

MSOD 616 Paper – After Session Reflection

Flash Consulting® Field Assignment

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Shift in Self-Awareness

They say that hindsight is 20/20. For me, clarity arrived on the very last day in Lyon. My closely-held beliefs about leadership and the image of myself as a leader were tossed naked under the stark, clinical light of interrogative self-scrutiny. Having stripped away the veneer of the meticulously crafted narrative I created for myself, and, over time having been seduced by it, I was reduced to the painful, unvarnished truth that under my bravado and blustering outward behavior, was a gnawing fear of becoming irrelevant. The frightened inner voice quietly asking, “Am I too old for this? Have I outlived my usefulness to the cohort? To the profession? To society?”

The MSOD 616 course was one giant kick in the backside which brought these questions to the forefront. It also provided the framework, tools, and vocabulary for me to answer these questions for myself. What I discovered was how much time and energy I had been consuming attempting to manage an image and a belief of, “If I have to show up, I might as well be in charge” by employing misguided strategies that confused altruism, “helping others,” information sharing, and fixing problems with seeking control, validation, affection, and purpose. I also had to come to terms with my heretofore implicit biases toward “optimal” leadership behaviors—being assertive, showing initiative, using declarative speech—and the internal blind spots these biases created which prevented me from seeing leadership constructs expressed in different forms and styles.

Throughout the entire course, starting with the first learning group assignment to produce a project plan to the flash consulting team engagement and debrief, and even the instructor-led lecture sessions with the entire cohort, my beliefs were being continually challenged and assaulted. Although I am still somewhat emotionally raw from the overall experience, I am

grateful for this crucible-like process and the new self-awareness that resulted from it. It is through this new lens that I will describe highlights from the consulting team experience and my role in it.

### The Engagement

Our Flash Consulting® field assignment took place at Lyon's Hôtel de Ville: Mission Développement Durable (Lyon City Hall: Sustainability Mission). Our client contact was Mme. Isabelle Niesseron, the Lyon City Manager to Fight Global Warming. The client request was to provide an actionable recommendation pack for coping with heat waves that included a synthesis of onsite interviews and best practices from North American cities. The interviews included directors and staff from two municipal nurseries and one elderly home, two residents of the home, and six randomly selected citizens we approached in public venues throughout the city. The pack also included recommended actions and a resource compendium with additional information. The team consisted of John Cramer, Evelyn Ghosh, Alicia Keyes, Kristy Lapidus, Katie McConnell, and Jane Vucevic. Our Learning Group Consultant, Jill Shaver, advised and guided the team throughout the consulting engagement and post-engagement team debrief.

### Choosing Our Co-Leaders

Early in our team formation, we defined the role of a team leader as someone "to facilitate teamwork to ensure diversity of knowledge, skills, experience, and passion, and that they are made use of in a productive and enjoyable way so that we meet or exceed our client goals. The leader will address norms that are not being followed." The team agreed to meet in a few days to choose who would lead. Given my ingrained belief pattern, my immediate impulse

was to assert my desire to lead, fight off any opponents, and dive into developing a project plan and assign tasks and resources. Tick tock! Instead, however, I paused and chose a riskier, more vulnerable action. I wrote the team a private email and shared my most closely-held beliefs around leadership and my role as a leader. The point of the email, however, was not to justify why I should be the leader but to declare why I must remove myself from consideration. It was clear to me even then that the only benefit of my leading would be to serve my own ego and not the needs of the team. What was best for the team and me was to step back and support the team in any role other than a leader.

Within hours the email precipitated a lengthy thread of intensely personal self-disclosures and views on leadership by other team members, which allowed the new team to get to know each other in a profound way and in a short length of time. By the time we met to choose our leader, Evelyn had already stepped up and stated she wanted to take a co-lead position, acknowledging both her desire and her trepidation of assuming the role. I quickly seconded. Kristy removed herself from consideration because she was already co-leading the Environmental Sustainability team that would present at the symposium. That left Alisha, Katie, and Jane.

What ensued was a rare learning moment for me as I witnessed a kabuki dance of group dynamics and power among women. No one was outwardly claiming the brass ring and asserting their desired intentions. On the contrary, the team had to coax the three of them by inviting them to lead. The initial response by all three was to demur, each yielding to the other in ritualistic polite, deferential tones, while at the same time expressing their willingness and reassurance to do what was best for the team. I was at a loss how to interpret what I observed. Katie eventually agreed to be the other co-leader, and I left the call confused and frustrated with the process.

My Point of View as an OD Practitioner

With my new-found self-awareness comes the question, “What now?” With what new beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes do I clothe myself as I move forward working with future clients and teams in Costa Rica and China and in my professional practice? As for my point of view as an OD professional, I have become sensitized to the internal drivers which govern my desire to help and to fix. I must become more discerning in how I react when I am triggered and to find new strategies to transform these triggers into opportunities to serve, beginning with a new daily mantra, “It is not necessary to react. Who’s the jerk in the room? I am. It will be okay.”