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                    School and Community Meetings

Meeting at my school:

        Recently, I attended a faculty meeting held at Rawls Byrd elementary school. The
meeting was held in the morning before students had arrived and classes began. The topic
being discussed was the findings of the Time Cohort Group, which appeared to be
composed entirely by the centers (physical education, art, music, computer, and library)
teachers. The proposal that they were reviewing was "The inequity of time allotted for
things like centers in small schools such as Rawls Byrd as compared to larger schools
such as Norge and Stonehouse Elementary."
        1. Unfortunately, rather than seeing the team work first-hand, much of this
meeting reviewed the process which the Time Cohort team had gone through when
discussing their topic at hand. From the form that the presentation took, it appeared that
the group had chosen one teacher as a representative of the group to present their findings.
Based on the information given during the meeting, it seemed that the team had worked
together to create "pros" and "cons" to the proposed idea of sending one centers teacher a
week to another school to teacher an additional center for that larger school.
        As a larger group, however, the rest of the faculty functioned as an extended team
for this smaller group of teachers. The principal and the selected centers teacher took
turns speaking to the faculty as a group, faculty members were able to ask questions or
add information during the presentation, and all were invited to make suggestions or ask
questions at the end. The use of a Power Point presentation was very conducive for
individuals who are more "Gold" while the invitation for others to share their thoughts
and opinions seemed to be a rather "Blue" approach. There were some facts and
information presented which would work well for "Green" personalities, but I do not
believe that the meeting would have worked well for "Orange" personalities. However, I
do not believe this meeting was a good example of how a team uses a consensus
decision-making process, and there was little conflict, so resolution styles were also not
very evident.
        2. As just mentioned, there was little conflict during this meeting. Much of the
faculty meeting was informational. However, some teachers expressed that they did not
approve of the idea which was being presented and felt that it would be harmful to our
school and our students. The teacher who represented the Time Cohort team seemed to be
using a hummingbird conflict resolution style. He did not just agree with whatever was
said, but acknowledged the ways in which he did agree but also asked for others to have
their opinions as well.
        3. I feel that in order to allow other faculty members to feel like they are more
involved in the collaboration process, the Time Cohort could have shared some
information with the faculty ahead of time so that they could come up with ideas which
would be relevant solutions and contributions. Or another approach would be to hold a
quick follow-up meeting in which faculty members could present their ideas. As it
currently stands, the centers teacher needs to present the Time Cohort Team's findings to
the school board and there is no time for teachers to share formal feed-back. Additionally,

the only reason we as a faculty were able to be part of this process was due to the centers teacher's meeting with the school board members being cancelled for the snow day.

  4. I did not directly participate in this meeting. I was a participant in that I sat in the meeting with the rest of the faculty, but I did not have anything suggestions to add to the meeting during that time.

  5. I believe that I have learned that as a faculty member, I may be called to be on a team which needs to work on presenting both sides of a proposal, even when I strongly disagree with one side or the other. It is my job to be as objective as possible in finding all sides of the issue and presenting them to others.

Larger Community Meeting:

  During the month of February, I attended a local school board meeting for Williamsburg James City County. There were a number of topics discussed during this meeting including the superintendent's proposed budget, the VA Arts Festival: World Class Education, and the James Blair Feasibility Study. This meeting was open to the public and there were community members and teachers in attendance as well as the board members. The members of the board were seated in the front of the room facing toward the members of the public who were present in the room. They each had microphones, and there was a podium in the middle of the audience area facing toward the board members where public citizens could address the board. The board was composed of three men and three women.

  1. This meeting displayed a much more formal example of the effectiveness of team and consensus decision-making process than the faculty meeting I saw at my school. As described in *Five Steps for Team Building: How to Create and Nurture Teams*, this team showed several of the steps used in working as a team. During the meeting, the members used an agenda which would meet some of the needs of Gold personalities. From what I observed, each member of the board also had an assumed team role to fulfill as part of the team. Additionally, the board members seemed to be monitoring their verbal and non-verbal behaviors. It was obvious that some of the members felt very strongly about issues, particularly concerning the cost of a study to be conducted about James Blair school. With such strong feelings, the meeting could have gotten out of hand quickly if the members did not control themselves.

  When decisions needed to be made, the board members followed a prescribed format for making decisions. The issue at hand would be described and then deliberated by members and sometimes public citizens until there was no more discussion to be made or if all debate about the issue had ceased because it was recognized that opinions were not going to be changed. At that point, one member would put the issue to a vote. Each board member would verbally announce their vote to either approve or deny the proposal being voted upon. Since there were six members, I am not sure how a tie might have been resolved, but there were no ties during my observation. The decisions were simply based upon which side had the greater number of votes.

  2. Due to the public and formal nature of the meeting, I feel that many board members kept their conflict resolution styles in check, but there appeared to be some members displaying identifiable styles. One member particularly seemed to be a woodpecker or owl style. He strongly disagreed with the proposal for the James Blair

study, and made his feelings evident. I am not certain if he would really be a woodpecker because the concern he displayed did not seem to be centered on himself, however there appeared to be no arguments that would possibly sway him in the slightest. In responding, other members of the board appeared to display conflict styles more in tune with hummingbirds. They acknowledged the more aggressive member's feelings but were also accepting of the information presented to them about the study. They were not strongly swayed by the woodpecker nature of the one member, which was evident in the fact that the member who was strongly opposed to the study lost in the decision-making vote.

I feel that the strong temperament and feelings displayed by the member against the study were important for the group and did serve them in certain ways. Admittedly, if this member had not voiced his opinion, there would have been less conflict about the issue. Community members would have presented their concerns to the board, but it did not appear that any of the other board members were willing to make a stand on the issue. Without this vocal board member, perhaps community members would have not felt comfortable to speak up and maybe some ideas to challenge the proposal would have never been heard. Even if the group still voted against his argument, this member served the team.

3. Next time, I feel that this team would benefit from all members of the board actively participating in the debate about the issue to be voted upon. During the discussion about James Blair, it was not apparent what all board members felt. When the final vote came, I actually found myself surprised by their votes. If all of the board members had presented their ideas, there would have been a greater range of ideas and more diversity of beliefs could have been expressed. Additionally, members could voice that although they may not personally agree with a proposal, they could defend it by saying how it might benefit the school system.

4. I did not participate in this meeting beyond the position of an observer. I did not have a background or any relevant knowledge that could have added to what was being discussed, so I felt it was best that I observe the process.

5. As I begin my teaching career, I will definitely remember how much can be learned about what goes on during board meetings. I found that the teachers in my school learned about what was discussed at the board meeting that night weeks after I already knew about it. The teachers on our kindergarten team were discussing what a "waste of money all these consultations are," and then started discussing that they had heard the school board had approved financing the study of James Blair school. As an educator and a community member, I feel that it is important that I am aware about what is going on in my community, so I will look toward school board meetings as my way to contribute to the process and stay knowledgeable about what is going on in my school system.