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Levels of Urgency & Attitudes toward Group Experiences

ABSTRACT

The freshman experience typically requires a profusion of challenging adjustments relating to a new and demanding college environment. One significant force of attrition is transition or adjustment difficulties for freshmen. Successfully influencing freshmen includes efforts that focus on helping students make an academic, personal, and social adjustment to college. Group work provides opportunities for patterns of interaction (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Tinto, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989).

It is believed that there is intensity in temporary group environments due to a need for individuals to quickly evaluate and adjust to other members, with speed and accomplishment as driving factors (Huff, Cooper, & Jones, 2002; Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer, 1996). Individuals with low levels of urgency, however, prefer taking a slow and methodical approach when adjusting to unfamiliar people and new environments (Praendex Corporation, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences between and among personality factors relative to levels of urgency and student attitudes toward group experiences. The research question was: What are the differences between and among personality factors relative to levels of urgency and freshman attitudes toward group experiences?. This study took place with hospitality students at a midsize, private university in the Northeast.

This quantitative, descriptive study employed two instruments: one measured student attitudes toward group experiences; the second measured personality factors utilizing the Predictive Index. Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency, measures of variability, and frequency counts were run and t-tests were used to determine if there were significant differences in attitudes toward group experiences based on personality factors.

Freshman students (n=98) with low levels of urgency reported significantly less positive attitudes about trustworthy attributes in others (M=2.99, t=-3.21, p=.01, d=.65) than those without the factor (M=3.50); significantly less positive attitudes about benefits of groups (M=3.75, t=-1.97, p=.05, d=.40) than those without the factor (M=3.99); and significantly less positive attitudes about valuing other students (M=3.34, t=-2.37, p=.01, d=.47) than those without the factor (M = 3.70).

This study provided an institution with proposed practices designed to influence freshman group experiences positively based on findings about student attitudes when taking into account personality relative to low levels of urgency. Recommendations include adjusting group experiences, by means of, inserting practices to address issues with temporary groups, and assigning freshmen to consistent groups during the crucial freshman adjustment period.

Problem Statement

A need existed to investigate improved pedagogical methods that influence student attitudes positively toward group experiences to enhance the development of graduates entering the workforce (Amato & Amato, 2005; Lerner, 1995; Page & Donelan, 2003; Peeters, Rutte, Tuijl, & Reymen, 2006; Sheehan, McDonald, & Spence, 2009), and to reduce the damaging consequences of negative group experiences and increase positive group experiences for students (Chapman & Van Auken, 2001; Huff, Cooper, & Jones, 2002; Lancellotti & Boyd, 2008; Page and Donelan). Improving student group experiences is important in educational environments because positive experiences yield such benefits as retention, higher levels of student satisfaction, and skill improvement (Amato & Amato; Bacon, Stewart, & Silver, 1999; Huff et al.). In addition, positive group experiences can enhance academic and social integration, which are essential components for freshman students, in particular, during the critical transition phases of the first year (Astin, 1993; Pascaretta & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987).

Groups are defined as a collection of individuals who are interdependent and who share responsibility for specific outcomes (Halfhill, Sundstrom, Lahner, Calderone, & Neilsen, 2005; Sundstrom, DeMeuse, & Futrell, 1990). Groups typically do not function effectively when left on their own and negative experiences are often the outcome. Negative experiences can have damaging consequences leading to student dissatisfaction, discouragement, stress, poor academic performance, ineffective learning, and attrition (Amato & Amato, 2005; Huff et al. 2002; McCorkle et al., 1999; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003).

Negative group experiences can result from deficient group skills, issues with the personality composition of a group (also known as group personality composition, or GPC), insufficient focus on the nature of relationships in groups, and group members judging one another based on categorical or action-based cues rather than on the character of each individual (Amato & Amato, 2005; Anderson, 2008; Halfhill et al., 2005; Huff et al., 2002; Peeters et al., 2006). It is believed that faculty can play a direct role in improving group experiences by encouraging students to understand basic personality types of themselves and others and to use this to facilitate team functioning (Amato & Amato; Page & Donelan, 2003; Peeters et al.).

Personality assessments have been identified as tools to use to understand the influence of various personalities in a group setting, and to adjust environments to better match the motivational drives of individuals, but more research was identified as necessary to propose recommendations for practice (Amato & Amato, 2005; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Peeters et al., 2006). This study responded to recommendations in the literature to propose practices to improve group experiences for students (Amato & Amato; Evans et al., 1989; Peeters et al.). The purpose of this study was to investigate differences between and among personality factors relative to levels of urgency and student attitudes toward group experiences to provide institutions of higher education with proposed practices.

Previous studies primarily used the Myers Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI) or the Big Five Personality Factor Inventory (Big Five) (Halfhill et al., 2005). In contrast, this study used a behavioral (personality) assessment known as the Predictive Index (P.I.) which had not been previously used to investigate student attitudes. In this study, the intensity

of attitude (agreement) was reported by personality factors relative to levels of urgency as defined by the P.I. for the following dimensions relative to group experiences: 1.) benefits of interpersonal interactions; 2.) value that other students bring to group experiences; 3.) trustworthy attributes identified in other students during group experiences and; 4.) benefits of group experiences. Two individual items were utilized to investigate the differences between and among personality factors and student attitudes about: group experiences, in general, and the value of group experiences.

