Critical Incidents During Collaboration of Students with Different Personality Profiles

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to increase understanding on the collaborative writing process among students with different personality profiles. Students' behavioural styles were assessed using LEONARD Personality Inventory (LPI). The 100-item LPI questionnaire was administered to the students to discover their respective personality profiles. This case study involved five Mass Communication students from a private institution of higher learning in Malaysia. Collection of data was conducted using video recordings, interviews, diary entries and observations. There were significant critical incidents identified in the course of collaboration. They, in turn, had mixed results on the task performance. It is recommended that instructors prepare students prior to allowing them to participate in collaborative writing sessions. Thus, outcomes from the collaboration can be improved.

Keywords: LEONARD Personality Inventory; critical incidents; collaborative writing; personality styles

1.   Introduction

According to American Psychology Association (APA), personality is defined as "individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving". There are 2 areas observed in the study of personality. They comprise understanding individual dissimilarities in personality characteristics and comprehending how the various parts of a person become whole. (American Psychology Association, 2016).

LEONARD Personality Inventory (LPI) was developed by Professor Leonard Yong (1999). LEONARD stands for "Let's Explore our personality based on Openness, Neutral, Analytical, Relational and Decisive behavioural tendencies in people." The function of LPI is to identify the preferred behavioural styles of individuals. In addition, intervention programmes are designed to enhance emotional intelligence (Yong, 2003).

There are 100 items in the LPI questionnaire which are used to assess one's behavioural style. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale consisting of 1 (disagree strongly), 2 (disagree a little), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree a little) and 5 (agree strongly). LPI is used to identify emotional orientations based on five dimensions of personality which are Openness, Neutral, Analytical, Relational and Decisive. A summarised description of the 5 dimensions of personality is provided in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, individuals with Openness dimension tend to handle situations with new and unique methods and easily misunderstood by others (Yong, 1999). Their strengths are being artistic, creative and innovative. However, their weaknesses are being easily bored, not following rules and impulsive.

Secondly, people with Neutral dimension are introverts, patient, loyal and they prefer routine work (Yong, 1999). Their strengths are being good listeners, desire being in a team, attempt to live harmoniously with others and considerate towards the feelings of others. In contrast, their weaknesses are they lack confidence, avoid conflicts, are self-conscious and sensitive.

Thirdly, Analytical individuals are perfectionists, meticulous, indecisive and sceptical in nature (Yong, 1999). Their strengths are they are highly responsible, conscientious, they think deeply before making decisions and persist in completing their work. Nevertheless, they are rigid, sensitive, do not share feelings and easily feel depressed.

Fourthly, individuals with Relational dimension are sociable, extroverts, optimistic and talkative (Yong, 1999). Their strengths are being positive, lively, influential and fun to be with. On the other hand, their weaknesses are not punctual, emotional, lacking tenacity in completing their tasks, quite disorganised, and are inclined to exaggerate.

Fifthly, Decisive people are described as driven, result-oriented, risk-takers, impatient and use a direct approach when interacting with others (Yong, 1999). Their strengths are being self-assured, persistent, resourceful and decisive. In contrast, their weaknesses are being too aggressive, short-tempered, strong headed, and easily annoyed.

There is a total of 26 Personality Profiles derived from research findings focussing on LPI (Yong, 2012). They are Creative Imaginator (Openness), Neutral Expert (Neutral), Analytical Thinker (Analytical), Relational Interactor (Relational), Decisive Decision Maker (Decisive), Error Buster (Neutral and Analytical), Exhorter (Relational and Decisive), Helpful Encourager (Neutral and Relational), Implementer (Analytical and Decisive), Accomplisher (Neutral and Decisive), Assessor (Analytical and Relational),

Creative Expert (Neutral and Openness), Creative Thinker (Analytical and Openness), Creative Relator (Relational and Openness), Creative Decision Maker (Decisive and Openness), Creative Error Buster (Neutral and Analytical and Openness), Creative Exhorter (Relational and Decisive and Openness), Creative Encourager (Neutral and Relational and Openness), Innovator (Analytical and Openness and Decisive), Creative Accomplisher (Neutral and Decisive and Openness), Creative Assessor (Analytical, Relational and Openness), Amiable Adaptor (Neutral, Analytical and Relational), Resourceful Strategist (Neutral, Analytical and Decisive), Persuasive Decision Maker (Neutral, Relational and Decisive), Energetic Strategist (Analytical, Relational and Decisive) and Versatile (Neutral, Analytical, Relational and Decisive).

The participants in this study were required to complete the LPI questionnaire to determine their personality profiles. Aiden was a Creative Relator while Maggie and Shasha were Helpful Encouragers. In addition, Woo was an Exhorter and Trisha was a Creative Expert. The strengths and weaknesses of the individuals with the respective personality profiles are provided in the following paragraphs.

