

INCREASING THE QUALITY OF FEEDBACK
WITHIN A TOASTMASTERS CLUB

A Master's Thesis Field Project

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Abstract

The client system for this project was Toastmasters International (TI). TI is an organization dedicated to improving its members' public speaking abilities by providing personal experiences and opportunities to experiment with different speaking tasks and methods, and by providing supportive feedback from fellow participants. This project involved a single club within TI that had been experiencing challenges with membership attrition. The tasks were to involve the club in an assessment process of potential underlying causes, to identify an area of focus for improvement, and to conduct measurements both before and after a series of interventions designed to improve the club's perception of how effectively feedback was delivered and received within the club. The project was marked by the 3 primary themes of (a) role clarity, (b) commitment, and (c) feedback, each of which surfaced during multiple phases of the action research project. The net result was a statistically significant improvement measured by 6 out of 7 interactive survey questions as determined by applying a t-test performed against the entire population of the club.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the client organization for my master's thesis field project and how I contacted the organization. I also cover the process used by the client and me to agree on the project goals and to set the stage for what followed.

Client System

In one of Toastmasters' brochures (n.d.) the organization described itself as follows:

Toastmasters International is a non-profit organization governed by a Board of Directors elected by the membership. The first Toastmasters club was established on October 22, 1924, in Santa Anna, California, by Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, who conceived and developed the idea of helping others to speak more effectively. More clubs were formed, and Toastmasters International was incorporated under California law on December 19, 1932.

Toastmasters International's business and services are administered by its World Headquarters, located in Ranch Santa Margarita, California. It has no salaried staff except the Executive Director and World Headquarters staff, who provide services to the clubs and Districts.

Parent Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of Toastmasters starts with the individual club member. There is no formal limit to club size, though it generally ranges from 10 to 30 people, including officers in the positions of President, Immediate Past President, VP of Education, VP of Membership, VP of Public Relations, Secretary, Treasurer, and

Sergeant at Arms. Groups of four to six clubs are organized to form an "Area" that has its own governing structure (shown more fully in Appendix A). Areas are grouped to form Divisions that are then grouped into Districts that then report to the World Headquarters.

Local Organizational Structure

For the purpose of this thesis project, only the structure of the individual club that I was working with is relevant. Details on Officer Titles and roles are shown in Appendix B. While each club chooses its own name, I use pseudonyms for both the club – Chinook – and its members.

Officer Title	Office Holder
President (Sponsor)	Larry Wise
Immediate Past President	N/A
VP of Education	Candice Green
VP of Membership	Daniel Miller
VP of Public Relations	N/A
Treasurer	Carl Sanders
Secretary	Daniel Miller
Sergeant at Arms	Andrew Collins

Table 1: Chinook Club Organization Chart, Winter, 2004

Despite formal roles and titles, each of which had clearly delineated responsibilities according to Toastmasters literature, the authority structure within the Chinook club was almost exclusively consensus-based. This aspect of the structure played a role in several parts of the project and will be covered in chapter 3.

In addition to the formal roles for officers above, within each weekly meeting there were also eight additional roles which rotated from week to week. Those roles and a brief description of their responsibilities are shown in Table 2.

Role	Responsibility
Toastmaster	Master of Ceremonies. Coordinate other roles and guide the meeting.
Grammarian	Focus on speaker's use of audible pauses ("um," "er," "ah," etc.), grammatical errors, and particularly interesting phrase usage.
Timer	Keep track of how long individual meeting segments last and provides warnings when time-limits are approaching.
Table-Topics Master	Provide impromptu topics on which members can speak without prior preparation. (This is a judged event with a vote on the best speaker and is open to guests.)
Individual Speakers	Deliver prepared speeches of fixed length, topic, and objectives, toward the completion of milestones in the Toastmasters program.
Evaluators	Provide feedback on the individual speakers. (There is one evaluator per individual speaker.)
General Evaluator	Responsible for providing an evaluation of the entire meeting, including getting "reports" from the Grammarian, Timer, and Table Topics Master about their roles during the meeting.

Table 2: Rotating Roles Within Each Meeting

My Involvement

I originally sought a Toastmasters club to join with the intent of social networking, making contacts for a potential source of employment, and meeting somebody who might provide a lead for a thesis project. This was in early January of 2004. I had been unemployed since the previous November and I required a thesis project by the end of March. I did not believe that I needed the formal services of

Toastmasters because I had already been an accomplished public speaker in high-school where I had won several awards. I attended the Chinook club mostly on the basis of geographic proximity to my home and the convenience of meeting times.

After attending the club three times as a participating guest/observer, two perceptions surfaced. First, I found parts of the club enjoyable, including "winning" the speech competitions in which I participated. Second, the club had certain qualities about it that would make it a good candidate for a thesis project, at which point I began discussion with the club president about my potential contributions as a consultant.

From the beginning of the project, my level of involvement with the club created a significant personal quandary. Chiefly, I sensed an ethical question about my potential dual-role as both a member and a consultant and whether the two roles could be kept separate. I chose to join as a full member and also to function as a consultant. Balancing these roles became an increasing challenge during the project's course, ultimately requiring me to choose one role over the other due to conflict of interest. This topic became a key source of learning and will be covered in detail in chapter 3.

Project Goals

The club's initial goals were (a) to increase member involvement in leadership activities within the group, (b) to increase the net value of the club to existing and new members, and (c) to decrease member attrition. All three goals were highly interrelated.

Membership numbers were part of the formal measurements that the parent organization tracked and were also part of the local club's focus. Initially, I thought that these measurements would be the determining factor for whether the project was successful. Later, I thought that the desired increase in membership numbers would

actually be a byproduct of creating additional net-value within the club. I hypothesized that by increasing the leadership involvement within the club, the net value to the members would increase, which would in turn reduce attrition. With less attrition, more members would stay and become senior members with more experience and be better able to provide leadership, thus producing a positive cycle.

This contrasted with the status-quo, in which attrition was a constant and significant drain on membership numbers. The club's primary method of addressing attrition was to recruit additional members to replace those who were lost. For example, the club initiated a recruitment campaign called "Reach Out and Renew." Unfortunately, the addition of new members placed an added burden on existing members, who were responsible for bringing new people up to speed. The combination of these factors formed a "Shifting the Burden" pattern (Senge, 1990), that will be discussed in chapter 2.

For the formal action research project, the issue of net-value to the membership received the most focus. The individual members identified new goals and measurements for assessing net-value. Thus, the project goals were changed from achieving externally measured membership targets to something more locally meaningful: improving the club's perception of how effectively feedback was delivered and received within the club.

Project Measures

Immediately following the project's data feedback session, the club's members engaged in a process of making meaning out of what had been presented. During that discussion, two break-out groups discussed next steps. By taking notes during those

discussions, officers in both groups extracted a number of measures directly from the members' comments.

The following week, six statements from those comments were presented to the entire club, and members were asked to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale the degree to which each statement was currently true for them, as well as the degree to which the statements represented an ideal to strive toward. This provided both an initial measurement on six objectives and a method to subsequently determine if the ideal states had been achieved.

At the end of the project, a second measurement was taken on the same six statements, and progress was measured from the original point toward the ideal that was defined by the initial measurement. Comparisons were evaluated using a *t*-test analysis.

Project Themes

Three themes emerged as significant components at multiple times during the project. The first concerned role-clarity, authority, and responsibility. The second concerned commitment – to the organization's purpose, to official responsibilities, to each other as fellow club members, and to the Chinook club's viability. The last theme concerned feedback – giving it, the requisite skills in doing so, and holding others capable of receiving it.

I will explore these three themes throughout the chapters that follow.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the client system, my involvement with the client, and project goals and measures. I also presented an introduction to the themes to be explored. In the next section, I will address the literature and theory relevant to this project.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I discuss the theories and written works of authors that influenced how I conducted myself during the course of the project. These theories are organized based on their relevance to the (a) client system, (b) content, and (c) methodology. The content section is further organized into (a) role clarity, (b) feedback, and (c) conflict.

Client System

The membership of the Chinook Toastmasters club was comprised roughly equally of men and women, with ages ranging from college-age through 80 years old. There was a mix of students, professionals, and retirees. It was predominantly Caucasian, with a few Asian members for whom English was a second language. None of these factors appeared to play a visible role regarding how the meetings were conducted.

The local club was comprised entirely of volunteers at both the leadership and membership level. There were issues regarding volunteering which were common to many volunteer organizations (macro issues), as well as issues particular to this Toastmasters club (micro). Additionally, volunteer issues apply to both the leadership and the membership level within organizations.

Starting with the macro level, "In order to operate with an unpaid workforce the first and most crucial step is to understand the motivations of those who are prepared to devote their skills and time to the purpose of the organization" (Wilson & Pimm, 1996). These motivations can be quite varied. Smith and Green (1993) identified some of the more common reasons, including a) to prove their worth, b) to meet new people, c) to

participate in meaningful experiences, d) to realize their own self interest, e) to build new skills, and f) to be part of a team. Wilson and Pimm (1996) identified additional motivators, including a) a sense of shared responsibility, b) because they want to help others, c) in order to seek change, d) to give something back to the community, and e) to obtain some form of qualification.

Despite all those reasons that people might volunteer, "Attracting volunteers and keeping them happy requires more than a simple thank you" (Masson, 2003). Attracting and retaining volunteers requires "clear purposes, strong values, and engaging opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships (Mason, 2003). Mitchell and Yates (1996) said that "Volunteer recruitment consists of four vital components: management, marketing, motivation, and mission," and that "You cannot enlist volunteers until you know exactly what you wish to accomplish as an organization."

Regarding volunteers at both the leadership and membership level, Kleine (2001) said that volunteer organizations need "Two kinds of people to perform volunteer service: deciders and doers" (p. 126). Within the local Toastmasters club, Volunteering at the leadership level entailed a willingness to serve as an officer of the club for a six-month term. Volunteering at the membership level entailed filling a specific roles for the duration of a single meeting, and was managed on an irregular but rolling basis.

Particularly regarding the leadership role within this particular club, my perception of discussions between officers was that they were experiencing some difficulty finding people to run for office towards the end of the project. Whereas I believed that anybody should be permitted to volunteer, the officers discussed hand-picking successors from the membership, even discouraging one volunteer who was

interested in the presidency. "Enthusiasm is not enough. Indeed it may be too much and unless it can be controlled and channeled it can lead to problems out of all proportion to the benefits which such enthusiasm might be thought to deliver" (Willson & Pimm, 1996, p.31).

According to one of the Toastmasters' training manuals called "Moments of Truth" (MOT), "People join a Club because they have a definite purpose or mission, such as learning public speaking skills, overcoming fear in front of an audience, or developing leadership skills" (Toastmasters International, 1993, p. 7).

Part of the organization's espoused theory is that "within a matter of moments, you've made a decision to either continue as a return customer – or discontinue your patronage and seek better services elsewhere" (Toastmasters International, 1993, p. 7). The manual says that it is not only the initial moments when one first explores a Toastmasters club, but rather a series of key moments of truth in which one makes this evaluation regarding whether the club is furthering one's individual purpose. These moments include (a) first impressions; (b) membership orientation; (c) fellowship, variety and communication; (d) program planning and meeting organization; (e) membership strength; and (f) achievement recognition (Toastmasters International, 1993).

Club officers who follow the instructions from the *Moments of Truth* manual are therefore directed to periodically examine how their club is doing with respect to those five key areas. The manual also spells out the process by which this examination is to take place. In some ways, such as surveys and interviews, this process compliments the action research (AR) methodology I was using to guide of this project. In discussions

with the club president, the apparent synergy of AR and the MOT contributed to his interest in sponsoring the project.

Similar to the idea that members' support for a club is made during those five key moments of truth, Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) espoused a two-factor theory in which there are both satisfiers and dissatisfiers contributing to peoples' evaluation of a situation. They submitted that satisfying factors tend to be more intrinsic, while dissatisfying factors tend to be more extrinsic.

This two factor theory is congruent with the espoused theory in the MOT manual because both satisfiers and dissatisfiers may be evaluated at each of the identified decision moments. "It may well be a number of motivations rather than any single one which induces a person to become active in an organization" (Willson & Pimm, 1996). However, as is shown through the wording of the measurement questions that I used for this project, I chose to focus more on the positive side of peoples' experience in the hopes of increasing the members' estimation of the value they were getting from the club. My choice to focus on increasing the positive (satisfiers) rather than reducing the negative (dissatisfiers) was based on principles of Appreciative Inquiry such as "recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials." (Cooperrider & Whitney, n.d., p. 2).

Additionally, since my own professional background with software quality assurance typically has me looking for things that are broken, I deliberately took an approach outside my strength by focusing on the positive. I wanted to see for myself whether "Organizations are heliotropic in character in the sense that organizational

actions have an observable and largely automatic tendency to evolve in the direction of positive imagery" (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990, p. 117).

The MOT manual focuses mostly on identifying areas within the club where improvements can be made. It urges officers to look at several of the common "reasons members leave," including being "chronically dissatisfied" or going "elsewhere because the people they deal with are indifferent to their needs" (Toastmasters International, 2003, p. 6). AI, on the other hand, advocates that "When beset with repetitive difficulties or problems, organizations need less fixing, less problem solving, and more reaffirmation -- or more precisely, more appreciation" (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990, p. 95).

Regardless of whether the key issues facing the club were related to moments of dissatisfaction, not enough appreciation, or a mix of the two, members still came to Toastmasters based on their own individual purposes or missions. In many cases, those missions centered on acquiring skill and experience in some aspect of communication and leadership. "The mission of a Toastmasters club is to provide a mutually supportive and positive learning environment in which every member has the opportunity to develop communication and leadership skills, which in turn foster self-confidence and personal growth" (Toastmasters International, 2003, p. 2).

Since creating a positive and supportive learning environment was part of Toastmasters' mission, I also wanted to look at the organization's theory of learning and compare it with the actual practiced within the club (Vail, 1996).

According to the TI introductory study manual:

The Toastmasters program is not a college, trade school or other formal course in public speaking. You'll find no instructors, professors or classrooms.

No one's work is graded and no tests are administered. In Toastmasters, members learn by studying the manuals, practicing and helping one another. Learning takes place in the club environment. Club meetings are workshops where you study and practice communication and leadership skills with others who are there for the same reasons you are. You learn by doing and by watching fellow club members.

An evaluator will give you verbal and written feedback on every speech you present. The evaluator provides a personal opinion of your talk, pointing out its strengths and offering suggestions for improving your next speech.

Evaluations have one purpose: to help you become a more effective speaker (Toastmasters International, 2003, p. 6).

The above is consistent with Lindeman's (1926) assertion that "Experience is the adult learners living textbook" (p. 10).

Despite the espoused theory of learning for Toastmasters, the local Chinook club did not fully comply with the formal Toastmasters program. The club deviated from the written plan primarily in the area of feedback. While there was an evaluator for every speech, many evaluations consisted of little more than answering yes or no to a formulated list of evaluation questions and the feedback was only one-way. The evaluator read his or her comments on the speech to the entire club, and the speaker sat quietly and listened. There was no dialog or exchange and opportunities to hear feedback from other audience members were rather limited.

Additionally, the introductory manual contains instructions and pre-formatted structures and guidelines for the member's initial ten speeches with a recommendation that the speeches should be presented in numerical order.

While the individual member is largely in control of his or her own pace through the program, the program itself has many formulaic elements. Vail (1996) advocated a greater degree of individual control in the learning process in that "the learner has substantial control over the purposes, the content, the form, and the pace of learning, and furthermore, the learner is the primary judge of when sufficient learning has occurred" (p. 58). He contrasted that to the "institutional learning philosophy, with its strong belief in the learner's need for proper guidance if the learning process is not to waste time and other resources and the learner is not to acquire 'bad habits'" (p. 59).

An institutional limitation that Toastmasters places on the self-directed learner is that the program assumes that everybody needs to perform the same set of ten initial speeches before moving on to advanced materials. There is no initial assessment of skill upon joining the club nor are there mechanisms for tailoring the program to particular goals at the introductory level. While individuals are free to do such things on their own, there is no structure within the organization to formally recognize or reward those self-directed efforts until such time as members complete the initial program of ten speeches. Despite a clearly defined purpose and value for creating some foundational communication skills in the speaker, these structures also contained elements of a more institutional approach in that "At bottom, institutional learning is as much a system of indoctrination and control as it is a system for learning" (Vail, 1996, p. 40).

Regardless of the theory of learning in use, part of Toastmasters' mission is still to provide "the opportunity to develop communication and leadership skills" (Toastmasters International, 2003, p. 2). However, Blumberg and Pringle (1982) postulated that opportunity alone is not enough to produce increases in performance. In their theory of work performance, they asserted that performance is an interaction of three interrelated factors: opportunity, willingness, and capacity, where capacity includes the dimensions of knowledge, skill, and education among others. These factors are represented visually in *Figure 1*.

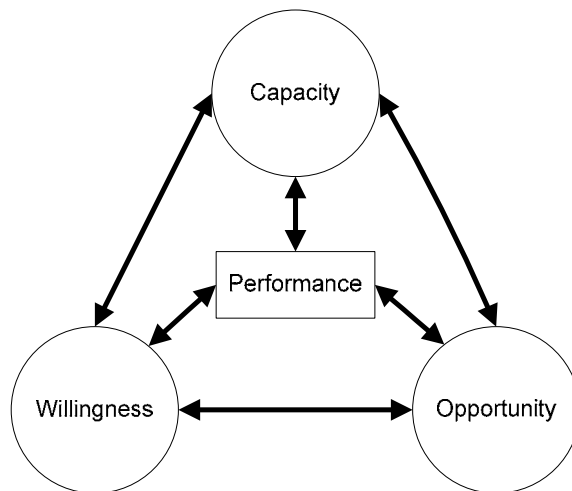


Figure 1: Blumberg and Pringle (1982) Model of Work Performance

One can assume that Toastmasters members already have a willingness to increase their communication skills because their attendance is voluntary. Clearly the organization provides opportunities through the structured speeches and roles that are assigned to members at each of the club meetings. Delivering on the mission to develop communication and leadership capacity therefore depends upon the organization's ability to somehow impart knowledge and skill to club members. That happens, in large part, through the educational program based on experience and practice paired with feedback.