Background of the Study

Groups and Factors that Influence Groups

As previously discussed, groups are defined as an interdependent collection of individuals who share responsibility for specific outcomes (Halfhill et al., 2005). Throughout all stages of group development, groups continually face two concerns: task-oriented concerns and socioemotional concerns. Group members are concerned with the effort to accomplish the group tasks (task-oriented concerns) while also dealing with relationships among members (socioemotional concerns). Balance is necessary, since focus of attention and effort to one area may cause strain on the other area (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

While attempting to reach goals or accomplish tasks, individuals in a group will each bring to the group experience their own such unique personalities as needs for, and expressions of, differing levels of dominance and social influence, an inclination for either task or relationship focus, preferences for varying speeds when accomplishing a task, and a predisposition for formal or informal interactions (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004; Perry & Lavori, 1983; Praendex Corporation, 1999). When

working in groups, individuals bring past experiences that taint perceptions of other group members and trigger such behaviors as one member having an avoidance reaction to a group member who has a strong personality resembling a rejecting parent or sibling (Bolman & Deal; James & Friedman, 1998; Napier & Gershenfeld). In addition to unconscious factors, individuals working together in a group are confronted with an enormous amount of interpersonal data to process during interactions including tone of voice, posture, and commitment level, and this can be overwhelming (Napier & Gershenfeld). According to Gestalt Theory, to deal with these complexities without becoming overwhelmed, a group member will conjure up a notion of reality taking incomplete data on another member and completing it based on stereotypes or past experiences. In doing so, the group member can attempt to organize the other member into a meaningful whole. It is believed, however, that such assessments made by an individual of other group members are often inaccurate (Napier & Gershenfeld).

Groups in Higher Education

Institutions of higher education recognize that students need to experience the challenges of working in groups to prepare for work in industry (Chapman & Van Auken, 2001). In addition to simulating real-world experiences, group projects can be used to teach students how to communicate better and to work well with others, both of which have been identified as essential skills for the workplace (Kasper, 2004).

Student groups can be defined as temporary groups in which participants have a limited history of working together, are assembled by the instructor, and have limited prospects of working together again in the future. Typically in temporary groups, assigned tasks have deadlines and are non-routine, consequential, not well understood,

complex, and involve interdependent work and continuous interrelating (Huff et al., 2002; Meyerson, Weick, and Kramer, 1996). Temporary groups are believed to create more of a task-oriented environment where accomplishment and speed are driving factors. It is believed that individuals experience an urgency to make evaluations of other members thus facing the risk of making erroneous interpersonal assessments (Meyerson et al.). Individuals often replace careful cognitive processing of qualified data with anticipatory emotions generated by unqualified data. Anticipatory emotions, which are the perceptions of individuals of the probable success or failure of an interaction, can induce an individual to assume ungrounded interpersonal outcomes. One of the most common anticipatory emotion is believed to be anxiety, which could trigger negative assessments and unproductive behavior (Huff et al., 2002; Kemper, 1978).

Students must experience the challenges of working in groups to be better prepared for team-oriented business cultures in the workplace. However, merely placing students in groups with the hope that group members will work together well is not sufficient because typically, groups do not function effectively when left on their own. It is believed that negative group experiences have far-reaching consequences for students (Chapman & Van Auken, 2001; Huff et al., 2002).

The academic experience of the student is influenced by group work with positive experiences yielding such benefits as higher levels of satisfaction, enhanced learning, and improved retention (Amato & Amato, 2005; Huff et al., 2002). Research (Lerner, 1995) suggested that to optimize group experiences, faculty should design structured approaches that identify interpersonal issues and provide tools for students to work better together (Huff et al.).

Negative Experiences. Research by Huff et al. (2002) revealed that student attitudes toward group experiences can be intense and complex and the necessary components for achieving successful group experiences can deteriorate quickly. Student attitudes toward group work are often cynical and pessimistic due to a history of repeated negative experiences with common issues resulting in students working with others who exhibit a lack of excitement and motivation, dealing with personality conflicts, and having difficulty in coordinating time schedules (Huff et al.; McCorkle, Reardon, Alexander, Kling, Harris, & Iyer, 1999; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003). Detrimental group experiences can lead to student dissatisfaction, ineffective learning, and poor academic performance (Huff et al.).

Instructors can influence group experiences by taking an active role in guiding students to develop and maintain relationships in a group (Chapman & Van Auken, 2001; Huff et al., 2002). Students who reported negative attitudes with group experiences are more likely to feel that conflict resolution or group dynamics were not discussed formally in class by faculty (Chapman & Van Auken). Faculty can feel ill at ease dealing with behavioral issues or interpersonal problems and, therefore, students are left alone to struggle with the relational and emotional aspects of group experiences (Lerner, 1995). Students report emotional consequences of negative group experiences including feeling stressful, worried, frustrated, discouraged, unsure, uncomfortable, and resentful (Huff et al.). Research recommended inserting processes for students “to become more flexible by understanding and adjusting to individuals with different styles” (Amato & Amato, 2005, p. 49) to move students from negative to more positive experiences.

Positive Experiences. Students learn more from good group experiences than they do from bad experiences (Bacon et al., 1999). Despite not being “ecstatic about working in groups” (Chapman & Van Auken, 2001, p. 122), students reported moderately positive attitudes relative to perceived benefits of working in groups including improving their communication skills, learning how to interact with others, increasing their ability to work effectively in groups, and preparing themselves for work in a company (Chapman & Van Auken; McCorkle et al., 1999). McCorkle et al. reported that students (84%) at least somewhat agreed that group projects encourage development of teamwork skills. Despite perceived benefits of group work, however, students still reported feelings of insecurity, frustration, anger, anxiety, alienation, overcompensation, and futility when working in groups (Chapman & Van Auken). Personality differences play a critical role in determining how effectively students interact, and interaction is related to perceived positive experiences. Therefore, students could benefit if faculty provide a framework to teach students how to interact effectively in groups (Amato & Amato, 2005; Huff et al., 2002; Peeters et al., 2006).

