Ron Milam
MSOD 614 - Assignment 5
Reflection Paper

a) the context of your consulting/assessment field assignment

We consulted for the Boys and Girls Club of Laguna Beach, a 60 year old-nonprofit organization serving youth in the community. In the contracting phase, we narrowed the scope of the project down to their interest in creating a new teen center using the following methods: 1) Generating feedback from local high school youth, 2) Researching best practices and 3) Assessing their organization's capacity to generate "community buy-in".

b) your evaluation of the experience

Working together as a team, the seven of us supported the client to reach several key insights that they came to on their own through our dialog with them. Through this process, I recognized the power of what Schein calls the "Process Consultation Model" and what Block calls "Collaborative Role". Block writes consultants in this role "don't solve problems for the manager. They apply their special skills to help managers solve problems themselves." This closely aligns with Schein's "the goal of PC is to increase the client system's *capacity for learning* so that it can in the future fix its own problems."

Through our research, we identified some best practices for them to consider (successful teen centers are youth driven). Through our dialog, we discussed how they could change their organizational culture to better support a youth driven process (the need to "let go" of deciding what the teen center will look like and instead facilitate a space for

teens to engage in the creation of their own teen center).

c) the skills, attitudes and behaviors which you demonstrated

We demonstrated different skills throughout this process. The interpersonal skills we demonstrated included supportiveness, listening and group process. The technical skills we demonstrated included a knowledge of nonprofit management and community engagement. The consulting skills we demonstrated included contracting, discovery and feedback (see section d below for details).

In addition, we demonstrated several attitudes and behaviors that relate to Edgar Schein's principles from Process Consultation Revisited. These include "be helpful", "stay in touch with the current reality", "go with the flow" and "be constructively opportunistic with confrontive interventions". Our main purpose was to be helpful. To do this, we needed to understand the current reality and designed a set of methods to give us a clearer picture of what was going on. We went with the flow and adjusted our discovery as new information emerged. Finally, when sharing our analysis, we looked for opportunities to constructively intervene through inquiry and support.

d) how what you experienced and practiced related to theory

Our experience related directly to theories presented by Peter Block in Flawless Consulting:

Phase 1, Entry and Contracting: In our first meeting, we worked with the client to explore the problem, discuss the client's expectations and decide the scope of our

consulting contract. We designed an approach to collect data that relied on three methods I mentioned earlier: surveying high school students, surveying best practices and interviewing the leadership at the Boys and Girls club about their own organizational capacity.

Phase 2, Discovery and Dialog: We developed a set of questions to ask high school students and refined the questions with our client. When four of us entered the school, our initial approach to set up a table in the quad and entice students to fill out our surveys evolved based on the input of one of the teachers we met. Mark, otherwise known as “the preacher”, instead split the us up and each took us to individual classes before lunch to survey students in class. During lunch, he guided and introduced us to various subcultures (thespians, nerds, jocks, seniors, etc.), gave a brief introduction to us and then we facilitated a focus group discussion. Our openness to our research design enabled us to generate much more feedback than we originally expected (we estimate we connected with around 200 students). While we interviewed the students, three others on our team researched best practices. Prior to our school visit, two of us interviewed the two senior staff to reflect on their organization’s capacity to engage the community.

As Block notes, “one of the consultant’s most important contributions to a client is a redefinition of the problem. Through our discovery phase, we redefined the problem based on our feedback and research. We were able to go from understanding the “technical problem” to its related “organizational problem”. The technical problem was them wanting to figure out what are the best practices for launching a teen center. The organizational problem was that in order for them to implement these best practices, they need to change

how they do their work. Or, put another way, the way they currently operate will not facilitate the development of the new teen center.

Phase 3, Analysis and the Decision to Act: Based on our research, we developed two key recommendations for our client: A new teen center needs to be “youth driven” and they need to engage the entire community in the process of developing a new center. Through dialog, we helped create a space where the client acknowledged the needed to “let go”. Instead of designing their new teen center for youth, they instead need to facilitate a process to engage the youth in designing their own center. We helped them explore barriers which might get in their way and also helped them develop specific next steps for moving forward.

e) how might your experience translate into another country’s culture

Discovery and dialog will play a key role in helping me understand another country’s culture. As Peter Block points out, “Give a great deal of attention to your relationship with the client. Include the client at every opportunity in deciding how to proceed...” I will need to use inquiry to understand a foreign culture.

I will need to also need to follow Schein’s principles of “always stay in touch with the current reality” and “accessing my ignorance”. Staying in touch with the current reality will mean testing my own assumptions, acknowledging my own ignorance and an active learning through dialog.

f) your point of view on doing assessments relative to the concepts of

organization development and consulting.

I appreciate Block's five consulting skills as a framework for approaching clients. I agree with his and Schein's focus on the "Collaborative Role" and "Process Consultation Model". I strongly support this approach because it jointly partners with a client throughout the process, effectively engages the client to overcome their own resistance and ultimately helps them take ownership in a solution. By working alongside the client, this assessment process has a higher chance of actually getting implemented.

More specifically, the other key learning point was to really narrow down our key findings and recommendations to two key items and have these recommendations take up only 15% of our final meeting with the client. The real space for change rests in the dialog with the client (30% asking the client if she's getting what she wants and 30% in getting a decision to act and 10% for close out/support). I directly experienced the "a ha" moments our client had, helped them understand and overcome barriers that might get in their way, and supported them to develop a set of next steps to move forward. It was a powerful process to watch unfold. I not only watched from a distance, but also actively participated, helping create a space for the insights to occur.