Individuals who are Creative Relators are cheerful, sociable, inspiring and versatile (Yong, 2003). However, their weaknesses are being talkative, inattentive, not punctual and restless.

In addition, the strengths of people in the Helpful Encourager category are harmonious, helpful and resolve tension well. In contrast, their weaknesses are feeling manipulated and fearful of abrasive people (Yong, 2012).

Furthermore, individuals who belong to the Exhorter category are persuasive, confident and persistent. Nevertheless, their weaknesses are manipulative, stubborn and restless (Yong, 2003).

Lastly, the strengths of people who are in the Creative Expert category are loyal, reliable, expressive and creative. However, their weaknesses are being loners, anxious and stubborn (Yong, 2003).

The aim of this study is to obtain insights on the collaborative writing process among students with different personality profiles categorised under LEONARD Personality Inventory (LPI). Therefore, situations which occurred during the collaboration were analysed thoroughly.

2   Theoretical Background

Constructivist approaches towards learning are given much prominence in group work. They place much emphasis on establishing an environment in which construction of knowledge and negotiation of knowledge with others is made possible (Duffy & Jonassen, 1991; Jonassen, 2000). Two examples of such learning contexts are discovery learning and collaborative learning.

Social Constructivist perspective on learning has a strong influence on collaborative learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Collaborative learning places much importance in group work. It is a situation in which two or more individuals have accountability, share decision making and perform tasks together in learning (Dillenbourg, 1999). Similarly, Springer, Stanne and Donovan (1999) describe collaborative learning as two or more people attempting to create knowledge together in solving a problem.

There are many approaches when using collaborative learning. They range from traditional face-to-face discussions to use of modern technology in communication such as online forums and social media networks (Hernández, 2012). In addition, collaborative blogs can function in providing opportunities for students to comment on a given topic and reflect on their thinking (Palloff & Pratt, 2005). The selection of approach to be used is dependent on the facilities available and the preference of both instructors and learners. However, the presence of "lurkers" who do not participate actively in collaborative work may adversely affect the group performance (Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews, 2004).

Collaborative work has been extended to writing, too. Collaborative writing is commonly performed in industry, academia and government (Beck, 1993; Couture & Rymer, 1989; Lowry, Albrecht, Nunamaker & Lee, 2002; Mabrito, 1992). There are three approaches used in collaborative writing (Sharples, Goodlet, Beck, Wood, Easterbrook & Plowman, 1993). They are sequential, reciprocal and parallel strategies. Learners pass work from one to another to improve the task in the sequential process. However, the reciprocal strategy involves participation of all learners when completing the work. The parallel group, in contrast, divides the jobs so that individuals can perform them independently.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

All of the participants in this study were Year One Diploma in Mass Communication students. They majored in Journalism. There were 3 female and 2 male students.

The participants consisted of Shasha, Aiden, Woo, Maggie and Trisha. They had mixed proficiency in English. Maggie scored A+ grade while Shasha, Aiden and Trisha obtained A grade for their English course in the previous semester. In addition, Woo possessed a B grade for the course.

LEONARD Personality Inventory (LPI) questionnaire was administered to assess the participants' personality styles. The results revealed the participants' personality profiles. Maggie and Shasha were Helpful Encourager (Neutral and Relational); Aiden was Creative Relater (Relational and Open); Woo was Exhorter (Relational and Decisive) and Trisha was Creative Expert (Neutral and Open).

The participants self-formed a group to discuss their writing task. They chose to be in the same group because they were close friends. Shasha was appointed as the leader by her group members.

3.2   Script Writing Task

The group was given a script writing task to perform. The length of the script should be about 2000 words and comprised three acts. It could be based on tragedy, comedy, problem play, farce, comedy of manners, fantasy, melodrama or musical drama. The participants were also permitted to produce a script with a few of the elements.

The participants needed 5 sessions to discuss and complete the writing task. Each of the session lasted two hours. They collaborated in deciding on the setting, creating the characters, describing the scenes and producing suitable dialogue lines.

3.3   Data Collection

The participants' discussion sessions were video-taped. Additionally, the researcher was present during all sessions to observe the interactions taking place. Observation notes, too, were produced to record down significant episodes which occurred.

Furthermore, the participants were interviewed after the discussions. They were also required to write journals in order to describe their experiences vividly. Therefore, the different research methods used helped to create triangulation of data needed in this study.

4.   Findings

A few interesting critical incidents were observed during the collaboration. They ranged from use of humour, challenges in group management, different expectations of outcomes from collaboration and tolerance towards dissimilar group members. These incidents had mixed effects on the group's overall task performance.