Using Personality Assessments in Higher Education

Groups have a powerful influence over individuals. There are imperceptible forces in groups that make people conform through social influence. Some likely forces include social proof and conformity (Cialdini, 2007; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). The social learning theory of Bandura & Menlove (1968) further explained how individuals are influenced by the actions of other individuals, but even more so by the actions of many other individuals. Personality assessments have been used to investigate and understand the experience of students relative to group work. Research has

investigated the individual personality factors as well as the influence of the personality of the group also known as GPC, or group personality composition (Amato & Amato, 2005; Halfill et al., 2005; Krass & Ovchinnikov, 2006; Peeters et al., 2006). The following recent studies researched the use of personality assessments to understand student experiences when working in groups.

Using the Big Five: Personality and Predicting Satisfaction. Peeters et al. (2006) studied undergraduate engineering students ($N = 310$) over a 13-week period at a Dutch university of technology to examine the relationships between personality traits and individual satisfaction with the team. The Big Five personality traits were measured using the Five-Factor Personality Inventory (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience). Satisfaction with the team was also measured, using a 5-point Likert-type scale varying from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The study revealed that some personality traits positively predicted such individual satisfaction with the team as agreeableness ($b = .27$, $p = .03$) and emotional stability ($b = .36$, $p = .01$); others did not, such as extraversion ($b = -.09$, *ns*). A significantly negative predictor of individual satisfaction with the team was conscientiousness ($b = -.58$, $p = .001$), suggesting that the more dissimilar group members are from one another relative to conscientiousness, the less satisfied individuals are with the team (Peeters et al.).

Using Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI): Group Personality Composition and Satisfaction. Amato and Amato (2005) researched student group experiences using the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI) personality assessment. One of the key purposes of the study was to examine the relationship between personality composition

of student groups and student evaluations of the group experience. The sample (N = 64) included two sections of Marketing Strategy students (n = 9 groups of three, four, or five group members) and one section of Macroeconomics students (n = 8 groups of three group members). Groups containing similar personalities based on communication dyads derived from the MBTI personality assessment were classified as compatible; groups with dissimilar personalities were classified as complementary. At the conclusion of comprehensive, semester-long group assignments, students were asked to respond to items on an evaluation (7-point Likert-type scale) to measure their perception of team experiences using constructs developed by McCorkle et al. (1999) and related to specialization of labor, collective action, teamwork skills development, and student administrative problems with group work.

Students of the Macroeconomics course viewed the overall team experience as more favorable when in a group with others similar to their own personality (compatible groups). Relative to specialization of labor, the compatible group mean exceeded the mean for the complementary groups relative to each member equally participating in: conceptual development of the project, final report writing, and each part of the project (t = -2.79, -2.33, and -2.24, respectively; each significant at $\alpha < .05$ for a two-tailed significance test). Relative to problems with group work, compatible groups reported fewer problems than complementary groups with members being late to meetings (t = 2.44, significant at $\alpha < .05$ for a two-tailed significance test) (Amato & Amato, 2005).

Students of the Marketing Strategy course viewed the overall team experience as more favorable when in a group having a blended personality composition (complementary groups). Relative to specialization of labor, the complementary group

mean exceeded the mean for the compatible groups relative to each member equally participating in: conceptual development of the project, final report writing, and each part of the project (t = 2.48, 2.57, and 3.24, respectively; each significant at $\alpha < .05$ for a two-tailed significance test). Relative to problems with group work, complementary groups reported having less problems than compatible groups with members being late to meetings (t = -3.65, significant at $\alpha < .05$ for a two-tailed significance test).The researchers purported that satisfaction with groups is most likely related to the personality characteristics of the individuals of which the group is comprised (Amato & Amato, 2005).

Using an Alternative Personality Assessment: The Predictive Index (P.I.)

In contrast to previous studies, this study utilized the Predictive Index (P.I.) behavioral (personality) assessment to investigate differences between and among personality factors and student attitudes toward group experiences. The P.I. has been used effectively in business settings for decades (Perry & Lavori, 1983) but had not been used to research student attitudes toward group experiences. Unlike the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator and the Big Five assessments that categorize individuals into personality groupings, the P.I. customizes the personality results to the individual, yet still allows for categorization (Praendex Corporation, 1999).

The P.I. assessment identifies such motivational drives of individuals as needs for, and expressions of, differing levels of: dominance (A factor), social influence (B factor), patience (C factor or conversely, levels of patience), and formality (D factor). In this study, the focus was on the C factor (levels of patience or conversely, levels of urgency).

Low Levels of Urgency Traits

Behaviors in individuals with a C-high factor (low levels of urgency) usually exhibit an unhurried pace, a slow and consistent manner, and even possibly lethargic behavior or unresponsiveness at the extremely high levels (Praendex Corporation, 1999). Individuals with low levels of urgency are typically patient, stable, consistent, reliable, and systematic in behavior. These individuals prefer the status quo and are inclined to accept the environment as is, rather than seeking change. Those with low levels of urgency enjoy methodical, systematic work that is consistent with experience and provides them with predictable and repetitious task demands. They also are believed to have a high tolerance and preference for routine and repetitive work. Individuals with this personality factor are easy to get along with, yet slow to adjust to new people, new situations, or change in general (Praendex Corporation, 1999).

Factors that Influence Groups

Many factors can influence the overall group, as well as the experience that individuals will have when working in groups. These factors include interpersonal aspects between group members, communication and trust among group members, underlying issues in the subconscious of individuals, behavioral motivational drives based on the needs of each individual, and social aspects with which groups influence the individual. Interpersonal aspects of groups are defined, in part, by interactions that are affected by levels of individual interpersonal competence. Identifying factors that influence groups can assist in identifying what affects group experiences and how to best design interventions for group experiences(Bales, 1950; Goleman, 2006; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004).