Thus, feedback becomes a key element of the value that the organization hopes to provide.

If Toastmasters were not providing value, it would not have persisted as long as it has (since 1924), and individual clubs would likely perish. This issue of value ties directly back to part of the original project goal: to increase the net value of the club to existing members. By the same token that Blumberg and Pringle (1982) postulated that multiple interdependent factors impact work performance, it was equally possible that what constituted value to new and existing members depended on multiple factors.

Content

Senge (1990), in his description of archetypes for systems thinking, described a pattern of interactions called "Shifting the Burden" as follows:

An underlying problem generates symptoms that demand attention. But the underlying problem is difficult for people to address, either because it is obscure or costly to confront. So people "shift the burden" of their problem to other solutions – well intentioned, easy fixes which seem extremely efficient. Unfortunately, the easier "solutions" only ameliorate the symptoms; they leave the underlying problem unaltered. The underlying problem grows worse, unnoticed because the symptoms apparently clear up, and the system loses whatever abilities it had to solve the underlying problem. (p. 104)

In the case of the Chinook Toastmasters, both the President and VP of Education said that the rate of attrition was a continual issue. However, rather than investigating or addressing the core reason for that attrition, they said that attrition is an issue in all clubs – membership goes up, and then it goes down again.

Factors that increased membership were periodic recruitment drives and efforts to have existing members invite guests (symptomatic solutions). Factors that contributed to the underlying problem of attrition were not seriously evaluated, perhaps because attrition was assumed to be a natural part of the cycle. In the President's words, "That's just the way it goes."

The last factor in the "shifting the burden" model (Senge, 1990) was that the symptomatic solution (recruitment) was actually having a negative side-effect over time in that the influx of new members simultaneously placed a larger burden on the leadership team, reduced mentoring resources for existing members, and potentially reduced the value of the club to other members by reducing the experience quotient within the larger club. The full system of interactions for the model are thus illustrated in

Figure 2.

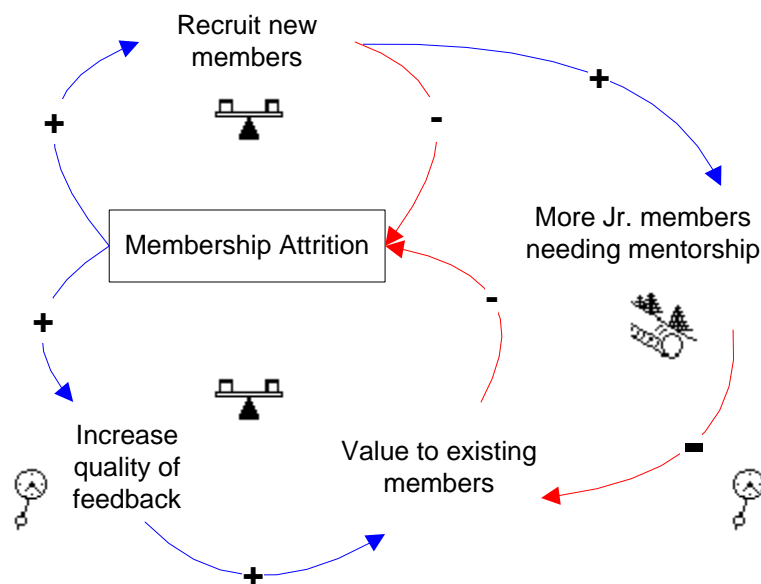


Figure 2. Shifting the Burden Model in the Chinook Club

I shared this model with the client as part of advocacy for shifting the club's focus from the symptomatic solution of recruitment toward the fundamental solution of

increasing the club's net value to the membership. I also advocated that increasing the club's net value could come from increasing the quality of the feedback delivered to individual speakers as part of the club's regular speaking exercises.

Two implications of this approach were apparent. First, the leadership team would have to play a larger role than they were currently playing. Second, there would be a delay before results of their efforts could be seen through changes in attrition. Supporting this approach, however, was that it aligned with the Toastmasters program's core. Many of the changes I advocated came directly from Toastmasters own literature that described the evaluator's role:

The evaluation you present can make the difference between a worthwhile or a wasted speech for your speaker. . . . The purpose of the evaluation is to help the speaker become less self-conscious and a better speaker. . . . Review the goals of the speech and what the speaker hopes to achieve. Find out exactly which skills or techniques the speaker hopes to strengthen through the speech. . . . Be as objective as possible. Remember that a good evaluation may give new life to discouraged members who tried their best. Remember, always leave the speaker with specific methods for improving. (Toastmasters International, 2003, p. 63)

Larry told me that other change-efforts had been conducted before, and that although they seemed to work for a while, the club continued to suffer from attrition over time. Kotter (1996) addressed many of the more common reasons that change efforts fail and presented strategies designed specifically to counter those pitfalls. Specific recommendations that were relevant to this project included (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) creating the guiding coalition, (c) empowering broad-based action, (d)

generating short term wins, and (e) anchoring new approaches in the culture (Kotter).

The guiding coalition in this case would be the club officers because in many cases "changing an organization requires leaders to change themselves first" (Quinn, Spreitzer, & Brown, 2000, p.148)

Role Clarity

Throughout all phases of the project, it was essential to my success as a consultant that I maintain clarity over my own role. Block (1999) outlined three principal roles consultants fall into: expert, pair-of-hands, and collaborative. In the expert role, "decisions on how to proceed are made by the consultant, on the basis of his or her expert judgment" (p. 23). In a pair-of-hands role, "decisions on how to proceed are made by the manager" (p. 24). In the collaborative role, "decision making is bilateral" (p. 26). Issues of role clarity were critical because at various points I switched from operating as a consultant to being a member of the club and back again.

Connor (1993) looked at various roles that people play within a change-process in terms of sponsor, advocate, target, and agent (SATA). "A sponsor is the individual or group who has the power to sanction or legitimize change. . . . An agent is the individual or group who is responsible for actually making the change. . . . The individual or group who must actually change is the target. . . . An advocate is the individual or group who wants to achieve a change but lacks the power to sanction it" (pp. 106-107).

The sponsorship role belonged to the club president, even though he chose to lead through a highly participative consensus-based process. As a student looking for a thesis project, I was an advocate for the project, but I was also an agent in my capacity as a

consultant performing the interventions. Lastly, I could also be considered a target in my capacity as a member of the club.

In terms of my learning, O'Neill's (2000) Client Responsibility Model proved the most valuable. For the project to be successful, I had to allow the Chinook club to own both its current environment and the solution required to move toward a more ideal state. I needed to recognize that I was not personally responsible for changing the organization because that responsibility clearly belonged with the client. I also needed to avoid becoming so inducted to the client's perspective that I might lose the value of an outsider's perspective into the system. The fact that I was playing multiple roles only exacerbated this challenge because "systems have a way of extending themselves out to their farthest boundaries, pulling anyone who comes close to them into their interactional vortex" (O'Neill, p. 47).

In order to act consistently with the Client Responsibility Model, I needed to adhere to several ground rules. Specifically, I needed to use the ground rules of the Mutual Learning Model (Schwarz, 2002). I needed to (a) share all relevant information, (b) explain my reasoning and intent, (c) combine advocacy and inquiry, (d) jointly design the approach for the project, (e) discuss undiscussables, and (f) use a decision-making style that generated the commitment within the client organization necessary for it to own the outcome (Schwarz).

"Undiscussable issues are those that are relevant to the group's task but that group members believe they cannot discuss openly in the group without some negative consequences" (Schwarz, 2002, p. 129). There were multiple occasions during the project where this was relevant, possibly because "people often overlook the negative

systemic – and uncompassionate – consequences that they create by not raising an undiscussables issue" (p. 129). Thus, I envisioned that part of my role as a facilitator was to increase the clients' capacity to discuss these issues so that they might make informed decisions about what they wanted to do for the future of the club. "Consulting is fundamentally an educational and capacity-building function" (Block, 1999, p. 324).

Feedback

The ability for the club to examine and change its behaviors around feedback was critical to the project's success. "Group members are often reluctant to give each other negative feedback, because they say they care about members and do not want to hurt them" (Schwarz, 2002, p. 166). Multiple interviews with club members revealed an almost identical sentiment – that if they told the speaker what they really thought, then the speaker would be hurt or the relationship would suffer. Part of the project would thus entail exposing people to the notion "that by withholding information, members hurt each other by precluding each other from making an informed choice about whether to change ineffective behavior" (Schwarz, p. 166).

Changing the clubs' perception of feedback was a challenge because the potential of fear was so high. "People avoid feedback because they hate being criticized, plain and simple. . . . They associate feedback with the critical comments received in their younger years from parents and teachers" (Jackman & Strober, 2003, p. 4). Often, recipients of feedback "are terrified that they will hear nothing but criticism," while providers of feedback "think that even the mildest criticism will be met with stonewalling, anger, or tears" (Jackman & Strober, p. 3). People "are afraid of asking for feedback about their behavior, because they don't want to uncover errors that might cause them embarrassment

or loss of face" (Lawrence & Wiswell, 1995, p. 52). "Many people have had so little experience with individualized feedback that receiving feedback from even one other person, let alone a group, can foster anxiety" (Church, 1995, p. 43).

On the other side of an emotional spectrum, Godin (2004) asserted that "The first rule of great feedback is this: No one cares about your opinion. . . . What I want instead of your opinion is your analysis" (p. 103). By analysis, he referred concrete, specific examples of what was effective, what was not, and what made the difference. He said that "even though it's scary to contribute your analysis to a colleague's [work], it's still absolutely necessary" (p. 103).

By working with the officers and the club members to become more comfortable giving and receiving feedback, this project had potential "to transform a feedback-averse environment into a more honest and open one, in turn improving performance throughout the organization" (Jackman & Strober, 2003, p. 8).

Conflict

Presenting individuals with feedback on their behaviors by sharing impact has a high perceived risk for many people (Jackman & Strober, 2003). To share challenging feedback with other people is to share that one does not see things the same as they do, and differences of opinions often produce conflict. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) considers different ways people prefer to behave when in conflict. In particular, it maps out factors of assertiveness and cooperativeness, resulting in five styles labeled Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating. The model also assumes that people move from one style to the next based on unique personal factors as conflict grows. The two styles I observed most

within the group were Avoiding and Accommodating, both of which are lowest on the assertiveness scale.

Relationship Awareness Theory (Porter, 1996a) also assumes that people shift behaviors as conflict grows, but has among its key assumptions that:

- We all do what we do because we want to feel good about ourselves.
- We tend to take two different approaches to life, based on whether we feel that things are going well or that we are faced with opposition or conflict.
- We tend to perceive others' behaviors through our own value system

(Schudder, 2001, pp. 21-24).

Additionally, Porter's (1996a) theory acknowledged that conflict might not be visible, despite being quite pronounced to the individual experiencing it. As a practitioner, Relationship Awareness Theory was valuable to me because as I became more aware of conflict, I could be more deliberate about how I might alter my style to help alleviate it within myself. A chart of my own scores using this model along with some implications and interpretations are included in Appendix C.

Since feedback may be associated with childhood criticism (Jackman & Strober, 2003), Williamson's (1991) concept of Personal Authority in Family Systems (PAFS) was also relevant. "PAFS includes the ability to know and direct one's own thoughts and opinions as well as the emotional freedom to choose whether or not to express these at any given moment or occasion, *regardless of intense social pressures or expectations from family members or others* [italics added]" (Williamson, p. 40). Especially in times of conflict, to consult effectively required that one retain "the ability to connect emotionally with other people in as self-expressive and intimate, or in as reserved, a

fashion as seems appropriate, and as one freely chooses at any given time" (Williamson, p. 40).

Methodology

Action research (AR) is an approach for the study of groups or organizations in which the members of the group being studied are also active participants in the research being conducted. Seminal contributors to this approach include Kurt Lewin and Chris Argyris. Lewin (1946) described the process as "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact finding about the result of the action."

The process described by Block (1999) is highly compatible with AR and more closely resembles the process I followed with the client. This process is outlined below:

Phase 1: Entry and Contracting. During this stage the client and consultant negotiate the nature of the working relationship, set project scope and direction, and establish mutual expectations for success.

Phase 2: Discovery and Dialog. At this stage the consultant is learning more about the client organization. This can include surveys, interviews, direct observation, personal experience with the client, or other methods. The consultant may also be facilitating the process by which the client performs this discovery. Fundamentally, "the purpose . . . of discovery is to mobilize action on a problem" (Block, 1999, p. 176)

Phase 3: Feedback and the Decision to Act. The results of the discovery and dialog are presented to the client in a manner that permits the client to make meaning out of it. Then, based on that meaning, the client owns the decision regarding what to do next.

Phase 4: Engagement and Implementation. Here, deliberate actions are taken to move towards the desired change within the system. However,

Implementation does not actually begin until the people who do the work decide whether they are going to make real changes or simply go through the motions. Real changes require real commitment, and part of your role is to help fire that spark. (Block, 1999, p. 249).

Phase 5: Extension, Recycle, or Termination. At any point, the consultant and client may return to earlier stages to modify the process, add or remove items, terminate the project completely, or start all over again.

Formal AR also entails taking measurements both before and after the implementation stage so that one can determine whether there was an impact that resulted from the implementation. While specific measurements were taken for this project, Block (1999) cautioned that "when we impose measurements system-wide, we have to be very careful that we really need and can make use of the measures that are collected" (p. 257).

Though far less formal than action research, the A.P.P.L.E. model of facilitation (Rohnke & Butler, 1995) also guided my conduct with the client. The model is used by Project Adventure with a focus on structured activities and play as a rich source of learning. Its phases are marked by (a) assessment, (b) planning, (c) preparation, (d) leading, and (e) evaluation. Assessment includes learning about who is in the group and what they want to accomplish. Planning includes what "activities will focus the group on the issues they want to examine" (p. 26). Preparation focuses on materials, props, and contingencies needed for the activities. Leading in this model includes setting tone,

modeling appropriate behaviors, observation, listening, and having fun. Evaluation includes appropriate debriefing of an activity and is where the behaviors demonstrated in the activity are connected back to what the group wanted to accomplish.

Of the factors listed above, being fun was the one that provided the greatest energy for me as a consultant. Milano and Ullius (1998) advocated that training events should be effective, efficient, and engaging. Effectiveness would be measured explicitly against the results the client achieved during the course of the project. Efficiency was mandated due to the limitations of time imposed by the structure of the Toastmasters meetings. This, in turn, required that my interventions permit the club members to "maximize learning in a short amount of time and still emerge with a deep, internal body of knowledge (Canabou)." I chose to make the events fun to help keep people engaged and because "simulation games and hands-on exercises give students a chance to interact with and focus on the subject matter both inside and outside the classroom (Canabou).

Another intention for integrating fun into the interventions was to increase the level of positive interaction that club members had with each other in support of making the club's feedback process more interactive. "Trust develops when people feel comfortable and safe enough to share their perceptions regarding one another's behavior without negative repercussions" (Reina & Reina, 2006, p. 47). Positive interactions, investment in relationships, trust, and feedback are all intertwined. "Providing constructive feedback sends a message that we are invested in the relationship; that we trust that the individual will pay attention to what we have to say" (Reina & Reina, p. 46).

My desire to increase the level of interaction when club members gave each other feedback began when I saw members deliver feedback via tiny slips of paper rather than

by talking to each other. "Anyone who equates delivering feedback with filling out forms has lost the battle for smart appraisal before it's begun" (Imperato, 1998, p. 144). The use of such forms changes "what might have been a natural, helpful conversation into an awkward, anxious inspection" (p. 144). My intent was to move feedback more towards a conversation. "To be effective, feedback needs to be two-way, engaging, responsive, and directed toward a desired outcome" (Lawrence & Wiswell, 1995, p. 49).

One more reason for weaving fun and play into the interventions and club interactions was based on the *see, feel, change* pattern that is associated with successful change efforts (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). The *see* part of this pattern can map to the data-feedback of action research, but does not need to be that formal. Instead, it is about allowing members to look at something new, or in new ways. This is less about facts and numbers, and more about creating "dynamic, eye-catching, compelling situations that help others visualize the problem or a solution to the problem" (p. 10).

"It's difficult enough to get negative feedback from people with whom you have satisfactory relationships. It's even worse with people you don't get along with" (Baumgartner, 1994). It was not my opinion that club members did not get along, but rather that their level of interpersonal contact was low. For that reason, I wanted to create compelling activities that would enable the club members to see each other in new ways. My hope was that seeing each other differently would "awaken feelings that facilitate useful change or ease feelings that are getting in the way" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 10) of providing effective feedback. It was my intention to increase the level and quality of contact between the members as an indirect way to reduce the barriers to delivering feedback. My assumption was that increased contact would positively change how they

felt about each other, and that changing how they felt about each other would change how they behaved towards each other, based on Kotter and Cohen's (2002) model of change.

Since delivering an effective speech and delivering effective feedback are skills that can be developed, there are several models for how to best teach or present these skills to the club members. A full review of teaching or learning theory is well beyond the scope of this paper, though a sizeable review may be found in Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998). Toastmasters own literature does not focus on a theory of learning, but rather that skills are developed through "studying the manuals, practicing and helping one another" (Toastmasters International, 2003).

A key method by which members help one another in the acquisition of public speaking skills is through feedback, formalized in the Toastmasters role of the evaluator. Race (2005) included *feedback* as a key element of his "Ripples" model of learning. This model posits that a *want or need* is at the center of ripples on a pond that radiate outward to produce *doing* something about that want, *digesting* what happens, and receiving *feedback* about performance. That feedback may become formalized through *teaching* and an *assessment* process, but the outer ripple ends with *understanding*.

Race's (2005) *want or need* can be related to Kotter's (1996) *sense of urgency*, in that both authors saw these as central to successful learning or change in behaviors. If the want or need is weak, or the sense of urgency is low, then change is unlikely. But whereas Kotter focused more on changes within a group or organization, Race focused more on learning within an individual. Whereas Kotter focused on empowering action within a group, Race's model is more simplistic in that it focuses on the more broad action of an individual *doing* something in response to a want.

