Functional Perspective on Group Decision Making

Applying the Five Steps within The Goonies

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Growing up in the 1980s was a privilege. It was totally awesome. I rocked the side-pony with my hyper-colored t-shirt while watching quality Saturday morning cartoons: Teenaged Mutant Ninja Turtles and Smurfs. The music of Michael Jackson and New Kids on the Block instigated riots from teen girls country-wide. But there was nothing more any 80s kid wanted than to be a Goonie.

In June of 1985, Warner Bros. released *The Goonies*. Even though we didn’t understand it at the time, the film brought the theory of Functional Perspective into our lives. *The Goonies* illustrated the power of group decision making. The theory, summarized, is a list of five requisite functions that must take place for a group to be able to make an effective decision. The Functional Perspective of Group Decision Making relates to this film because of the decisions this rag-tag group of friends had to make in order to save the Goon-docks. Each of the five functions of effective group decision making are covered throughout their adventure.

This is an important theory of communication to apply because as a gainfully employed adult, I have to make decisions within a group setting everyday. In these group settings I have encountered the five functions of effective group decision making and the three types of communication. However, in those group settings I wasn’t aware of the Functional Perspective theory and its assumptions. Now, as I prepare to apply this theory to the film, *The Goonies*, I am now equipped with the knowledge to accurately apply the theoretical concepts and its assumptions.

This paper is divided into five sections: a review of literature on the Functional Perspective Theory, a review of literature on the film *The Goonies*, a description of the methods I used to research this topic, an analysis of that research, and a conclusion.
Review of Literature on the Functional Perspective Theory

Randy Hirokawa and Dennis Gouran are the theorists behind the Functional Perspective of Group Decision Making. This theory suggests that there are five functions for effective decision making: analysis of the problem, establish a goal, identify the alternatives, evaluate the pros of each idea, and evaluate the cons of each idea. By first analyzing the problem, the group will unite to become focused on the issue. After focusing on the problem, the group will then establish a goal to rectify the problem. Identifying the alternatives allows ideas to flow within the group allowing for options to be chosen from. Finally, the group will evaluate the pros and cons of each idea presented.

The Functional Perspective Theory tries to predict and to explain group behavior. When this theory is applied within a group setting, “successful group decision making and problem solving is most likely to occur when group interaction results in the fulfillment of the essential requirements of the task” (Wittenbaum et al., 2005). In other words, when the five functions of effective decision making are applied—problem analysis, goal setting, identify alternatives, and evaluation of pros and cons—groups will have more successful results and outcomes.

There are three types of communication within a group: promotive, disruptive, and counteractive. Promotive communication keeps the group moving forward. For example, a group member may help the group focus by telling them a story about how he or she solved a similar problem. Disruptive communication is just that—disruptive. These disruptions take away the focus from the group. However, disruptions can serve a positive purpose within group decision making. It can alleviate tension or provide comic
relief. Not all disruptive communication is negative. Counteractive communication helps to get the group back on track. This type of communication gives the group information they need in order to solve the problem (Duck, 2012).

The main assumption of the Functional Perspective Theory is that group interaction has a positive effect on the final decision. Meaning, all of us are smarter than just one of us. A collaborative effort will yield more results than someone going at it alone. Another assumption is that internal and external environments can affect the group as a whole (Putnam, 2012). This means that things that happen internally within the group have an impact and also things that happen outside of the group have an impact as well.

**Review of Literature on The Goonies**

_The Goonies_ is a high-adventure film for kids that came out in 1985. This film has endured the test of time. Almost thirty years later, the children that grew up watching this film, now adults, relive the good-old-days by making a bowl of popcorn and popping in the DVD. Roger Ebert wrote the following review:

"The Goonies" is a smooth mixture of the usual ingredients from Steven Spielberg action movies, made special because of the high-energy performances of the kids who have the adventures. “The Goonies", like "Gremlins", walks a thin line between the cheerful and the gruesome, and the very scenes the adults might object to are the ones the kids will like the best: Spielberg is congratulating them on their ability to take the heavy-duty stuff” (Ebert).