Interpersonal Aspects of Groups. Coming into a group means interacting with others and each individual brings to a group differing needs and varying motives that influence interactions (Goleman, 2006; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). To enhance interactions, it is important for individuals to understand the subtexts and underlying aspects, which are believed to influence interactions. Individuals can improve the interpersonal aspects of group work by understanding such unconscious factors as prejudices from past experiences, as well as behavioral motivators, in themselves and others (Goleman, 2006; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004; Praendex Corporation, 1999). If individuals can understand and appreciate their own styles, as well as those of other group members, interpersonal relationships can be much less confusing and frustrating (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Interpersonal Interactions. High-performing groups develop positive interpersonal interactions (Argyris, 1962; Bolman & Deal, 2003, Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). Effectiveness is achieved in groups when interpersonal behavior becomes conscious, discussable, and controllable (Argyris, 1962). Interpersonal interactions create patterns that shape the group environment (Shechtman & Horowitz, 2006).

There are three categories of goals relevant to collaborative relationships: task goals, communication goals, and interpersonal goals. The first category, know as task goals, relates to conducting the work required. The second category, communication goals, can be described as monitoring the process of communicating. The third category, interpersonal goals, is defined as establishing or maintaining the qualities of

the relationships. In examining interpersonal goals, three stages exist as follows (McGrath, 1984; Shechtman & Horowitz, 2006).

When members of a group interact, the process relative to interpersonal goals can be viewed as three stages: the form of interaction (a series of behaviors, verbal or other, that form communication patterns), the content of the interaction (information and experiences that address task components and interpersonal relationship components), and the consequences of the interaction (the impact or outcomes of the interaction). Each stage works together to form patterns of relating over time including communication patterns and interpersonal relations patterns. The patterns affect change in participants over time (McGrath, 1984; Shechtman & Horowitz, 2006). An individual effective in interactions will consider the form, the content, and the consequence relative to recipients. When considering this, the individual can tailor the interaction to be better received and to trigger motivating needs of a recipient. For example, the form of the interaction could be tailored by an individual based on the personality type of a recipient by an individual choosing written (for a task-oriented individual) versus face-to-face communication (for a relationship-oriented individual). To tailor the content of an interaction, the individual could choose between providing a recipient with a highly structured and detailed task definition (for a formal, detailed, technically-oriented individual) versus an open-ended, generalized task description without defined parameters of how to accomplish the task (for an informal, uninhibited, non-conforming individual). The consequences of the interaction are believed to influence the attitude and motivation of all involved, positively or negatively. As individuals within a group tailor interactions to meet the needs of one another, positive

patterns form (Evans et al., 1989; Kolb, 1984; Goleman et al., 2004; Goleman, 2006; Praendex Corporation, 2006).

Innate temperamental differences between individuals play an important role in shaping interpersonal interactions and have a bearing on group experiences (Amato & Amato, 2005; Horowitz et al., 2006). For example, certain personality profiles, such as those with low levels of urgency will desire little conflict between people (interpersonal harmony) within a group environment and a strong level of support and team-orientation. Conversely, other individuals will be invigorated by competition with, and a level of independence from, others in the group (Tieger & Barron-Tieger, 1998; Praendex Corporation, 1999). If some group members prefer closer interpersonal relations and other members want more distant relations, recurring personality clashes and lower productivity can result (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Reddy & Byrnes, 1972 as cited in Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939 as cited in Napier & Gershenfeld).

Enhanced Interactions. Effective groups have members who enhance interactions by fostering rapport. Members of effective groups learn to adjust to one another and to compromise when undertaking work. Rather than complaining about one another, the group creates an environment of understanding with open dialogue to address issues (Goleman, 2006; Lancellotti & Boyd, 2008; Praendex Corporation, 1999). Group members learn to give and receive non-evaluative feedback; to become open and experiment with new attitudes, values, and feelings and permit others to do the same; and to own and permit others to own their ideas, feelings, and values (Argyris, 1962). High-performing groups develop positive interpersonal interactions in which people

listen to and question one another with respect, process information collectively, work through disagreements with openness and humor (Goleman et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 1998; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004), listen to one another, foster communication, build consensus among members, and manage conflict (Bolman & Deal, 2003). When a group enters into a task having established a predefined need to be cooperative and interdependent, the group realizes more acceptance of ideas (Lancellotti & Boyd; Napier & Gershenfeld). Positive interdependence, which exists when all members benefit from the success of other group members (Page & Donelan, 2003), is found in effective groups when members choose to rely upon one another to accomplish tasks (Bolman & Deal; Johnson et al.).

The personalities of group members may affect team interactions (Amato & Amato, 2005). Individuals can better understand how others will respond to one another, challenges, or environmental factors when considering personality types of members (Evans et al., 1998). Lancellotti & Boyd (2008) revealed that interactions can be enhanced when students use type theory to talk about their own behaviors before conflicts arise. Utilizing exercises wherein students could reflect upon their own personality and discuss their personality traits with their team, groups learned to joke openly about their different styles. Instead of complaining about one another, the students learned to discuss how to accommodate styles of one another.

Trust. Trust can be defined as “one party’s (the trustor) confident expectation that another party (the trustee), on whom the trustor must rely, will help the trustor reach his or her goals in an environment of risk or uncertainty” (Huff et al., 2002, p. 25). Individuals in a group typically assess the trustworthiness of one another and look for

such trustworthy attributes as reliability, openness, capability, integrity, and benevolence. The latter three traits have been identified as more deep-rooted character traits which are believed to take more time to accurately assess (Huff et al.). Benevolence, integrity, and competence have also been found to be key determinants of trust when combined (McInnes, Lin, & Li, 2007).

Meyerson et al. (1996) reported that in temporary groups, such as student project teams (Huff et al., 2002), swift trust is the form of trust that is required because groups lack sufficient time to assess trustworthy attributes of other members. Swift trust is “a unique form of collective perception and relating that is capable of managing issues of vulernability, uncertaintly, risk, and expectation” (Meyerson et al., 1996, p. 167). Members in a group must wade into the experience as opposed to waiting until experiences reveal if team members are trustworthy (Meyerson et al.).