Kotter and Cohen (2002) also emphasized that with any significant change effort, communicating for buy-in is essential, and that this involves "more than data transfer" (p. 84). Likewise, McArthy and McArthy (2006) asserted that "case studies cannot substitute for learning that occurs through experiential learning activities. . . . Through experiential learning, the student comes face to face with making decisions that are real rather than merely thinking about a situation or case" (p. 201). These factors all contributed to my choice to make the interventions and activities highly interactive and participatory in nature. The philosopher Sophocles said it in a similar manner: "One must learn by doing the thing; though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try." This was important because according to Connor's (1993) SATA model, at the end of the project, I would be leaving the system in my capacity as a change agent and the sponsor and target would be responsible for maintaining any positive effects achieved from our interactions on their own.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the models and theories that influenced how I conducted myself as a consultant during the project. I also covered other work on role clarity and feedback, which were two themes throughout the project. In the next chapter, I will discuss in greater detail the events that took place during the project, including the interventions I made.

CHAPTER 3

Intervention

In this chapter, I cover the sequence of events in the project in roughly chronological order, focusing especially on the recurring themes which defined both my interaction with the client and the club members' interactions with each other. From a high-level view, the project took place over the timeline shown in Table 3 below.

Phase / Event	Date
Entry and Contracting	1/15/04 - 2/16/04
Dialog and Discovery	2/10/04 - 3/27/04
First Engagement - Dynamic Duo	2/23/04
Second Engagement - Behavioral Specificity	3/15/04
Contracting for Data Feedback	3/22/04 - 4/13/04
Data Feedback	4/15/04 - 4/23/04
Clarification of Goals and Deciding to Act	4/20/04
Initial Measurement	4/30/04 - 5/10/04
Third Engagement - Feedback Training	5/3/04
Final Measurement and Presentation of Results	6/21/04

Table 3. Chinook Toastmasters Club Project Phases and Timeline

Project Themes

Throughout the project, three themes emerged in various forms: role clarity, commitment, and feedback. I will briefly describe each of the themes and then elaborate on them further as I describe each phase of the project.

Role Clarity

Questions about role clarity emerged amid discussions about who was responsible for performing which duties. Role clarity was also an issue when club officers had questions regarding limits of their own authority relative to the parent organization and which actions they were allowed to carry out on their own through personal initiative. In my own case, I often questioned whether I was really acting as a consultant or a member

of the club and whether I was acting as an outside expert or in collaboration with the sponsor.

Commitment

In the context of this Toastmasters group, for me, commitment meant following through with promises made and being willing to endure anxiety or frustration in the service of larger goals. Commitment also meant a willingness to execute officially designated responsibilities, especially in the face of resistance. At the lowest level, commitment meant showing up for meetings or continuing to hold an elected role for the duration of a term. In my own case as a consultant, it also referred to my dedication to work with the client through the end of the project in the face of my own reactions to the events that transpired.

Feedback

As a theme throughout the project, I believe that feedback pertained to the fundamental skills of giving and receiving information about the impact of one's words and actions upon another person. Feedback skills implied a willingness to tell one another what one's personal experiences were in response to the other's actions. Lastly, I think that delivering feedback required a level of trust that the information would be appropriately received.

Chinook Toastmasters Club Project Phases

Entry and Contracting

I initiated the contracting phase when I approached Larry Wise in his capacity as club President. We discussed a potential project after one of the weekly meetings and agreed to meet at a coffee shop to discuss the matter in greater detail. At that time, I

already had a general proposal outlined, and we discussed the matter at length. In retrospect, it was here that all three themes began to emerge.

Role clarity. Larry described his understanding of the consultant role as an external expert who comes in to address a problem and then leaves. I took some time to explain the collaborative approach (Block, 1999) that I was looking for in order for us to undertake the project together. Further, we discussed our respective notions of what was wrong with the club and what needed fixing. Those notions provided a starting point, but a more formal "discovery and dialog" (Block, 1999) process was needed in order to adhere the principles of action research. Thus, the project would require genuine sponsorship on Larry's part for me to be an effective change agent.

This was a problem from the start because Larry said that he wanted me to present my proposal to the club members and have them vote on whether it was worthwhile or not. I preferred to determine first if Larry thought it was worthwhile. If so, I wanted him to introduce the project to the club in his role as President so that it contributed to his goals, rather than merely supporting my need for a thesis project.

Larry said that his desire to have the club vote was based, in part, on his discomfort with bearing responsibility for a decision that would impact the group, as well as a preferred leadership style based on consensus.

Through discussion, Larry admitted that he resisted presenting the project directly because he was not really clear about his own goals for the club. I found his openness and vulnerability to be the ideal backdrop for explaining the value of starting the project with a formal assessment process. The purpose of that assessment would be to identify goals relative to the status-quo.

We reached a compromise regarding Larry's role: something between Larry fully sponsoring the project and me presenting it to the club for a vote. The result was that Larry would present the project to the senior members (officers), and they would be given the chance to vote on whether to proceed or not. To make that presentation successful, I coached Larry to help him clarify why he felt proceeding would be important to the club and why we should undertake the task at this time. In essence, I coached Larry to help him create a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1996).

Additionally, just as Larry and I needed to negotiate his role as a sponsor for the project, we also needed to negotiate my role as a consultant. Due to the club's structure, in particular that meetings are only 90 minutes long and seek to maximize the number of speakers and feedback, Larry expressed a concern that any time I took for the project might be seen as detracting from the members' goals of giving speeches and getting credit for doing so. To address that concern, we planned a novel approach in that I would join the club as a full member and then use the existing structure within the club of giving speeches as the avenue to advocate for change.

My challenge would be to make it clear when I would be acting from a consultant role and when I would be acting from a membership role. Despite my best efforts, this became a problem shortly before data feedback.

Commitment. The role of President of a local Toastmasters club is an elected post for a six-month term, renewable for up to a year. Larry was in his second term. In discussing his formal role, Larry indicated that "I see people turning to me for direction, and I am actively resisting providing that direction." When asked why, he replied that he

was "not comfortable with structured leadership roles." When asked if he had any kind of vision for the club, he replied "I can't say as I do."

Given the above, I wondered how or why Larry stepped into the role of President in the first place. When asked, he replied that he never really wanted the job, but neither did anybody else at the time. Larry was asked to fill the role, and said yes because he thought the club needed a president. In his words, "I was asked, and I served."

When asked what made the role so unpalatable for him, he replied that it was a lack of knowledge and training for leadership. Later, he asked rhetorically, "Do I want to put myself in a role of leading? I'm still asking that of myself."

Upon hearing that, I responded with concern. I knew that if Larry could not adequately play the role of a committed sponsor, the project was destined to have significant troubles down the line. I shared this concern with him and used it to segue into a discussion of anticipated resistance and how he might respond.

When I tied our discussion to the mission of Toastmasters to develop communication and leadership skills, Larry said that the project would be more likely to be well received within that context. I believe that just as public speakers need to be comfortable and accustomed to managing their own anxieties to become better public speakers, leaders need to be comfortable with the tensions or anxieties in the groups they lead in order to be more effective.

Feedback. During our contracting discussions, Larry told me that one of the more significant motivating factors behind his sponsorship of the project was that he wanted feedback on how he was doing in his official capacity as President. He also said that the club's skill at delivering feedback to speakers could probably use some improvement.

While the initial project goals were more focused on membership growth, I suspected that improving feedback would play a significant role in attaining that growth.

The lack of feedback within the system also showed up as an issue for the club when I presented the project to the other officers. During that presentation, when I explained that the project would begin with an assessment phase, I perceived the meeting as animated with excitement. Officers started listing a number of things that they each said were ripe for improvement, speaking more rapidly, and smiling. While I noted these for the assessment survey I would create, I also asked, "Have any of these issues been discussed in prior meetings amongst the senior officers?"

The answer was "No." In fact, in the last year, there had not been a single meeting of all the officers to discuss direction for the club. Thus, even for the club's leaders, there was a disconnection between themselves as leaders and the details of the club in which they were all members.

The epitome of this disconnect showed up in how feedback was given to speakers after they gave their speeches. In most cases, rather than direct and immediate verbal feedback, the audience would provide its feedback on a 1 x 3 inch slip of paper not much bigger than my thumb. Flabbergasted, I asked what kept the club from using a different format or larger sheets of paper. The VP of Membership said, "We still have hundreds of these old forms left."

Through questions to the group, I highlighted that every one of the officers just expressed vehement hatred for those slips of paper, yet the forms continued to be used. What kept that system in place? One of the officers replied, "Inertia." I suspected that, until that moment, they had not known what the others thought or felt about the way

things had long been done. This suspicion was based on the unanimously stated dislike for those forms, yet none of them had previously mentioned it aloud.

Discovery and Dialog

Based on many of the comments senior officers made, as well as a prior conversation with Larry Wise, I created a draft survey that I intended to have Larry e-mail to the club members. The survey was web-based, designed to allow numeric data to be tabulated automatically and for text data to be compiled with little effort. I showed the draft survey to all of the officers and, with the exception of minor changes in wording, they agreed that it should be sent out to the club membership.

Larry let the membership know that the survey would be forthcoming and issued a sponsoring statement regarding the survey's purpose of learning what was important to the club members and improving the club's value. This assessment survey and data are shown in Appendix C.

Role clarity. I had concerns about whether I was acting as the project leader or as a catalyst for the club to actually conduct the assessment process more actively for itself. Although I had extracted the survey's content from the officer's comments, I played a significant role in actually picking and choosing which of their comments I thought were relevant for the survey, rather than leading them through a process by which they would create and administer the survey themselves. All of the officers expressed excitement about learning the club's views on the issues that were discussed, but there was not so much excitement that anyone had taken action to learn those views prior to my arrival.

Commitment. Despite Larry's request that people respond to the on-line survey, after the first week there were only two responses out of an expected 14. None of the

officers, including Larry, had taken the time to respond. The second week, Larry again requested during the club meeting that people answer the survey, but again few responded.

LIOS faculty suggested to me that one of the purposes of the assessment and data feedback process was to bring the client into contact with its own data. Further, my web-based approach to data-gathering, while efficient, did not actually facilitate such contact and also may have been impersonal. In response, I began completing the data-gathering process by calling the members directly and interviewing them using the same questions that were in the on-line version of the survey.

Feedback. What became clear during the interview process was a significant amount of feelings, beliefs, and frustrations amongst the members about a number of concerns within the club. These were concerns that did not come out in the few surveys that were answered, nor in the discussions with the officers. Some of those concerns were structural, some were personal, and in almost all cases, there was a pattern of not saying what one thought, felt, or was aware of to the person who might be in a position to act on that information.

For example, in one interview, respondent X said of member Y that Y was "the worst offender of never giving specific feedback in response to speeches." When I asked X if he had ever mentioned this directly to Y, X said he had not done so. I asked X if he saw that he played a role in that pattern by withholding his own feedback from Y, to which X responded, "I suppose so."

First Engagement – Dynamic Duos

In my capacity as a "member," one of my duties was to conduct an exercise called Table Topics. In Table Topics, members are given a topic and must speak extemporaneously on that topic for up to two minutes. I chose to vary the format by having a pair of speakers come to the front, rather than just one, and to have them speaking to each other rather than to the audience at large. My intent was to shift to a format that promoted greater personal contact between members where listening would be as important as speaking. The format was not designed to be a debate, but rather an unprompted conversation between the pairs.

The result was that Table Topic speeches, which typically lasted only one minute out of an available two minutes, took the full four minutes allotted for every pair. Further, for the first time since I began the project, members began to stay in the room after the formal meeting ended to engage in conversations with one another.

I received multiple comments that this approach was novel and appreciated and a request that it be continued. Larry said, "I would like to see that format expanded to take up an entire meeting at some point in the future." Another member wrote to me:

I actually learned something new about how I respond in conversations and that was really great. I was brainstorming and wondering – as a learning tool – would evaluations or feedback be good after the table topics were over? Feedback could include suggestions to help speakers where they got stuck in the conversation and comments on what worked well.

Despite the comments above, this format was not repeated by anybody else in the remaining time that the project continued. However, it appeared to me that after this

intervention, people began "chatting" more with each other both before and after the meetings.

Second Engagement – Behavioral Specificity

During the length of the project, Larry and I met every two to three weeks outside of the club to discuss how things were going. It was also a period where I was able to offer some direct feedback on his leadership and on my perceptions of the effects of his actions. In one such meeting, we discussed the degree to which the feedback generally given in the club was not behaviorally specific. Instead, feedback consisted of things like "good" and "I liked your speech," without being actionable or directly related to the speaker's words or behaviors.

To address this, Larry and I put on an "act" at the next club meeting. The members were asked to observe us for the next 30 seconds, then write down what they saw and what they heard. During that time, Larry yelled at me, and I continued to back away from him as he approached. He accused me of not delivering positive results, and I countered that it was not my project, but that the project belonged to Larry and the club.

Of the 10 people participating, all of whom subsequently read their observations out loud, only one of them wrote something that referenced behavior ("Larry yelled at Ashley; Ashley backed away.") The other nine wrote judgments like "Larry was angry," "Ashley was scared," or "Ashley was defensive." Nobody mentioned the most deliberate part of the act, which was that Larry quite dramatically threw a book at the wall.

I followed this up by explaining the difference between behaviors and judgments. The point was not that judgments are bad, just that remarks about behaviors provide more concrete feedback to which one can respond, and that judgments summarize a large number of behaviors in an ambiguous manner (Schwarz, 2002). The act was also designed to be highly visual so that the club could see what I was talking about, in the

hopes of changing how they felt about feedback, which would allow them to choose whether they wanted to make a change (Kotter and Chohen, 2002).

Contracting for Data Feedback

The period leading up to the data feedback meeting with the officers and the process of contracting with them for the data feedback to the full club proved to be a far more significant part of the project than I anticipated. I suspect that the difficulty was because the officers had only met as a group once before, when this project was presented to them for the first time. It was possible that this was the first opportunity they had to examine their own beliefs and behaviors regarding what was or was not working for them within the club. This examination included questioning whether the club should even continue to exist, as will be explained below.

Data feedback consisted of two stages. The first was with the officers (Education, Treasurer, Membership, and President) outside of the regular meeting time. I presented a high-level summary of the data to them and contracted for the design of the larger data feedback session that would involve the entire club. This approach permitted greater flexibility of time with the officers and was intended to get their support for the larger presentation which would follow.

Role clarity. At this point in the project, I became more aware of the degree to which I was functioning as a leader/member, rather than as a consultant helping to increase the organization's capacity to bring about change for itself. To the extent that I was really a "member" of the club, exercising leadership was actually a desirable and encouraged behavior. As a consultant, the more leadership I exercised, the less would be required of the officers and members to address the data which rightly belonged to them.

Thus, I became increasingly uncomfortable with this personal role ambiguity. When I considered running for the role of President the next time elections came around, I realized that I had become inducted into the organization and that, as a consultant, I needed to extract myself from this level of induction so that the club could address its own issues (O'Neill, 2000).

Commitment. The data feedback meeting with the officers began 20 minutes late because Larry had not yet arrived. When he entered the room, he was clearly winded and his breathing was labored. He began to speak right away, but I encouraged him to take a moment to center himself. He did, after which he opened by saying that he may need to step down from his role as President due to increasing demands on his time from his wife, who was battling cancer.

Larry and I had discussed this the night before, but this was the first the officers heard it. When I had spoken with Larry, he was quite torn by his multiple responsibilities and wondered what would happen if he stepped down. I presented him with the options that somebody else would step forward, or the club could be given the choice to close. To the latter, he said "I think that's an excellent idea. Even just hearing that as a possibility, I'm feeling better about it already. I'm breathing easier."

However, in response to Larry's news, none of the other officers had any interest in stepping forward, and all said so explicitly. That created a dilemma in that elections were not far away, that nobody had expressed any interest in running for any post, that every single officer present expressed an aversion to assuming the role of president should Larry step down, and that the topic of "closure" was absolutely taboo. I waited for

Larry to bring up that subject, since he expressed such relief upon hearing it the night before, but he kept silent. I looked to Larry, but he would not lift his eyes from the table.

Eventually, I asked the group "Is there a process by which a club may choose to bring itself to a close?"

I thought that the response by the Treasurer was swift and harsh. He said "Why on earth are we even discussing that as a possibility? I think that subject is completely unacceptable. I don't want to discuss it in this meeting, and I surely don't want it mentioned as a possibility in front of the larger club." His face was visibly red as he spoke, after which he physically turned his chair such that his back was towards me for the rest of the meeting.

I was surprised by the level of energy in his response and I interpreted his body language as a form of resignation from the meeting. I looked to Larry for support but none was forthcoming. I was disappointed by Larry's silence. As much as I wished for some resolution on the topic, I recognized that it was not mine to provide. So, with the critical topic still unaddressed, we moved into planning how the data feedback would be conducted with the club in the next week

Feedback. During that planning discussion meeting, I learned that there were a number of topics that the officers preferred not to discuss publicly, such as the potential closing of the club. Likewise, the VP of Membership was planning to quit (or at least scale back) after his term was up, but he said he did not want that discussed outside of the officers' meeting. Additionally, the VP of Education said that she did not want to continue in her role, and the President was not ready to announce that he might step down too. Lastly, although he did not say so at the time, the Treasurer would subsequently

resign just three weeks later without giving any notification to the club and without a goodbye. Despite the meeting's intent of providing the officers with feedback from the club, and to plan for the larger feedback session, I came to understand that feedback was not part of this club's culture.

The data I would present indicated a hunger for more feedback for self-improvement. Yet the VP of Membership resisted any structural change which would reduce the number of speeches that could be given, even if reducing the number of speeches left more time for giving feedback on the remaining speeches.

When I pointed out that there appeared to be a strong resistance to giving feedback, one officer replied, "Of course! That's why there's an officially designated evaluator for the speakers – because nobody wants to do it!" When I asked about potentially moving to round-robin feedback, another officer opposed that because it would take more time. He said, "You don't get a CTM [Competent Toastmaster] for evaluating people – you get a CTM for giving speeches."

