Western Michigan University and the Community: A Collaboration

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Western Michigan University and the Community: A Collaboration

Senior Thesis Presentation
Ashley K. Owen
WMU Graduate: Spring 2008

Activity
“Strength of Weak Ties”
An Activity on Increasing Collaboration Within and Between Groups Through the Use of Weak Ties

Created By: Ashley K. Owen

Purpose
To demonstrate to participants the value of utilizing resources both within their own groups and throughout other groups to reach a common goal having collaborative intentions in mind.

Materials
A large stack of Index cards (Needs vary by number of participants)
1 pair of scissors
1 role of Scotch tape
A clock to keep track of the time

Procedure
To Begin:
1. Divide the whole group into 3 subgroups
2. Have each group select a person to collect materials (They do not know this yet, but they are the Weak Ties)
3. Give Person 1 a large stack of index cards
4. Give Person 2 a smaller stack of index cards and the scissors
5. Give Person 3 the same amount as Person 2 and the Scotch tape
6. Explain to the groups that they have 5 minutes to construct the tallest tower they can using only the materials given to them

When Time Is Up:
1. Observe how well each team did
2. Ask the 3 Weak Ties to return to the front of the room
3. Tell the whole group that those 3 people are now able to go to each other for help, materials, ideas, etc. BUT that only those 3 people are allowed to interact outside of their own groups
4. Give them 5 more minutes to construct the tallest tower they can in their 3 groups
When Time Is Up:
1. Observe how well the teams did this time around
2. Now explain to the group that everyone must work together to build the tallest tower possible BUT the other members of the 3 groups cannot work together until the Weak Ties from each group introduce the members of their groups to the Weak Ties of the other groups
3. Give the whole group 5-10 minutes to complete this task

When Time Is Up:

It is now Discussion Time!

Questions to Lead With:
What worked and didn’t in the first round? The second round?
What changed with the third round? What was better? What was more problematic?
If the Weak Ties had not been able to work together what do you think the results would have been?
Is there obvious value in the utilization of weak ties in completing this activity? How can this be applied to real life situations?
The strength of weak ties is vital when attempting to collaborate successfully within and between groups. Weak ties refer to the connections individuals have with others in various groups or organizations. These connections are typically professional or casual in nature, lacking extreme intimacy, but prove to be useful in various situations.
The Class

• Dr. Paul Yelsma’s Group
• Problem Solving Class
• Department of Communication
• Fall 2006 Session

The Project

• To find and solve a real problem in the Community
• Work in a group of no more than 5 people
• Generate a solution to the problem using none of our own resources
The Process

- We randomly formed our group based on an interest in working with children
- First 3 weeks of semester were spent searching for a problem topic
- Narrowed our problem to Kalamazoo Transportation, Douglas Center, and Interfaith Community Center
The Process (Cont.)

• After many phone calls and group meetings, we decide on Interfaith Community Center as the focus of our Problem Solving

• Narrowed topic to helping the children of the center in some way

• Began exploring our weak ties

• Ashley contacted Dorothy Young at Interfaith to determine their specific needs (Consistency with Tutors)

• Emily called around WMU in search of groups that might need community service hours and was eventually connected with Education Department

• Our weak ties led us to Dr. Patricia Chilton-Stringham and Kappa Delta Pi
• Students in KDP are required to complete community service hours each semester
• They are always looking for new opportunities
• Megan and Ashley attended a KDP meeting and presented the needs of Interfaith to the group
• KDP readily agreed to help
• The next step was introducing the two organizations...

The Meeting

• Ashley and Megan arranged for a meeting between Members of KDP and Members of Interfaith
• An important purpose in this meeting was to establish connections and find common interests
• The establishment of new weak ties was vital to the progression of the project
The Meeting (Cont.)

- Throughout the meeting, the members of Interfaith and KDP found many things in common personally and professionally.
- Relationships began to form between the groups.
- Arrangements and commitments were made for the groups to begin working together.
- New weak ties had been made!

The End?

- Just when we thought our job was done, our weak ties struck again!
- Another group in the problem solving class was struggling to find a use for the money they had raised in a charity event.
- We were aware of the problem and new how to help...
Finishing Touches

- Dr. Yelsma (one of our weak ties) informed us that Interfaith needed mittens for the children
- Putting our brains together, we figured out how to help Interfaith and the other problem solving group
- Use the strength of our weak ties to bring them together!

Strength of Weak Ties

- We connected the leader of the group with Dorothy Young at Interfaith
- We also connected the leader with Dr. Stringham and KDP
- KDP offered to match the group’s $50 donation and the funds were eventually brought to Interfaith
The Future

- Dr. Stringham recently updated our group on interactions between KDP and Interfaith
- Tutors from KDP continue to attend sessions every day they are needed
- KDP has planned a Reading is Fun Day and each child will receive a book
- I still see the members of my group and three of us even have classes together this semester in which we are in groups
- We remain friends and will continue to be weak ties far into the future

Useful Tips

- Do not disregard connections with seemingly random people, they could prove helpful some day
- Don’t be afraid to initiate contact, people are usually willing to help
- Obtain and maintain casual contact with members of various organizations whenever possible
- Keep a record of these names and their contact information
- Finding common ground between yourself and the members of other groups is critical to the success of the collaborative effort
- Smaller numbers are always better when bringing organizations together and establishing new weak ties
Conclusion

- When attempting to work collaboratively, having, using, and maintaining weak ties is crucial to the success of the task at hand.
- This can also lead to the success of future tasks in which those same weak ties prove to be strong resources once more.
- How can you relate this back to the activity?

Special Thanks To

Dr. Paul Yelsma
Ms. Dorothy Young
Dr. Patricia Chilton-Stringham
Dr. Janice James
Emily Popielarz
Megan Sommer
Jarrett Juergonsen
Jacquie Bialik &
The Children and Volunteers of Interfaith
Question & Answer
Note Taking Guide For Audience During Presentation
Activity

Thesis
• The strength of weak ties is vital when attempting to collaborate successfully within and between groups.
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Dr. Paul Yelsma’s Group Problem Solving Class
Department of Communication
Fall 2006 Session

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The Meeting

The End?

Finishing Touches

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Full Outline Given to Audience After Presentation
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WMU Graduate: Spring 2008

Activity

Group Problem Solving and Interfaith Community Center

Thesis

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The Group

- Ashley Owen
• Emily Popielarz

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