

SGA Cabinet Observation Project

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Small Group Communication

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Introduction:

The Student Government Association (SGA) is the leading organization at Pittsburg State University that contributes largely to the student body. The organization is made up of the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, 6 Cabinet members, Senators, and Advisors. SGA lobbies at Topeka for legislation that affects PSU students, allocates fee dollars to student organizations, decide how student's fees should be spent, and continuing to work for the betterment of Pittsburg State University. Our small group observed the President's cabinet. Meeting every Wednesday at 6:00 p.m., this gathering is to prepare members for the following senate meeting at 7:00 p.m. Taylor Gravett, *SGA President*, is the face of SGA. He oversees each cabinet member and is responsible for keeping them trained. He also attends monthly Kansas Board of Regents meetings, keeping up to date on higher education issues, and conversing with other Kansas regent schools. Gravett's schedule is intense with meetings, public engagements, ribbon cuttings, and speaking with constituents. Kiki Eigenmann, *SGA Vice-President*, is Gravett's right hand woman. Eigenmann is the person who keeps SGA together. She runs senate meetings and sets the agenda and procedure each week. She coordinates training for senate members and keeps them educated. Rodney Kimlin, *SGA Treasurer*, maintains the SGA budget and records all receipts and disbursements for the Association. Kimlin keeps SGA's spending in line with what was originally planned in their line item budget and accounts for these transactions. Tadd Lucian, *SGA Legislative Affairs Director*, is third in succession and is the President Pro Tempore of the senate. Lucian oversees a committee that is charged with recognizing and taking action on issues at a state and local level. He is the enforcer of the Student Government Association Constitution and is the person who makes sure SGA is following the correct policies and procedures. He also

travels each month with the President to the Kansas Board of Regents meetings. Bailey Peak, *SGA Academic Affairs Director*, is responsible for the promotion of activities that motivate academic success. She coordinates SGA's Educator of the Month and free scantrons for students. Peak also plans Apple day. Audrey Gilbreath, *SGA Campus Affairs Director*, is responsible for representing student concerns regarding campus facilities, parking, dining services, and campus safety. Gilbreath is in charge of poster and sidewalk guidelines and coordinating Pitt Points scholarships and the Campus Capitol Improvement (CCI) fund. Alyssa Marsh, *SGA Community Affairs Director*, promotes SGA's presence to the community. Marsh oversees a committee that organizes student discount programs and canned food drives. She also meets with the Pittsburg Chamber of Commerce. Joshua Packard, *SGA Public Relations Director*, oversees a committee that promotes SGA and its projects/events to the campus and community. Packard is always looking for ways to better promote PSU. Jake Letner, *SGA Big Event Director*, organizes the Big Event. This is the biggest volunteer event for college students. His job is to oversee the committee that works to fundraise and plan the event.

The President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and cabinet members are all paid positions. They're required to work 10-20 hours per week and are always available for students. They can be contacted by going into the SGA office or scheduling an appointment. During cabinet meeting, members are required to present to the group what they're currently working on as directors and discuss what they're doing in their separate committees. For instance, Audrey, Director of Campus Affairs, shares that her committee has finished up with the student surveys on the Campus Capital Improvement project and shows the findings. She then will discuss where her committee goes from there. This is an opportunity for Audrey to share this information and

get feedback from other directors and the President.

Structure

A group's culture is the pattern of beliefs, values, and norms that are shared by the members in the group. These patterns are developed as the group spends time together and creates its own culture. This culture is determined by the way they communicate with each other. The communication of a group is always changing and so the group's culture is always being slightly altered and amended. Structuration is the concept that a group forms and continuously reforms itself through the communication methods of members. How the group communicates, both verbally and nonverbally, determines how the group develops (Galanes 2013).

During SGA Cabinet meetings, members sit around an oval table facing the others in the group. Although there is no assigned seating, each member has adopted their own seat in which they sit in every week. There are only eight seats around the table and all members except Alyssa sit there. Because Alyssa is consistently late, she ends up sitting outside the circle at her desk.