Since the focus was "time," I then asked about a speech that one of the officers gave a week ago that took seventeen minutes when it was only supposed to take eight. I asked "Did it count?" The very idea that an individual or the group could say that a particular speech did not count for credit was an anathema to them. Larry told me that in the club's history, no one had ever denied another credit for a speech. Further, the Treasurer added, "I just don't think that evaluation is an appropriate role for Toastmasters. Just follow the manual and the mission." On this last point, the president remained silent despite the Toastmaster's Promise, "To provide fellow members with helpful,

constructive evaluations" (Toastmasters International, 2003, p. 3). The full text of this promise is shown in Appendix E.

My challenge was that the data indicated feedback was a key issue, and the officers were reluctant to discuss it. The same was true of leadership, as none of the officers wished to continue in their current roles, and the idea of asking the membership to volunteer for leadership was simply unacceptable to the VP of Membership who said, "If we did that, nobody would step forward." Lastly, while that might make the topic of closure more valid, resistance to that possibility was highest of all. Following Schwarz' (2002) Ground Rules for Effective Groups, I chose to move in the direction of greatest resistance on the basis that "Undiscussable issues are those that are relevant to the group's task but that group members believe they cannot discuss openly in the group without some negative consequences" (p. 29). I then submitted the following to them for consideration:

"Let's suppose that everything you have said as a group here tonight is true – that nobody wants to give feedback, that nobody wants to take a leadership role, and that closure of the club is an extremely unpleasant topic to be avoided at all costs. If all of that is true, then that necessitates two things: (a) presenting this data to the membership for their own consideration, and (b) the need to discuss it as a group to make some meaning out of it. The purpose is not to bring closure of the club, but to collectively decide what needs to be done if, in fact, that option is to be avoided. This topic is important because without some effort, the club will lose all its officers in June and will have nobody to take their places. The purpose of data feedback is to discuss what the club wishes to do about that. The issue of closure must be raised in order to give some

real meaning and purpose to the conversation, because otherwise, it might indeed become a reality."

After consideration of the above, even the Treasurer conceded that I did indeed need to present the data to the larger group. At that point, we discussed the format for the larger data feedback meeting. We agreed that:

- Larry would open with the agenda and sponsoring statement.
- I would present the "summarized data" from the survey.
- Larry would speak further about the data as part of his "Moments of Truth" presentation for his CTM Gold requirement.
- The themes from the data feedback session would be listed on butcher paper for people to self-select the topics they wanted to discuss in greater detail in break-out groups.
- The agreed-upon topics for self-selection were Leadership, Membership, Participation, Evaluation/Feedback, and Other.
- One officer would lead each of the break-out groups, and I would be a rover to check on process.

"Closure" of the club might come up, but since it only arose in the discussion with the officers and the data I gathered did not directly support it, closure would not be a listed topic for selection.

Data Feedback

Role clarity. Despite the agreements made less than a week earlier, the data feedback session did not go at all according to plan. For starters, Larry had not prepared an agenda, nor had he created the break-out sheets. Second, instead of starting on time

with the usual religious consistency, the meeting began 10 minutes late while Larry chose to wait for late-comers to arrive. This shortened the time that could be used to make meaning of the data and necessitated a more abbreviated presentation of the data than I would have preferred. Third, Larry did not segue from the data feedback into his Moments of Truth presentation to make meaning of the data. Instead, his presentation was largely scripted from a Toastmasters manual and I believed that it had little connection to the data. Lastly, in his instruction to the group about signing up for the break-out groups, he had people sign up for two of the five groups, "Other" was not specified, and he mixed the lists in a way that I found confusing.

The net result was that, rather than break-out groups by the themes identified from the data feedback, two groups formed: one on Leadership and one on Membership. The Membership group focused on the topic of recruiting new members.

The choice for me was whether to intervene and rescue Larry from the confusion, to try bringing us back to the agreements we made about the design of this meeting, or to use what was happening as still more data. I chose the latter because I did not see a clear way to step in that would keep Larry in the leadership role and because I did not know if the departure from our agreements was a form of resistance or simple confusion.

Commitment. If I were committed to a particular outcome, I might have intervened. Instead, I had managed to pendulum during the course of the project from over-functioning as an expert, to under-functioning detachment, to a point closer to the middle and to the Client Responsibility Model (O'Neill, 2000). From that middle ground, Larry was leading the presentation, and I chose to work with whatever he presented so as

to support his actions however I could. My commitment had reached the point where I was focused primarily on being effective as a change agent and process consultant.

Feedback. During the subsequent break-out groups, people discussed membership and leadership relating to the club's future and the officers heard the views of other members.

Within the *Membership* group, Candice (VP of Education) led the discussion by directing it towards recruitment. However, one of the participants openly opposed recruiting additional members. Instead, she wanted to focus on strengthening what already existed within the club. She said, "If people get their needs met here, they are more likely to show up and less likely to leave in the first place. And if we take some time to learn what their needs are, that's even better." Candice noted that this would be a good topic for the larger group but she did not act upon it within the smaller group, so I chose to intervene.

I asked Candice if she knew what the needs were of the people in the group in front of her. She seemed a bit confused. I said, "If we want to see change, we don't have to leave this room to make it happen. We can start right here." Her sub-group represented about half of the club membership and learning their needs and wants would be a first step toward addressing them. She agreed and then started following up with the members of her group to learn their needs. She also created a list of action items that are covered with the results in chapter 4.

Within the *Leadership* group, there were no recently-joined club members, and all but one of the participants was a current or former officer. Larry led that group's discussion by asking where or how the group might be able to *find* the next set of

officers, rather than how to *create* or *groom* them. However, one of the participants asked, "Are we trying to find leaders, or people to fill leadership offices?" Larry said that he had not thought about the distinction. Then Daniel (VP of Membership) answered that the topic was limited to finding people to fill officer roles.

At that point, I chose to intervene because I knew that Larry and Daniel were operating with information that the rest of the group did not have. Following Schwarz' (2002) second ground rule for effective groups, I knew it was not my job to reveal that information, but rather to give Larry and Daniel the opportunity to bring it to the surface. I said "Before we move on, Larry, I wonder if you or Daniel would care to share anything from our previous officer meeting with this group?"

At that point, both Larry and Daniel announced that they would most likely be leaving the club in July, just after the club elections. Then multiple people in the group sat up straight, and the topic appeared to take on a greater sense of importance. Still, nobody expressed interest in stepping up to fill any of the open officer roles.

Bob, one of the former club Presidents, then emphasized that when he was President, he knew the importance of creating a succession plan so that things would go smoothly from him to the next President. He indicated how paramount that was now, especially with the news of the current President and VP of Membership moving on, rather than just stepping down. Larry did not appear to register the meaning of what Bob said because Larry transitioned the topic into a discussion about ceremony. I intervened again by identifying what looked like a misunderstanding, at which point Larry brought the topic back to issues of succession.

Despite being the *Leadership* group, populated by current and former officers, this group did not come up with a list of action items nor did it identify candidates to fill the officer roles. Instead, it concluded that the club did not recognize success very well. Carl, the Treasurer, had taken notes during the meeting and said he would forward them to the club next week. However, he resigned from the club prior to following through with that commitment.

Clarification of Goals and Deciding to Act.

During the week following the data feedback meeting, the officers met again to discuss the data and the Moments of Truth presentation in greater detail. While I intended to participate in that meeting, I missed it completely through my own error. However, my absence also provided the officers their first chance to make meaning out of their own data without my influence to spur or guide them.

I subsequently spoke with Larry one-on-one to decide what the next steps for the project needed to be. Larry believed that with everything now on the surface, the project was over. I suggested that the next step was actually to pick a topic to focus on from among the many areas that were identified for improvement. I explained that, in the project's next stages, we would take a measurement, intervene, and then measure again, based on the area of improvement we chose for greater focus.

The original goals for the project before data gathering and feedback had been (a) to increase member involvement in leadership activities within the group, (b) to increase the net value of the club to existing and new members, and (c) to decrease member attrition. As a result of the data feedback session, the action items from the group that discussed membership issues, and the officer's previous meeting, Larry and I decided to

refine the goal to make it more clear and narrow. Focusing more on part (b) from above, we reworded the new goal "to measure and improve the club's perception of how effectively feedback is delivered and received within the club." Next, we discussed particular measurements; we chose to use either quotes or paraphrased statements that members had made during the previous data feedback session. We also discussed the design of a training program intended to help the members look at feedback as an active and engaging process.

Initial Measurement

From notes that I had made during the data feedback session, I drafted seven positive assertions such as: "I consistently give feedback that allows the speaker to refine their behaviors to deliver better speeches."

The assertions were written on butcher paper, one assertion per page, with two seven-point Likert scales, from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, on the bottom. These were presented to the entire club. I told participants that the first scale would indicate the degree to which they believed the assertion was true for them right now. The second scale would indicate the degree to which the participants held the statement to represent an ideal worth pursuing. Participants were given two colored dots for each assertion to mark their answers on each of the two scales.

After all participants had responded, I opened the floor for discussion about what the answers meant and to give people an opportunity to elaborate on their answers if they so chose.

The initial measurement showed that in 6 of the 7 assertions, members agreed on the ideals and that the ideals had not yet been achieved. Larry indicated that seeing it

visually made it much more clear what the club needed to do over the next months to improve the results.

Third Engagement – Feedback Training

The primary intervention was an interactive activity designed to let the club see feedback in a different context, to change their feelings on what it meant to give and receive feedback, and to let them choose whether or how to change their future behaviors based on what they would learn from the activity (Kotter and Cohen, 2002). I chose the activity based on my own history with experiential education from when I worked as an outdoor education instructor.

Structurally, the participants were paired up with a senior and a junior member in each pair. Junior members had a cup with 14 sugar cubes that they stacked any way they chose in order to make the highest tower they could within 60 seconds. That was the ‘practice’ round. The real activity began when the junior members then blindfolded themselves and repeated the activity using only their non-dominant hand while receiving live feedback and coaching from their senior partner. The key point was not the tower but the communication and working relationship between the pairs. This activity lasted two minutes, after which the blindfolds were removed and participants discussed the activity through structured questions that I posed.

For the junior members (builders), I asked, "What were some of the things your coach did that were helpful to you as you built your towers?" Answers included:

- Getting feedback that allowed me to fine-tune my actions.
- The more specific the feedback was, the easier it was to use.
- It helped when my coach let me know if I had a solid base.

For the senior members (coaches), I asked, "Working one-on-one with your builders, what skills did you practice that apply to coaching a person giving a speech?"

- I need to be specific and to the point to help the builder. I also need to be both positive and constructive. Neither one works in isolation.
- I wanted to reach over and do it myself and had to struggle to put my feedback into words if I was to help my builder.
- I found myself resisting giving negative feedback and, because of it, my partner's tower fell. I have to give accurate information to be of value.

I also asked if any of the pairs used the practice session to discuss what kind of feedback the builders might find most useful. None of them had. I kept asking similar questions and then driving home the connection between this activity and giving speeches (Rohnke & Butler, 1995). Since the activity was designed to be fun, it was safe to talk about successes and shortcomings without awkwardness. However, I believed that only if the club members made the connection between the activity and the skills needed to give speeches would the activity provide value (Vail, 1996).

The next phase was to have participants take 60 seconds to plan how they wanted to work together in the next round (using the same roles). They were not permitted to touch the cubes in this time, but only to plan their working relationship and agree on what type of feedback each builder wanted and needed. During those discussions, one member said, "If you and I both know what I'm planning to do, then you can give me better feedback in order that I can achieve my goal."

The participants then repeated the activity and I tallied the results. Some pairs did better, and some did worse. However, one participant said, "Even if the tower was not as

high the second time, the quality of our conversation was better." That was something I hoped they would carry forward long after the activity ended.

Final Measurement and Presentation of Results

The final measurement took place seven weeks after the training and was structured almost identically to the initial measurement. The difference was that the participants only indicated the degree to which the seven assertions represented their current views. I did not re-assess whether the ideal had moved. Logistically, I used the same sheets from the initial assessments, except that the previous answers were obscured by the paper on which the participants placed a new dot to indicate their current opinion.

After the participants placed their dots on the paper, I took the sheets with the new answers and moved them directly below the old answers. The club could then see all three data points: the initial assessment of the current-state, the stated ideal, and the final assessment of current-state.

This format allowed me to present the results to the entire club visually and allowed the club to make meaning of the data immediately. Even prior to running the statistics on the data, it was visually clear that the project had achieved six of the seven ideals stated in the assertions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I covered the sequence of events in the project and addressed the recurring themes that were present. In the next chapter, I will cover the results of the intervention in greater detail and the methods used to evaluate the project.

CHAPTER 4

Results

In this chapter, I describe the measurements made before and after the primary intervention for the project and how the results relate to the revised project goal.

The Business Goals

The initial project goals were (a) to increase member involvement in leadership activities within the group, (b) to increase the net value of the club to existing and new members, and (c) to decrease member attrition. After the data feedback, the revised goal focused on how to measure and improve the club's perception of how effectively feedback is delivered and received within the club. This was a bottom-line goal in that it related to "the reason the organization exists" (O'Neill, 2000, p. 104), which is "to provide mutually supportive and positive learning environment" (Toastmasters International, 2003, p. 2). The revised goal also had a human relations component, in that it concerned how club members related to each other when giving and receiving feedback.

Methodology

I created a single survey which was administered at the beginning and the end of the intervention period. The survey consisted of seven assertions that I drew largely from earlier comments the participants made during the data feedback session. Since I wanted the participants to see the survey results immediately, rather than wait while I tabulated them, I wrote each of the seven assertions on its own sheet of butcher paper with two seven-point Likert scales ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree* on the bottom. The first scale indicated the degree to which the participants believed the

assertion was true for them right now. The second scale indicated the degree to which the participants believed the statement represented an ideal worth pursuing. Participants were given two sets of colored dots to mark their answers on each of the two scales. This yielded two sets of data for each of the seven assertions.

At the end of the intervention, the process was repeated, except that for the second round of measurements, participants only provided their current assessment, and not whether their ideals had changed. Appendix F shows a sample of the survey format, while Appendix G has the numeric and graphical results of the survey.

Quantitative Measurements

As a result of having an initial assessment, a stated ideal, and a final assessment, I was able to generate 3 hypotheses and implications for each of the 7 assertions to which the participants responded, as shown in Table 4.

Null Hypotheses	Research Hypotheses	Implications
There is no difference between the <i>initial assessment</i> and the <i>stated ideal</i> for the assertion being surveyed.	There is a difference between these two measures.	By rejecting H ₀ , we infer that there is a performance gap to be addressed via the project interventions.
There is no difference between the <i>initial assessment</i> and the <i>final assessment</i> .	There is a difference between these two measures.	By rejecting H ₀ , we infer that the intervention had an impact on the target group.
There is no difference between the <i>final assessment</i> and the <i>stated ideal</i> for the assertion being surveyed.	There is a difference between these two measures.	By accepting H ₀ , we infer that the population has achieved its stated ideal.

Table 4: Null Hypotheses, Research Hypotheses, and Implications

These hypotheses were tested using *t*-tests. The *t*-test requires that it be performed on either interval or ratio data. The Likert scale used is interval data. The *t*-test also requires a random sample drawn from a normally distributed population. For the first set of data (*initial assessment* and *stated ideal*), the data represented the entire population of the Chinook Toastmasters club at the time of the measurement. Since I was dealing with the entire population rather than a sample, random sampling did not matter. The remaining *t*-test requirements pertain to multiple groups or multiple populations. I was dealing with the same population each time, so those requirements do not apply. Finally, the *t*-test requires that the population distribution be normal. Not all data sets met this criterion. However, "Extensive studies have shown that the T statistic is quite robust to non-normal distributions. . . . As long as the data is interval or ratio and the population distributions are not exceedingly non-normal, the T statistic will likely be reliable" (Swanson, 2002).

Quantitative Results

Appendix H shows the full quantitative analysis for each of the seven assertions in the pre- and post-intervention survey. In 6 out of the 7 assertions, there was a statistically significant change between the times before and after the intervention period. Therefore, I infer that the null hypotheses – the interventions had no effect – can be rejected. In 5 of the 7 assertions, the difference between the final state and earlier stated ideal was no longer statistically significant. Therefore, I infer that the null hypotheses – there is no difference between the second measurement and the original ideal – cannot be rejected. In other words, it looked like the stated ideal and the second measurement were the same data set.

Therefore, based principally on quantitative, statistical data, I concluded that the intervention was a success for the Chinook Toastmasters Club.

Qualitative Results

From a subjective standpoint, many positive results stemmed directly and indirectly from my participation in this project. For example, Larry told me that my interventions were "highly effective." When I asked for more details, he offered that it was "because they brought to the surface issues that were right under our noses, but not being talked about."

Other changes include the presence of a sign on the door to the meeting area to let people know they were in the right place. I know that to be significant, because I wondered if I was in the right place on my first meeting, too. Further, Larry had begun making efforts to greet people when they arrived, especially new members and visitors.

Prior to my participation, there had not been a single officers' meeting in over two years. During the project, there were three in which I was involved, plus two others without my participation. Additionally, toward the end of the project, the officers held informal check-in meetings every other week. Larry had indicated that these were essential to keeping the club on track.

Candice, VP of Education, was able to identify on her own that "there is a disparity between the standards for success, and what we are actually doing here." She subsequently put forth several motions for change related to training programs that were designed to bring greater alignment with the objectives of the parent organization.

Also, one of the formal club roles is the Jokester. Formerly, this person would bring in a joke and read it. To make that role consistent with giving a speech, The

Jokester now tells the joke to the group from memory, the way jokes are usually delivered.

Lastly, as an observer, it looked like the level of behavioral specificity of delivered feedback had improved dramatically. Toward the project's end, I attended my first meeting in nine weeks. I had previously removed myself as a member due to the dual-role conflicts and a sense that I received little personal value from being in the club. At this particular meeting, the person acting in the Table Topics Master role asked me if I wanted to participate in the Table Topics competition again.

