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Crestview Junior Tournament Committee

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## Introduction

The following analysis of The Crestview Junior tournament committee is based on observation at two meetings, attendance at the committee's two-day tournament, and meeting minutes. Following a brief background on the committee, I have used two models to analyze the group. Wheelan's (1994) Integrative Model of Group Development was useful for analyzing overall how the committee currently functions as a group. Katzenbach's and Smith's (1993) Team Basics Model was useful for determining more specifically what stands in the committee's way.

## Committee Background

Crestview Country Club, located in Crestview, CA, is host to The Crestview Junior, an annual two-day event attended by 200+ of the top-rated junior golfers in Northern California. The event has earned a "premier" status based on various criteria. The tournament committee is comprised of 14 committee members who meet monthly, beginning in November, to prepare for the tournament. The tournament is hosted in early Spring. Of the 14 committee members, 10 belong to Crestview Country Club and have children who participate in the junior golf program; three of the committee members are not members of Crestview Country Club; one committee member is a golf professional who is a Crestview employee. Four of the 14 committee members are new to the committee this year. The current tournament Chairperson has served in his role for five years.

In addition to the Chairperson, the committee has a Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer, and Secretary. Various committee members have manager roles for the tournament including registration, transportation, operations, food and beverage, volunteers, driving range, awards, and scoring.

The tournament committee is a sub-committee of the club's golf operations committee. The tournament Chairperson reports to the Golf Operations Chairperson who is also a member of the country club. In addition, the tournament committee requires the support of the club's General Manager and the Director of Golf who are paid, full-time employees of the club. Despite these various relationships, the tournament committee essentially operates autonomously.

While there was no discussion of specific purpose or goals, the Chairperson offered this at the final pre-event meeting, "Remember, the goal is positive feedback and no complaints."

### Analysis

In the first stage of the Integrative Model of Group Development, dependency and inclusion, members depend heavily on the designated leader as the group begins its formation or as new members enter. They carefully navigate the territory and are cautious about what they say and do for fear of rejection or retaliation (Wheelan, 1994, pp. 14-15).

Overall, the tournament committee appeared to have moved through the dependency and inclusion stage. As stated in the committee background, although the majority of the committee members have previously worked together to coordinate the tournament, four new members have recently entered the group. This change in membership implies that this committee, as whole, is a newly forming group (Whelan, 1994, p. 14). Using the "Who Talks to Whom" method of observing communication, I noted that the majority of communication flowed directly from the Chairperson to individual committee members and back (Bradford, Stock, and Horwitz, 1978, p. 75). The Chairperson would frequently confer with the Vice Chairperson about the various discussion points. There were few statements made to the group as a whole or between committee members. Initially, I observed this communication pattern as a sign of dependency on the leader; however, other signs of the dependency and inclusion stage, such as fears, anxieties,

and minimal work accomplishment were absent (Wheelan, 1994, p. 15). Ultimately, the observation seemed indicative of a communication network rather than a group development stage. Specifically, the group was experiencing a centralized communication network which, according to Wheelan (1994), typically is also reflected in the group's work; information goes to one person, in this case the Chairperson, who solves the problem and then confirms their solution with someone else, in this case, the Vice Chairperson (p. 30). This type of communication pattern, while temporarily efficient, will ultimately erode member satisfaction and inhibit the group's development (Wheelan, 1994, p. 31).

The second stage of the Integrative Model of Group Development is counterdependency and fight which is characterized by conflict as members begin to struggle with how they will work together. Group members also begin to free themselves from the authority figure during this stage (Wheelan, 1994, pp. 15-16). By the time I observed the tournament committee, the new members were generally settled into their roles, and the experienced members were actively using their past tournament experience to complete the delegation of responsibilities and tasks. The group did, however, experience conflict. For example, a new committee member attempted to propose a last minute idea about changing a particular task. The Chairperson was firm about his position and appeared not willing to listen actively to the suggestion from the new member. Another point of conflict resulted when various members attempted to free themselves from the Chairperson. This was particularly evident when the Chairperson distributed a detailed, minute-by-minute timeline for the day of the event. While some members made humor of it, one person tore the timeline in half and stated, "I don't need to be micromanaged." Overall, I did not conclude that the committee was stuck in conflict. However, there may be ongoing issues related to the Chairperson's micro-management style.

