

PSO 5461 – Organizational Dynamics

Small Group Analysis Paper

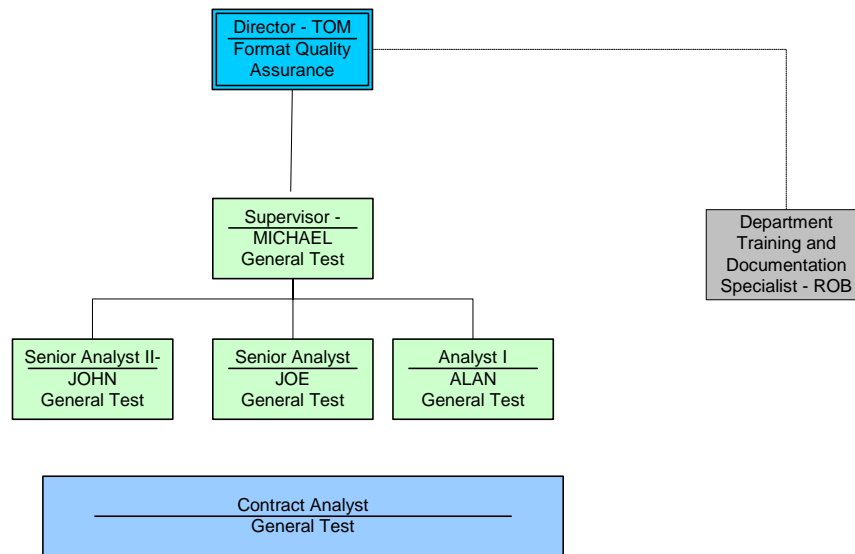
Submitted by:

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The group I observed for this assignment consisted of five individuals from the Format Quality Assurance Team at Sony Computer Entertainment. My boyfriend, Rob, works in this group, and arranged for me to observe the group on two occasions in a professional setting. The concept of my observing the team for purposes of a graduate school project was presented to the group by Rob and with the group’s consent, my observations were scheduled. Both observations occurred at the weekly Friday morning “Senior Analyst Team Meeting”. I observed the group for 3 hours total; consisting of two - 1.5 hour meetings on Friday, October 29 and Friday, November 5, 2004.

To begin, it is important to share an organizational structure which is depicted below in **Graph A**. In addition, to follow is my understanding of the group’s roles, responsibilities, key objectives and goals.



Sony Format QA – General Test Team – “Graph A”

Director: Tom is the Director. (Tom did not attend the meetings I observed; the data I collected on Tom was from Rob.) However, Tom is the leader of the group recognized by both the Organization and Team members. Tom is responsible in total for 135 employees; 75 of whom are full-time employees, the remainder representing contract employees. The primary function of the Quality Assurance Department is to test final production game software for adherence to documented platform standards and general functional stability prior to manufacture for market release. Tom's primary responsibility to this group is to coordinate departmental resources and provide the vision necessary for thorough and accurate testing of pre-market release software.

Supervisor: Michael is the Supervisor who is responsible for daily operations and management of the General Test Group. He is also the liaison between contract staff employees who conduct daily test activities and Game Publishers. Michael's responsibility is to make sure that the bug reports are written and communicated effectively before sending to the Publishers as well as delivering the overall message of the report. Michael is also responsible for first-line annual reviews of the contract staff.

Senior Analysts: Joe, Allan and John. Senior Analysts are full-time employees who participate in the testing process as well. However, they are considered to be an authoritative knowledge base (Subject Matter Experts) on testing standards. For example, whenever there is ambiguity on testing procedures, methods, standards, or an interpretation of issues, the Senior Analysts are responsible for escalating issues through a rigorous process. All Senior Analysts report to Tom.

Contract Analysts: Primary responsibility is to test game and report bugs. I did not observe this group. However, they play keenly into this assignment because the majority of my observations of the Senior Analyst group focused on discussion regarding this group.