In response, a number of things occurred to me all at once. Chiefly, I would not mind being a member again. I had seen, felt, and sensed movement within the club, such that it was no longer true for me that there would be no value of joining. The dual-role conflict still existed, but I was genuinely able to appreciate that the club provided positive value to its members through the feedback they provided each other. I had become my own data-point. I accepted the invitation and won the competition for the night. More importantly, I was able to re-connect with what originally sparked my interest in the Chinook club – the possibility that I could learn something here by listening to the feedback others provided. This was important for me because it represented a qualitative shift in how I looked at the club.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology used and the statistical data that served as the foundation for evaluating the project's success. I also described a number of qualitative factors that contributed to a positive evaluation of success.

CHAPTER 5

Personal Impact

In this chapter, I describe the personal impact that the project had on me as a practitioner and how factors from my family of origin and work history may have manifested themselves in how I interacted with the client. I describe the role that conflict played in deepening my understanding of consulting and of my own reactivity. I discuss how my scores on the Strength Deployment Inventory (Porter, 1996b) are reflective of my behavior within the client system and the impact that the project had on the client system.

Family of Origin

I am the older child with a brother younger by four years. A standard of excellence was always the norm – whether as an expectation from my parents or self-imposed. Regardless of my performance, I grew to expect that Mom or Dad would tell me what I could do better. As I internalized those admonitions, I began to look for ways I could do better on my own, hoping I could find my own shortcomings before others pointed them out. When I heard feedback, I paid close attention so as to avoid making the same "mistake" again. That contributed to my forming an extremely high set of standards for excellence and a fierce sense of independence and self reliance. Those traits are simultaneously my strengths and also my biggest weaknesses (Porter, 1996a).

Growing up, conflict was dealt with in two ways that were polar opposites. My mother avoided conflict to the point of cut-off on a regular basis, often retreating to her room and slamming the door in the middle of a disagreement. This made it very difficult to take a conflict through to the point of resolution. With my father, on the other hand, a

passionate discussion about multiple aspects of an issue was a way to be deeply engaged and to hold his attention. On the occasions when I was able to hold my ground or convince him of an argument, my sense was that he was proud of me for the depth of my thought. On the other occasions, I enjoyed our discussions and often learned a great deal from him. Thus, conflict could be either a way to join, or a source of cut-off, with very little middle ground.

When I looked at the Toastmasters club, I believed that people were there to improve their public speaking skills. That meshed well with my focus on self-improvement. If Toastmasters could help me see weaknesses in my presentations before others did, then it was definitely a group that sparked my interest.

Work History

My work history is quite diverse. However, much of it for the last nine years involved quality assurance (QA) work in the software industry. As a QA manager, I focused on looking for things that were broken and that needed fixing. When I found something, it was my job to give people the feedback they needed in order to correct the problem.

That lens limited the purpose I saw in Toastmasters because I overlooked the more social aspects of group participation. I was looking for problems and expected that other people were too. At work, the bigger the problem and the sooner I pointed it out, the greater the positive impact and the opportunities to fix the problem before the product was released. If I was aware of a problem and did not provide detailed and timely feedback prior to product release, then I was not doing my job. Additionally, the first thing management would ask whenever a customer found a problem was "Why wasn't

this found earlier by QA?" As a result, I have been trained to find lots of problems, to provide very specific details on what I found, and to let others make the ultimate decision about whether to address any items that I pointed out.

The Role of Conflict

Two elements of my family of origin were present for me within the client organization. First, I felt a high degree of urgency to address any issues as I became aware of them. Second, there was a high degree of conflict avoidance in the system.

One issue I continued to pursue relentlessly with this Toastmasters club was the issue of how to select people for succession. I operated under the premise that one should "seek volunteers who are interested in the association, its activities, and the position" (Bova, 1999, p. 121). The client, on the other hand, was adamant about not asking for volunteers. The officers voiced concern that if volunteers were sought, then nobody would step forward, and they did not want to bring the issue about volunteering up for larger discussion. The client's position on this came out when I was contracting for data feedback, discussed in chapter 3.

Something in the issue about seeking volunteers was threatening to the client, or at least to the officers, such that they stated explicitly that the issue was not open for discussion. I, on the other hand, continued to see this as a key factor in the club's future and had great difficulty letting go of it. I wanted to explore the issue in great detail (like my father), but if I did, the client might terminate the whole project (like my mother). It was my personal difficulty letting go of that issue which alerted me to my own level of induction within the system and to being hooked into a family of origin story.

It was a pivotal moment for me as a consultant when I realized that I was in conflict with the client about what the most appropriate next step should be. I had to make a personal choice about my next steps, independent of what the client's next steps might be; I needed to draw upon my Personal Authority (Williamson, 1991).

I was also frustrated by the difference between the sponsorship I had with Larry the night before on the phone, when he expressed relief that closure was a viable option, and his dead silence in the meeting with the officers. I knew then that, despite his private sponsorship the night before, his sponsorship did not extend publicly, and that I could not proceed with our earlier agenda of discussing what I saw as a critical issue. That event gave me a deep understanding of the "critical role of sponsorship – if it is weak, advocates must educate sponsors, replace them, or fail" (Connor, 1993, p. 113). I believe that sponsorship is equally important for consultants and change agents.

Under other circumstances, I might have felt a sense of resignation or hopelessness regarding the issue of seeking volunteers. Instead, because of my increased understanding of the Client Responsibility Model (O'Neill, 2000), I was able to back away from the same issue, knowing that it rightfully belonged to the client. For whatever reason, the client was simply not willing or able to face that issue at that particular time. Outwardly, my behavior was still one of letting go of an issue that I saw as important. Inwardly, I was able to see the decision to let go as the most appropriate way to hold the client responsible for solving (or not solving) its own issues. I also believe that this was the most appropriate behavior for a change agent and process consultant.

Strength Deployment Inventory

Relationship Awareness Theory (Porter, 1996a) and the Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) (Porter, 1996b) were introduced in chapter 2. My own SDI scores are shown in Appendix D. There are specific ways in which my SDI scores reflect the way I behaved within the client system at various points. In particular, Relationship Awareness Theory advocates that people behave in two fundamentally different ways, based on whether things are going well or whether they are in conflict.

According to my SDI scores, I am a "hub" when things are going well, because that allows me to relate to people in the style I most value. In particular, I am "open minded and willing to adapt" and I "experiment with different ways of acting" (Porter, 1996b). That is highly consistent with my behavior in the beginning of the project, when I was working with the sponsor to figure out what the project needed to be. I started out by collaborating with Larry to define the project. Later, I became more directive with where the project needed to go. Finally, I returned to the Client Responsibility Model (O'Neill, 2000). I tried a multitude of behaviors until I found what allowed me to accomplish my own goals of moving the project forward for the purpose of my thesis requirements.

Also according to the SDI, when I sense that I am moving into conflict, I move towards an "Altruistic-Nurturing" style, but only slightly. When I enter some form of conflict, it is usually the emotional side of the contact which I have overlooked, and that is where I need to turn for resolution. In particular, once I sense conflict, I will focus on what the other party feels, having recognized that logic and force are not apt to be of

value to me. However, the experimental nature of my behavior dominates, always looking for what works rather than strictly adhering to any particular style.

Impact for the Client

In order to better understand the personal impact that my behaviors had on the club's officers, I had a feedback session with them shortly after the final results of the intervention were shared with the club. The meeting's purpose was to speak more candidly about what had transpired over the course of the project and to solicit feedback from them regarding my own behaviors and effectiveness.

I believe the impact on Larry was the greatest, both because he and I spent the most time together and because he offered the most direct feedback on the impact I had on him. He said that he appreciated that I gave him an opportunity to look at the world in front of him through a different set of eyes. Toward the topic of feedback within the club, Larry said: "I'm now giving myself permission to write as much as I need to – if my feedback takes half a page, then so be it! I'm no longer limiting myself to that 1 x 3 inch slip of paper, thanks to feedback I got from a consultant about doing so. Why on earth was I staying inside that tiny space when I had more to say?"

I told him it was great that he gave himself that permission now and I asked if he thought the rest of the club had that permission, too. "Probably not," he replied.

When I asked Larry for specific feedback on the impact he thought I had on the club, he said: "I've appreciated both the input and the push-back that I get from you. You have been a very positive and perceptive observer. The real strong positive you have is bringing us back to the core values of the club."

The impact on Daniel (VP of Membership) related more directly to the topic of feedback and he was able to articulate some of the ways that my feedback helped him. He said he recognized that much of the feedback he typically gave speakers had been more general in nature and that, through our work together, his feedback became much more focused on behaviors. As an observer, I agree with his self assessment.

When I asked Daniel for specific feedback on the impact I had on him, he said: "Initially, when you came on board with this project, I had resistance to you. You were an outsider, plus there's something about how you initially come across – very expert-like – that I found distancing." He also said that as the project's focus began to change from a more broad exploration to a smaller focus on feedback, his perception of the project's value increased. Also, he said that during our one-on-one time discussing feedback, he was able to see me as a person and not just as a consultant. On hearing that, I came to see the degree to which genuine contact is essential for being effective in any consulting capacity.

Candice (VP of Education) said that the biggest impact I had on her was to increase her recognition of the importance of goals – for the club, for herself, and for each of the speakers as they gave their individual speeches. She said that as an indirect byproduct of the project, she now took a greater personal interest in the goals of any speaker she was going to introduce and recognized that she could encourage others who were giving introductions to do the same.

When I asked Candice for specific feedback on the impact I had on her, she said: "You shed light on the needs of the club, but I would have preferred that you remain a member of the club rather than removing yourself from that role to be more of a

consultant." Later, when I mentioned our discussion about the need for more leadership, she added: "Sometimes I thought you were putting things in a more negative light. My personal goals were not about increasing leadership – they were just about being a better speaker."

For the officers as a group, we discussed how the norms within the club are neither static nor beyond their direct influence. I mentioned a series of events that all three of them witnessed and that I perceived as unpleasant. I described the events to refresh their memory and then asked what their reactions to the events had been. Each of them recalled the events and admitted that they were uncomfortable when they had occurred, yet none of them had spoken to the person responsible for the events to share the impact that his behavior had had on any of them.

With that, Larry shared that he had an "Aha," believing that feedback was really something that needed to be made part of the club's culture, rather than just something we worked on regarding individual speeches.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how my family of origin patterns influenced my tendency to look for ways to improve. I discussed how that pattern contributed to my work environments and how I initially carried those patterns with me into the client environment. I discussed a particular conflict between the club's senior officers and myself, and how that increased my self awareness as an ABS practitioner. I looked at my behavior through the SDI model, and examined the impact I had on the client organization through the feedback they gave directly to me.

CHAPTER 6

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I summarize the project and conclude the thesis with a greater focus on how the project contributed to my learning as a consultant and practitioner.

Summary

The client system for this project was a local chapter of Toastmasters International. The project's goal was to measure and improve the club's perception of how effectively feedback is delivered and received within the club. To achieve that goal the project focused on the feedback that members gave to each other as part of their planned and impromptu speeches.

The principal methodology was action research, heavily influenced by the work of Block (1999) in terms of the stages that were followed: "entry and contracting," "discovery and dialog," "feedback and the decision to act," "engagement and implementation," and finally "extension, recycle, or termination" (p. 6).

Three principal themes emerged throughout the project, recurring at multiple stages. Those themes were feedback, commitment, and role clarity.

Feedback

I expected the issue of feedback to emerge, as it was part of the project's focus. As it turned out, the issue of giving and receiving feedback permeated all levels within the client system. It applied in terms of the feedback speakers got in response to their presentations. It was essential in terms of my own interactions with the President. It was relevant in terms of what the sponsor would and would not say to the other officers. It showed up in what the officers were and were not willing to do regarding practices to

which all officers objected, but about which none chose to speak or act. It showed up in the gap between what members and officers would say privately and what they would say to the person or group that was impacting them. It was also an essential stage of the action research project in that "discovery and dialog" entailed feeding back my discoveries from surveys and discussion to the group in a formal presentation intended to mobilize the group to choose its subsequent path.

Commitment

The issue of commitment is indirectly related to feedback because people need some level of commitment to each other in order to risk sharing critical feedback. However, in terms of this project, commitment issues ran much deeper.

At various times, there were questions about the commitment level that all of the officers had to the club as a whole. For example, questions arose regarding whether any other officer would step up to fill the President's role should he leave to tend to his wife who had cancer. Some of the presentations the officers gave about their official responsibilities, taken in large part directly from Toastmaster's manuals, revealed that they were not fully satisfying their responsibilities as spelled out by the parent organization. When officers' terms came to a close, questions arose about succession amidst concerns that nobody would step forward if volunteers were requested. The President even questioned whether the club should continue to exist or whether he should discuss the procedures for bringing it to a close. Lastly, in my own case, I often questioned my own commitment both to the club and to the thesis project.

Role Clarity

Role clarity was the most significant issue for me as a consultant throughout the project. It surfaced because I wore a number of different hats at any time. I was a process consultant and change agent, a club member and part of the target group, a person providing or a presenter receiving feedback, a student, a leader, an insider, and also an outsider. Likewise, the club's officers had official responsibilities through their roles, but they were also members of the club seeking their own objectives.

Conclusions

Toastmasters has been around since 1932, with chapters existing in over 80 countries. The club's mission has been sufficiently simple and yet valuable enough to permit it to expand to the size that it is today, almost entirely on a volunteer basis. In many ways, this project was about the client group re-committing to the club's mission of providing a mutually supportive and positive learning environment.

I believe that my ability to tie this project's goal to the existing Toastmasters mission helped the sponsor approve the project during the initial contracting stages. Tying my project's goals in with Toastmaster's mission also allowed me to weave my interventions into the club's structure through its regularly scheduled meetings.

In Toastmasters, learning comes from hands-on practice, experimenting, and giving presentations on various topics. Parallel to that, the changes seen through this project came from hands-on, experiential activities with large-scale participation and involvement within the club. I believe that the target group's active involvement in the very process designed to bring about change was a significant factor in making the project successful.

Summary of My Learning

Of the lessons I take with me from this project, the importance of "role clarity" stands out the most. I say this not just because it was a theme in this project, but also because, through this project, I gained greater insight into many of my existing corporate challenges that involved unclear roles. I believe the added skill I acquired in identifying role-ambiguity as a component within the target system will continue to serve me well.

Next in importance for me is the need for clear and public sponsorship. Many times I have been an advocate lacking sponsorship and have attempted to proceed with change efforts anyway. I now recognize that I am a less effective change agent if I cannot first secure appropriate sponsorship. Further, that sponsorship must be openly expressed rather than merely given privately. Open sponsorship helps others with role clarity and ensures that the sponsor and I are really on the same page. Private sponsorship with public silence is effectively a lack of sponsorship for all but covert operations. I've seen this many times before, but this project helped formalize the lesson. Sponsorship is so important that "if it is weak, advocates must educate sponsors, replace them, or fail" (Connor, 1993, p. 113).

Parallel with the value of sponsorship is the need to understand the sponsor's world, as the sponsor sees it, with his or her own particular values. For example, it would be easy to judge the President of the Chinook club based on some artificial standard or my own biases and expectations. Looking at him with compassion, however, I see that he did not want the role in the first place, did not enjoy it, and did not want to be in a position of leadership. Yet his sense of personal duty to the club and to the other members led him to serve in that role because he had been asked to do so.

This compassion for the President as a person helped me join with him on a deeper level than we could have reached had I only focused on his role. Likewise, I had to recognize the value of joining with the target group in some meaningful way. I prefer to work from the role of a subject-matter-expert. However, no amount of expertise, even with crystal clear roles and overt public sponsorship, will make me effective unless I can establish an appropriate level of contact and rapport with the target group. Many times I have essentially hidden behind expertise or a clear task and forced changes through out of necessity or edict. Not only is joining with the group far more effective, I have also found it more enjoyable. Plus, with more effective joining, I believe there is a greater likelihood of the target group being willing and able to provide essential feedback needed to make mid-course corrections in a protracted change project.

In contrast to the importance of joining would be the cautions of induction – becoming so joined with the target group that I become subject to the same forces I am actively trying to change, or worse, that I become part of the problem. For example, as a club member I considered running for the office of President. That was a sure sign to me that not only was I inducted with the organization, but also that I was not holding the club or its officers capable of addressing their issues on their own. I had made the club's issues my issues. In the context of this project, when I recognized my induction and stepped back, it was an "aha" moment. It made the value of the Client Responsibility Model (O'Neill, 2000) sink in for me. The lesson applied not just to this project, but to my work as an employee where it is equally important that I hold my supervisors both responsible for and capable of performing their own roles. This is true even if, in my

mind, significant performance issues are at stake. "Like it or not, client managers have a right to fail" (Block, 1999, p. 50).

Somewhere between joining from the outside and induction from within, there is an appropriate balance point for each situation. Presently, it is the recognition of this continuum that will permit me to be more deliberate about where I choose to stand in an effort to be more effective.

Yet even with role clarity, sponsorship, joining, compassion, and the Client Responsibility Model, there still needs to be a compelling sense of purpose to tie everything together. In the case of this project, the focus centered around increasing the quality of feedback. However, it was only relevant because it related directly to the club's more compelling mission of providing a mutually supportive and positive learning environment. The lesson for me here concerns the importance and value of tying a change-process to a larger, more compelling mission or purpose wherever possible. By doing so, I can tap into a vast body of existing knowledge, experience, and commitment, rather than having to create it from scratch.

Lastly, with feedback being one of the principal themes within the group, how I conducted myself regarding feedback probably carried as much weight as any theories I might have brought to the table. I could only hope that my own practice of actively soliciting and responding to feedback, as well as consistently delivering feedback in behaviorally specific terms, would begin to catch on. This was more than just something that I did. Rather, it was part of how I showed up within the system – open to input from others, actively inquiring into what others were seeking, and sharing timely, behaviorally specific impact. This was true in terms of feedback for speeches, data feedback sessions,

and numerous one-on-one sessions I had with the President and officers. I believe that how I conducted myself will leave a longer impression on those in the club than any fact, theory, or intervention that I might have introduced.