Trust in groups has been found to be central to effective groups because trust can improve collaborative outcomes, promote more efficient communication, help members to stay problem-focused rather than having energy diverted from project objectives due to socioemotional issues, and influence members to compensating for one another when necessary. A climate of trust yields positive emotions, generates satisfying relationships within the group, and augments student effort and motivation (Huff et al., 2002; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004).

Motives of Interpersonal Behavior. Individuals inherently possess motivating needs and “will work most effectively in environments which provide them with opportunities to satisfy their motivational needs” (Praendex Corporation, 1999, p. 86). It is believed that one person cannot motivate another person; an individual must motivate

himself or herself. A climate can be created and communication fashioned to trigger a person to become motivated. It is believed that motivating needs vary based on personality. One individual would be motivated by variety and change in the setting and/or pace of work versus another individual who would be motivated by stable, familiar, and comfortable environments. Some individuals are motivated in an environment in which they can rely on others for initiative and new ideas. Other individuals are motivated in an environment in which they can control their activities, innovate, accomplish their agenda, and prove themselves. Although it is not always possible for individuals to work in environments or on tasks that best match their motivational drives, individuals working together can learn to create an environment in which they are mindful of the personality preferences of one another, to help one another with tasks and optimize individual strengths (Praendex Corporation, 1999).

It is widely believed that interpersonal behavior is motivated (Horney, 1945 as cited in Shechtman and Horowitz, 2006; Leary, 1957 as cited in Shechtman and Horowitz; Sullivan, 1953 as cited in Shechtman and Horowitz). People behave in ways that incite desired reactions from others. Interpersonal behavior forms a dynamic system of interactions in which the motives of individuals are either satisfied or frustrated, depending on the reaction of others. For example, if an individual boasts, he or she is conveying a variety of messages such as a desire to be recognized as exceptional. The boaster is not merely emitting an action in the presence of another, but rather he or she wants something from the other person such as recognition. The boasting behavior is motivated. The receiver may or may not provide that which the boaster wants. If the receiver provides that which the boaster wants, the boaster experiences satisfaction, if

not, the boaster experiences frustration which can lead to anger (Shechtman and Horowitz).

According to Shechtman and Horowitz (2006), interpersonal motivations can be used to understand personality styles. Two classes of interpersonal motivations exist: communal motive and agentic motive. Communal motive is a motive to connect with others and has been called connectedness, affiliation, love, warmth, or nurturance. Agentic motive is a motive to control and influence others and emphasizes the self as a distinct unit and has been called influence, control, dominance, power, or status. These motives run along continuums with the agency axis spanning from influencing (dominating, controlling) to yielding (submitting, relinquishing control). The communal axis spans from disconnection (indifferent, distant) to connection (engaged, close). The two axes form a two-dimensional graph that can be divided into eight octants, representing eight personality scales. The importance of these motives in individuals varies from time to time; but on average over time, motives are more important to one person than to another. Individuals can then be mapped to octants of personality style that are driven by interpersonal motivations (Shechtman & Horowitz, 2006).

In groups, difficulties in interactions arise, and individual dissatisfaction results, when one member does not understand the motivating needs of another member (Lancellotti & Boyd, 2008; Praendex Corporation, 1999; Tieger & Barron-Tieger, 1998). When motives behind a behavior are unknown, interpersonal interactions often are perceived as ambiguous or confusing, leading to miscommunication between interacting persons (Horowitz et al., 2006). If groups can learn to sense and understand the inner thoughts of, and driving forces within one another, groups can more effectively navigate through

interactions (Goleman et al., 2004; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004; Sheehan et al., 2009). To enhance interpersonal interactions, individuals must learn to understand underlying motives, or behavioral motivators, in others (Goleman, 2006; Praendex Corporation, 1999). For example, two individuals may bring to a group a propensity for conflict with one another during interactions. The behavior of each of these individuals is produced by underlying motives unique to the personality of each person. During interactions, person A, with a personality high in dominance (self-confident, assertive) and high in urgency (fast-paced, impatient), is likely to assume his or her way is best without consulting with others and perceive rapid results to be of the utmost importance. Interactions with this individual are likely to be one-sided and rushed.

Person B, with a personality high in formality (conscientious, accurate) and low in urgency (methodical, passive) is likely to appear resistant to take action and perceive that he or she is the only individual who will accomplish the work at an acceptable level. Interactions with this individual are likely to be slow and steady, yet also exacting. Each individual is asserting pressure during interactions, but for differing reasons. The former is motivated by accomplishing the work and concluding the task as quickly as possible. The latter is motivated by a steady, deliberate, and unhurried approach to work and a need to mitigate risk, avoid error, and meet all necessary task requirements at the highest level (Praendex Corporation, 1999). In effective groups, person A and person B will show one another empathy, point out underlying problems, reduce dissonance, negotiate how to handle tasks, and make concessions as necessary for the good of the group (Goleman et al., 2004; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). Taking time to address interpersonal issues unique to the group is key for enhancing interactions such as when

groups bring out into the open the preferences of each person and his or her abilities to contribute something positive and unique to the group experience (Goleman, 2006; Horowitz et al., 2006).

