*HUMT 3720/*3730 Adaptive challenge small group work | ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

## Key dates

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Fri, Mar 31 | In Class | Assignment details handed out and discussed |
| Fri, Apr 7 | In Class | Introduction to the case consultation process |
| Wed, Apr 12 | Canvas | Adaptive challenge case presentation write up due |
| Tues, Apr 18 | Canvas | Instructor feedback received |
| Fri, Apr 21 | Arranged | Case consultation session 1 |
| Fri, Apr 28 | Arranged | Case consultation session 2 |
| Sat, Apr 29 | Canvas | Reflection questionnaire A due |
| Fri, May 5 | Arranged | Case consultation session 3 |
| Fri, May 12 | Arranged | Case consultation session 4 |
| Sat, May 13 | Canvas | Reflection questionnaire B due |
| Fri, May 19 | Arranged | Case consultation session 5 |
| Fri, May 26 | Arranged | Case consultation session 6 |
| Sat, May 27 | Canvas | Reflection questionnaire C due |
| Fri, Jun 2 | Arranged | Case consultation session 7 |
| Sat, Jun 3 | Canvas | Reflection questionnaire D due |

## Learning outcomes

After successfully completing all consultation group sessions, you will have:

* Articulated implicit and explicit assumptions that you are operating under
* Evaluated areas to work on in your personal adaptive challenges
* Developed your capacity to observe, interpret, and intervene successfully
* Developed your capacity to sustain a simultaneous presence on the dance floor and the balcony
* Reflected on the academic learning, your own learning and experiences, and those of your consultation group peers
* Expressed yourself clearly and concisely

## Grading criteria

The case consultation write up and the four reflection questionnaires are each worth up to 100 points and are together 30% of your overall course grade. These assignments will be graded using a reflection rubric consisting of four criteria: Depth of Reflection, Required Components, Structure, and Spelling and Grammar. Descriptions of the four criteria are available on Canvas.

## Task and purpose

The case consultation process is a critical conversation focused on the storyteller’s adaptive challenge. The task is to:

* To assist the storyteller to observe and interpret the adaptive challenge under consideration, not to develop a solution
* To come to an awareness of the assumptions the storyteller is operating under – particularly those having to do with power relationships and hegemonic practices & ideas.
* To investigate whether these assumptions are well grounded
* To look at the storyteller’s practice from different viewpoints
* To think about the implications of the conversation for the future

The purpose of the case consultation process is to use the tools and approaches we’ve learned to make adaptive challenges more susceptible to progress, employ diagnostic devices through which you can interpret both your behavior and others' in the context of these challenges, and examine as a group how your behavior and others' behavior might be modified to produce better outcomes. Ultimately, the case consultation functions as a learning process for the entire group.

## Your case consultation write-up

Your adaptive challenge should be no longer than two single-spaced pages. Describe a challenge, dilemma, incident, or problem that you face within an organization (club, team, family, friend group, volunteer group, etc.) of which you are a part.

1. **Characterize** the challenge or opportunity from **your perspective**. Who are the major players, and (very briefly) what are their major interests?
2. Name the **assumptions** you are operating under – assumptions about the organization, major players, and their role in the problem/opportunity
3. Describe as concretely as possible the **actions you have taken or that you currently intend to take** regarding the challenge you face.
4. **Pose the question** concerning this challenge that you would most like to address.

When choosing your challenge, consider the following:

* You need not reveal the identities of the participants or organizations involved, but you should provide enough description so that your consultation group peers can meaningfully discuss the challenge with you. If you choose, you may change the names of the participants, the names of relevant organizations, and the description of the setting to preserve confidentiality.
* Our focus is on adaptive challenges so take care to avoid problems that are exclusively technical in nature.
* If possible, give a brief example of a conversation you have had or expect to have in working on your problem or opportunity.

In the past, students have submitted challenges ranging from struggles running a student club, a stressful situation in a job environment, concern over leadership challenges in internship placements, to some very significant personal issues connected with self, friends, or family. A sample write up can be found on Canvas.