_The Goonies_ is about a group of boys that go on one last adventure before their neighborhood is demolished. Within the group, there are the token personalities: the smart kid, the kid with the silver tongue, the fat kid, and the Asian kid. Also along for the adventure, is the
older brother, Brandon, and two high-school girls that aren’t quite sure how they got caught up in this crazy adventure. Mikey, the smart kid, and his friends decide as a group to go on one last adventure after finding a treasure map in his dad’s stuff in the attic.

Janet Maslin of the New York Times said the following, “This is truly a great kid’s film and a great family film. The clever usage of the plot is what will really capture your attention. If not that then the great characters, bits of action, and bits of comedy will catch your eye” (Maslin). This film has become a cult classic because the kids that grew up watching the film can now enjoy it with their children almost thirty years later. Another review of the film given by the studio that produced the film, Warner Bros., said that it “is a film that still delights the young and the young at heart” (Warner Bros.).

These reviews indicate how The Goonies is a quality film that resonates with some many people—the young and old. It is film about how one group of boys and their tag-along’s make group decisions that have a lasting impact on their lives and the lives of their families.

Method of Analysis

My main method of research was a textual analysis. I separated the film into sections based on the decisions the characters in the film had to make. I applied the concepts of the Functional Perspective theory to each of the separated sections. Those concepts are the five requisite functions—analysis of the problem, establish a goal, identify the alternatives, evaluate the pros of each idea, and evaluate the cons of each idea. I will use specific examples from the film to illustrate how this theory applies to the film.

I then applied two more additional concepts of this theory: functional utterance and ideal speech situation. Our course textbook defines functional utterance as “an
uninterrupted statement of a single member that appears to perform a specific function (Griffin, p. 241). Again, I will use a specific example from the film to illustrate this concepts application to the film. Ideal speech situation is “a discourse on ethical accountability in which discussants represent all who will be affected by the decision, pursue discourse in a spirit of seeking the common good, and are committed to finding universal standard (Griffin, p. 243). This concept can be applied to a pivotal moment in the film.

The following section is an in depth analysis of the theoretical concepts found within the Functional Perspective theory. The analysis will provide detailed descriptions on how each concept applies to The Goonies.

**Analysis of Film**

I will go through the five requisites of effective group decision making found within the film *The Goonies*. I will first analyze the problem. Then I will state the goal that the kids set out to achieve and identify the alternative ideas they came up with. I will then evaluate the pros and cons of the group’s decisions. Finally, I will go illustrate examples from the movie that captured the concept of functional utterance.

**Analysis of the Problem.** The film starts out as the last Goonie weekend. They are loosing their homes and neighborhood to foreclosure. A big developer is moving in to build a country club where the Goonies neighborhood resides. Mikey tries to delude himself by saying, “Nothing exciting ever happens here anyway! Who needs the Goon-docks?” However, as all the boys—Mikey, Mouth, Chunk, and Data—gather at Mikey’s house, reality sets in and the boys are devastated to loose their beloved Goon-docks.
As the film moves along, the Goonies find themselves in Mikey’s father’s attic looking at the museums rejected items. Mikey uncovers a treasure map made back in 1632. The Spanish writing on the map inspires the boys to take action and save the Goon-docks:

Ye, intruders beware!
Crushing death and grief,
Soaked with blood of the
Trespassing thief.

As the Goonies analyze the problem of losing their neighborhood, Mikey states, “Guys, what are we going to do about that country club? It’s killing our parents. If we don’t do something now, there’s going to be a golf course right where we’re standing!” That transitions nicely into the Goonies setting a goal to save the Goon-docks.

**Goal Setting.** The main goal is the save the Goon-docks. The boys would use the treasure they find to pay off the foreclosure debt. After a brief run-in with a couple of the developers, the Goonies decided as a group to follow the map to the treasure. The four of them set out on their bikes, treasure map in hand, to save their neighborhood from foreclosure.