Freshman Students

Currently, 61% of students entering institutions of higher education as freshmen in the United States are part of the generational cohort known as the Millennial Generation (born 1982 – 2001) (U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Science, 2007). They are also known by such names as Nexters, Generation Y, Echo Boomers, or Kipper (kids in parents' pockets) (Carlson, 2005; Howe & Strauss, 2000). In 2008, 3.2 million Millennials received their high school diploma, eclipsing the graduating classes of the baby boomers of the 1960s (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; McGlynn, 2008). Of those graduating, 69%, or 2.2. million students, were attending college in October 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Pushed to collaborate during grade school, Millennials have a group orientation. They use on-line mediums for the potential of peer networking and connecting rather than for the anonymous freedom found in an on-line environment. Team orientation is a core trait and these students come to college expecting team teaching, team assignments, and team grading. Millennials choose to learn from each other rather than a professor, are seen gathering in groups at tables in the library, and pass around information electronically (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Although Millennials are accustomed to learning together, research of students from this cohort revealed that the effectiveness of group work at the undergraduate level is still plagued with incompetence. Researchers also identified that these students have

stunted their interpersonal and face-to-face skills due to an over-reliance on communications technology. Millennials may also lack the skills necessary to demonstrate introspection and self-reflection which are key to the development of trusting relationships that help, support, and encourage self-directed learning (Carlson, 2005; Elam, Stratton, & Gibson, 2007; Goleman et al., 2004; Murray, 1997; Sheehan et al., 2009; Zeff, Higby, & Bossman, 2006).

Psychosocial Development: Interpersonal Competence. The seven vectors of Chickering and Reisser (1993) address the psychosocial development during the college years which are: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Chickering & Reisser purported, and research (Theike, 1994) has validated, that these vectors generally follow a sequential pattern from freshmen to senior year in college. Although not rigidly sequential and more like spirals, vectors do parallel student developmental capabilities (Evans et al., 1998) and the first vector is generally associated with entering freshmen (Theike).

The first vector identified is the stage within which freshmen develop competence including three components: intellectual competence, physical and manual competence, and interpersonal competence. Intellectual competence entails acquisition of knowledge and skills related to subject matter, critical thinking, and reasoning ability. Physical competence is achieved through such activities as athletics, recreation, and attention to wellness. Interpersonal competence necessitates such skills as the ability to align personal agendas with the goals of groups, to choose from various strategies to build

relationships or help a group function, to communicate effectively, and to develop in cooperation such as working effectively with others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 1998; Theike, 1994). Interactions influence the development of interpersonal competence such as faculty-student interactions and interaction with peers (Thieke). An overall sense of competence increases as students learn to trust their abilities, receive accurate feedback from others, and integrate their newly developed skills (Evans et al.; Theike).

According to theorists, typology can serve as a support structure within which psychosocial development can take place, influencing the approach students take when addressing developmental aspects of their lives. Typology theory can assist the student in identifying factors that create consistent ways of coping with change and the demands of life, such as those during the crucial first-year transition (Evans et al., 1998; Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989) as well as in developing interpersonal competence. Interpersonal competence can be developed as students learn to understand themselves and make more accurate and unbiased appraisals of others (Evans et al.; Goleman, 2006).

Involvement and Retention. The first year of college can be overwhelming for students. Of freshman students, 26% fail to continue beyond their first year at private colleges; 27% at public colleges (ACT Institutional Data File, 2007). First-year students are making decisions about whether an institution is the right fit during the first months, weeks, and even days on campus (Gardner, 1986). Fostering student success in the freshman year is a significant intervention for student persistence (Upcraft et al., 1989). The significance of relationship building and social integration for the student during this

transition is stressed for achieving retention. Student decisions to remain at college are influenced, in large part, by their social experiences (Mayo, Helms, & Codjoe, 2004).

One significant force of attrition is transition or adjustment difficulties. Acclimating to the new environment is difficult for students because support systems built within previous environments may be gone or no longer as easily available. Freshman students must start to build support systems amid the stresses of a new and demanding environment with unfamiliar people and confusing systems. Successfully influencing freshmen students includes efforts that focus on helping students make an academic, personal, and social adjustment to college. Because of the risk of attrition, interventions targeted at the first-year experience have become a focal point (Evans et al., 1998; Upcraft et al., 1989).

Tinto's (1987) interactional approach to attrition purported that student contact or involvement was related to student retention. Based on Tinto's approach, students bring to college sets of attributes (race or ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status), skills, and motivation which influence the extent to which they will interact and integrate into the academic and social aspects of the environment. The greater the congruence between the college and the student, the more involvement with the environment, and the more likely the student will persist. The environment of the institution, defined as "the academic and social systems and the individuals who shaped those systems" (Tinto, 2005, p. 2), provides patterns of interaction between the student and other members of the institution. These patterns greatly influence retention of the student, especially during the first critical year (Astin, 1993; Evans et al., 1989; Pascaretta & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987; Upcraft et al., 1989).

According to Tinto (2005), during this crucial transition, freshman student involvement matters most; in particular, involvement with faculty and most notable, involvement with faculty outside the classroom. The quality and responsiveness of faculty may be one of the most powerful resources available for improving student success and persistence. Programs are best if designed to forge stronger connections to faculty, with students feeling understood and validated during the critical transition period of the freshmen year (Astin, 1993; Evans et al., 1989; Pascaretta & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987; Upcraft et al., 1989).

Tinto (2005) recommended that institutions consider retention methods that “employ collaborative and/or cooperative pedagogies that require that students learn together in a coherent, interdependent manner… students who learn together become more academically and socially engaged, that is they spend more time together and on task, learn more, and in turn persist more frequently” (Tinto, p. 9). Involvement in the classroom is particularly key for non-residential students. For these students, the classroom is often the only place where they meet with other students and the faculty. Without robust involvement there, student involvement is unlikely to occur elsewhere (Tinto).

Tinto (2005) further recommended addressing the deeper roots of student attrition by implementing programs to improve student involvement in ways that enhance retention over time, weaving retention efforts into the fabric of institutional life. Best practices have included programs that last a full term or longer and have been designed to provide an environment in which students are welcomed, supported, and celebrated (Bigger, 2002; Gardner, 1986; Gardner, 2001).

Research Question

The research question was as follows:

1) What are the differences between and among personality factors relative to levels of urgency and freshmen student attitudes toward group experiences?