4.1   Use of Humour

Humour was recurrent in the participants' interactions. Only Shasha, Aiden and Maggie were comfortable in interspersing humour with their discussions. However, it was observed that Woo and Trisha failed to use humour when presenting their ideas.

There were three uses of humour identified in the group's interactions. They were adding interest, drawing attention and leading the discussions. Aiden and Maggie used humour to make the sessions lively while Shasha, being the leader chose humour as a tool to

facilitate her group's discussions. Aiden, too, used humour to make his group members pay attention to him.

Shasha, Aiden and Maggie were inclined to use humour due to their personality profiles. Shasha and Maggie, with personality profiles as Helpful Encouragers, were described as people-loving, encouraging, peaceable and effective appeasers. Shasha as the group leader used humour in refining the group members' ideas and ensuring that they were kept on track. Maggie, meanwhile, used humour to make the sessions interesting. Aiden who belonged to the creative relater category was described as charismatic, inspiring and liked attention. He was observed to use humour in order to enliven the atmosphere and to draw attention to himself.

However, through the interviews with Woo and Trisha who did not use humour in their interactions, they still found the sessions lively and were of the opinion that the humour used helped them to learn from each other successfully. Humour was discovered as a useful tool which promoted learning (Garner, 2006). Woo and Trisha were reluctant to use much humour because they were concerned that it might increase the aimlessness of their discussions. They were concerned with their slow pace in writing their script due to their group's easily distracted behaviour. This situation concurred with the view provided by Ziegler (1998) that the effectiveness of humour on learning could not be ascertained and therefore might be detrimental to groupwork when humour was used excessively.

4.2   Challenges in Group Management

A major challenge faced by Shasha as the leader observed was in group management. The problems which existed were distractions from topic of discussions, refusal to receive

her instructions, a lack of respect for, Woo, the director of the play and a lack of effort in their group assignment. They could be attributed to their different personalities and their preoccupation over other assignments they had to complete within the same period of time.

The first problem which the group faced was their inability to concentrate on the discussions. Aiden who was a Creative Relater and derived much enjoyment from talking incessantly caused his group to focus on other matters instead of the topics discussed. It was observed that he interrupted and sidetracked discussions on the selection of a group member to become prompter, decision to be made on size of props and writing process of a detailed script. Consequently, Shasha attempted to steer her group back to the matters but Aiden continued to introduce his new topics. He seemed ignorant of the frustrations that Shasha was experiencing and he even expressed his satisfaction with the sessions through his interviews and journals!

Secondly, Shasha as the leader could not control the group successfully. All of the group members with the exception of Trisha ignored her efforts in prompting them to respond to her leading questions. Aiden constantly diverted his group's attention from the topic being discussed by introducing other topics. Meanwhile, Maggie, being a Helpful Encourager who loved the company of people, responded to conversations on the side issues initiated by Aiden and Woo. Consequently, Shasha expressed her anger and disappointment with her group's refusal to follow her guidance through the interviews and journals. This was supported by Trisha who voiced out her unhappiness over her group's lack of organisation in their collaborative work.

The third problem in the group was a lack of respect towards Woo, the appointed director of their play. It was observed that Shasha relinquished her control of the group after Woo

was chosen to become the director with the hope that the discussion would be productive. She was disappointed that Woo did not have the initiative to lead the group but instead joined in Aiden's introduction of new topics of discussion despite a lack of direction in their interactions. The analysis of interviews and journals of the participants revealed that Woo, Shasha and Trisha were deeply concerned over the group's inability to concentrate and make decisions on the matters presented.

Fourthly, it was observed that the group did not put in much effort into their collaborative writing task. The group members did not prepare for their discussions by reviewing their class notes and making extensive research on their topics of discussion prior to their collaboration. They were unsure of the role of a prompter, the importance of using the appropriate props for the venue they would be acting in and were confused with trend over a brand of products. Their interactions did not provide useful conclusions in their areas of difficulties but they chose to ignore them. Consequently, some of the participants, Shasha, Woo and Trisha were unsure if they were performing the task correctly. They expressed their concerns through the interviews and journals whether they were benefiting from the group discussions. Their doubts made them reduce their contribution during collaboration. According to Schnake (1991), he states that a group member will reserve one's effort when the individual observes that others are not contributing to avoid being exploited. It has an adverse effect on the group's performance and motivation.

4.3 Different Expectations of Outcomes from Collaboration

The group has different expectations of outcomes from the collaboration. They were regarding communication among members, acceptable amount of fun in discussions and

appropriate individual behaviour. The situations created by the differences result in a lack of focus on the writing task.