The layout of the meetings was casual, but procedural. When the SGA Cabinet begins their meetings, the president, Taylor, usually starts with what needs to be discussed and how the meeting will proceed. If the president is not at the meeting for some reason (he was not in attendance during the first meeting that was observed because he was sick), the vice president, Kiki, will take his place in this role of initiating and orienting. Each cabinet member then each takes a turn talking about their area. They discuss what they are working on, relay new information, discuss any problems they might be having and suggest how other cabinet members can help. Other members are free to ask questions and propose ideas during the meeting. Meetings were always organized and discussion was task oriented. Each member always had

their turn to speak if they wanted to.

Most members are fairly active listeners, but some members are selective with their active listening and often seem like their minds are elsewhere. During one meeting that was observed, several cabinet members were eating their dinner during the meeting. Sometimes members take out their phones and seem to be completely tuned out. Rodney was either on his phone or his laptop in two of the three meetings that were observed. Audrey was on her tablet much of one meeting and in the third meeting that was observed, spent most of the time with her textbook, working on her homework. Alyssa regularly was faced away from the circle, doing other things at a desk or on her computer. Several times both Audrey and Alyssa would randomly exit the meetings individually and not come back for 10-15 minutes at a time. These type of behaviors seemed to go unnoticed most of the time by group members. If the group members did notice these behaviors, they didn't show any sign that they were annoyed or bothered by them. The behaviors were ignored by the other group members. Taylor, Kiki, Tadd, Jake, Bailey, and Josh actively listened during meetings and were attentive to the other members when they spoke; whereas, Rodney, Audrey, and Alyssa paid attention only when it was their turn to speak and the discussion had to do with their own topic. This is a general observation. There were times when these three members did actively listen to others, but in general, they only gave their full attention to the group when it had to do with their topics of discussion. We suggest that members of this group need to give more respect to other group members when they speak, be participant observers and active listen.

Analysis of Behavioral Functions

The behavioral function analysis was performed at the February 12th meeting of the SGA

Cabinet. This was the meeting that Alyssa was absent. There was a bit of tension beforehand because of an issue that had arisen about too many people going to an SGA function. It had upset a couple of the members. This was a very structured meeting, starting with Taylor speaking and giving an outline of the points that will be covered in the meeting. The roles as President and Vice President that Taylor and Kiki take on are noticeable in the meeting because they speak more than others and confidently. As the meeting goes on, Jake speaks once and pitches in every once in a while. Rodney stays quiet since he is the recorder of the meeting but still contributes. Tadd brings up a subject about the some of the members not being happy with him and that subject is ignored and moved on to the next subject. Bailey speaks once about scantrons being here and is then quiet the rest of the meeting. Josh also speaks once about t-shirts. The meeting went very smooth and casual and ended quickly. The analysis below shows the leadership roles of Taylor and Kiki immensely. Also, the chart will show a few of the behavioral functions of the members of the group during the meeting.

The diagram can be read from left to right. The names at the top of the chart can be matched with the behavioral functions with a number of tallies representing the frequency of the behavioral function used.

Behavioral Functions

	Bailey	Jake	Taylor	Kiki	Rodney	Josh	Tadd	Audrey
Initiating and Orienting			III			II		

Information Giving	I	I	I	II		I	II	I
Information Seeking	I							
Opinion Giving	II			I				I
Opinion Seeking	II			I			I	
Summarizing			I	I				
Coordinating			I					
Consensus Testing				II				
Recording			I		I			
Supporting				I		I		I
Tension Relieving		I						

From the chart above it is shown that every member of the group had spoken at least

once. The functions frequently used show the role of each member.

Leadership

The leadership in the SGA cabinet is powerful, perplex, and sometimes overwhelming. Leadership is defined by the influence exerted through communication that helps a group achieve goals; performance of a leadership function by any member (Galanes, 2013).

