of opportunity. I've never seen disagreements as a negative to either getting things done or to the ability of people to work together. However, I have been on many teams where individuals have not just shied away from conflict, but ran away from it. Lencioni (2002) says that teams without

conflict "resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments." He goes on to say that this leads to the third disfunction, lack of commitment. I have worked in many organizations where harmony is more important than the team truly producing meaningful work. It's been hard for me to see past the idea that there are simply people who do not like conflict. While there is some element of that, the bigger issue is as Lencioni states, a lack of trust. During the immersion, we were able to experience trying to solve a problem with people who had similar styles to us. As was pointed out to my group (the Drivers), we were able to disagree directly and no one's feelings seemed hurt. Everyone participated and we eventually reached a direction that we felt comfortable with. I think that because we had done the work with the Full Value Contract, we had all completed the Style Inventory, and we were all in the class, we had enough trust to move forward without offense. This has not always been my experience, even with other Drivers. Therefore, I now understand that it's not necessarily only that people don't like conflict, but also that we have not spent enough time building trust to make it safe to have conflict.

I truly appreciate the opportunity to learn about a topic that is so important to me in an academic setting. There is a lot of content that exists in the world and a lot of leadership books that are suggested, but it's hard to just put them into practice after spending a few hours reading. Having gone through this experience with so many opportunities to participate and reflect was invaluable. I look forward to putting the things I learned into practice in my organization so that I can build a positive foundation for the path I want to explore in the future.

References

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