Methodology

This quantitative, descriptive study investigated the differences between and among personality factors relative to levels of urgency and student attitudes toward group experiences. The study employed two instruments. The first instrument was a survey used to measure student attitudes toward group experiences based on constructs gleaned from the literature (Amato & Amato, 2005; Bacon et al., 2005; Chapman & Van Auken, 2001; Curran & Rosen, 2006; McCorkle et al., 1999; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004) and included: 1.) benefits of interpersonal interactions during group experiences; 2.) value of other students during group experiences; 3.) trustworthy attributes of other students during group experiences 4.) benefits of group experiences; 5.) value of group experiences and; 6.) group experiences, overall.

The second instrument was used to measure personality factors utilizing an instrument known as the Predictive Index (P.I.), which is a behavioral (personality) assessment. The P.I. measures four primary factors representing needs for, and expressions of, levels of: dominance (A factor), social influence (B factor), patience (C factor, or conversely, levels of urgency), and formality (D factor) (Praendex Corporation, 1999). In this study, the focus was on personality factors relative to C-factor or levels of urgency (or conversely, patience).

Participants

In this study, a convenience sample of intact groups of participants was chosen (*n* = 98) based on students assigned to freshman level courses through the student self-registration system at the university, for the first term of the academic year. No special screening criteria was set up to ascertain that participants possessed certain characteristics. The prerequisites for the course did ensure; however, that students were freshman status. The participants were not randomly assigned but rather units were chosen by means of administrator selection (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Each student was majoring in a hospitality discipline and self-enrolled in the course for 11 weeks in a university in the northeast. Participants (*n* = 98) represented 43% of the population of freshman students enrolled in an academic program of hospitality.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used. The first survey was used to measure student attitudes toward group experiences. This survey was self-administered, computer-based, and quantitative in design with constructs gleaned from the literature relative to student group experiences. The second instrument was a behavioral (personality) assessment survey, known as the Predictive Index (P.I.) and developed by PIWorldwide, Inc.™. This is an intact instrument, which is a commercially prepared, computer-based, cross-sectional survey, and quantitative in design.

Data Analysis

Dimension creation and individual questions for the instruments were based upon the literature to define dimensions of group experiences including student attitudes about interpersonal interactions during group experiences, benefits of group work,

valuing other students during group experiences, perceiving trustworthy attributes in other students (Amato & Amato, 2005; Bacon et al., 1999; Chapman & Van Auken, 2001; Goleman, 2006; Goleman et al., 2004; Huff et al., 2002; McCorkle et al., 1999; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). Two questions were utilized at the item level to investigate the difference between personality factors and student attitudes toward: overall group experiences, and the value of group experiences.

Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency, measures of variability, and frequency counts were run to assess the attitudes of participants toward group experiences relative to the factors of personality as defined by the Predictive Index (P.I.). T-tests (independent samples tests) were used to determine if there were significant differences in student attitudes toward group experiences based on levels of urgency.

Validity of Attitudinal Survey

To address content validity of the attitudinal survey, questions were developed from the literature and experts were asked to review questions and format of the instrument. Professors who teach freshman courses were utilized to check face validity of the instrument. Literature on attitudes was used for affective instrument construction (Anderson, 1981 as cited in Gable & Wolf, 1993) to ensure the instrument properly measured student attitudes. Dimension creation and individual questions for the instrument were based upon constructs including student attitudes about interpersonal interactions during group experiences, benefits of group work, the value of other students during group experiences, trustworthy attributes in other students during group experiences, value of group experiences, and the rating of overall group experiences

(Bacon et al., 1999; Chapman & Van Auken, 2001; Goleman, 2006; Goleman et al., 2004; Huff et al., 2002; McCorkle et al., 1999).

Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the internal reliability of the dimensions on the attitudinal survey instrument. An acceptable level of alpha internal consistency was achieved for each dimension: interpersonal interactions (.78), benefits of group work (.84), value of other students (.84), and perceiving trustworthy attributes in other students (.87). Two individual items were utilized to investigate the differences between and among personality factors and student attitudes about: group experiences, in general, and the value of group experiences.

Validity of Behavioral (Personality) Assessment

The personality assessment survey, known as the Predictive Index (P.I.), is reported as having seven of the eight scales with reliability above .80 and all of the scales having split rates of reliability above .70. Test-re-test reliability of the P.I. is reported as .65 for a time period of 3 months to two years; .57 for a time period of 2-4 years, and .53 for a time period of 4-8 years (Perry & Lavori, 1983).

Findings

The differences between and among personality factors relative to levels of urgency and student attitudes toward group experiences are reported below.

Low Levels of Urgency and Attitudes about Trustworthy Attributes in Other Students

As shown in Table 1, which depicts differences between students with and without a low levels of urgency and attitudes toward perceiving trustworthy attributes in other students during group experiences, students with low levels of urgency (n = 52 or 53% of

freshmen) reported significantly less favorable attitudes about trustworthy attributes in other students in a group less (M = 2.99, t = -3.21, p = .01, d = .65) than those without this factor (M = 3.50).

Table 1
Differences Between Personality Factor (Low Levels of Urgency) and Attitudes (Perceiving Trustworthy Attributes in Other Group Members) of Freshman Students (n = 98)

	Dimension: Perceiving Trustworthy Attributes in Other Students During Group Experiences *(Questions were 5-point Likert-type scale: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)*					
Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*	*d*
Attitudes of students with Low levels of urgency	52	2.99	.77	-3.21	.01	.65
Attitudes of students without factor	46	3.50	.78			

Low Levels of Urgency and Attitudes about Benefits of Group Work

As shown in Table 2, which depicts differences between students with and without low levels of urgency and attitudes toward the benefits of group work, students with low levels of urgency had significantly less positive attitudes about the benefits of group work (M = 3.75, t = -1.97, p = .05, d = .40) when compared to those without this factor (M = 3.99).