I initially observed the group with two theories in mind which I selected from the Recommended Readings. One source was Leland P. Bradford, Dorothy Stock and Murray Horowitz' work entitled "*How to Diagnose Group Problems*" and Daniel C. Feldman's work in "*Diagnosing and Changing Group Norms*". The reason I chose these two sources was because they focused more on Group Behavior vs. Team or Organization Behavior. Given the background I had that this group was a departmental group within an organization, the amount of time I would be able to spend with the group, and my passion for group dynamics, I focused on these two models initially.

Ultimately, I chose Feldman's work as my first model in which to view this group because Feldman spends a great deal of time focusing on the norms of groups and cites established patterns and pitfalls for consultants to be aware. Whereas, Bradford, Stock and Horwitz focus on Group Conflict, Apathy and Inadequate Decision Making. The thrust of Feldman's work is focused not on the common resistance regarding formal change in an organization, but, rather discussing the norms of a group based on a group's resistance to change because they are steeped in what Feldman calls,

"Informal obligations, mutual expectations and long-standing relationships that have developed in an organization over time."

Feldman's model concentrates on how group norms develop, why they are enforced, how to diagnose and finally, change them to achieve effectiveness. This group had been together for 3 years, so I assumed that Feldman's observation of the informal obligation and expectation norms might be present in this group. Also, Feldman often depicts scenarios of training groups which is an important function of the Quality Assurance Department and members go through rigorous training of testing policy and procedure.

The Lead Analyst Group met at 8am with no official agenda, so to speak. The weekly meeting by all appearances had an informational goal to "check-in and update" on issues in the General Test Group that week. The only stated item was mentioned was by Rob who had joined the meeting to formally introduce me and discuss his transition from Format QA to the Information Design Group at Sony.

John led the group discussion airing an observation delivered in a grievance tone that he had witnessed some of the contract workers 'making personal phone calls on the job'. According to Feldman, group norms develop in four ways. One method, I saw prevalent in this group which mapped to Feldman is that the group develops norms on the "Explicit statements by supervisors or co-workers". I learned from Rob the clear direction of the group given by Tom was that they were physically placed in strategic worksites (cubes) throughout the QA department so they could observe and help the contract analysts in the case of Tom's absence which incidentally was about 80% of the time. So, while Tom constructed this team who had considerable knowledge and experience in the QA process

at Sony, their real stated goal as a group was to be the “eyes and ears” for the Leader. This example must be what Feldman means when he explains, the meaning of “Explicit statements of supervisors...” Feldman quotes Whyte and avers that these “Norms facilitate group survival or task success...(Whyte, 1995). So, the group’s survival is founded on the premise that they are “chosen” by Tom to an elevated status within his organization with the goal of policing the contract analysts.

I observed the group’s behavior when John brought up the subject of employee conduct and the group was in consensus that this was not appropriate professional behavior. Rob questioned if Michael, the Supervisor of the Contract Analysts had been invited to the meeting. Joe replied that “he had a standing invitation, but his attendance was spotty.” The group then engaged in other grievances about contract employees ranging from tardiness to other work ethic issues for the remainder of the session save for Rob’s announcement. The group was in consensus that action should be taken in the form of a written policy to incorporate in a company procedural manual. Rob reminded the other group members that employee conduct was already documented in that manual and the group would have to work through Michael to get any amendments or additions approved. The group seemingly ignored Rob’s recommendation by talking over his comment and then, Alan spoke up and declared he would write up the policy addition to send to Tom for approval. The group reached consensus on the action item(s) and adjourned. All other verbal and physical cues indicated to me, that the group had been functioning together well for a long period of time. There was no dissention; only

agreement. And, interruption was accepted, allowed and, in most cases, the floor was won by the louder individual.

