Remodeling to Process Emotions Through Teamwork

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Abstract

As an undergrad at Boise State University, nothing could have prepared me or my family for all that would take place in our family over the past three and half years. Most recently, a dilemma in my family’s life has been trying to heal and move on from a messy separation and divorce. In considering my project, I really wanted to find a way to give back to my children in a way that could help lift their spirits and show them that all the struggle has been for the betterment of our family. The garage was the last area of the house to go through and had been a promised remodel for years. By using an innovative approach, it became a healing project for all the stakeholders involved.

Keywords: Innovative approach, children of divorce, emotional intelligence
Section 1: Introduction to your Capstone Project

While others may glance at this project as just a way to get a garage remodel done, it is far more personal to me and my stakeholders. These past three and half years have required sacrifices from not only me as a full-time student, full-time employee, and full-time single mom, but also my children. Almost two years ago now, my family went through a messy separation which began when my then-husband was finally arrested for domestic violence related crimes and charged with aggravated assault. Watching my children deal with the emotions that resulted from realizing just how bad it was and knowing that they wouldn’t get to see their dad for a long time, was heart-wrenching. There was a lot of deep anger, sadness, and stress that was percolating in all of us, and part of that was because we were still dealing with having to store his things because he couldn’t come and get them. Finding a way to help my children start to heal and take a breath of fresh air became my number one goal. I also wanted to find a way to acknowledge and reward them for the sacrifices I know they have made while I have been busy in school—what better way than to remodel a space in the house with them in mind?

From start to finish, my project entailed going to court to see what could be done about the No Contact Order being modified to allow for my ex to come get his things so we could clean out, removing all the clutter and either donating it or taking it to the landfill, removing shelving from the walls, repairing the walls and ceiling, painting the walls and ceiling, cleaning and painting the floor, purchasing some workout equipment that has been on our wish list for a while, and setting up a gaming area for my children and their friends to use as a safe, semi-supervised hang-out area. I had my stakeholders (my children) on board right away and we started with good energy. Even though the No Contact Order was not modified to allow for their dad to come get his things, we loaded it all up on a trailer ourselves, learned how to maneuver...
the trailer all over the Treasure Valley, and dropped it somewhere for him to pick up instead. It was tough, physical work to get the garage cleared, and my children and I cried tears of frustration and got on each other’s nerves several times, but we were overall happy to be making progress. Seeing their dad’s things gone forever was a sigh of sweet relief.

A couple weeks into the project I got a call that my mom wasn’t doing well, and we needed to get to Minnesota as soon as we could. She passed one week later, and we ended up staying there a total of three weeks dealing with funeral arrangements and helping my dad get things a little figured out. My dad then decided to drive back to Idaho with us. He wanted to keep himself busy after losing his wife of fifty years, so he was an unexpectedly added stakeholder in the project as he helped on the garage too. We all worked hard during Thanksgiving break to make up for lost time and get the project done and were successful in completing it almost exactly as projected, we just needed to cut out painting the floor and wait until summer to complete that step; it was too cold, and time didn’t allow for that part anymore. Overall, I and my stakeholders are extremely proud of the progress we made and our ability to complete the project despite the unforeseen events that took place. This was a huge labor of love—one that made us stronger as a family team. We didn’t just remodel our garage; we remodeled our family.

Section 2: Elements coming together

Innovative Approach

My question became “How might I finalize this chapter in my and my boys’ lives while taking into consideration the very real healing that still needs to happen?” In order to solve this problem, I used the very practical things I learned in my MDS 440 Project Management course to organize the work, used the knowledge I gained in my MDS 375 Perspective Taking course to recognize the level of emotional intelligence in me and my children, drew on some leadership
skills I have learned in my Applied Leadership courses, and even implemented ideas I picked up
from my Conflict Management courses as I navigated some big emotions in my children.
Finding the research necessary to help my project took a lot of digging. I looked up ideas on
decluttering, steps for remodeling, and tried to find solid sources on the effects of divorce on
children. To kick the project off, an article I came across called “The Complete Guide to
Decluttering” says it best when it says:

Tackling a decluttering project doesn’t just clear your [...] garage of stuff you no longer
need and let you check off a major item on your to-do list. In times like these, when the
world is full of uncertainty and anxiety, decluttering can also give you a sense of
control—and even help reduce stress. (Esswein, 2020)

**Emotional Intelligence**

The work that I performed is indicative of awareness of self and others because I was
forced to pay attention to how everyone was feeling about the project. It was very emotional for
all of us and I have seen especially in my oldest how he has a lot of unresolved anger issues that
surfaced. In research from Neher and Short, “Children of divorce reported significantly more
substance-using friends and less use of coping and social skills than children whose parents had
not divorced” (1998). My goal was to create a space that my children could be proud to hang out
with their friends in and work towards building a new life; I didn’t want them to be antisocial
and continue down some dark paths. The researched ended with:

[Children of divorce] may be influenced positively by seeking to reduce involvement
with substance-using friends and family members and by enhancing coping and social
skills. [...] increased levels of problem-focused coping, assertiveness, and self-esteem
were associated with reduction in substance abuse, antisocial behavior, and anxiety.
As I aim to consider the emotional intelligence of my stakeholders as well as the audience, I explain my ‘why’ in a way that can be understood by someone who hasn’t been in my shoes before. I’m also connecting things that happen in the project to things that are going on internally as well as explaining clearly what is going on. The outcome of this project is valuable to others because it is a project of resilience and teamwork. I have learned that we as people are more than capable of accomplishing anything we set our mind to, regardless of things that may pop up to try to throw us off course.

