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MSOD 612

Assignment 3: Reflection Paper

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1. I really enjoyed our first intensive. Thank you for designing it. I felt engaged throughout the process, enjoyed building relationships with folks in my cohort and gained insights throughout the session. I'm walking away from the session with a much greater awareness of my own self along with an understanding of tools to assist me with further inquiry.

MSOD Intensives are exactly the type of learning environment I thrive in: interactive, experiential, varied, creative, embodied, reflective and connecting to my whole person. One of the things I like most about the program is the opportunity to reflect on my actions or the actions of a group I'm in. I had several conversations with various classmates and professors debriefing various interactions. It helped give me a deeper understanding on what occurred.

The main insight, which I mention below is how my strengths, when overplayed, can create a negative and unhealthy tension for groups I'm in. I now have a greater awareness for when that behavior occurs. Sometimes I'm able to catch it and change. Other times, I still revert into the same pattern. I have named it with my wife and she agrees. I have also more actively questioned my assumptions around situations where that behavior comes up. One thing I have done is attempt to look at the perspective from different situations. For example, when I was frustrated with a recent group project, my knee jerk reaction was to blame my teammate. I took a step back and asked myself what I could have done differently to impact the situation. I also stepped back and reflected on how the experience of this team exposed me to real challenges teams face, and how exposure to that challenge is ultimately a good thing because it is a learning experience.

Throughout the intensive, I had the opportunity to connect with most of the students in our cohort. Whether it was my SPINE partner, discussions over meals, walk and talks, triads, small groups, ocean swims, campfires or dance parties, I

gained an appreciation for my classmates. My concern prior to the Intensive about the levels of engagement from my classmates no longer exists. I experienced them to be smart, committed, open, curious, courageous and fun.

I especially appreciated the three-day container of the small insight groups, which gave us all an opportunity to deeply explore our own selves and discover others in the process. The greatest surprise came during my insight small group. I didn't expect to come so face to face with one of my blind sides from the Johari Window. As I discussed one of my committee members, I spoke with confidence about how that member served me. Yet, this member often rubs other people the wrong way, without me knowing it. I experienced first hand three different instances where my own actions caused more disharmony in the group than harmony. In these moments, I lost touch with my wise self. I gained the insight that my positive authentic self can let go of some of the things that irritate one of my committee members. In connecting with my wise self, I can more authentically collaborate with others, which is something I greatly desire.

This has impacted me in situations where I experience frustration or irritation and am tempted to lash out, my wise self has been more proactive in questioning assumptions around the situation and intentionally viewing it from multiple vantage points. I have started a dialog with myself and have also engaged Jennie in these conversations.

Regarding my own behavior, even if what I'm frustrated by is valid and real, my challenge is to react to it in a more productive, authentic way. One tool I have used is inquiry, both internally on myself and with others. Self-inquiry by first asking where the frustration and irritation is coming from and then engaging in a dialog with others. As Teri Egan wrote in the Strategic Leading in Complex Environments, "Authentic Collaboration: The ability to foster collaborative experiences that are characterized by high degrees of personal accountability, self-awareness, empathy and compassion." Authentic collaboration starts with me and now knowing about "neural plasticity", I'm even more eager to change my own behavior so that I'm in a better position to positively engage with others.

These experiences gave me greater awareness and clarity of my own self. My intuition in the past alerted me that sometimes I could rub people the wrong way with my focus, intensity and rigidity, but I didn't fully realize what was going on. Now, I feel like I have a greater set of tools to keep this committee member in check when his actions are not needed. This awareness is the first step in me changing my own behavior in the future, which will ultimately enable me to be a more effective practitioner.

Regarding my emerging practice point of view, this session gave me a much deeper understanding of self as instrument. Before I can change an organization, I need to know how to change myself. I need to know how I change. During the intensive, I experienced greater awareness through the various activities and conversations. I recognized the importance that inquiry plays, both in others and myself. Who knew questioning assumptions could be so much fun? In my previous paper, I wrote, "I know I sometimes struggle with frustration and stress". Through the intensive, I gained a greater understanding of where this comes from (my disgruntled committee member).

The other thing the small group did for me, in addition to my own greater self-awareness, is it gave me a deeper appreciation for the multiple layers of history and narrative in others. All of these people I had just met a few days prior, and the insight groups gave me the opportunity to know more about them than I ever expected. The insight for me was that the layers I experienced with my peers exist in every group I facilitate.