Post Script

The delay between completing the project and completing the thesis was close to two years. While concluding the writing and soliciting proof-readers, I contacted Larry again by e-mail. He responded as follows:

It was a pleasure to receive your email! The club is doing great! We are up to about 30 members, thanks in a large part to excellent evaluations our club gives to speakers! We started growing quickly when [Cameron] took over as President and achieved President's Distinguished Award for growth. I received the spark plug award for sticking with it to success! Our club received the Phoenix Award for a prime example of a club which has risen from the ashes to success in [our] District.

By the way, [Daniel] passed away as a result of a massive heart attack. Others have moved on and new people have joined – nothing ever stays stable in the real world.

I would like to see and read your thesis – it seems to me that a follow-up about the success [is in order], due in no small part to [the] excellent evaluations which you helped the club to establish!

[Larry]

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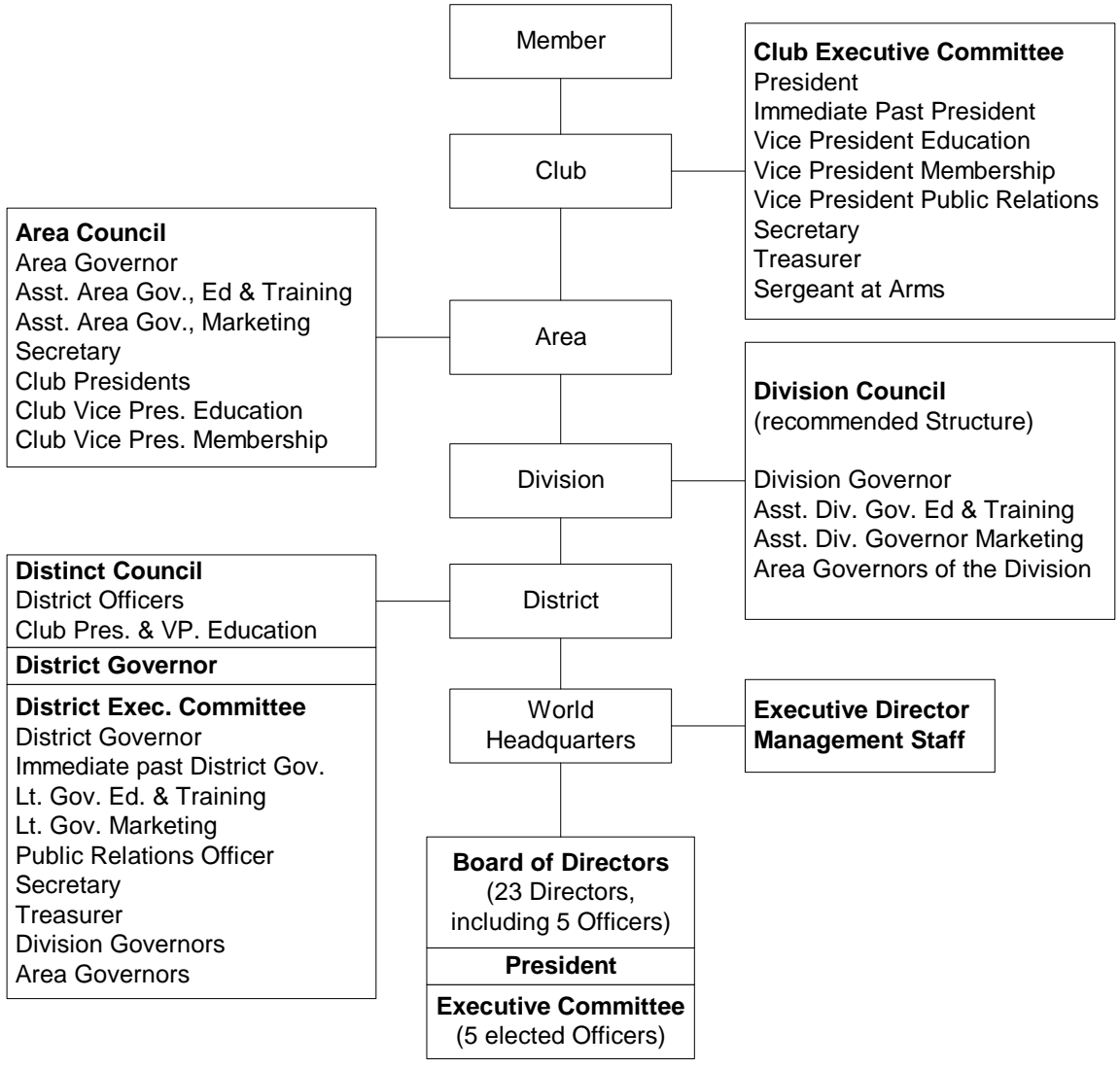
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Appendix A: Toastmasters International Organizational Service Chart

Toastmasters International Organization Service Chart

This chart traces the flow of services, material, and programs upward from the Board of Directors through the various echelons of Toastmasters International to the ultimate beneficiary, the individual member.



<http://www.toastmasters.org/pdfs/orgchart.pdf>

Appendix B: Officer Roles and Responsibilities

All Officers

- Attend club meetings regularly, and arrange for another officer to cover duties when absent
- Attend monthly officer meetings
- Attend 1-2 local Toastmasters officer trainings during the year
- Help plan club activities and take on other duties as necessary

President

- Serves as Club's chief executive officer, responsible for general supervision and operation of the Club.
- Presides at Club meetings; greets new guests and members
- Directs Club in way which meets educational growth and leadership needs of members.
- In cooperation with executive team, establishes long-term and short-term goals for club growth.
- Chairs the Executive Committee (Officer Team)
- Ensures that all officer duties are completed in a timely and quality manner
- Ensures that all officers are adequately trained for their positions
- Works with Secretary and Vice President Membership to prepare and submit the semiannual membership report and maintain the calendar of events and deadlines
- Conducts monthly Officer meetings

- Represents the club within the Toastmasters organization at large by attending and voting at area, district, regional and international council meetings

Vice President Education

- Responsible for planning successful Club meetings so that each member has the opportunity to achieve his or her educational goals.
- Maintains the schedule of weekly meeting roles and fills empty roles as needed
- Prepares and makes copies of the weekly agenda
- Makes weekly updates to the meeting roles, member directory, and CTM progress chart on the club website
- Signs Communication and Leadership manuals reports educational program completions promptly to World Headquarters.
- Coordinates recognition of member achievement.
- As second-highest ranking Club officer, presides at Club and executive committee meetings in absence of the President.
- Ensures that each new member receives orientation to the Toastmasters educational program, including assignment of mentors and new member induction.
- Monitors the effectiveness of orientation and mentoring programs and makes improvements as necessary

Vice President Membership:

- Plans, organizes, and implements a continuous marketing effort which ensures that the Club maintains or exceeds a charter membership level of 20 members.

- Works with groups inside and outside of Toastmasters to promote Club membership and membership retention.
- In coordination with Club Treasurer, (and the Club Secretary - ed.), responsible for prompt submission to World Headquarters of Club's semiannual report (including membership list and dues payment).
- Provides for recognition of Toastmasters who contribute to increase of membership in Toastmasters International.
- Maintains accurate membership roster and attendance records.
- Chairman of Club Membership Committee.

Vice President Public Relations

- Develops, implements, and administers a program that maintains a positive image of Toastmasters for all members, guest and the general public.
- Responsible for internal and external public relations for the Club, including but not limited to:
 - preparing and distributing news releases regarding Club activities;
 - working with Club officers to develop literature about the Club;
 - representing Club with the media.
- Works with the Club Newsletter Editor and Sergeant-at-Arms to maintain an effective program of internal Club communication.

Secretary

- Types and distributes minutes from officer and weekly club meetings
- Prepares and submits the semiannual membership report
- Keeps membership information up-to-date and accurate

- Monitors Toastmasters supplies and works with Treasurer to place new orders as needed
- Maintains a calendar of Toastmasters events and deadlines
- Maintains the general club business files
- Collects communication and leadership program manuals from new members once they receive their new member kits
- Along with Vice President Membership and Club Treasurer, ensures semiannual membership reports, dues, and membership roster are mailed to World Headquarters and received by April 10 and October 10.
- Submits names of newly elected officers to World Headquarters within ten days following election.

Treasurer

- With President, is a co-signer on the club checking account
- Deposits checks, submits dues payments, pays all bills promptly
- Keeps complete and accurate records of all financial transactions
- Prepares and monitors the club's annual budget
- Presents a verbal and written financial report monthly
- Submit club accounts for audit upon request
- Notifies members of dues payable and collects semi-annual dues
- Along with the Vice President Membership and Club Secretary, ensures semiannual membership reports, dues, and membership roster are mailed to World Headquarters and received by April 10 and October 10.

Sergeant-at-Arms

- Responsible for serving as master host and making proper physical arrangements for all Club meetings.
- Coordinates with Vice President Public Relations and Vice President Membership to ensure that each member and guest is welcomed at club meetings.
- Responsible for orderly conduct of meeting, including:
 - arranging meal service,
 - meeting room layout,
 - Setting out materials and equipment,
 - collecting ballots,
 - Tallying votes,
 - Controlling Club property between meeting

Immediate Past President

- Provides guidance and serves as resource to Club officers and members.
- Chairs the Nominating Committee.
- Assists in the preparation of Club Success Plan and promotes Club's efforts to become a Distinguished Club.

("Officer roles & responsibilities", 2006)

Appendix C: Initial Assessment Survey and Response

2a. Why did you decided to join Toastmasters? When you joined, what were you hoping you would get out of joining? What benefits or personal goals were you hoping to achieve as a member?

Fear and/or confidence based reasons

- To improve self-confidence
- I do not feel comfortable speaking in front of groups at all.
- To conquer my fear of public speaking
- To improve my overall confidence speaking in front of groups.

Social Reasons

- Social reasons. I enjoyed the program.
- To get to know other people and learn from them
- I like meeting people of different backgrounds and interests.

Improved effectiveness

- To improve my speaking/presentation skills
- I was hoping to learn how to better express myself both verbally and nonverbally.
- To better articulate and achieve goals.
- To become better speaker
- I wanted to be more effective in meetings at work.
- I joined Toastmaster's because of my job.
- To express myself with more clarity.
- To be able to think faster on my feet
- To improve my spoken English
- To improve my communication skills.
- To be become a better writer and a more considerate listener and speaker.
- To improve my conscientiousness and self awareness when speaking in front of audiences, to improve my delivery.

2b. How many Toastmasters clubs did you visit prior to deciding to join the club you are in now?

Number of Clubs	Number of people giving this answer
0	5
1	3
3	1

2c. When you were deciding on **which** Toastmasters club to join, or if you were a member of another club prior to joining this one, what were the factors that were important to you in choosing this club rather than any other club?

Time / Place / Convenience	People / Environment / Feel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time - prefer evening club • Location - close to home • location/time • it's convenient - time and place • time/place was important • time, and location • Proximity to home and scheduling • Convenience; the meeting time and place works well with my work schedule • The meeting location and time were convenient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt comfortable, acknowledged, supported, and encouraged to grow. • general feel / atmosphere. • The organization of this club is more professional. • members of this club impressed me • Some senior members are very skillful in speech. • I feel I could learn more and improve much in this club. • Liked the people, . • Familiarity with people in club.

2d. How satisfied are you that *you are benefiting* from your membership in Toastmasters?

Rating	Count
6. Very Satisfied	3
5.	6
4	1
2	1

3a. What aspects of the way our local club operates right now do you most want to **keep the same** because of their **value** to you and your own **personal goals** within Toastmasters?

People / Environment

- Members are truly friendly and supporting.
- It's a non-threatening environment.
- Encouraging speeches, growth as a speaker

Roles / Structure

- The formality and structure of the meetings.
- The diversity of meeting functions and activities for participation.
- Having a casual & friendly atmosphere while still maintaining a sufficient degree of professionalism
- Attention to time.
- most valuable part of the club
- Forcing to get up and speak in front of the club.
- Giving speech is encouraged a lot.

Table Topics

- Table-topics.
- I'd like to keep Table Topics part of the regular meetings;
- A section for table topics and prepared speeches and evaluations.
- The table topic is very helpful.
- round-table on the table topics

Other

- Feedback and overall evaluations from members who have been in Toastmasters longer--are real helpful.
- The teaching sessions, the evaluations.
- The critiques of the content of the speeches as well as the delivery of speeches is important to me.

3b. If you were free to change anything about the way our local club operates, so that the club would be of **greater value** to you and your own **personal goals** within Toastmasters, what would change(s) would you make?

Mentor / Assistance for new members

- A mentor. Someone who really knows what my personal goals are and is providing suggestions of how I might be a more effective speaker, and how I am working on that in each speech, and is pushing me to reach my goals in ways I may not have thought of on my own.
- It would be great if we had a mentoring program in place, although I'm a little put off by people telling me to mentor others when no one ever offered a shred of mentoring advice to me when I was a new member.
- provide new members with mentors, especially those w/stage fright.
- More help on preparing speech or the role I need to play. Some kind of tutorial or mentor.

Leadership

- The leadership team should meet more often and provide stronger direction to the club.
- Finding people to take on administrative and mentoring responsibilities
- The club could do a better job of nurturing future leaders, so that it isn't constantly a struggle to find enough people willing to fill the officer roles when the new term starts.
- I'd like to find a way to get the club members to take more of an interest in Toastmasters activities outside of the club.

Feedback

- Change the feedback process and make more of the program more interactive.
- I think the evaluations lack substance; they don't stimulate growth in members
- when we have more than 1 speaker, vote on the best one.

Table Topics

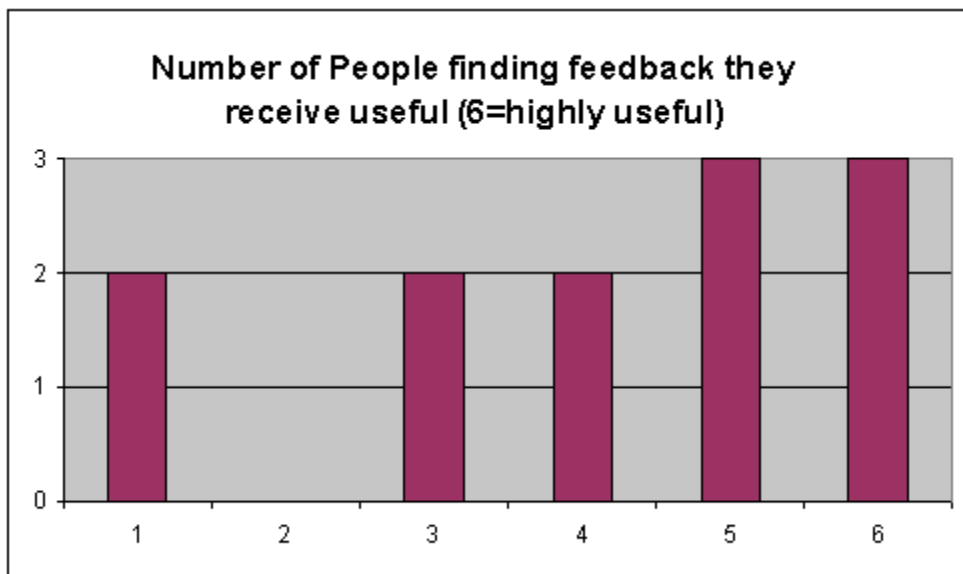
- I'd really like less hand clapping; I understand the need to support members by clapping for them, but I also think the clapping goes WAY overboard.
- Brief applause for a speaker is fine.. then either the speaker needs to rush their butt up their, or enough with the clapping already!
- Try to incorporate more humor into table topics.
- When people are asked to speak on a certain topic, such as in table topics, speak on that topic -- changing the topic to something like the weather misses the point of table topics.

Other

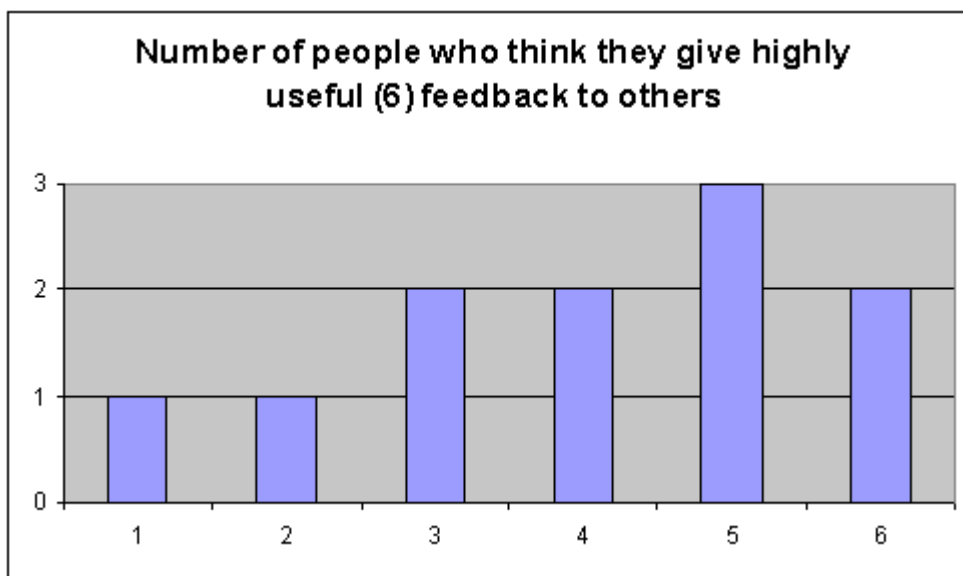
- I'd like more members to regularly attend the meetings so that no one feels that he/she is having to do too much work for any given meeting.
- I would prefer the meeting end at 8:30p

Feedback

4a. How useful is the feedback that you receive towards improving **your own** speaking skills?



4c. How useful do you think that the feedback that you provide is towards improving **other members'** speaking skills?



4b. If you could change anything about the way feedback is given or structured in the club, so that it would be **of greater value to you** in improving your own personal speaking abilities, what would you change?