The members of the SGA's cabinet are all leaders and all individually have the power to influence each other's behaviors. They're all designated leaders. President Gravett and Vice-President Eignemann are the most powerful designated leader of SGA. They were elected into their positions in April of 2013, after running an on-campus campaign to the student body. Director Lucian uniquely was elected by the SGA senate for his position. The other 6 cabinet position were all appointed by President Gravett.

Although each member of the SGA cabinet has their own title and place, the leadership is all over the place. At times members are freely speaking at any given time, making powerful remarks about one another and pushing their opinion. While some members such as Bailey and Jake tend to sit back and wait for a chance to speak, everyone else has no problem voicing their opinion. At one point the leadership was so overwhelming, Kiki had to overpower the group and ask that everyone would refrain from speaking out and to raise their hand to speak.

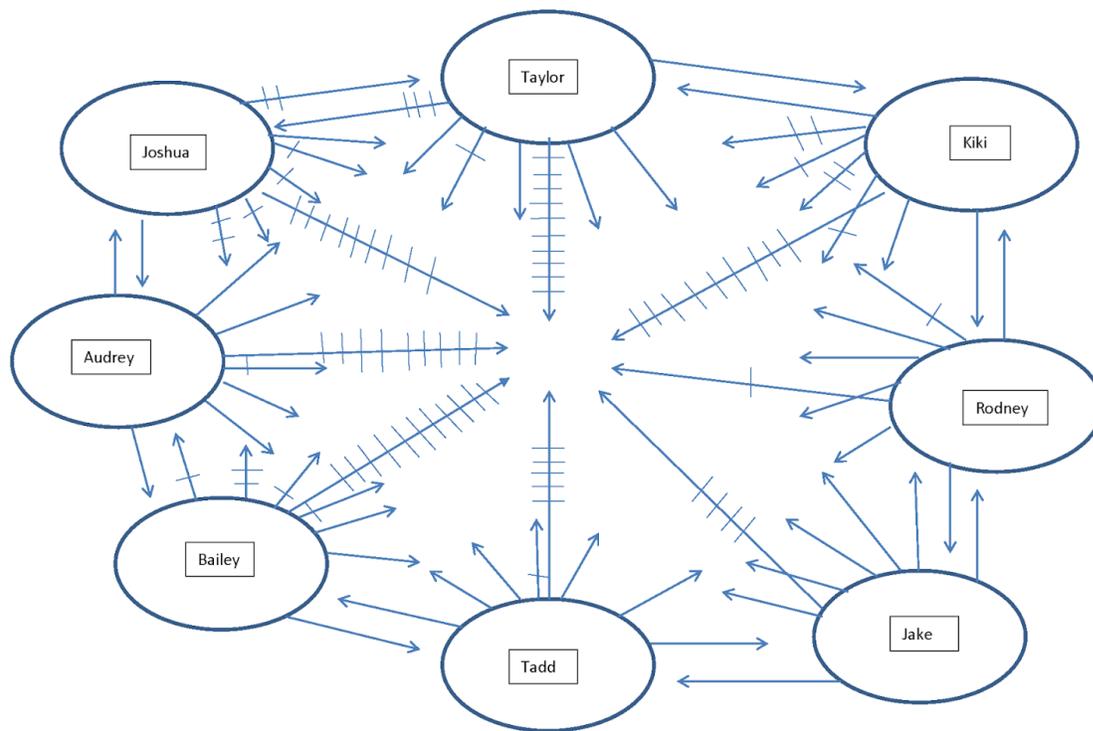
The leadership style of the group is mainly democratic but at times leans laissez-faire. A democratic leader encourages members to participate in group decisions, including policy-making decisions (Galanes, 2013). Taylor and Kiki all look for input from directors and take others feelings into consideration. Only rarely do they let directors have complete control over certain issues and events. You can tell that Taylor has a lot of faith in his members because

at times he will give them the go ahead to do whatever they decide.

