

ADAPTING PROTOCOLS: Variations on The Consultancy

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NSRF's [Consultancy Protocol](#) provides powerful, useful feedback for helping an individual or a team think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma. It so effectively typifies the power of a well-run Critical Friends Group, that it's always taught and practiced in Five-Day New Coaches Trainings. When new coaches return to their schools and start CFGs, it's often one of the first active protocols used after the scaffolding, team- and trust-building activities are completed.

Originally developed by Gene Thompson-Grove, Paula Evans and Faith Dunne as part of the Coalition of Essential Schools' National Re:Learning Faculty Program, the Consultancy was then further adapted and revised as part of work of NSRF. It's been adapted specifically for [Looking At Student Work](#), and [further suggestions have been written](#) to help Presenters more effectively prepare for presenting dilemmas.

But sometimes, it's hard to find the full 50 minutes to conduct a Consultancy, per its original design.

Then the [Thirty-Minute Protocols](#) were written, including a shortened version of The Consultancy, to be conducted in dyads. This option can still get a Presenter some great feedback in a short period of time, but only from a single person.

Sometimes, it feels better to get feedback from a larger group, and a larger number of people want to bring dilemmas to the same meeting. Thus, another adaptation was created called the [Two-Minute Consultancy Rounds](#). (Follow the link to download a formatted version of this protocol, outlined in the rest of this article.)

The Two-Minute Consultancy Rounds protocol allows each member of the CFG to bring a limited, defined challenge, problem, or dilemma to the meeting, and to receive two minutes' worth of feedback from every other member of the group. The total time for the protocol depends on the number

of participants: for a group of ten, it will take a total of 30-45 minutes to complete, including debriefing. It's best used after a CFG has been together long enough to have experienced at least one or more traditional 50-minute Consultancies, and certainly not until the group has achieved a basic level of openness and trust between the members.

Materials Needed – Each person participating within a circle will receive a stack of half sheets of paper, contained with a paper clip, equal to the number of participants. (Thus, for a group of ten people, each person will have a paper-clipped stack of ten half-sheets of paper. If your CFG includes 15 people, divide into three groups of five, and give each participant a stack of five sheets of paper.)

Objective – To brainstorm silently, in writing only, several possible solutions or suggestions for individual participants' own current work challenge, problem, or dilemma.

Procedure

- 1) Sort out your groups into no more than 10, no less than 5, in each circle or around each table.
- 2) Distribute the stacks of half-sheets of paper, and pens or pencils as necessary.
- 3) Each person is given about three minutes to think about a current, job-related challenge, problem or dilemma, for which they do not presently have a solution. Each should develop a framing or focusing question – e.g. “How can I get more group involvement out of my students?” or “How can I get my students to be more punctual?”
- 4) Each person now has two minutes to write out the issue, ending with the framing or focusing question. They must use only the face of the top half-sheet of paper in their stack. Suggest that they keep their writing terse as everyone will need to read and understand quickly, to write only on the front, not on the back, and to stick with only the top half sheet.

5) When the timer rings, the coach confirms that each person has written down a framing question. Then reset the timer for two minutes and everyone passes their paperclipped stack of papers (with their dilemma on top) to the person to the right. Each person then reads the dilemma just received, pulls a blank paper from the bottom of the stack, and has two minutes only to jot down their first thought, idea, or suggestion to address the dilemma. When finished writing, or when the two-minute bell rings, each person attaches their completed sheet just behind the cover dilemma sheet they just read, and reattaches the paper clip.

6) Repeat this process every 2 minutes and keep the process going until each person gets his/her sheet back with the attached suggestions/ideas.

Facilitator Tips – monitoring each person’s time is crucial. Say things like: “30 seconds left,” then, “Time’s up, clip your response behind the dilemma sheet, and pass it on.”

Debrief – Last, after everyone has received their original dilemma back and read all the attached responses, take time to debrief as a group.

Possible Discussion Questions:

- “What solutions were discovered that you hadn’t previously considered?”
- “Can you see any value in trying some of these suggestions/ideas?”
- “What suggestions/ideas triggered other ideas or solutions for you?”
- “What does this teach you about reaching out to others for help?”



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The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) is a professional development initiative that focuses on increasing student achievement through professional learning communities. We train individuals to coach Critical Friends Groups, or CFGs, a specific type of Professional Learning Community (PLC). Critical Friends Groups use protocols and activities to facilitate meaningful and efficient communication, problem solving and learning.

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