Feedback / Evaluation Content

- Feedback should be more specific, with examples given.
- Require feedback on the slips of paper to be concrete and actionable.
- I would like to see a second evaluator or round-robin evaluation.
- The entire feedback process is almost worthless.
- Feedback must become more focused. The history at the club has promoted very laid-back feedback.
- I'd like the feedback to feel more genuine;
- A lot of feedback is given with kid gloves on ... I don't want to damage another person's ego.
- I would like to see more emphasis on evaluation.
- Make feedback a dialog rather than the anonymous one-way process.
- In my humble opinion, leaning how to evaluate another is one of the hardest roles we perform in Toastmasters.
- Too many of our evaluations (even from some of the more experienced members) are either of the "grocery list" variety (reading off the items in the evaluation guide and saying "yes" or "no" about whether the speaker met the goal), or of the "whitewash" variety ("the speech was so great, I can't think of anything to make it better").
- Do some general presentation / training on approaches to feedback.
- Conduct a serious education session on how to evaluate. (Toastmasters has a program called "Evaluate to Motivate" expressly for this purpose)
- Unless the evaluator is really great, he/she is so focused on preparing his/her evaluation presentation that appropriate evaluation of the speaker is short-changed.
- I don't think feedback is strong here. We're too nice -- we don't want to hurt anyone's feelings.
- Feedback is an area where we are not good at it -- and it's critical to [speaker's] improvement.
- people hold back on their feedback... nobody wants to hurt anybody else's feelings. **I hold back.**
I don't know... maybe people just don't know how to give more directed, honest feedback.

4b. If you could change anything about the way feedback is given or structured in the club, so that it would be **of greater value to you** in improving your own personal speaking abilities, what would you change? (continued)

Feedback Format

- Get rid of those tiny slips of paper for feedback. Too small and no time to write.
- The current evaluation & ballot form we use for other members (aside from the assigned evaluator) to give feedback to the speaker doesn't have enough room to write on; I'd like to see us switch to a different form.
- After feedback, the speaker should be given an opportunity to **practice** the changes recommended.
Have you ever taken music lessons? You play a song and your instructor says, "That's great, but could you play this part like this..." and you play/attempt to play as your instructor suggested. We're missing that piece in Toastmasters.
- Doing the same speech over again, using the feedback would help.
- Verbal feedback would allow it to be more detailed.
- I think it might be helpful after the [formal] evaluation to query the audience for any other input members might like to give, in terms of constructive criticism.
- Make the feedback more interactive. Why is Larry the only one who gets his feedback interactively?
- Give feedback quicker -- right after the speech, rather than all speeches then all evaluations.
- A willingness to **try** new things, and perhaps interact more with each other as **people** than the formality of roles within TM.

Mentors / Experience

- Having a **mentor** who is helping me work on specific skills.
- I understand many evaluators are **just learning** how to give an evaluation.
- Only when an evaluator feels **confident** in his/her abilities does the speaker (receiving the evaluation) really benefit.
- Personally, **I don't feel confident yet** in my ability to give an evaluation to a more experienced member.
I wouldn't be surprised if they said I was not giving them the feedback they need
- I'm very dissatisfied with the entire mentor process... as soon as somebody shows up, they should be assigned a mentor, or pick one.
- The grammarian should also try to thoughtfully correct the grammatical content of a person's speech.

4d. What more would **you be willing to do** in order to make the feedback that you provide to others of greater value to other members?

Greater Involvement

- Lead workshops on effective evaluation
- Maybe listen more attentively?
- I can always put more effort into my evaluations.
- I'd be willing to find out (the week before) which speech the speaker will be giving so that I'll have more time to become familiar with the objectives of her/his speech.
- Many people only want to participate at the level of attendance.

Improve Skills

- Take a class on evaluations. [Note: refers to getting this outside of Toastmasters]
- Learn how to make a valuable feedback.
- Even though I generally feel I do a good job as an evaluator, going through the "Evaluate to Motivate" program would still help me improve my skills further.
- Provide training on feedback skills. Model giving more effective feedback. Present options to the club to make it more effective.
- There are lots of training opportunities available, but I don't see people going to them -- we all just wing it.

4e. What more do **you think you need** (from others, or from the club) in order to make the feedback that you provide to others of greater value to other members?

Clear Goals From The Speaker To Guide Evaluations

- Know specifically what the personal goals are for the speaker which he/she is trying to attain in each speech.
- One thing that can help is if the speaker lets me (as their evaluator) know prior to the speech if there are any specific things they'd like me to watch out for while I'm evaluating them.
- Some general ideas about the perspectives I should pay attention to [from the speaker].

Feedback

- A class on effective evaluations.
 - Honest clear feedback
 - Get more information about how to provide the feedback.
-

Leadership

5a. The term "Leadership" has many meanings to different people, regardless of what the dictionary definition says. What does the term "Leadership" mean to you personally?

Setting Direction

- Providing a clear sense of direction and purpose for our club, which the membership buys into and supports through their own endorsement and behavior.
- Someone who takes responsibility to direct others toward a common good.
- Guiding a group of people towards a goal.
- The ability to guide, educate, and lead (the group) through example.
- "leadership" to me is an individual or group of individuals who have people who are willing to follow them (for whatever reason).

Display of Dedication and Commitment

- Leadership means dedication to a cause.
- People taking on roles to help in operation of club, and helping others develop as speakers.
- Leadership means setting a good example which others will want to emulate.
- Leadership means volunteering for new responsibilities and performing those tasks well.

Motivational

- The ability to motivate people to accomplish a task.
- I think it means the ability to motivate others to achieve both their personal goals and collective goals as well.

5b. How would you describe the existing leadership **within the local club?**

Supportive Views

- Very good.
- I think it's pretty good.
- It's good.
- As far as I can tell, it appears good.
- Some very good, some not so good, some adequate.
- I think the leadership is good and the leaders do a great job.
- I think Larry, especially, has done a remarkable job of keeping this club together.
- Overall, the leader(s) appear well experienced and thoughtful.
- Our current group of officers is very conscientious.

Challenging Views

- We have the roles or jobs of leadership (president, VP Education, VP Membership, etc.), but I do not think we have much real leadership exhibited within the club.
- Sometimes Larry has a certain amount of ego that gets in the way some time when he monopolizes the meetings.
- It could be stronger and more directive in terms of how to direct the club.
- Like most small groups, being a leader isn't something most members want to do - in fact they hide from it.
- So our leaders are to some extent leaders by default - nobody else wants to do it.
- I don't know how to light a spark within the club, but I definitely think it needs to be done.
Larry has done it for a long time [been president]. For the most part, Larry is the club. Much of it really does rest with him.

5c. Are there areas of leadership **within the local** club that you think need to be examined, changed, or discussed in order to increase the value of the club to you as a member?

Leadership / Role Clarity

- I think the club needs to make more of an effort to groom leaders for future years.
- There should be the expectation that new members will eventually assume leadership roles in the club
- The leadership group should meet more frequently and provide direction to the club.
- Maybe have someone in charge of a **mentoring** program--or of setting up a mentoring program.
- Training about the roles of the club

Commitment

- We need to examine our purpose, and our commitment to each other's growth as members of the club.
- I think people come to do their own speeches and go home -- not to help others with their speeches.
- Some times, people speak just to give their speeches -- there is not much investment.

Other

- I would like to see the program schedule issued well in advance (2-3 months).
- I'd would like to see more of the officers get involved in activities outside of the club; they can pick up a lot of ideas from members of other clubs to bring back to our club.

5d. What are you personally willing to do to increase the leadership within the club?

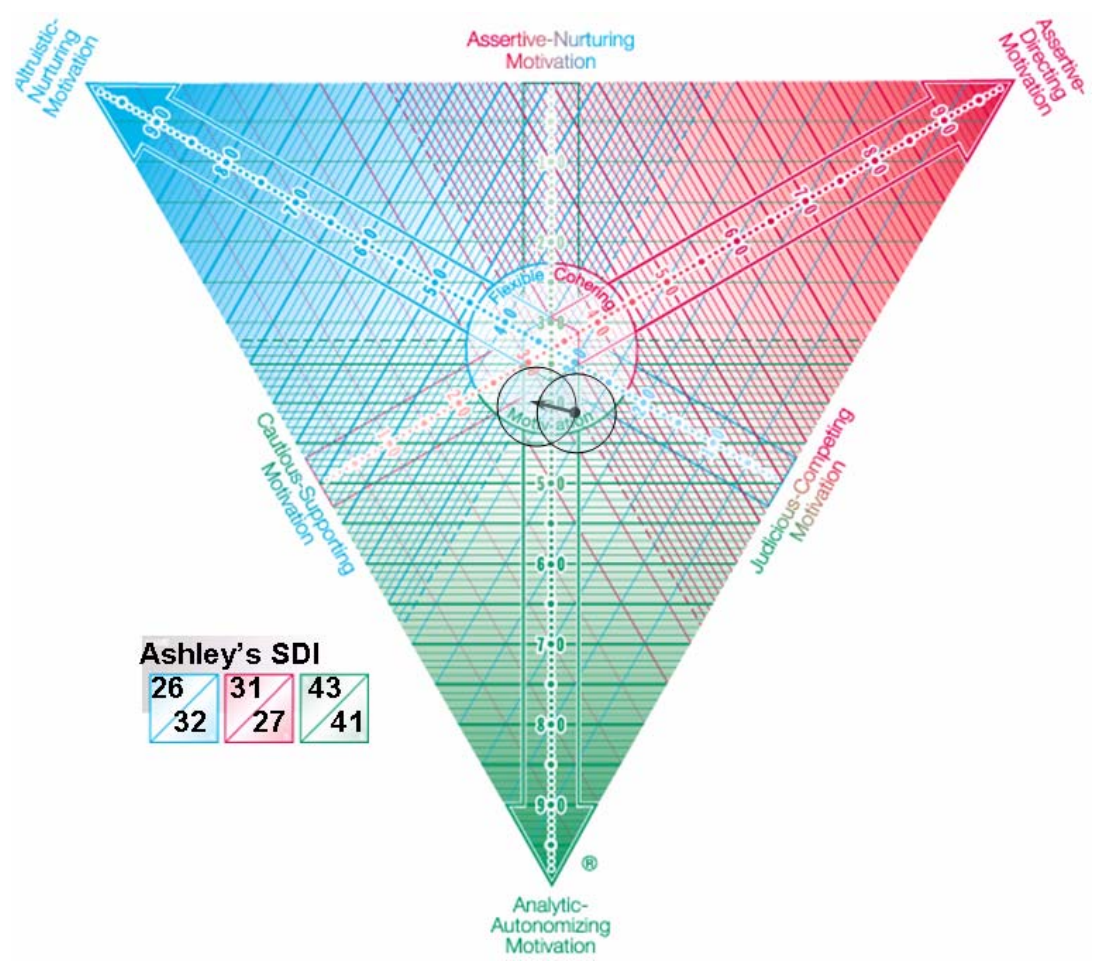
Support for the Status Quo of Leadership

- I have [held various roles over time] I don't expect to do anything more.
- Nothing... I've held offices before.
- Nothing.
- Honestly, I don't know!
- I'm not interested in [leadership] roles. I would do them if I had to, but I don't want them.
- I don't see leadership as a primary goal (or of primary importance) for/to me right now
- At the moment I am not able to dedicate more time.
- I mostly want to improve my self confidence by becoming a better public speaker.

Willing to Step Forward

- Present workshops and mentor if helpful
- Learning leadership skills will most definitely become a goal for me after I achieve my immediate goal.
- Whatever I can. I could mentor new members on how to be a grammarian, jokester, etc
- I believe more time commitments would be necessary on my part.
- I'm willing (and eager) to discuss any of the officer roles in depth with any person who might be interested in them. I'd also be willing to conduct (possibly along with the other current officers) an educational session at one of the club meetings on the subject of club officer roles.

Appendix D: Strength Deployment Inventory Scores



Implications / Interpretation

The small circle on the right represents my preferred style when things are going well.

The small circle on the left represents my preferred style when I am in conflict.

The relatively short line between the two centers implies that my behavior changes, but not by a great deal.

In conflict situations, my preference is to move towards a more altruistic/nurturing motivation. This might show up as an increase in "joining" behaviors.

Appendix E: A Toastmaster's Promise

Being a Toastmaster means more than simply making a commitment to self-development. Everyone who joins a Toastmasters club is making a commitment to the club, to its members, and to the organization as a whole.










As a member of Toastmasters International and my club, I promise ...

- To attend club meetings regularly;
- To prepare all of my speeches to the best of my ability, basing them on projects in the Communication and Leadership Program manual or the Advanced Communication and leadership Program manuals;
- To prepare for and fulfill meeting assignments;
- To provide fellow members with helpful, constructive evaluations;
- To help the club maintain the positive, friendly environment necessary for all members to learn and grow;
- To server my club as an officer when called upon to do so
- To treat my fellow club members and our guests with respect and courtesy;
- to bring guests to club meetings so they can see the benefits of Toastmasters membership offers;
- To adhere to the guidelines and rules for all Toastmasters educational and recognition programs
- To maintain honest and highly ethical standards during the conduct of all Toastmasters activities.
- (Toastmasters_International, 2003, p. 2)

Appendix F: Sample Survey Question and Presentation Format





Initial Presentation

"I know that when a speech I give is signed and approved for credit, it means I have really met the objectives. The club is committed to my growth and learning and will require me to repeat a speech rather than give credit for just completion."

	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neutral (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly Agree (7)
Now (5/10/04)							
Ideal							














Follow-up Presentation

The question above was visible, but the Likert scale below completely obscured the initial set of answers which the participants had previously given.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neutral (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly Agree (7)
Now (6/28/04)							

Composite Presentation

After the follow-up measurement was taken, the papers were shuffled to display something like the following, which the participants could then discuss openly. This let them make their own meaning of the progress they had made.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neutral (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly Agree (7)
Now (5/10/04)							
Ideal							
Now (6/28/04)							

Appendix G: Survey Data for the Initial, Stated Ideal, and Final Measurements.

1. I consistently give feedback that allows the speaker to refine their behaviors to deliver better speeches. The feedback I give is behaviorally specific, allowing the speaker to choose which behaviors to change for subsequent speeches.

	5/10/04: Ideal	5/10/04: Measured	6/28/04: Measured
1: Strongly Disagree	0	0	0
2	0	3	0
3	0	3	0
4: Neutral	0	3	0
5	1	5	4
6	7	0	4
7: Strongly Agree	6	0	1
Total	14	14	9

2. I make sure that my evaluator and the audience know my specific goals, so that they can provide concrete feedback towards the skills I most want to improve.

	5/10/04: Ideal	5/10/04: Measured	6/28/04: Measured
1: Strongly Disagree	0	0	0
2	0	3	0
3	0	5	2
4: Neutral	0	4	1
5	3	2	0
6	5	0	1
7: Strongly Agree	6	0	5
Total	14	14	9

3. I support giving more time and attention to feedback to speakers, even if it comes at the expense of reducing the number of speakers we can have in a meeting.
(Methods for accomplishing this to be determined later - round robin Feedback, more than one evaluator, etc.)

	5/10/04: Ideal	5/10/04: Measured	6/28/04: Measured
1: Strongly Disagree	1	1	0
2	1	2	3
3	1	4	0
4: Neutral	2	6	0
5	1	0	0
6	5	1	4
7: Strongly Agree	3	0	2
Total	14	14	9

4. I place a high value on learning and improvement of my peer's skills, and my feedback to them reflects this dedication.

	5/10/04: Ideal	5/10/04: Measured	6/28/04: Measured
1: Strongly Disagree	0	0	0
2	0	1	0
3	0	0	0
4: Neutral	0	4	0
5	2	3	0
6	8	4	5
7: Strongly Agree	4	2	4
Total	14	14	9

5. My peers place a high value on my personal improvement and skill development, and their feedback to me reflects this dedication.

	5/10/04: Ideal	5/10/04: Measured	6/28/04: Measured
1: Strongly Disagree	0	0	0
2	0	1	0
3	0	1	0
4: Neutral	0	3	0
5	4	7	3
6	4	1	1
7: Strongly Agree	6	0	5
Total	14	13	9

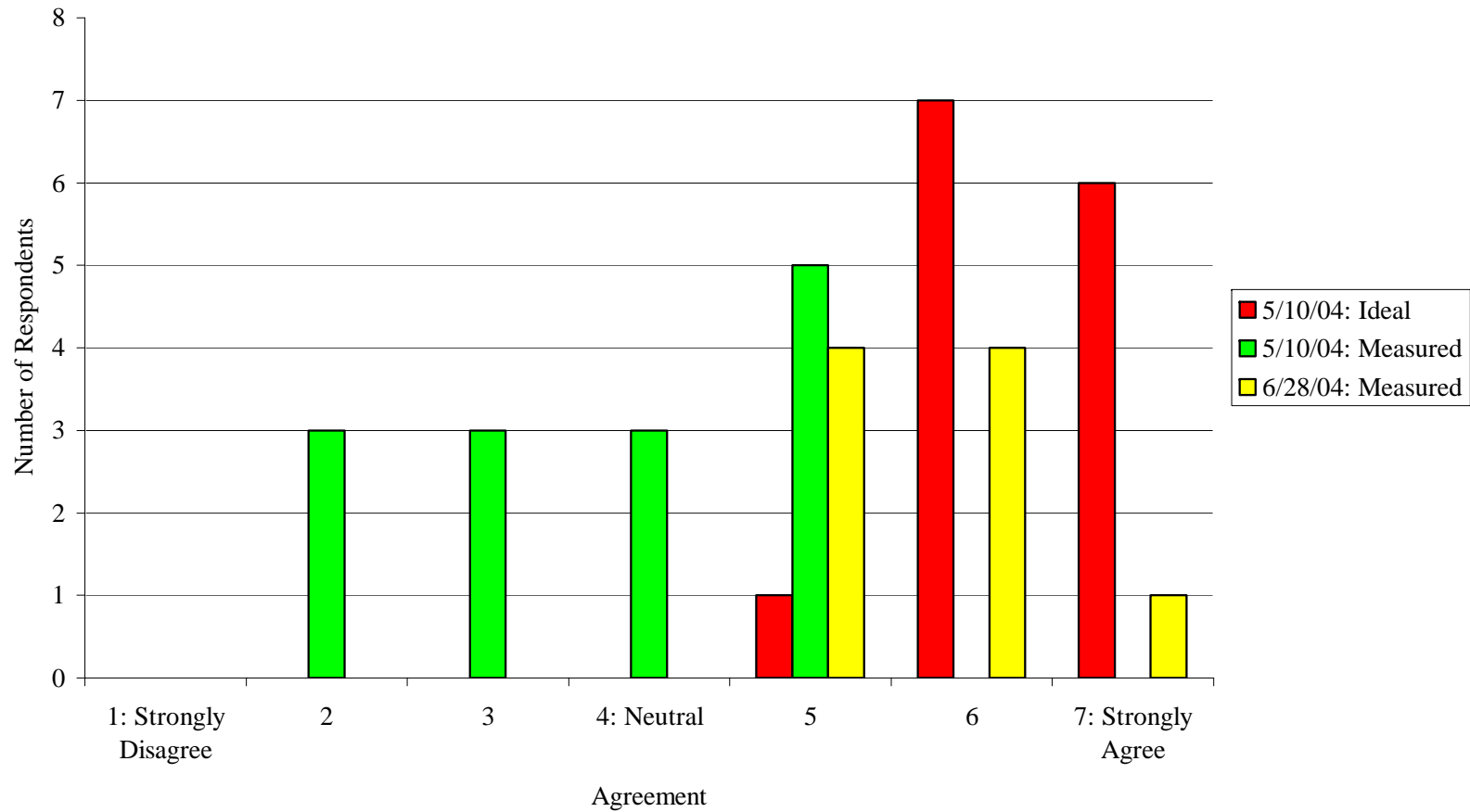
6. I am able to give "difficult" or "challenging" feedback to a speaker regarding areas they need to work on, because I know the speaker will receive this as a gift towards the improvement of their own personal skills.