Verbal Interaction Analysis

During two of the three meetings that were observed, a verbal interaction diagram was created. Verbal interaction diagrams analyze who talks to whom and how often they speak during the meeting. These analyses also show if certain members are more dominant than other members. However, something the analysis does not show, is how long certain verbal interactions last. A member might go on and on for five minutes without being interrupted but this would only be shown as one tally mark. Observation notes tried to include if certain members communicated in longer sentences or tangents than others and if certain members only spoke in short, one or two word bursts.

Below are shown two different verbal interaction diagrams (VID) created in two of the SGA Cabinet meetings that were observed. The circles represent each member that attended the meeting. The longer arrows that point toward the middle, represent communication that was directed at the entire group and the shorter arrows pointed at other circles represent communication that was directed at an individual member. Most of the time these diagrams are easy to read, but it becomes more complicated when more members are in the diagram and the amount of arrows multiplies. The first VID (observed February 12, 2014) shown below, only has eight circles because one member was absent, but the next VID (observed February 19, 2014) shows all nine members. We also show a table to go with each VID in order to see the numbers more clearly. The totals at the right side of the table are the total sends that member



communicated. The totals at the bottom of the table are the total number of communications that member received.

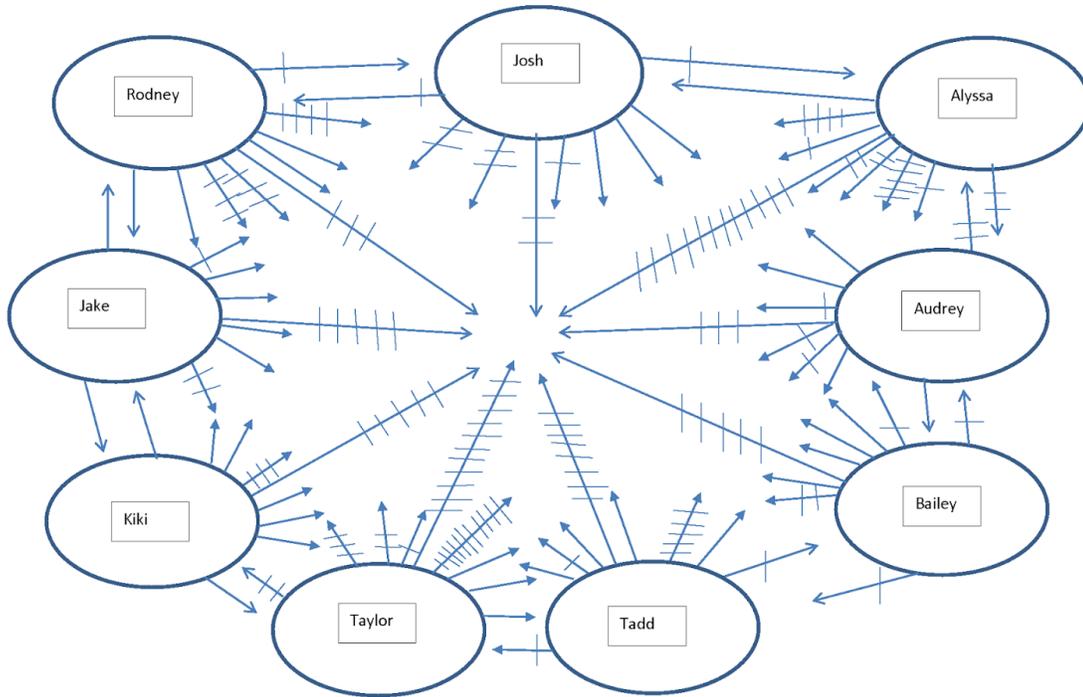
According to the VID, during the SGA Cabinet meeting on February 12th, Bailey appears to be the most dominant communicator, but most of her participation comes from short replies to other members where she asked for clarification on what was being said. Bailey is an active listener and likes to make sure she is on the same page as the member who is speaking. Kiki spoke almost as much as Bailey according to the VID, but her comments were more lengthy and she did more elaborating and information giving. Josh did a lot of information giving when it was his time to speak as well as opinion giving and this is why his numbers were higher than

most members.

