

PSO5461 Selected Group Analysis

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I observed two sessions of community workshops that were set up to allow Simeon Cherokee Developers to communicate their plans for the Campus Bay Residential Development that is proposed for the former Stauffer Chemical plant site in south Richmond. The first workshop took place on April 29, 2004 from 7 to 9 PM in a community center in south Richmond for residents of the Panhandle Annex, Southwest Richmond Annex, and Richmond Annex neighborhoods. The second workshop took place May 12, 2004 from 7:30 – 9:00 PM as part of the regular Marina Bay Neighborhood Council meeting.

The developers were proposing a project that would provide housing for approximately 2000 individuals. The proposal included townhomes, multi-story apartments and three high-rise apartment buildings. Construction would be near a bird sanctuary and next to the Bay Trail, a bicycle and hiking trail that runs from Richmond to Emeryville at the edge of the bay.

Participants in the first workshop from the development corporation included Russell Pitto, the CEO of Simeon Cherokee Development Corporation and representatives from the architectural and environmental cleanup firms that were subcontracting on the project. Richard Mitchell, representative of the Richmond Redevelopment Department and approximately 100 individuals from the local communities also attended. Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Pitto, and his associates were introduced to the community. Members of the community did not introduce themselves or provide any information about their reasons for participating in the meeting.

Participants in the second workshop included Mr. Pitto and Susan Cronk, the project manager for the development , along with an assistant, and a representative from the environmental cleanup firm. Mr. Mitchell was also present, along with leaders of the Marina Bay Community Council, and approximately 80 individuals from the Marina Bay community. A few

members of the Richmond Annex community were also present. At the beginning of the meeting, all participants were asked to introduce themselves and say to which community they belonged.

The goal of the meetings for the developer was to provide information to local communities who would be impacted by the development and collect concerns to add to the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that is required by federal and state law before the project could be approved. The goals of the neighborhood participants was not clearly stated, though several people expressed the desire to stop the development and others expressed the desire to understand the project better.

The proposed project has raised concerns within the local community about blocked bay views, damage to natural habitat, toxic substance release, and several other issues. The local neighborhood leadership in south Richmond actively requested participation by members of the community by sending out email and delivering fliers to each home in the neighborhood. It is not known if the Marina Bay neighborhood council acted in the same way.

Analysis

There are five perspectives that I am aware of from which to evaluate the observed group. They are conflict management, group facilitation, organization development, organization learning, and change management. I will concentrate within this paper on organization learning and facilitation because I observed that Mr. Pitto desired that the community learn about his project, and the community desired that Mr. Pitto learn about their concerns about the project. Group discussions like these meetings require facilitation that helps the organization to work toward a shared understanding of each side's desires and concerns.

The next sections will describe models for facilitation and group learning which will be used to develop an intervention strategy that may help in future interactions.

Facilitation of Group Learning

Chris Argyris and Donald Schon developed models for group learning that they called single-loop and double-loop learning [Smith]. The model contains three elements: governing variables which are the dimensions that must be kept within acceptable limits; action strategies which are the actions that people carry out to keep the variables within limits; and consequences which are the results of the actions. With single loop learning, action strategies are modified based on consequences and governing variables are not examined. In double loop learning, the governing variables are examined and possibly changed based on the consequences of the action strategy that was chosen.

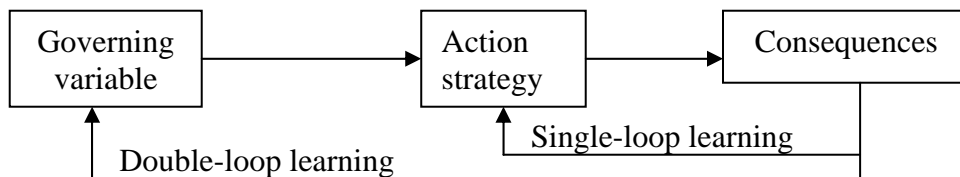


Figure 1: Argyris and Schön Learning Model

Argyris and Schön suggested that effective group learning relies on double-loop learning because variables that describe theories-in-use are examined along with the actions and consequences. They also presented two models, which they call Model I and Model II, that describe the governing values of behavior that inhibit or encourage double-loop learning. Model I describes behaviors that result in single-loop learning. Model II describes non-defensive behaviors and attitudes that help the organization look at the governing variables and participate in double-loop learning.