Table 2
Differences Between Personality Factor (Low Levels of Urgency) and Attitudes (Benefits of Group Experiences) of Freshman Students (*n* = 98)

	Dimension: Benefits of Group Experiences (*Questions were 5-point Likert-type scale: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)*					
Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*	*d*
Attitudes of students with Low levels of urgency	52	3.75	.63	-1.97	.05	.40
Attitudes of students without factor	46	3.99	.56			

Low Levels of Urgency and Attitudes Toward Valuing in Other Students

As shown in Table 3, which depicts differences between students with and without low levels of urgency and attitudes toward valuing other students during group experiences, students with low levels of urgency had significantly less favorable attitudes about the value of other students ($M = 3.34$, $t = -2.37$, $p = .01$, $d = .47$) when compared with those students without this factor ($M = 3.70$).

Table 3
Differences Between Personality Factor (Low Levels of Urgency) and Attitudes (Valuing Other Students During Group Experiences) of Freshman Students (n = 98)

	Dimension: Valuing Other Students During Group Experiences *(Questions were 5-point Likert-type scale: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)*					
Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*	*d*
Attitudes of students with Low levels of urgency	52	3.34	.76	-2.37	.01	.47
Attitudes of students without factor	46	3.70	.75			

Summary & Recommendations

Low Levels of Urgency and Freshmen Attitudes

Freshman students with low levels of urgency (53% of freshmen) had significantly less positive attitudes about trustworthy attributes in others, significantly less positive attitudes about the benefits of group work, and significantly less favorable attitudes about the value of other students during group experiences than those without this factor (or those with high levels of urgency).

The significantly less favorable attitudes of these individuals as revealed in this study may be attributable to nature of group work in college and the behavioral motivators underlying this personality factor. Student groups are believed to be comparable to temporary groups, which are environments that do not allow members to take sufficient

time to assess other members. In addition, in temporary groups, assigned tasks are often non-routine, and group work involves interrelating with new members (Huff et al., 2002; Meyerson et al., 1996; Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). New group experiences are likely to be less suitable to individuals with low levels of urgency because these experiences do not initially meet their motivating needs. These individuals prefer a slow and steady approach, and a stable work environment with long-term affiliations. Those with the low levels of urgency are usually slow to adjust to new people, diverse or unpredictable situations, or change in general. Temporary group environments would oppose these natural instincts of those with low levels of urgency because new group environments in class are often unstable and individuals can be grouped with unfamiliar people while doing non-routine work (Huff et al.; Meyerson et al.; Napier & Gershenfeld).

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Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action to improve group experiences for freshman students are reported in this section and include adjusting group experiences, by means of, inserting practices to address issues with temporary groups, and assigning freshmen to consistent groups.

Adjust Group Environments Taking Into Account Low Levels of Urgency

Freshman students with low levels of urgency reported significantly less favorable attitudes about trustworthy attributes in other students, the benefits of group work, and the value of other students during group experiences. It is recommended that faculty learn to understand the motivating needs of freshman students with this factor and adjust group environments to positively influence student attitudes toward group

experiences. The significantly less positive attitudes reported by these individuals are likely to be influenced by not only group experiences, but also other experiences during the freshman year. The freshman experience usually requires a profusion of many challenging adjustments relating to a new and demanding college environment with unfamiliar people and confusing systems (Evans et al., 1998; Praendex Corporation, 1999). To mitigate anxiety experienced during group work for freshman students, two adjustments could be considered, and they are: inserting practices with temporary groups, and assigning students to consistent groups during the crucial freshman adjustment period.

Insert Practices to Address Issues with Temporary Groups. Faculty could insert practices that address detrimental aspects of temporary groups that are likely to impede the motivating drives in individuals with low levels of urgency. It is believed that there is intensity in temporary group environments due to a need for individuals to quickly evaluate and adjust to other members. Speed and accomplishment are also understood to be driving factors in temporary groups (Huff et al., 2002; Meyerson et al., 1996). Individuals with low levels of urgency, however, prefer taking a slow and methodical approach when adjusting to unfamiliar people and new environments (Praendex Corporation, 1999). For example, personality assessments utilized at the commencement of freshman group experiences could be used to accelerate familiarity among group members. Group members could gain knowledge of other group members through the results of a personality assessment. Members of a group could identify and utilize the strengths, motivating drives, and preferences of one another when working together (Myers & McCaulley, 1985; Praendex Corporation). This practice is likely to

assist students with low levels of urgency in becoming more acclimated to others in their group in a steady, non-threatening, and methodical manner. As students review and discuss the personality styles of one another, individuals low levels of urgency might also perceive their fellow group members as more predictable and unsurprising because they can classify behavior (Tieger & Barron-Tieger, 1998; Praendex Corporation). This is in line with the literature because personality assessments can improve group functioning by teaching students to understand basic personality traits of one another (Anderson, 2008; Amato & Amato, 2005). Using personality assessments can be effective in assisting students in getting to know other team members, which is also a key initial step for enhanced team-building (Evans et al., 1989; Page & Donelan, 2003).

Assign Freshmen to Consistent Group Environments. To further adjust the academic environment to match the motivating drives of students with low levels of urgency, faculty could assign freshman students to a student group that remains consistent during the semester for all such assignments as in-class exercises, discussion groups, and term projects. This adjustment, during the crucial freshman adjustment period, might provide a more stable work environment for those with low levels of urgency. A consistent group is also likely to provide these students extended time to become familiar with other students. Additionally, students can more easily build extended affiliations with fewer temporary-like group environments, which are motivating needs for individuals with low levels of urgency (Praendex Corporation, 1999).

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Further Research

Further research is recommended to investigate the differences between and among personality factors relative to levels of urgency and student attitudes over periods of time. In addition, the findings relative to freshman with low levels of urgency and less favorable attitudes toward group experiences provide fertile ground for future qualitative research, such as focus groups, to ascertain disadvantageous external influences during the critical freshman adjustment.

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