## Care for each other in the case consultation sessions

The group is invited to provide double confidentiality. This means that the group never refers to the case presenter or anyone else about the case again (except in the reflection that you'll write for us). Only the case presenter has the option to approach a group member for further discussion. In other words, "*what happens in the case consultation, stays in the case consultation*."

Each group member is invited to *hold the soul* of the case presenter. The case presenter's heart and soul went into the development of their case presentation write-up. So, you have to be there for them. As Parker Palmer encourages us in A Hidden Wholeness, open your mind to the image of a bird you are holding in your hand...it's a bit like holding the soul. As you do this, you need to resist some temptations:

* Your hands may start to close around the bird, wanting to take it apart and see what makes it tick.
* Your arms may begin to tire while holding the bird...your attention flags. But the bird and the soul are light…it can be carried for the length of the consultation.
* At the end, our hands may make a subtle but persistent upward motion that says, "*See what you've learned*? *Fly away and take action*!" But the bird will fly when it's ready and we can't know when that is. Stay with the bird until it decides it's time.

A final thought: Success in the case consultation group is not defined by solving the problem. It's in how well we *hold the soul*.

## Roles participants play

In a process of structured critical conversation, we suggest that people think of playing one of three possible roles - storyteller, detective or umpire.

* The **storyteller** is the person who is willing to make herself the focus of critical conversation by first describing some part of her practice or life experience.
* The **detectives** are those in the group who help her come to a more fully informed understanding of the assumptions and actions that frame her practice or experience.
* The **umpire** is the group member who has agreed to monitor conversation with a view to pointing out when people are talking to each other in a judgmental way. She also keeps the group focused on the discrete stages in the exercise, making sure they are followed in sequence. This is mostly a non-speaking role. She interjects only if the group is going off track or if she judges that someone is breaking the ground rules for the exercise.
* At each iteration of this exercise the roles change. As each new story is told each person assumes a different role so that all play each of the roles at least once.
* Although this is a heavily structured and artificial exercise, the intent is for these dispositions to become so internalized that the ground rules and structure outlined above become unnecessary.

## The ground rules for the process

* During your first meeting, have a conversation about group norms.
* We offer this list of group norms from the Office of Multicultural Affairs as a starting point for your discussion:
  + Seek first to understand, then to be understood
  + Practice active listening skills
  + Utilize this as a brave space
  + Share our own stories and speak from our own experiences
  + Challenge ideas and not people
  + Challenge by choice
  + Work towards the goal of deeper understanding rather than complete agreement
  + Ask clarifying questions without giving judgment
  + Be mindful of the space you’re taking
* The group should consider any additional rules that would support its process.
* The ground rules should be reviewed by the group for the first few meetings at a minimum until the process is second nature.
* For additional reading: Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces. *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. Stylus Publishing, Sterling, VA, 135-150.

## How the process works

1. **The Storyteller Tells the Tale** (15 MINUTES)

* The conversation opens with the person who is the storyteller describing as concretely and specifically as possible an incident from her practice or life that for some reason is lodged in her memory. This incident may be one that is recalled because it was particularly fulfilling or because it was particularly frustrating. Most probably it is an incident that leaves the teller somewhat puzzled by its layers and complexities – an adaptive challenge. The storyteller describes the incident in her own words and without any questions or interruptions. Her colleagues, who are in the role of detectives, attend to her remarks very carefully. They are listeners with a purpose.
* The detectives are trying to identify the explicit and implicit assumptions about practice that they hear in the storyteller's tale. Some of these will be general assumptions about what good practice looks like, some will be about how a good professional should behave, and some will be about how to behave in the specific situation described. The detectives are listening particularly for assumptions that pertain to how the storyteller conceives of power dynamics, or assumptions that are hegemonic (i.e. that seem admirable & useful to the storyteller but that actually work against her best interests & support an inequitable situation). The detectives are also asked to imagine themselves inside the heads of the other characters in the story and to try to see the events through their eyes. If possible, the detectives make mental or written notes about plausible alternative interpretations of the story that fit the facts as they hear them, but that would come as a surprise to the storyteller.
* The last 3-5 minutes of this part of the process serves as a silent pause to think/write about assumptions/questions before sharing them. Consider: *What am still wondering about after hearing this story? What am I confused about and need more information? What information do I need to understand or uncover assumptions the storyteller holds? What do I think the other participants might be thinking/feeling, assuming?*