	Taylor	Kiki	Bailey	Tadd	Rodney	Audrey	Jake	Josh	Group	TOTAL
Taylor	-	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	10	11
Kiki	0	-	2	1	0	1	0	2	9	15
Bailey	1	1	-	0	0	1	0	2	11	16
Tadd	1	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	5	6
Rodney	1	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	1	2
Audrey	0	0	0	0	1	-	0	0	9	10
Jake	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	4	4
Josh	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	-	9	14
TOTAL	3	1	5	2	2	2	1	4	58	78

Below is the VID from the February 19th meeting. According to this VID, Alyssa was the most verbally dominant member of the group and Taylor was the second most verbally dominant. Alyssa was extremely verbal in this meeting, but it is worth mentioning that she did not become verbally dominant until it was her turn to speak at the very end of the meeting. Alyssa spoke longer than anyone else when it was their turn to speak and she took up the most

time. The meeting went much longer than expected because of this. Halfway through Alyssa’s speaker time, Audrey got up and left the meeting abruptly and was gone for almost ten minutes.



	Taylor	Kiki	Bailey	Tadd	Rodney	Audrey	Jake	Josh	Alyssa	Group	Total
Taylor	-	2	0	0	2	0	3	1	9	11	28
Kiki	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	8

Bailey	2	0	-	1	0	0	0	0	1	5	9
Tadd	1	0	1	-	0	0	1	0	5	8	16
Rodney	3	0	0	3	-	0	0	1	4	3	14
Audrey	1	1	0	0	0	-	1	0	2	3	8
Jake	2	0	0	0	0	0	-	1	0	5	8
Josh	1	2	0	0	1	0	2	-	1	2	9
Alyssa	5	2	1	5	4	2	1	0	-	12	33
Total	15	7	2	9	7	2	8	3	25	54	133

Tadd was also one of the most verbally dominant members during this meeting. This is because one senator recently sent a letter to cabinet, requesting Tadd's resignation from SGA. When the cabinet was going over the situation and what had been happening, Tadd would add his opinions and views on the matters as well as defend himself and answer questions from the other cabinet members. Because some of the issues were over financial matters, Rodney was also answering questions and providing clarification for some issues. In all meetings, Taylor was always one of the most verbally dominant, which makes sense because he is the leader of the group and must lead them and give clarification. Other verbally dominant members vary from week to week depending on what is going on and what the issues are that week. However, members like Jake and Audrey are rarely verbally dominant members of the group.

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is messages other than words to which listeners react. Nonverbal communication is used more than any form of communication. It can range from facial expressions, body language, posture, tone of voice and volume. An example would be, if someone were to make a statement that was false and was corrected, they might respond with an eye roll or a facial expression that would show how they felt about being corrected other than verbally showing it.

There were many nonverbal signs in all of the meetings observed of the Student Government Association. In the first meeting, Jake would raise his hand when he wanted to speak. This would go ignored for some time now until Kiki acknowledged he wanted to speak then Jake would finally get a chance to speak. It seemed that him raising his hand was not effective. There seemed to be many actions going like Alyssa sprayed herself with perfume and the only person who reacted to that was Tadd with a confused look on his face. Alyssa was also eating her dinner during the meeting. These nonverbal showed a lack of importance this meeting was and showed the casualness of it.

In the second meeting, there was not as much nonverbal actions. Rodney had been on his laptop the whole night. Kiki nodded her head a lot during the meeting and was very engaged in the meeting. Later in the meeting, Tadd had left for a phone call and Kiki also had left the room for a phone call.

The last meeting we observed had very many nonverbal shown. Alyssa was late to the meeting by 10 minutes. During the meeting Josh was biting his nails, looking somewhat bored. Audrey had her textbook and notebook open the entire meeting and was doing her homework.

