



Consultancy Protocol

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Purpose

The structure of the Consultancy helps presenters think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma. The Consultancy protocol has 2 main purposes – to develop participants’ capacity to see and describe the dilemmas that are the essential material of their work, and to help each other understand and deal with them.

Time

Approximately 50 minutes

Roles

Presenter (whose work is being discussed by the group)

Facilitator (who sometimes participates, depending on the size of the group)

Consultants

Outside perspective is critical to the effectiveness of this protocol; therefore, some of the participants in the group should be people who do not share the presenter’s specific dilemma at that time. The Consultancy group is typically a small and intimate one – from 4-7 people. Larger groups can easily subdivide into consultancy groups.

Process

1. The presenter gives an overview of the dilemma with which she/he is struggling, and frames a question for the consultancy group to consider. The framing of this question, as well as the quality of the presenter’s reflection on the dilemma being discussed, are key features of this protocol. If the presenter has brought student work, educator work, or other “artifacts,” there is a pause here to silently examine the work/documents. The focus of the group’s conversation is on the dilemma. (10-15 minutes if there are artifacts to examine)
2. The consultancy group asks clarifying questions of the presenter — that is, questions that have brief, factual answers. (5 minutes)
3. The group asks probing questions of the presenter. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand her/his thinking about the dilemma presented to the consultancy group. The goal here is for the presenter to learn more about the question she/he framed and to do some analysis of the dilemma presented. The presenter responds to the group’s questions, although sometimes a probing question might ask the presenter to see the dilemma in such a novel way that the response is simply, “I never thought about it that way.” There is no discussion by the consultancy group of the presenter’s responses. At the end of the 10 minutes, the facilitator asks the presenter to re-state her/his question for the group. (10 minutes)

4. The group talks with each other about the dilemma presented. In this step, the group works to define the issues more thoroughly and objectively. Members of the group sometimes suggest actions the presenter might consider taking. These suggestions should be framed as “open suggestions,” and should be made only after the group has analyzed the dilemma. The presenter doesn’t speak during this discussion, but listens in and takes notes. The group talks about the presenter in the third person. (15 minutes)

Possible questions to frame the discussion:

- What did we hear?
- What didn’t we hear that might be relevant?
- What assumptions seem to be operating?
- What questions does the dilemma raise for us?
- What do we think about the dilemma?
- What might we do or try if faced with a similar dilemma? What have we done in similar situations?

5. The presenter reflects on what she/he heard and on what she/he is now thinking, sharing with the group anything that particularly resonated for him or her during any part of the Consultancy. (5 minutes)

6. The facilitator leads a brief conversation about the group’s observation of the Consultancy process. (5 minutes)

Note: See Consultancy Dilemmas to craft dilemmas for use with the Consultancy Protocol and Facilitation Tips for process advice.