

# **The Reflective Practitioner: Consulting, Conflict, and Change In Organizational Settings**

**Nova Southeastern University**

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Effective conflict consultants need to be able to work and function as facilitators of purposive organization change. The role of the consultant in this process is critical. This course will focus on the role of the internal/external consultant in assessing the health of an organization and assisting in addressing and solving the communication, structural, and organizational issues and conflicts that stand in the way of productivity, efficiency, and workplace satisfaction.

At the center of this course is an off-site field work experience. Class participants will become members of 3-6 person consultation teams that will engage in a consultation experience with an organization. The action research/process consultation intervention consists of the four primary steps as diagrammed and outlined below.

## **1. Data Gathering**

**4. Implementation  
& Follow-Up**

**2. Data Analysis &  
Generalization**

**3. Data Feedback**

## **Explanation of "Four Steps"**

### **1. Stage I: Data Gathering**

- Involves conducting an assessment of the current situation through data gathering. Data gathering is conducted through individual one-on-one interviews or combined with surveys that are confidential and non-threatening.

### **2. Stage II: Data Analysis and Generalization**

- The data gathered during Stage I are analyzed and generalizations are formed. Findings and recommendations are documented in an oral and written report for presentation to the client during Phase III.

### 3. Stage III: Feedback

- This session is facilitated by the process consultant(s). Findings are reviewed with participants and issues are addressed or resolved. The outcome of this phase is to remove obstacles preventing the group from achieving its desired outcome. A communication problem-solving process is used to develop action plans to achieve desired outcomes.

### 4. Stage IV: Implementation and Follow-Up

- This stage concludes the process with the implementation and evaluation of action plans agreed upon by the group.

Throughout the consultation, participants will examine the political, psychological and ethical implications of their work, and assist clients with understanding change possibilities. The primary outcomes of this course are the development of essential knowledge, skills, and attitude of a "reflective practitioner" and the ability to use this experience to assist groups and organizations to meet their strategic objectives.

Central to the success of the organizational intervention will be the forming and functioning of effective consultation teams. Participants are expected to actively engage in cooperative learning exercises to assist in team development and team effectiveness.

In addition to the fieldwork experience and cooperative learning exercises, the methodology of the course includes lectures, skill demonstrations, skill practice, readings, and discussions. One of the three weekend meetings will be a special workshop for class participants and others on Assessing and Intervening in Organizational Conflict.

## Course Structure

The course is designed as a *temporary system* that functions as a *Consulting Firm*. The faculty, Neil and his associates, will serve as the firm's *Senior Partners* in this temporary system. Students are *Consulting Associates*, professional staff "employed" by the firm. Associates will be formed into *Consulting Teams* on the second day of class.

*Senior partners* are available for consultation to consulting teams during the course to provide assistance regarding process and content of the consultation and understanding of organizational dynamics. The tasks of the senior partners are to enhance the learning of the consulting associates, support team building, and to prepare and assist the consulting teams in providing quality services to the client system. Senior partners meet periodically with the client to assist in contracting and to check progress of the consultation efforts. *Senior staff does not, however, consult directly to the client system, leaving the primary responsibility of the consultation in the hands of the associates.*

## Course Objectives

1. Investigate and explore role and requirements of the internal/external consultant in working successfully with organizational conflict and change.
2. Assess ones own skills/abilities to be an organization change agent.
3. Enhance one's own skills/abilities to be an organization change agent.
4. Develop an understanding, expertise, and appreciation for action research/process consultation.
  5. Work effectively and successfully as members of the consulting firm and the consulting team to service the client and to support one's own learning.
6. Work in collaboration with client and client system to meet their improvement needs within confines of process consulting and the time framework of the course.

## Course Expectations

1. To attend *all* in-class and out-of-class meetings and a February workshop on *Assessing and Intervening in Organizational Conflict*
2. To complete all assigned readings by due date.
3. To actively participate as valued member of consulting team.
4. To share responsibility for work and success of consulting team.
5. To willingly assess/evaluate ones work.
6. To conduct oneself in a responsible and professional manner at all times with client system and as member of the temporary consulting firm.