Model I values include achieving the purpose as defined by the actor, win and do not lose, suppress negative feelings, and emphasize rationality. Strategies include unilateral control of environment and task, and unilateral self-protection. These strategies are done by discouraging inquiry, using non-useful illustrations and attributions, and treating one's views as correct, covertly attributing and evaluating, and leaving important information unstated. The consequences include building defensive relationships, reducing freedom of choice, lack of public testing of ideas, and reduction in the amount of valid information that is available [Smith].

Model II values include valid information, free and informed choice, and internal commitment. Strategies include sharing control and participating in the design and implementation of a chosen action, which are aided by focusing on observable data during evaluation, bringing conflictive views to the surface, and supporting public testing of evaluations. The consequences of Model II behavior is minimization of defensive relationships, a higher freedom of choice for everyone, and improved chances of double-loop learning within the organization.

Roger Schwarz built his Skilled Facilitator Model [Schwarz, p 65] from the Mutual Learning Model which is a modification of Model II as used by Action Design, founded by Robert Putnam [Schwarz, p 87]. Schwarz proposed that using the model and focusing on self and group awareness and learning as a facilitator can help a group move forward to meet its desired goals. As part of the analysis of the group interaction, the facilitator roles and the group interaction roles will be assessed in terms of Model I and Model II behaviors, actions, and consequences.

Within the two meetings that were observed, there were several situations in which Model I values and behaviors were seen. These included statements and questions made by the

participants to the presentors, including one individual who stated that he had not been listened to in the past and didn't believe that he would be listened to again. Another individual, believing that every one of the participants in the room who were not associated with the developer had come there in opposition to the development, asked for a show of hands of those who were opposed. When he realized that not everyone there raised a hand, he muttered that everyone should be opposed. A third example occurred when an African American woman raised a question about when the city was going to change the way they were making decisions about redevelopment. She spoke in opposition to the development and expressed frustration at Mr. Mitchell, who was also black, as a representative of the city. Mr. Mitchell's response was to say, "That's like saying have you stopped beating your wife yet?" Race is mentioned here because Mr. Mitchell appeared to respond to that questioner differently than to other questioners who were white, a perception that seemed to be shared by other members of the group, who responded with a loud gasp. After Mr. Mitchell's remarks, several participants left the meeting.

Another Model I interaction took place between Mr. Pitto and an individual who described himself as the attorney for the community that was affected by the development. The attorney spoke for several minutes, presenting what he described as his clients' issues and concerns. His use of language and tone did not encourage a positive response and a feeling of openness on the part of Mr. Pitto, who responded defensively by stating that he was 'not prepared to debate the issues at this time'. Until that point in the meeting, Mr. Pitto had not used words like debate but instead had used words such as collaboration, and cooperation in his statements.

There were several instances of Model II behavior, especially on the part of Mr. Pitto during the first meeting. He presented the information in a manner that seemed to encourage questioning and expression of conflicting views. He presented a demeanor that suggested honest and open concern for a good outcome to the meeting, and a willingness to re-evaluate his decisions based on the information he obtained from the discussion. During the meeting, he responded to questioners by thanking them for the question and then working to communicate his answer after reflecting for a moment on the question. It seemed that he was not presenting a knee-jerk response to questions.

There was also Model II behavior on the part of the audience when members raised questions that presented data and information without assuming that everyone already knew the data. Several individuals asked questions that contained information about their concerns, explaining their questions as they asked.

Cherokee Simeon presented a power-point show describing the development project at the first meeting. The presentation was not designed for a large group of people and was difficult for participants to read and follow. At the second presentation, the developer handed out a brochure containing some of the more important information from the slide presentation. Designing, printing and publishing such a brochure suggests that Mr. Pitto and his organization took time to look at what had occurred during the first meeting and evaluate what was needed to improve communication. Similarly, community members handed out packets of information at each of the presentations, including descriptions of opposing views on the development project. These packets were different between the two meetings, though they were not as significantly different as the developer's were.