1. **The Detectives Ask Questions About the Event** (10 MINUTES)

* After the storyteller has finished speaking, the detectives are allowed to break their silence to ask her any questions they have about the events she has just described. The detectives are searching for any information that will help them uncover the assumptions they think the storyteller holds. They are also looking for details not provided in the first telling of the story that will help them re-live the events described through the eyes of the other participants involved, thereby helping them to understand these events from the different participants' perspectives.
* Detectives’ questions are asked only for the purpose of clarifying the details of what happened. They must refrain from giving their opinions or suggestions, no matter how helpful they feel these might be. Detectives should ask only 1 question at a time. They should not give advice on how the storyteller should have acted. Keep laughter to a minimum, you don’t know how it’s received.
* As the storyteller hears the detectives' questions she tries to answer them as fully and honestly as possible. She also has the opportunity to ask the detectives why they asked the particular questions they put to her.
* The umpire points out to the detectives any examples of judgmental questions that they ask, particularly those in which they imply that they have seen a better way to respond to the situation than the way that's been described. Examples of such questions would be those beginning "*Did you really believe that* ...?", "*Didn't you think to* ...?", or "*Do you mean to tell us that* ...?" The umpire brings the detectives' attention to the ways in which their tone of voice and body language, as well as their words, risk driving the storyteller into a defensive bunker.

*THREE-MINUTE PAUSE: For participants to sit with information shared*

1. **The Detectives' Report the Assumptions They Hear in the Storyteller's Descriptions** (10 MINUTES)

* When the incident has been fully described, and all the detectives' questions have been answered, the conversation moves to the assumption hunting phase. Here the detectives tell the storyteller, on the basis of her story and her response to their questions, what assumptions they think she holds. This is done as non-judgmentally as possible, as a reporting back exercise. The detectives seek only to state clearly what they think the storyteller's assumptions are, not to judge whether they are right or wrong. They are asked to state these assumptions tentatively, descriptively and non-judgmentally, using phrases like "*It seems as if* ...", "*I wonder if one assumption you might be holding is that* ....?", or "*Is it possible that you assumed that* ...?" They state only one assumption at a time, do not give advice, and watch out for laughter.
* The umpire intervenes to point out to detectives when she thinks they are reporting assumptions with a judgmental overlay.

*THREE-MINUTE PAUSE: For participants to sit with information shared*

1. T**he Detectives Give Alternative Interpretations of the Events Described** (10 MINUTES)

* The detectives now give alternative versions of the events that have been described, based on their attempts to re-live the story through the eyes of the other participants involved. These alternative interpretations must be plausible in that they are consistent with the facts as they have been described by the storyteller. When appropriate, detectives should point out how power or hegemony plays itself out in the different interpretations they are giving.
* The umpire points out those moments when a psychoanalytic second guessing is taking place. This happens when the detectives start to preface their interpretations with remarks like "*you know, what you were really doing*", or "*what was really going on*".
* The detectives are to give these interpretations as descriptions, not judgments. They are describing how others involved in the events might have viewed them, not saying whether or not these perceptions are accurate. They should not give any advice here.
* As the storyteller hears these alternative interpretations she is asked to let the detectives have the floor so that they can state their case as fully as possible. After they have described how the situation might look through the eyes of other participants, the storyteller is then allowed to give any additional information that would cast doubt on these interpretations. She is also allowed to ask the detectives to elaborate on any confusing aspects of why they are making the interpretations they are. At no time is she expected to agree with the detectives.

*THREE-MINUTE PAUSE: For participants to sit with information shared*

1. **Participants Do an Experiential Audit** (10 MINUTES)

* Finally, the storyteller and detectives state what they have learned, what insights they have realized, and what their reflection means for their future actions. Now the detectives can give whatever advice they wish.
* The umpire gives an overall summary of the ability of participants to be respectful listeners and talkers, and also gives her perspective on the story.