On the subject of “Why Group Norms are Enforced”, Feldman states, “...groups and organizations enforce norms that pertain to behaviors that are perceived to as important or significant to the unit”. My observation is that Lead Analysts believe their behavior of monitoring contract employees’ work ethic is central to their maintaining their status as Lead Analyst; a select and distinguished group. I observed passion, energy and detailed history being shared around these issues. This led me to conclude that it is a norm to bring these issues to bear in their weekly meetings as part of a central goal of the group’s survival. Feldman also speaks to the point further about “Facilitating Group Survival”. In this discussion, Feldman asserts that groups will establish whole sets of behaviors to try and block a consultant (or facilitator) from learning the real problems of the group. This tenet of Feldman’s requires more monitoring of the group. I believe that part of the group’s cohesion and conformance to norms is based on a few distinct factors: 1) they share a history as a work group, set apart because of their skill set, knowledge and experience within their department; 2) they all share a common passion for “Gaming” and; 3) their distinction in the organization at least on a departmental level, allows them to remain somewhat autonomous. Point 3 can be best illustrated by the organizational chart. While on the chart, it appears that the Lead Analysts report to the Supervisor, Michael, in fact, they do not. They report individually to Tom, who in reality is not a ‘present’ leader. Tom’s lack of presence at work creates autonomy for the Lead Analysts because they have no one to lead and guide them. Hence, each member in the group

maintains their individual autonomy at work by staying “tight” as a group. Their tasks are the same, yet they function as individual contributors and peers. Meaning, Lead Analysts do not rely on one another in a work flow process. There must be occasions where the Group meets to discuss testing policy and procedure with the simple goal of information sharing and knowledge transfer. Yet, I did not witness that dialogue in my first observation.

Upon my second observation of the group, Michael, the Supervisor joined the meeting; Rob did not. The meeting began with Michael updating the group on some of the releases that had been postponed by the QA process. Allan then spoke and followed up the action items of the last group meeting. I did observe that the Senior Analysts all sat in the same chairs as the meeting prior. Michael looked frenzied and sat two chairs down from the group at the table near the door. Feldman discusses this behavioral norm in the concept of “Primacy”. These behaviors have little impact on the task the group is attempting to perform, but they give the group a sense of routine and stability. The basic concept of primacy is that certain behaviors are established at the beginning of a group, which can affect the group throughout its lifetime and as a result, these behaviors go “unquestioned” and can be reinforced if gone unnoticed by facilitators or consultants attempting to help the group to function more effectively. Feldman uses the example that if OD efforts are implemented in a union company and the union is not included from the beginning; the union team may feel “left out” and choose not to participate in the organizational effort. So, it is very important as a consultant to look for these norms when diagnosing a group’s

behavior because if overlooked, the intervention could be thwarted by seemingly innocuous norms.

In Diagnosing Group Norms, Feldman speaks of “nontask areas that norms cluster”.

What he is describing here is norms that are outside of the tasks of the group. One of the areas that were clearly a nontask norm for the group was around work ethic. Each of the Lead Analysts including Rob and Michael had all been lowly Analysts at some point. (It is the career path at Sony for the QA department .) Therefore, all of the Lead Analysts had an established work ethic of working “heads down”. So, when they saw “younger” Analysts working in a fashion that did not meet their criteria, they became enraged. This nontask norm coupled with the fact that Tom mandated the group to be his “eyes and ears” resulted in meetings discussing nontask norms versus task norms. Also, there could be a norm here that contract employees are considered “less than”. However, it was difficult to discern and I’m not sure the group would have owned that norm.

Feldman admits that it is easier to change norms at the beginning of a group rather in a mature group. The change management piece as I see it for this group would be an organizational reporting structure change followed by implementing team processes and team building. These appear to be bright individuals with keen experience, but as a consultant, I would use this data to illustrate that their experience is not being used effectively. The question could be posed, “Is this Groups goals and lack of organizational structure and leadership creating any cash outflows for Sony?” Most likely, no. But, the missed opportunity of building a team by leveraging their skills and

competencies to create greater efficiencies in the organization, to think out of the box, build leadership skills and emulate the corporate vision is definitely a missed opportunity.