There appeared to be an effort made on the part of the developer to communicate information about the development process, the timeline for the project, and the vision he had for the final product. He described in detail the small and medium size developments but did appear forthcoming about the high-rise development. Several members of the public raised questions concerning that part of the larger development because the developer seemed to skip over those details. The appearance of ignoring the part of the project that was of greatest concern to the community did not help the developer build a trust relationship with the community. This behavior fits more with following Model I behavior, and the consequence of that could be seen in the defensive posture that was taken by the listeners at the first meeting. In the second meeting, Mr. Pitto did not appear to change his approach to speak less defensively about the high rise structure. He appeared more defensive about it instead, and seemed less willing to discuss the concerns.

At the first meeting, Mr. Mitchell took the role of facilitator. He created and distributed an agenda, set up chairs, welcomed new arrivals and introduced the presenters. During the presentation, he worked to manage the interactions between the presenters and the participants, especially when he was concerned that the participants were not allowing the presenters to speak. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Mitchell also showed some Model I behavior in an interaction with a listener. In the second meeting, Mr. Mitchell took on a non-facilitator role, and stood at the back of the room instead of in front.

There were several problems with Mr. Mitchell acting as facilitator for the meeting. It was difficult for participants who did not know the role of the Richmond Redevelopment Agency to know what role Mr. Mitchell was taking in the discussion. As the meeting progressed, it became apparent that Mr. Mitchell was not neutral, but instead was supportive of

the redevelopment project. While neutrality may not have been necessary, the meeting may have progressed better if Mr. Mitchell had taken the time to make his role in the discussion clear. In the future, Mr. Mitchell may find it useful to bring in an outside facilitator to lead the discussion, allowing him to participate as a representative of the city.

At the second meeting, Ms. Findley, the president of the Marina Bay neighborhood council, facilitated the meeting. She led the introductions of all individuals, explained the process of the meeting, introduced the presenters, and managed the question and answer process. She appeared to be neutral on the subject of the discussion, and stayed in the role of neutral facilitator for the discussion, though she did not say clearly that she would be taking a neutral stance in the meeting. Her behavior seemed to open up the space for Model II behavior in other participants, because she seemed to be focused on minimizing defensive relationships and allowing all individuals to present their views equally and respectfully.

Interventions

Based on the Double-loop Learning model and Argyris' Model II, there are several modifications that could be suggested for better interaction and improved learning within the organization. The first is to bring an outside facilitator into the meetings, allowing all members of the organization to participate as members. A skilled facilitator who could help individuals surface their assumptions and communicate non-defensively, which could help the group build a trusting relationship within which long term issues can be resolved. If hiring a facilitator were not possible, I would encourage participants to take the time to state their positions on the issues under discussion that would help everyone to be clear on each person's perspective.

It would be difficult during such short meetings to take the time to teach the group about mutual learning and theories-in-use, but working with the presenters to help them gain skills in

advance of such public meetings could be useful. Such coaching might include discussing the other party's objections so that leaders could be prepared to act non-defensively when presented with such information. During the discussion, alternative solutions could also be prepared, allowing for presenters to seem open to possible different solutions, instead of being attached to a single position.

Another possible change would be to suggest that presenters prepare for the meeting by learning what the most difficult aspects of the proposal are within the community and address those issues first, instead of appearing to leave them until last or leaving them out. Building a presentation that acknowledges the difficulties along with the possibilities might open the discussion up to real double-loop learning for everyone.

Members of the neighborhood council could also have presented their material to the community in a less aggressive manner, which would have encouraged a Model II approach rather than a Model I approach. It may be useful for the community to have a separate discussion about how to motivate members to participate without having to suggest that the issue under discussion is a dire emergency.

Mr. Pitto did a good job of remaining positive and non-defensive through most of the first meeting. He worked to communicate his desire to be in a relationship with members of the community. He should be encouraged to see how his behavior did have a positive impact on the meeting process, even though it was not apparent at all times. Mr. Mitchell has a powerful presence in meetings he attends, which should be valued by all participants. If possible, Mr. Mitchell should be coached on how to interact with people who speak strongly to him and how to communicate his desires without limiting the discussion.

References

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