**Creative Thinking**

Because my project is a hands-on remodel, it has been so helpful to reference back to my project management class that I took over the summer and use some of those ideas and planning strategies to help me think of unexpected obstacles and plan my budget. I also referred to practical sources that gave me ideas on how to accomplish a remodel through easy-to-follow steps including *Renovations Done Right* (Esswein, 2017) and *How to Remodel a Garage: The Ultimate Guide* (Contractor Quotes, 2019). In designing my timeline, I tried to think of engaging ways to involve my boys in the process and not overload them at the same time. I feel my approach is unique because while other families have (unfortunately) been in similar situations and heartache, using the stress and trauma as fuel to ultimately destroy the last reminder of what was, and build something new and hopeful is healing and empowering. While I could complete the project by myself or hire out a lot of tasks, coming together as the family that we are now, is only making our bond stronger.

**Your Innovative Solution**

I saw this need to clear out once and for all what had become a huge burden to allow a
new normal to commence. I wanted to do something meaningful and something that I believed in completely. I wanted this to count for something on a deeper level; it has been a long road to this degree. In combining the emotional work with physical work, I was able kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. The garage project gives the perfect opportunity to let out some deep-down anger, struggle together, and ultimately succeed with a completed project. I am giving myself and the stakeholders a new life. Through blood, sweat, and tears, we tackled the remaining presence of an abuser who spent far too many years under the same roof as us. We finally cleared everything out, took a breath of fresh air, and smiled for real again.

Section 3: Results

The results are a finished garage space for gaming and working out, the ability to stay in budget, and a huge weight lifted off our shoulders. I asked my stakeholders their thoughts and feelings as to how they were thinking the project was going, what they were feeling emotionally, and what they hoped to accomplish yet. At first, they were all about the project: they wanted a cleared-out space for a gaming area, an elliptical and weight bench, and they shared what color(s) they wanted the walls to be. As the project progressed however, emotions were surfacing and they were tired. There were tears of frustration, fighting amongst each other as they got annoyed, and flat-out refusal to do anything more to help out. It was amazing to witness them come around in their own time and take ownership of what was being done.

A tangible benefit to me and my stakeholders is added usable square footage that can be used to relax, entertain friends, and work out. Another tangible benefit is not having to see my ex-husband’s chaotic mess of things anymore. Not having to be frustrated by his stuff in the way and needing to step around or move it to get to something else really did clear our minds and feels like a completely fresh start. Benefits that are intangible are a sense of pride in what we
were able to help accomplish, and a renewed hope for the future as we finally settle into our new normal stronger together. The impact on me and my stakeholders has been overall positive as we learned new renovation skills, got to work through some tough emotions, and ultimately turned a space that was avoided into one that everyone wants to be in now.

Section 4: Conclusion

I anticipated the results that I got; however, I didn’t anticipate that two of my stakeholders would fizzle out and lose steam half-way through the project. I learned to give them grace, trusting that they would come around in their own time. I also didn’t anticipate that my project would be so beneficial to a stakeholder I didn’t plan for: my dad. His grief has been immense since my mom passed, and for him to have a project to do for one of his daughters (me), was something his heart needed to keep going. For him, it also wasn’t about the completion of the work, but rather dealing with the fact that life must go on and it can be good, even if it’s different. If I could do this project differently, I would take the time earlier on in the planning stage to involve my stakeholders even more. Had I sought more input from them, maybe two of them wouldn’t have given up briefly. I also would’ve liked to spend more time with each of them individually throughout the process.

I learned that managing my time is crucial and to be prepared for interruptions because this is real life. Albert Einstein says, “The only thing we can be certain of in this life is that we can be certain of nothing,” and while it’s imperative to have a plan of action, it’s reasonable to expect the unexpected and be ready to go with the flow. Losing my mom mid-way through this semester really threw a wrench in my plans, but the show must go on and as I was able to get back to work, I learned to give myself grace as I adjust to a new normal without my mom on this
earth. I am proud of what we have accomplished as a family, not only through this capstone project, but also through the experiences we have shared these past three and a half years.
Appendix

Project pictures, timeline, budget information, and feedback quotes can be found at this link:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/18_hdEfjQZnGzlZFn1ziKy7m3m9TjP8gis/e

edit?usp=sharing
References