As I start to think about the next two courses on small group dynamics, I'm really excited. This is one of the realms I am most experienced with, having now facilitated over 200 retreats and meetings. I'm energized by working with small groups. I have experienced a range of interactions with people and look forward to sharing my experiences with others in my cohort. Most of my knowledge of small group dynamics comes from my own self-study of facilitation. I'm influenced by books such as "The Skilled Facilitator" by Roger Schwarz, "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making" by Sam Kaner and "Visual Meetings" by David

Sibbet. I'm a member of the International Association of Facilitators and will also bring this experience to the group.

I expect to continue to refine my inquiry skills with groups I serve. I want to be more open with groups to test my assumptions and engaging in a dialog with them rather than just jumping into action. That could look like me sharing what I'm observing from the group, attaching meaning to it and asking the group if that is the right assumption about what is going on. Based on that, I would enter a dialog with them to jointly develop next steps.

What I have not studied is larger theories around group dynamics. I'm eager to build upon my existing knowledge and learn a new set of tools to build effective groups. No matter how much existing knowledge and experience I have, I continue to be challenged in this work. Given the complexity of our own selves, it's no surprise groups of individuals working together gets so messy. I expect to encounter some challenging situations in the next intensive as we work together in small groups. On the ride back, Gil and I had at least an hour discussion about our different approaches of being in groups (an authentic collaboration we would not have had had we not participated in the intensive). Our styles are different and we acknowledged that. We came to a greater understanding of each other. That doesn't mean we won't rub each other the wrong way in the future.

I will bring my own perspective on small group work as we move forward with the online course and the next intensive. I look forward to challenging my own assumptions and experimenting with new tools. I'm most interested in challenging the following assumption around expectations. I have a set of expectations about a project (deadlines, responsibilities, etc.) that I need to better test/communicate with others at the start of a project. I would normally assume that others I'm collaborating with are on the same page with me without specifically communicating/verifying this at the start. I recognize that others have different work styles than me and need to better understand the dynamics of others so I can more effectively collaborate with them.

Regarding personal development goals related to my whole person, I think of the following:

- Spiritual: What practices build a spiritual connection within a small group (broadly defined as meaningful connections to each other and work making a positive difference in the world).
- Physical: Having experimented with many variations of including physical activities in small groups, I want to learn even more. I want to challenge myself to research new ways to engage people physically in group settings rather than just use the same old exercises I have used. For example, this year I have had many groups use the room as a map and locate where the work and live. While this is interesting, it uncovers some layers of information about the people in groups. I need to come up with some variations or some completely different exercises to keep things fresh for me and them.
- Intellectual: I want to learn the foundational group processes theories. I also want to get a sense for the major thought leaders in this field. In 2013, I want to be more intentional about developing authentic mentoring relationships to have a space to reflect on my learnings from the reading and the program. To some extent, this relates to me becoming a more effective facilitator. I'm finding myself interested in a larger set of issues and practices beyond just facilitation. Facilitation is one method and I want to expand my set of tools. One thing I want to get better at is collaborating with a client in diagnosing organizations (based on Peter Block's *Flawless Consulting*).
- Intuition: I want opportunities to practice, reflect, and refine my role as facilitator and participant. I desire a space to reflect more on my own actions and others in a group. In group situations, I and others make many intuitive situations. I like the Action Research method of reflecting on what happened and having a dialog around that. What this could look like with clients is me being more intentional to debrief with them on sessions I facilitated beyond my normal group assessment at the end of a meeting or retreat.
- Emotional: I want to explore techniques that build stronger emotional bonds in between participants in a small group. I also want to refine my inquiry skills in high-emotion situations. With my journaling, I want to be more

proactive in reflecting on high-emotion situations after they happen to use them as learning experiences (rather than ignoring them, forgetting them or leaving them open). Asking the questions “What emotions did I experience today?” and “What did I do with them” (from your Journaling to Expand Whole Person Awareness” will help me gain greater awareness about myself (which is a more disciplined way to use my journaling time). If I start with my own self-inquiry on a set of specific questions and get into the habit of answering them on my own, I’ll become better at answering them in the moment of a high-emotion situation.