The third stage in Wheelan's (1994) model is trust and structure, which results from a flow of open and task-oriented communication and successful emergence from conflict (pp. 16-17). With tensions and emotions out of the way, a team in this stage is able to focus on their task (Wheelan, 1994, p. 17). The heavy focus on roles and responsibilities and the past experience of tenured committee members did provide the group with structure for task execution. However, communication did not flow easily, particularly when the committee was stuck in a centralized, structured communication network. From a trust standpoint, it appeared that the Chairperson did not completely trust that the members would successfully execute, and the members, in turn, were concerned about the being micro-managed. There were few, if any, indications of group-building (Nandy, 1991).

The fourth stage of the Integrative Model of Group Development is work, which is characterized by the group's ability to formulate and share ideas that result in a product. Members use available resources and open communication as tools for task completion (Wheelan, 1994, pp. 17-18). Prior to the two-day tournament, the committee's work consisted of task planning, delegation, and follow-up. After the event, their work consisted of debriefing the event, wrapping up post-tournament details, and compiling a list of recommendations for next year. During the event, their work focused heavily on execution. Despite the fact that the committee struggled in earlier stages of group development, they appeared to work together during the tournament like a "well oiled machine." Their energy and enthusiasm was high, and everyone pitched in with the exception of one committee member who independently chose to watch the tournament instead of working. There were several examples of "on the spot" creative decision-making and problem-solving, independent of the Chairperson, which may be attributed

to the fact that the communication network changed to a decentralized structure. The Chairperson stepped away from his previous style and made room for the committee to execute.

The fifth stage of the Integrative Model of Group Development, termination, occurs when either the group completes their work and they permanently disband, or the group completes a particular task. High functioning groups will use termination as an opportunity to evaluate their work, provide feedback, and share feelings. Often, in their debriefing, the group will revert to earlier stages of the model, particularly the conflict stage (Wheelan, 1994, pp. 18-19).

The committee began their termination process immediately after the second day of the tournament by celebrating at a local restaurant. The termination continued one week later at the tournament debriefing. At the beginning of the debriefing meeting, the Chairperson distributed thank you notes and a small gift to each committee member. I noted, however, that a committee member actually wrote the notes for the Chairperson and, therefore, she did not receive a card or gift. Similarly, the committee did not formally thank or recognize the Chairperson. While there was an attempt on the part of some to share feelings, it was not all-inclusive. Again, the committee may lack an awareness of group-building roles and skills.

During the debriefing, the Chairperson specifically asked the committee to report, one at a time, on "What we can do better next year." The committee members, however, took it upon themselves to also report, "What we did really well." Several committee members, but not everyone, received specific positive feedback about their contributions. The group also reminisced about the event and referenced their "post event let down." Eventually, as is typical of the termination process, the committee reverted to the conflict stage (Wheelan, 1994, p. 18).

There were two major conflicts during the termination process. First, emotions ran high when the committee learned that the Chairperson had unilaterally reversed the group's decision

— which was previously documented in meeting minutes — about the maximum number of participants they would accept into the tournament. The night before the tournament, the Chairperson added four more players. When several members confronted him, he put it back to the group, told them to “Work this out” and then left the room. I observed this as avoidance/flight, particularly since he is the only member not in favor of reducing the number of contestants. With no clear decision making process in place, the group ultimately decided to revisit the issue — more flight and avoidance — next year.

The second point of conflict revolved around a committee member’s dissatisfaction with the Treasurer, who was not present at the debriefing. Specifically, the committee member was dissatisfied with the Treasurer’s lack of active participation during the two-day event. Contrary to the committee’s explicit agreement — everyone will work and everyone will keep their cell phones on for easy access — the Treasurer watched his son play in the tournament and had his cell phone turned off. Eventually, the group returned to the work of terminating by wrapping up the post-tournament details.

In addition to The Integrative Model of Group Development, the Team Basics model was useful for analyzing the tournament committee. According to Katzenbach and Smith (1993), “A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (p. 45).

While I have not integrated the entire Team Basics model, several components were particularly useful for analyzing what stands in the committee’s way. For example, the Team Basics model presents three categories of complementary skills necessary for a team to do their job. The first category is technical or functional expertise (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p. 47).