Rodney was on his phone a lot during this meeting looking at something. Alyssa was at her desk to the side doing things on her computer, plugging in her phone, walking around, and grabbed an orange. She was turned away from the meeting most of time and not staying involved with it unless it was her turn to speak. Both Bailey and Jake seem to be always attentive. They keep eye contact with the person who is speaking and follow what they are saying. Bailey likes to give verbal feedback by making sure she understands everything that is being said. Later in the meeting, Audrey left the room in the middle of when Alyssa was speaking. It is noticeable that Audrey may not like Alyssa and that is why she left while she was speaking. Alyssa seemed to go on for about 15 minutes when speaking.

Analysis of Postmeeting Reaction (PMR) Forms

In order to understand and analyze how the members of the Student Government Association felt about the functionality of their group, they were asked to complete a post meeting reaction (PMR) form. A post meeting reaction form is an anonymous form members fill out after meetings in order to gauge how satisfied they were with the meeting and if they felt like they were heard by other members. They were first asked how clear the goals were in the discussion, on a measure of very clear, somewhat vague and muddled. How the atmosphere was on a measure of cooperative and cohesive, apathetic, and competitive. How well organized and vigilant the discussion was on a measure of disorderly, just right, and too rigid. How effective was the leadership supplied by the chairperson on a measure of too autocratic, democratic and weak. The preparation of the meeting on the measure of thorough, adequate, and poor. If they found themselves wanting to speak when the chance was not given on a measure of almost never, occasionally and often. How satisfied they were with the results of their discussion on a measure

of very satisfied, moderately satisfied and not satisfied. Lastly, how do they feel working with the same group again on a measure of eager, I will and reluctant.

Many members of the group agreed that the goals were clear in their discussions/meetings. There was not one person who said it was muddled. It was interesting to see that every single person had responded to the environment being apathetic. It is hard for this group to cooperative with each other and be cohesive because they are all leaders and have very strong opinions. The answers to the rest of the questions were all very similar among this group of members. There were only two members that said they felt reluctant to working with this group again. Overall, since most of the members responded with the same answers it shows that for the most part, members have similar beliefs about they way in which things are discussed and handled within the SGA cabinet.

Conclusion

Overall, we felt like the SGA Cabinet is doing well in meetings. They are able to accomplish tasks and get the job done, but we still had some suggestions for them to improve. Our recommendations for the group are to improve the discussions, respect other group members and come to meetings better prepared. Although Taylor is the leader of this group and President of SGA, very rarely does he make decisions for the group or give any orders. At times his leadership can be somewhat Laissez-faire. We do not think that Taylor should become autocratic, but we do think he should take more control over the meeting time, and keep members of the group accountable. We suggest that he establish initial ground rules before the meeting begins. As mentioned previously, several members consistently do not pay attention during meetings. They spend that time doing homework, eating dinner or on their phone, tablet,

or laptop. We believe some ground rules need to be made to approach this issue. Also, Taylor could do a better job of leading discussions and keeping them goal-oriented. To help with this, the procedure of the meeting should be stated at the beginning and followed throughout. If the group were to get off topic, Taylor should steer them back into the right direction.

This leads right into the next point of respecting other group members. If there are rules about turning off electronic devices and putting away homework, it helps members focus on what others are saying and more importantly, this shows respect to others. Some members are in their own little world throughout the entire meeting and not listening to what others have to say. However, those same members expect others to listen whenever they speak. Everyone needs to give their full attention to other members when they speak and make it a goal to be active listeners.

Our last recommendation is for members to come to meetings better prepared. Many times, members forget important details of what they need to say and haven't brought the proper notes or information to give to the rest of the group. This disrupts the flow of the meetings, especially when a member has to add something they forgot to say before, when another member is speaking. The back and forth is unorganized and confusing. Meetings would run smoother if everyone came more prepared.

References:

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