Firstly, there was a communication problem in the group. According to Trisha, there was a lack of clear communication and assertiveness which made it difficult for the group to progress in their task. It was also observed that Shasha, the group leader who attempted to voice her disapproval over the lack of concentration of her group members was ignored by them. In addition, Aiden was ignorant of the problems he created by not accepting instructions from his leader but even stated his satisfaction over the discussions in his interviews and journals. Maggie and Woo decided to play neutral by joining in the side conversations initiated by Aiden. This piece of findings on communication problem concurs with results obtained from a study conducted on collaborative learning which revealed that the faculty, too, faced challenges in promoting communication and co-ordinating group members in discussion boards and chatrooms (Eastman & Swift, 2002).

The second situation which had negative implication was the constant playfulness of the group members. It was observed that all of the group members with the exception of Trisha displayed lively behaviour and experienced much fun throughout the collaborative sessions. Trisha, being a Creative Expert who should enjoy fun and creativity surprisingly did not interact much with her group members. In fact, she was conscientious and constantly expressed her concern on the lack of progress of work through her interviews and journals. Shasha, too, in due time realised that her group was not focussing on their task and attempted to facilitate her group closely. However, her efforts were futile due to Aiden's refusal to follow her guidance but continued to make jokes and introduced matters unrelated to the task. The situation became worse when Maggie and Woo joined him in his antics. Aiden and Maggie even expressed their

satisfaction with the discussions through their interviews and journals without realising Shasha's frustrations in facilitating their group.

The group also faced adverse situations due to different expectations of appropriate individual behaviour. Their interviews and journals unexpectedly revealed that the group members had dissimilar views on their behaviour during their sessions. Shasha, being a responsible leader felt that she had to maintain a balance between having fun with completing the group task successfully. It was observed that after a few sessions, she became quite stern towards her group members who distracted others from their work. However, Aiden, Maggie and Woo failed to respond positively to her. Only Trisha understood the need of paying attention to Shasha as she attempted to guide the group. Both Shasha and Trisha were similar in their opinions that the group needed to be guided in order to perform well. On the other hand, Aiden was ignorant of his carefree ways which slowed the group's progress and even stated his enjoyment of being able to express his opinions freely with his friends! In addition, Maggie and Woo were comfortable in being easy-going and constantly followed their friends' behaviour which could be at the expense of having productive collaborative sessions. Woo only became concerned over the group's delay in completing their task in the last few sessions of discussions.

4.4   Tolerance towards Dissimilar Group Members

It was observed that the group members had a high tolerance towards dissimilarities among their group members. They did not reprimand group members who were playful and undisciplined. It could be attributed to their personalities and the collectivist culture they belonged to.

Aiden who was from Creative Relater category was satisfied to have his group members interacting with him. Maggie and Shasha who were from Helpful Encourager category were extremely patient and placed much effort in working harmoniously with their group. They were tolerant with Aiden even though his antics distracted their collaboration. Only Shasha as the leader finally felt totally responsible in controlling her group and lead them in their task. In addition, Trisha as a Creative Expert was quiet and allowed her friends to behave playfully. However, William, unpredictably, being an Exhorter did not attempt to guide his group to be productive in their discussions but constantly joined in sharing jokes with his friends.

The group's high tolerance towards their members' behaviour could be attributed to the culture they belonged to which was collectivist culture. Many of the group members including the group leader were concerned over the delay in their task. The majority of them felt strongly that they should follow the overall group's amiable behaviour and not create disunity by expressing their frustrations openly over the slow pace of their progress. Consequently, the progress in their work was much delayed. However, the lack of individualistic behaviour in the group reduced the possibility of friction and conflict occurring. Similarly, in a study conducted on people originating from Hong Kong and America, it was discovered that the importance of harmony in relationship compared to self-esteem in the Hong Kong group was higher than the American group (Kwan, Bond & Singelis, 1997).

5.   Conclusion

The findings in this study revealed a few interesting critical incidents observed during student collaboration. They ranged from use of humour, challenges in group management, different expectations of outcomes from collaboration and tolerance

towards dissimilar group members. These incidents had mixed results on the group's task performance.

It is recommended that open communication be encouraged in collaborative work. Since collaborative writing is defined as a social and communicative act (Bruffee 1987; Trimbur 1985), communication has a strong influence on the outcome of collaboration. It was observed that some of the informants in this study were dissatisfied with the slow progress in their group work due to other group members who diverted from their task. On the other hand, they did not disclose their feelings openly to their group but only expressed their views through their interviews and journals. Therefore, their group members might not be aware of the problem.

Furthermore, useful guidelines on how to collaborate successfully with other students can be provided to students before they start working together. Firstly, they can be provided with information on characteristics of different personality profiles categorised under LPI. This enables them to understand their own behaviour and their friends' behaviour, as well.

Secondly, students can be enlightened of appropriate and inappropriate conduct during discussions. Garrison (1997) opines that self-directed learning which involves self-management; self-monitoring and motivational dimensions can benefit students in learning. Students who reflect on their behaviour during past discussions then become good collaborators.

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