

Date: 10/31/96
To: Ronald Heifetz
From: Vladimir Petit Medina (mc-mpa)
Subject: Group Study Questionnaire (Form II)
Group F Week : 6th

Special Assignment : Juntao's case or learning from the large class

1) Are there common or are there competing conceptions of purpose in the group? What effect does this have on the group's ability to proceed with the task?

After two months, we may easily conclude that there are still competing conceptions of the purpose of the group. In fact, in spite of the efforts that Professor Heifetz has made to let the class flows to its own equilibrium point, many people still do not understand his methods and his special way of teaching. So, multiple conceptions of the purpose of the class emerged from many people's interventions in every single session of the large group. Then, the dynamic is an attempt of moving forward but it has the great value of being a part of the trial and error system. This discrepancy over the purpose causes some distraction and in some cases it forced the class to some work avoidance. Then, few people speak too much and many people decide to be apart or to get on the balcony.

The task that Thursday, was to analyze the case brought out by Juntao and in studying his personal experience, we were supposed to learn about leadership, the analysis of the whole system itself and the ways that a failure could be possible avoided. At the same time, we were to apply the new skills in order to improve our analytical capacity. However, many people began to be disturbed by Juntao's limited English and at the very beginning of the presentation they decided not to participate in the search.

2)What was the initial event of the group meeting?

When Professor Heifetz was about to initiate the random process to select the case presenter, someone expressed her thought that Juntao's case deserved to be the one to be presented that day with no other condition. Professor Heifetz asked the audience and many people supported the idea, but during their interventions they said something about the case presenter that increased the expectations of the classmates. How? It was very simple. just as an example, a senator said:..." I was case presenter this week and I was prepared to make my presentation but I think Juntao's case is the most important in the Kennedy School and so I strongly recommend to hear his case". I could feel the expectations and curiosity level increasing. Then Juntao started presenting the case, with the active help of professor Heifetz.

3)Was there any difference between what the CP identified as the leadership dilemma in the case and your own interpretation of the problem in the case? If so, what?

No, but having to know the case with more details it gave a different perspective of the Tiannamen massacre. The insight perspective destroys some of the pattern of that fact that many westerns have studied as a historical beginning of the freedom process in China. But the simplicity of the intentions and the candid explanations forced to a new conclusion: the did not have a real idea of the kind of effects they could cause. What happened revealed a tremendous lack of expertise and a evident failure of leadership: the wrong assessment of the reality, the absence of a proper holding environment, the inefficient use of the enormous informal authority that Juntao had gained and, finally, the absence of something similar to the staying alive notion. I will explain those concepts in extent. Juntao was trying to say this but the people did not see it.

4) What was the primary hidden issue of the consultation group meeting and what was the underlying problem in the case? Was there any parallel? Did the initial event provide a clue?

The large class as a consultation group had to important hidden issue: 1) Juntao's limited English made some people feel that the case did not deserve attention, and:2) Juntao's candid explanations revealed some kind of complexity that not many were willing to accept. I knew that this was going to happen since the very beginning. Why ? Just because many people in the class just want to show off rather than learn and the most important lesson that Heifetz has taught me so far is that leadership is itself a learning process. The candid explanations and the complexity of the case made some people turned the head and I could see some kind of envy because of the type of help he was receiving from professor Heifetz. Something else appeared: the evident disinterest in those exotic examples from developing countries that are not usual and useful for those who live in developed countries. As a proof I invoke the fact that the previous case presenter before the large class had been another foreigner, as someone who was sitting close to me remembered. To reinforce this idea I also invoke the fact of the extremely discourteous intervention of an American woman who declared that she was sorry because after having listened to Juntao's case she thought that the case presenter of her group could help a lot with her case. This woman did not have an idea that she was attending the analysis of one of the most important political fact of the century and so, she was admitting that the case did not meet her expectations. She was so disconnected from the case that even the case of Christopher Columbus would not have deserved her attention because that man did not speak English as his native language. But, at least, that woman had enough courage to express what many people were whispering. I could hear them and I have to confess that it was one of the worst days of my life.

On the other hand, the underlying problem in the case was that those brave students were challenging one of the strongest states of the world without being so aware of what they were exactly doing. Then, in some way, those young Chinese were so idealistic that they wanted to call the attention to the cause of democratization, but did not assess the real dimension of the risk. So the assassination became. Therefore, they wanted to be taken into account as Juntao wanted in that class.

There was no parallel because the active work dynamic did not even start to work

5.- Identify the most productive intervention of the meeting. What made it so ?