The tournament committee has consciously delegated responsibilities according to the members' skills and expertise. For example, the Vice Chairperson uses his computer skills to create the various forms, pairing sheets and scorecards that are required for the event. He also maintains a thorough database of current and past contestants. The Treasurer, an accountant, uses his skills to maintain the committee's budget. Another committee member used his public speaking skills to serve as master of ceremonies for the event. The committee does not, however, have all of the tools they need to effectively function. For example, while the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Secretary have a good grasp on the myriad of tasks required to coordinate the tournament successfully, the committee has very little of this knowledge in writing. An operations manual, including job descriptions and policies and procedures might empower the members to execute more fully and independently and reduce the tensions associated with being micromanaged by the leadership.

The second category of complementary skills is problem-solving/decision-making (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p. 47). The committee's decision-making method, in particular, stands in their way. They do not engage in rich discussion when solving problems and making decisions. When they do discuss, not everyone is heard and, frequently, the group defers to the Chairperson and/or Vice Chairperson. Additionally, they do not have a specific voting process. Occasionally they show a raise of hands for a majority ruling, but that method is used only sporadically. A larger issue, however, lies in the fact that, even when the committee believes they have made a decision based on majority ruling, the Chairperson covertly overturns the decision. This behavior ultimately has a negative effect on the committee's trust in their leader.

Interpersonal skills, which are necessary for creating common understanding and constructive conflict, represent the third category of complementary skills (Katzenbach and

Smith, 1993 p. 48). The committee's team functioning could improve if they were able to use interpersonal skills to manage conflict and deliver constructive and negative feedback. Various members of the group became emotional, frustrated, and stubborn when defending their positions. Developing their ability to listen actively and objectively and challenge assumptions would be productive.

Wheelan (1994) indicates that groups should aspire to a 60:40 task:maintenance ratio (p. 32). I observed (approximately) an 80:20 ratio. My observation is that the committee members take on group-task roles but rarely group-building roles. While several committee members do provide positive feedback to one another, more emphasis on group-building would enhance interpersonal skills and help to develop the team's ability to, for example, productively confront one another, effectively collaborate, and build on one another's ideas (Nandy, 1991, pp. 92-96).

Another key component of the Team Basics model is common purpose and performance goals (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p. 49). While the Chairperson has stated his goal for "positive feedback and no complaints," the committee as a whole has not created a purpose statement. Common purpose creates a positive tone and helps to clarify the work of the team (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p. 49). A rich discussion about "Why are we here?" and "What is our purpose?" would provide a stronger foundation and also serve as a useful exercise for developing skills such as active listening, appreciative inquiry, and testing assumptions. Additionally, specific, measurable goals tied to a rich purpose statement could ultimately improve individual performance and serve as a map for decision making. For example, the Chairperson frequently states that he wants to maintain the tournament's premier status awarded by the state's junior golf association. However, the majority of the committee members are

unclear about the specific criteria used by the association. A purpose statement and specific goals that address the tournament's premier status could provide clearer direction and accountability.

Mutual accountability naturally occurs from team purpose and performance goals. When teams are mutually accountable for their work, trust ensues (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993, p. 60). Based on my observations, committee members least trust the Chairperson and the Treasurer. Neither the Chairperson nor the Treasurer consistently hold themselves accountable to the group's administrative and group-functioning decisions. The committee, as a whole, also does not hold the Chairperson or Treasurer directly accountable to key decisions and performance norms. Skill building around mutual accountability and productive confrontation would serve this team well.

In conclusion, although the committee navigated the five stages of group development, there are clearly some things getting in their way. While I would not characterize this group as dysfunctional, neither would I characterize them as highly functioning. What works for this group is their genuine passion for junior golf and their experience in hosting the tournament. The majority of the members are very task-oriented which is good for this type of project that does not require a lot of strategy and/or analysis. While they are willing to coordinate their activities, true collaboration could be improved. Committee members are also generally willing to overlook some weaknesses in leadership; however, improvement in the Chairperson's skills would result in a higher degree of trust and mutual accountability. In general, the members of the committee are congenial, cooperative, task-oriented, and well intentioned. If they changed nothing, they would continue to complete their task each year. However, if they invested time and energy in enhancing their development as a group, they would experience a higher degree of cohesion and effectiveness.

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