## Course Requirements and Grading Procedures

1. In and out-of-class meeting attendance and active participation at all times.
2. Completion of readings and ability to apply insights from readings to discussion and consultation.
3. A learning journal-- to help you to reflect upon and learn from your experience and assist the senior staff in charting your effort and progress.
4. A group paper and a brief individual reflection on your consulting experience.
5. An individual paper/exam to integrate your learnings and insights.
6. Team presentations on your consulting work.
7. A peer evaluation of your team members' contribution to the success **of the consultation.**
8. Active participation in the February workshop on *Assessing and Intervening in Organizational Conflict*.

**NOTE: APPROXIMATELY ONE HALF OF YOUR FINAL GRADE WILL BE DETERMINED BY YOUR *WRITTEN WORK* (GROUP PAPER, PAPER/EXAMS AND JOURNAL) AND ONE HALF BY YOUR *CLASS PERFORMANCE*(ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION AND QUALITY OF CONTRIBUTION TO CLASS, WORKSHOP, TEAM AND CLIENT.)**

### **Materials to Obtain at This Time**

- 1. Class Workbook and Reader (Obtain by calling Syracuse Copy Center At 315-472-0546 and ordering reader 20044-1002 before weekend of Jan.9**
- 2. Process Consultation Revisited by Edgar Schein (Addison-Wesley), 1999.**
- 3. Reframing Organizations by Lee Bolman & Terrance Deal (Jossey-Bass), 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2003.**
- 4. An 8 1/2 x 11 Notebook for in class and field notes, and to aid in journal writing.**

### **Journal Assignment**

Each participant is required to keep a journal. This is intended to capture the participant's journey throughout the course, their thoughts and feelings about the experience as a whole, and an opportunity to document specific insights, reflections and learnings.

Some concrete suggestions to assist you in the process include:

1. Thoughts and feelings about material and exercises presented and practiced in class. What specifically enhanced your learnings? What was a barrier to learning? What might you, or the instructors, do differently to enhance learning. Make sure to indicate the most significant learnings for you each day.
2. Notes, thoughts, and feelings about reading assignments--what excites you, what infuriates you, confuses you, or confirms some of the class learning. (Please include a page numbers of specific ideas in the readings to which you are referring.) Again, most significant learnings are needed in this section.
3. A running log of your process consulting/action research experience. How is it going for you? How are you doing as far as gaining rapport, establishing trust and credibility with the clients and your interviewees? What is troubling or confusing to you at this point? Are any of your values, beliefs, or behaviors being challenged or transformed?
3. Your relationships with your consulting team. Keep track of where you stand with each of the other members of your consulting team in terms of establishing and developing positive professional relationships. Allocating separate pages for each group member on your consulting team will give you a cumulative record of the highlights of your interactions with

each member. As you scan these pages, you will be able to see just how your relationship has or hasn't developed with each member of your consulting team. In addition, you will want to track your professional relationship building success with other associates and the senior members of the consulting firm.

5. Your own growth as a process consultant/researcher. Keep track of the cultural norms, shared assumptions about behavior, as well as ethical and moral dilemmas that emerge in relationship to action research and your consulting experience. How are you growing/developing in relationship to self (personally and professionally), working in teams, and consultant-client relations. How has your behavior supported and/or interfered with accomplishing your objectives and client system need/objectives?

Your task in the journal is to be reflective and analytical. It is your opportunity to give the staff feedback on what is working and not working for you. Even more important, it is an opportunity for you to chart your own learning progress and to integrate some of the major concepts that are being presented.

Journal entries should be concise and thoughtful rather than rambling or more generalities (e.g.: I learned a lot today.) Journals will be most helpful to you if they include ideas that are important to you, conclusions you have drawn, lessons to remember, questions that trouble you, and a synthesis of theory and practices. For us, your journal should help us evaluate the effectiveness of the material and presentation, as well as the depth, intensity, and sincerity of your effort in the educational process. In order to receive an "A" for your journal, you will have to do outstanding work on each of the components of the journal.

Try to make journal entries promptly at the end of every class or at least every week. Entries are best and easiest when they are fresh in your mind. Journals will be turned in at periodic dates for review. At this time staff will review and give prompt feedback. The Final Journal will be handed in after the last class. You will be making several entries in your journal between each weekend class period.