I think Heifetz's continuous interventions were the most productive just because he was trying to help Juntao and the class

6.-Did the group use any work avoidance mechanism to maintain equilibrium? Did the people in the case use any work avoidance mechanisms to maintain equilibrium? If so, what were they? was there any similarity?

At tiannamen Square: Authorities did not want to face the demands of the students which were the same of almost the rest of the Chinese population. By ignoring the demands and just focusing on the act of rebellion the government just want to avoid to ripen an issue and its direction. The debate about these facts was held six months later and also I could be held at that very moment but authorities did not want to make any concession. The government feared of exploring the unfamiliar but at the same time wanted to give a lesson to those who wanted a rebellion against the existing status quo.

At the class: The people avoided the analysis of the case itself by not paying attention. Most classmates did not even know what Juntao was talking about. So, the equilibrium remained untouchable.

Similarity? Perhaps the fact that ignoring some issues and values was a common mechanism of work avoidance.

7.-How were you used by the group? Were you used well or poorly?

I was not used by the group in the proper way. Also, I decided to be apart because I was so shocked by some interventions and attitudes that I became depressed. It could be an incentive but I did not accept it like that. I became shocked and my capacity to response was suddenly affected. Many years in politics and I never saw an ingratitude like this. Then, I decided to reflect on it a while, and to prepare some kind of action to create the proper environment, later on.

8.-How was the chairperson used by the group?

Heifetz always does a great job. He was trying to help Juntao at the time he was directing the adaptive work. I regret that many of us do not want to take advantage of his skills.

9.- To whom did the group give informal authority and Why?

The group did not give informal authority to anybody. Many people have tried but the permanent competition has made it so difficult. Also I think that almost everybody considers himself a leader and that is not true.

10.-Identify one moment when you thought you had something worthwhile to say and you held yourself back?

Evidently when the fat woman expressed her sorrow. I really did want to say something important to awake those unconsciousness minds but I thought that it could be dangerous because I was out of control. I have faced many challenges in my life: shots, assaults, army operations and coups de etat, but nothing has driven me so crazy as this expression of ingratitude and incomprehension.

11.- What interplay between your own personal tuning and the dynamics of the small group account for your capacity to intervene? In what ways have the large class dynamics influenced your behavior?

In my case, for so many years I have been dancing in the stage. Now, I am learning to get on the balcony at the time that I began to experience a productive sensation: being led by someone rather than being leading someone. In fact, the constant search for leadership as a position to gain had made me a professional dancer with no real power over my own future. I was just following the music but I was not able to decide whether I wanted to continue dancing or not. The goal was just to continue dancing as a way to keep playing the real game of politics. But I have learned that leadership is an activity which implies values, responsibilities and mechanisms beyond the simple game. And I have been practicing the new skills by observing from the balcony. Sometimes I reflect back on my whole life, and sometimes I reflect on the actions of my own groupmates. So, having said this is much easier to understand why I have not wanted to exercise my capacity to intervene, so far. The large class dynamics are the lab in which I can experiment and practice my skills and my new perspective of leadership. The dynamics have influenced me in three aspects: a) I have seen how even an academic group can verify some kind of constant leadership disputes, then, is much easier to connect some facts with previous experiences; b) I have noticed to what extend the multiple hidden issues come out and the people insist on avoiding them which has made me aware of the times I have been looking for the real explanations without getting to the real point:c) I have experienced the anxiety caused by the search for a new equilibrium in times of increasing distress.

So the influence may be measured in terms of quality of the analysis and the level of the active learning.
And, I think that leadership demands the permanent assessment of the opportunity. I am working hard on it.

12.-Identify two key words from the group and discuss the relevance of their etymologies to the hidden issue?

1)**Disdain:** from dek, to take or to accept, with the suffixed form dek-no- and from Latin dignus, worthy, deserving. To regard or treat with haughty contempt. In few words, an open disrespect caused by the belief that something is not worthy or deserving. The large class did not assess properly the dimensions of the initial event. Juntao was the protagonist of one of the most important facts of contemporary history, which is the openness process of China, which was initiated by those students who did not have even an idea of the kind of martyr that the community will create upon their history. They did not estimate properly the honor of having one of the witness of the most brutal collective assassination of this century. This fact made the real adaptive work impossible, because the representation of the values of the case by the people in the class did not have the usual intensity, except the said absence of attention.

2)**Hostile:** from ghos-ti, stranger, guest, host and from Latin hostis, stranger. Hostile in the sense that some people were inhospitable with the story of one man who was making a big effort and the comprehension of the case and the analysis became severely damaged.