## Reflection questionnaires

The purpose of these questionnaires is to help you analyze the consultation group sessions. **In other words, the reflections focus on the group as a complex social system, not the content of the case consultations.** You are asked to reflect and respond fairly rapidly as you must in the actual practice of leadership. Copy each questionnaire into a separate document, taking care to include the text of each question with your answer. Your response to each question should not exceed a 140-word ‘tweet’ and should make good use of course concepts as you go. Fill out each questionnaire within one day of the session and take no more than two hours to complete each one. Submit to Canvas by the associated deadline.

## Questionnaire A | Case presenter: Y / N | Umpire: Y / N | Name:

1. *Now that you have experienced two consultation group sessions, how would you describe the purpose and the task of these experiences?*
2. *Now that you have experienced two consultation group sessions, how are you used by the group? Are you used well or poorly?*
3. *How is the umpire used by the group?*
4. *To whom does the group give informal authority and why?*
5. *Identify the most productive intervention of either of the last two sessions. What made it so?*
6. *Which of your interventions in either of the last two sessions generated work, work avoidance, some combination of the two, or went nowhere?*
7. *Can you identify a moment in either of the last two sessions when you thought you had something worthwhile to say and you held yourself back? If so, why?*
8. *In either of the last two sessions, did the group use any work avoidance mechanism to maintain equilibrium? Did the storyteller in her case use any work avoidance mechanisms to maintain equilibrium? If so, what were they? Was there any similarity?*
9. *Are there other observations on which you wish to comment?*

## Questionnaire B | Case presenter: Y / N | Umpire: Y / N | Name:

1. *Select and describe the initial event of either group session (i.e. what happened in the first few minutes)?*
2. *What was the primary hidden issue (i.e. deeper adaptive challenge) of this group session (not of the case)?*
3. *Did the initial event (in this group session, not in the case) provide a clue for identifying the primary hidden issue of the group session? If so, what was the connection?*
4. *Did the hidden issue of this session have an impact on the group dynamic as the group worked the task? If so, what was the impact?*
5. *Was there any way that the hidden issue of this group session resembled the underlying problem or dynamic in the case?*
6. *Identify one key word from this group session and discuss the relevance of its etymology to the hidden issue.*
7. *Has there been any difference between your capacity to contribute in the consultation group and the large class? What issues are embodied in the group that might account for this difference?*
8. *Are there other observations on which you wish to comment?*

## Questionnaire C | Case presenter: Y / N | Umpire: Y / N | Name:

1. *By now, each member of the group has probably begun to take on a particular role for the group. Identify these roles. What perspective on the case does each group member represent?*
2. *Are there common or are there competing conceptions of purpose in the group? What effect does this have on the group’s ability to proceed with the task?*
3. *What interplay between your own personal tuning and the dynamics of the small group accounts for your capacity to intervene? In what ways has the large class dynamics influenced your behavior?*
4. *Sometimes work avoidance mechanisms are easier to identify than the issues being avoided. The timing and nature of the work avoidance mechanisms often provide a clue to a hidden issue. What issue was being discussed at a time when the group generated a work avoidance mechanism? What was the work avoidance mechanism? Did anyone intervene to redirect the group’s attention to the issue?*
5. *In thinking about your interventions, are there differences between what you intended and the outcomes they produced?*
6. *In retrospect, did any of your past interventions “plant seeds” for work by the group? If so, what is the “fruit” of those seeds?*
7. *Identify one moment when you were able to hold steady (as distinct from holding back). How did the group react? Were there pressures to give in and, if so, how did you withstand those pressures? If you don’t have an example, discuss why you think that is.*
8. *Are there other observations on which you wish to comment?*

## Questionnaire D | Case presenter: Y / N | Umpire: Y / N | Name:

1. *Consider the case consultation experience as a microcosm of a complex social system. What parallels can you draw between the course materials and your experiences in the group? Select three key concepts on which to reflect.*
2. *What parallels have you seen with other groups of which you are a part?*
3. *What aspects of this experience will you take away for use in future group settings?*
4. *What intervention did you learn the most from and why?*
5. *What would you identify as your growing edge working in complex social systems? What is your plan to work on this?*
6. *Knowing what you know now about this complex social system, how might you have entered the group differently and for what purpose?*
7. *Are there other reflections on which you wish to comment?*