The second model I chose for analysis fed by my observations of the group is Adriane P. Beck's, "*Developmental Characteristics of the System Forming Process*". Beck's general model has been applied to Psychotherapy Groups as well as Group Systems Developmental Theory. Beck has a nine-staged approach which somewhat tracks Tuckman and the Group Organics Model authored by Catherine Lilly and Stas' Kazmierski. Beck theory embarks with group identification and agreement to be a working functional group much like Tuckman's Forming Stage. Phase II is establishment of group identity, tasks and directions are on the table to be discovered. This stage is also where different types of roles emerge in the group such as the Emotional Leader, Task Leader, Scapegoat or Divergent. How well Phase II goes according to Beck is dependent on how differences are handled by the Group. Here, the group is developing comfortable norms. Phase III is where storming can most likely occur. Also, a key element of Phase III is Interpersonal Learning. Interpersonal Learning is a theory introduced by Irv Yalom in his model of Therapeutic Factors of Group Therapy Model. The major crux of Interpersonal Learning is that one of life lessons is that [we] don't always get what we expect in life and that is a universal principle. So, in Phase III when a group learns that the "unexpected" happens and it can be difficult to digest, conflict can arise do to the discomfort and yet, it is comforting to learn that other members of the group share a similar experience. There is an interpersonal process that occurs when we have to look at our own patterns, reactions and expectations as an individual and as a member of a group.

In this phase, after storming, a group's sense of safety can now be established by the fact that they are forming a more comfortable base for an authentic-self to be present in the group. Beck's Phase IV the group can be viewed as re-norming or where there is rising energy of the group around safety, sense of team and aligned purpose. Beck goes further with this theory in Phase V which can be best described as the Enchantment Stage. This stage is where the group is functioning fluidly and accomplishing its goals. Phase VI is where the group struggles with autonomy vs. intimacy. Do we become maintain as a high-functioning group or do we break off on our own? I often think of members of rock bands when I think of Phase VI. A member experiences high-performance within a group and considers breaking off on their own. Often in Phase VI according to Beck, groups will restructure and find a new leader. Phase VII deals with creativity in the group, new ways to solve problems and Phases VIII and IX deal with termination and goodbyes of the group.

How does the Quality Assurance Format Team I observed match to Beck's goals? Based on my observations, I would say they mapped quite well to the first V stages of Beck's models of group development. I had to leave some room for interpretation and also collected some data from Rob. But, despite the fact that the group convened in my presence largely to review contract employees' behavior, and they had no clear authority to change that behavior is not the point. The team has established norms as evident in talking styles, consensus forming, seating arrangements, group purpose was clear and group identity solid. The group had a Task Leader and a Scapegoat. (Alan and Michael respectively.) I did not observe the group storming. But, I did observe the group collude

when Michael raised the subject of whether or not it was appropriate for the group to write up a policy and send to Tom without his inclusion in the process. The group maintained a united front stating that Michael was too busy (Joe cited that Michael worked 80 hours a week and had not taken a vacation in 2 years!) and that Tom had asked them to be the “leading examples” for all General Test Group employees. Michael insisted that he be included in the process, but the group again led by Alan at this point, stated that they reported to Tom on all aspects of the QA process and if that included employee process, then “so be it”. The Lead Analysts position was that Tom could approve their policy and procedure and send to Michael to implement in the Procedural Document which would then subsequently be used as a metric in performance reviews. The conversation definitely got heated and the group remained cohesive and in my observation, slightly dismissive of Michael.

In conclusion, I found it fascinating that this group had no real management authority, but convened to critique behavior that management should try to effectively change. Yet, the only deliverable of change they were empowered to create was a report to their Leader who was ultimately responsible, but not directly managing the very people they were critiquing. Rob helped and filled me in on some data. Michael was over-worked as a result of Tom’s absence. Michael could not effectively oversee the 55 contract employees given his workload. He often relied on the staffing company who supplies Sony with the contract employees to rigorously screen candidates and then on the Training Organization to make sure that they were well-trained in their job responsibilities. If management issues arose after those two safeguards, then Michael

would prioritize as needed. However, the contract analysts are not really a big efficiency problem at Sony, but the perceived role of this group as given by their Leader, forced this group to focus on “what was wrong” versus tasks and goals which created operational efficiencies and/or cost reductions. Despite this truth, the group was aligned and had established norms that seemed to function very well for them in my two observations.

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