**Identification of Alternatives.** Throughout the adventure to find the treasure, Mouth, Chunk, and Data all make the comment to turn around and go home. An alternative to their goal to save the Goon-docks is to quit and accept what is coming. However, Mikey is steadfast in staying the course. After Chunk says for the second time, “Come on, Mikey. It’s late. Let’s go home” Mikey says forcefully, “Go home!? What home? In a couple more hours it ain’t gonna be home anymore.” This statement gets all the boys back on track to achieving their goal—save the Goon-docks. Along the way, there are decisions that the group must make to keep moving forward. For example, after
almost being crushed by one of One-Eyed Willy’s booty traps (booby traps—that’s what I said) the group encounters a rock blocking their path. The group is hesitant to move the rock. One of the girls tells Brandon, Mikey’s older brother, “Brand, God put that rock there for a purpose, and I’m not sure you should move it.” The group then offers some alternative ideas to why the rock shouldn’t be move: maybe the Fatelli’s are behind it, maybe Chunk found the police and they can just turn back, or maybe it’s another one of One-Eyed Willy’s booby traps. As a group, they decided to move the rock. Behind it was a cave filled with flesh-eating bats. Is all of this worth it just to save their neighborhood? The following sections evaluate the pros and cons of the Goonies goal.

**Evaluation of the Pros and Cons.** Before the Goonies set out on their adventure, the Goonies really struggled with how they were going to accomplish their goal. The one major pro that got the ball rolling for the group was when Mikey said, “But what if? You guys, just what if this map could lead to One-Eyed Willy’s rich stuff. Then we wouldn’t have to leave the Goon-docks. It’s our last chance to see if there’s any rich stuff.” As a group, there was a feeling of trepidation. They knew that the task before them was almost impossible. Also, finding the newspaper article in attic about the professional treasure-hunter, Chester Copperpot, having gone missing in pursuit of the treasure, left a negative impact upon the group as a whole. Mouth said, “If Chester Copperpot didn’t find it, how would we find it?” However, the Goonies knew that the one pro of finding the “rich stuff” outweighed any cons they came up against. Even when the group had the opportunity to give up and chose safety and warmth, they all chose to continue forward. They chose to continue forward because Mikey used the concept of functional utterance.
**Functional Utterance.** Functional utterance is “an uninterrupted statement of a single member that appears to perform a specific function” (Griffin, p. 241). At this point in the film, the Goonies find themselves in the bottom of the Old Moss Garden wishing well. They are tired, cold, and hungry. They have a choice to make. They can ride up the bucket to safety, warmth, and food, or they can continue on to save the Goon-docks.

Mikey’s statement sets the course for the rest of the film:

“Don’t you guys see? Don’t you realize? [Chester Copperpot] was a pro. He never made it this far. Look how far we’ve come. We gotta chance. Don’t you realize? The next time you see sky, it’ll be over another town. The next time you take a test, it’ll be in some other school. Our parents, they want the bestest stuff for us. But right now, they gotta do what’s right for them, cause it’s their time. Their time, up there. But down here, it’s our time, it’s our time down here. That’s all over the second we ride up Troy’s bucket.”

This statement had a lasting impact on the group to move forward in pursuit of finding One-Eyed Willy’s treasure and saving the Goon-docks.

**Conclusion**

*The Goonies* is a film that illustrates the Functional Perspective of Group Decision Making. Each of the five requisites of effective group decision making were met. This rag-tag group of boys identified a serious problem; they focused their energy into achieving a goal. Along the way they came up with alternative ideas to increase their chances of success. Most importantly, the Goonies weighed the pros and cons of their decision to save the Goon-docks.
This idea of group decision making is important because everyone has to make decisions within a group everyday. That group can be within a family, or friends, or in a work setting. Whatever the circumstance may be, the Goonies showcase a great example of this theory.

As an adult, I have to work effectively within a group setting. Decisions must be made to make progression possible. I suggest people take a closer look at the way they organize the group decision process. This theory proves that effective, successful outcomes can be met by following the five requisites for group decision making.