	5/10/04: Ideal	5/10/04: Measured	6/28/04: Measured
1: Strongly Disagree	0	0	0
2	0	2	0
3	0	5	0
4: Neutral	0	1	2
5	3	2	2
6	6	2	3
7: Strongly Agree	5	2	2
Total	14	14	9

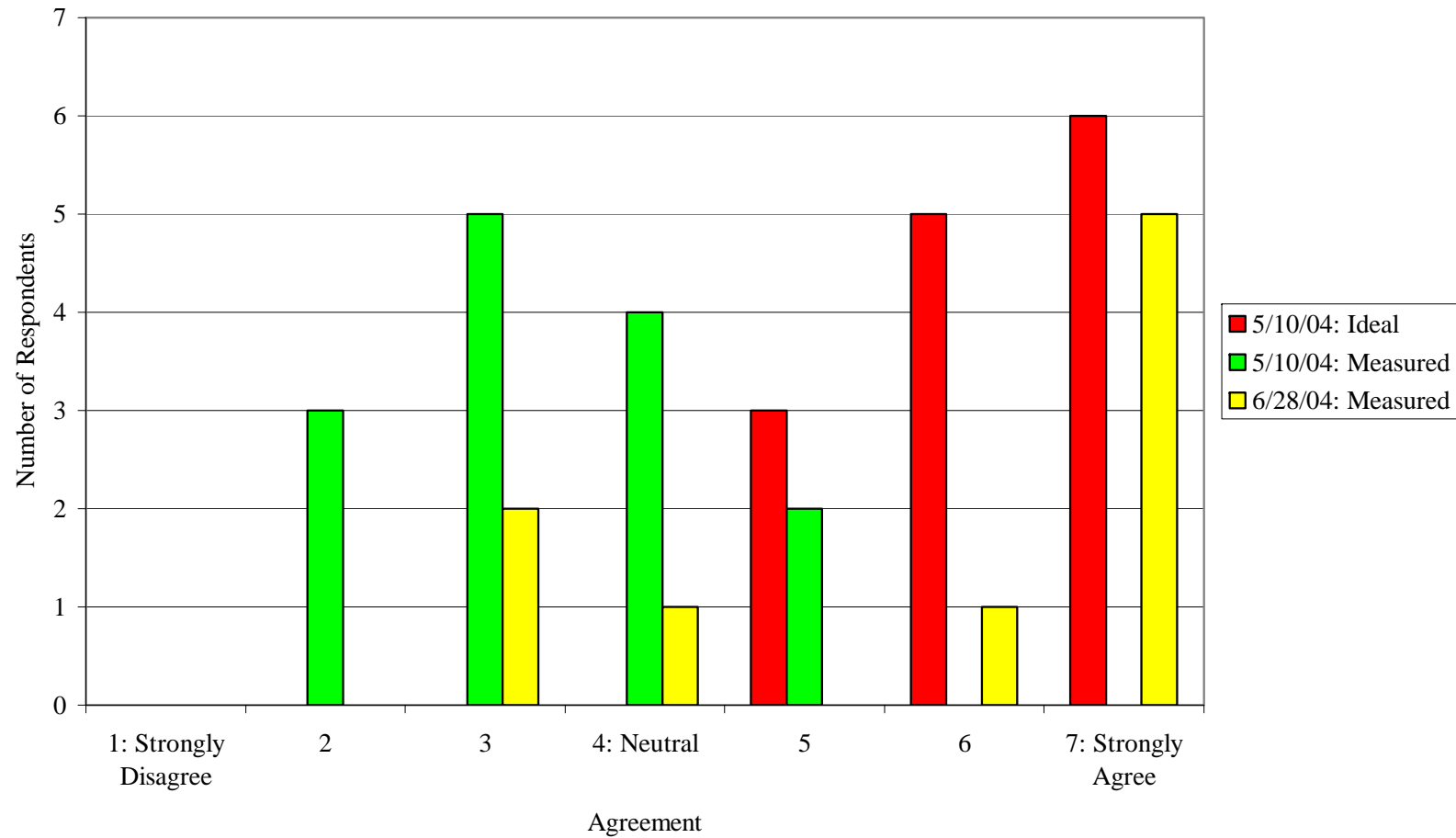
7. I know that when a speech I give is signed and approved for credit, it means I have really met the objectives. The club is committed enough to my growth and learning to require me to repeat a speech rather than giving credit for completion of a speech that still needs more practice.

	5/10/04: Ideal	5/10/04: Measured	6/28/04: Measured
1: Strongly Disagree	0	4	1
2	0	3	0
3	0	4	0
4: Neutral	5	1	0
5	4	0	3
6	2	2	3
7: Strongly Agree	3	0	2
Total	14	14	9

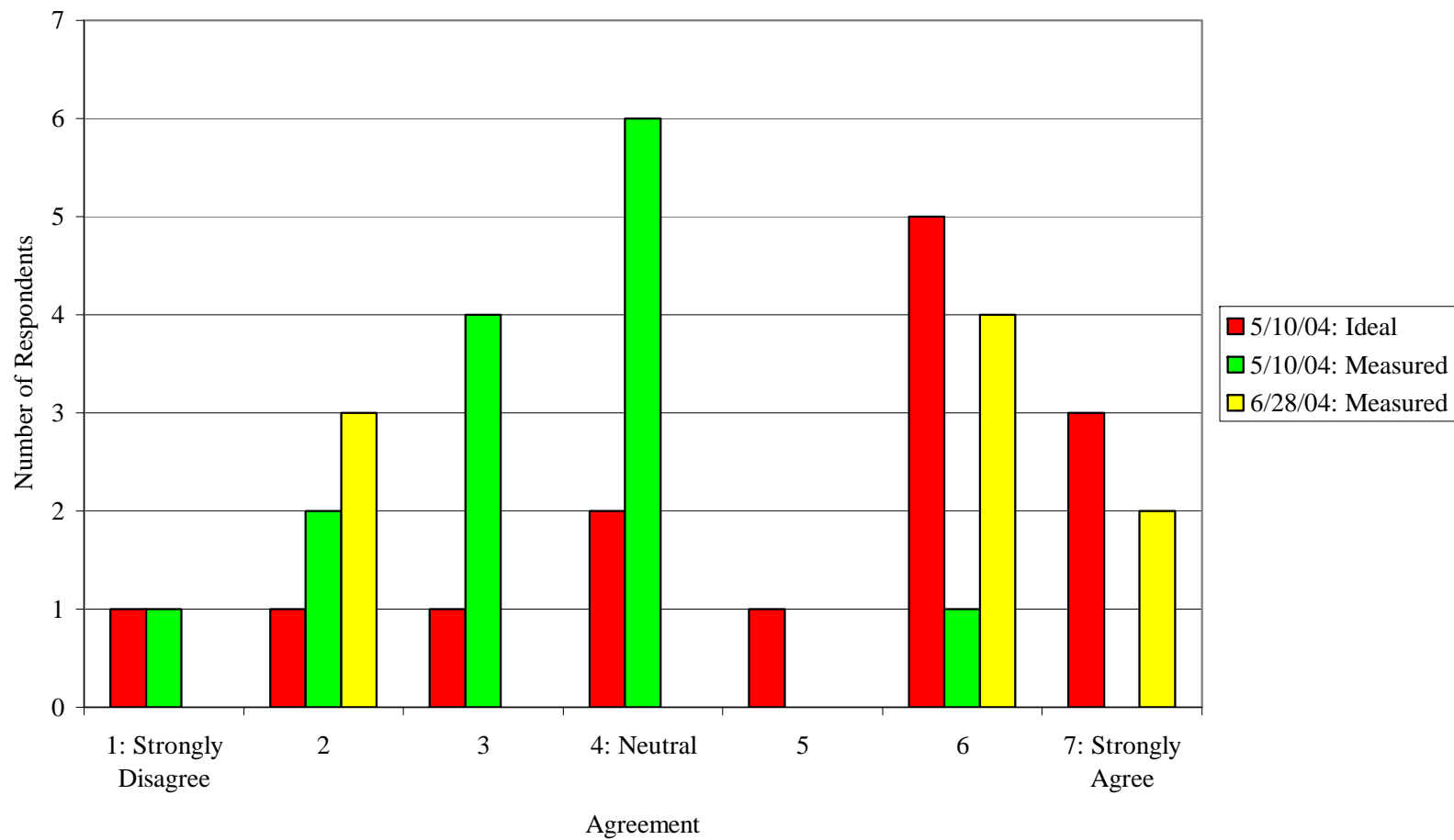
1. I consistently give feedback that allows the speaker to refine their behaviors to deliver better speeches. The feedback I give is behaviorally specific, allowing the speaker to choose which behaviors to change for subsequent speeches



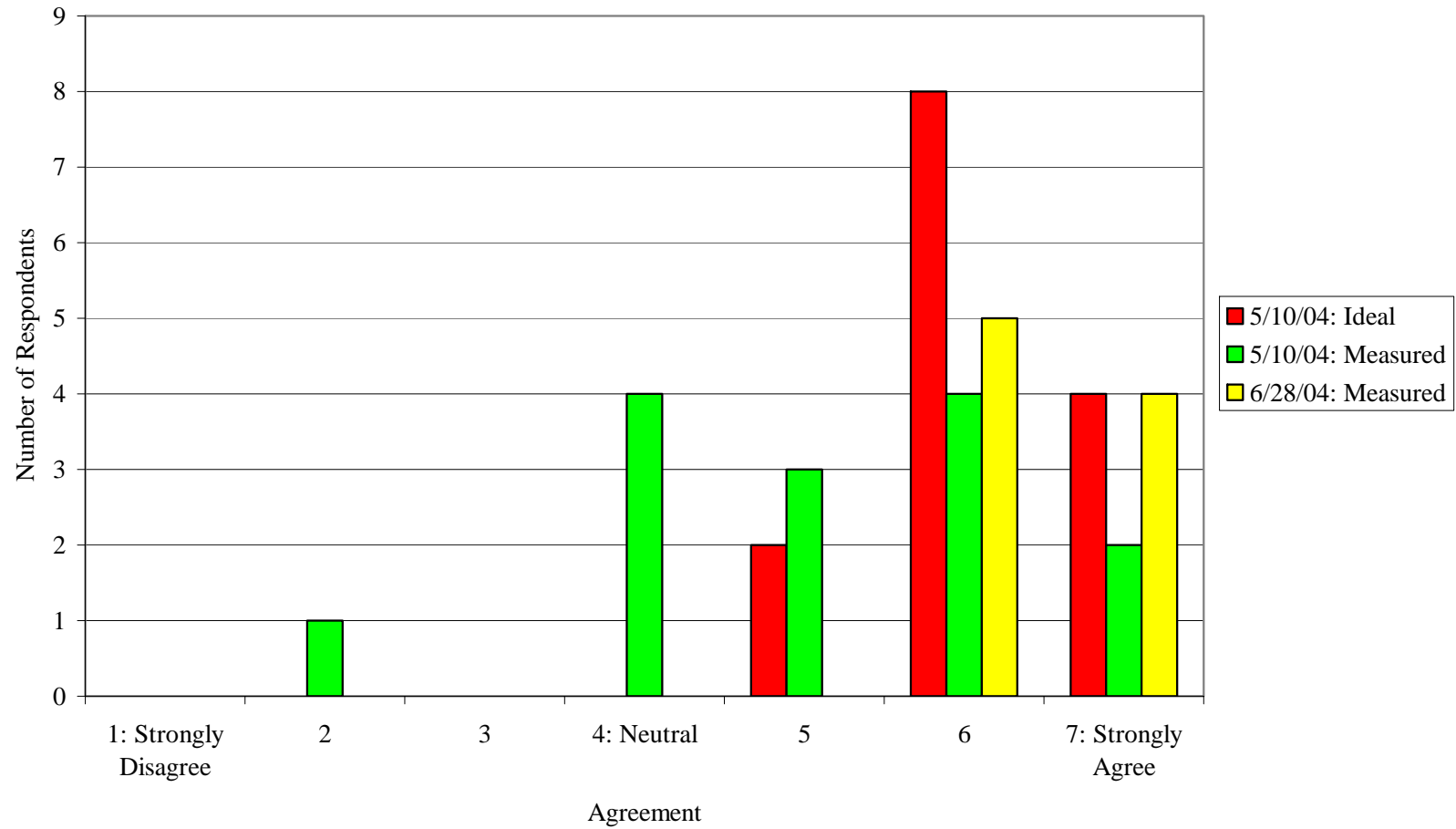
2. I make sure that my evaluator and the audience know my specific goals, so that they can provide concrete feedback towards the skills I most want to improve.



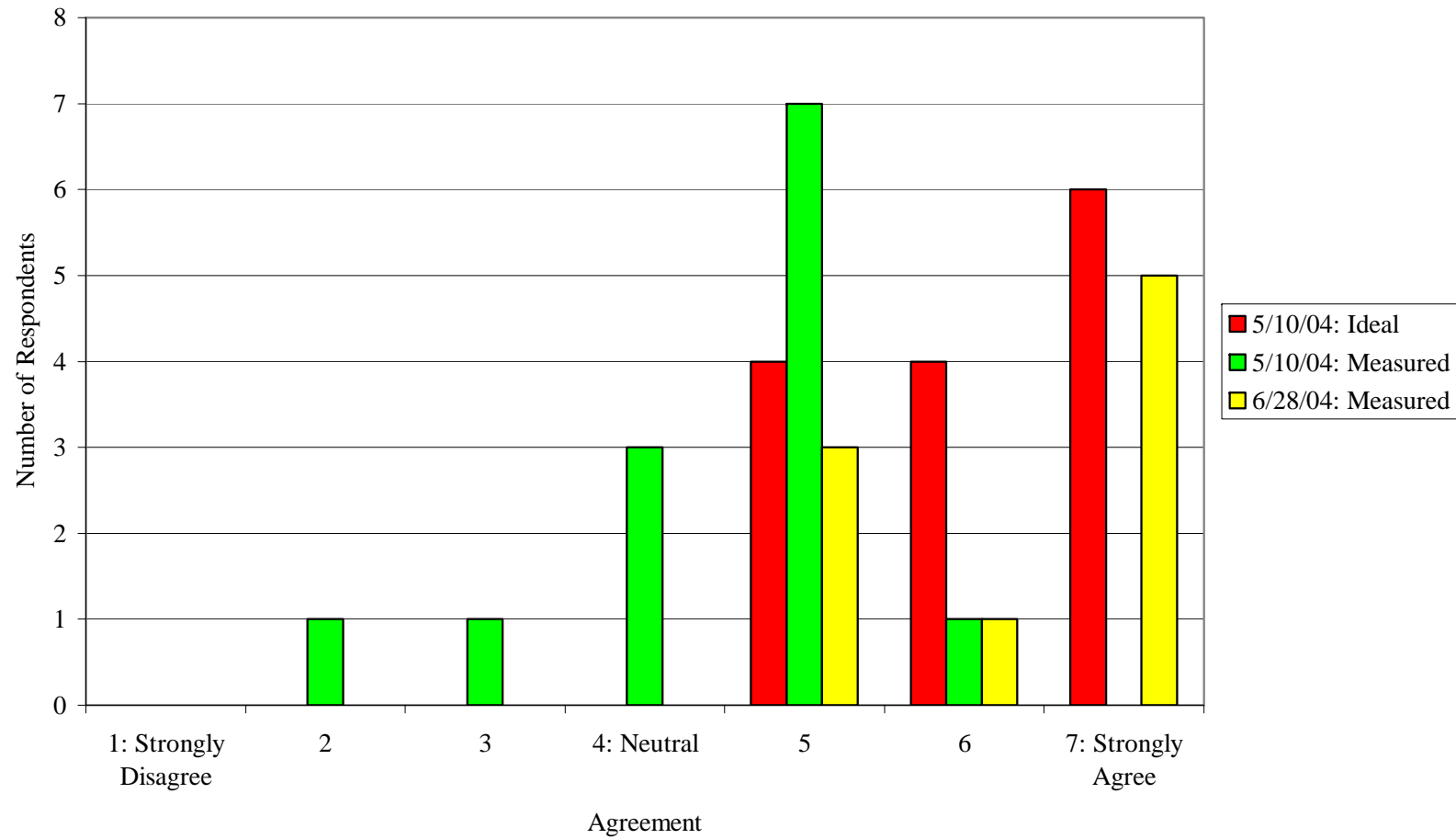
3. I support giving more time and attention to feedback to speakers, even if it comes at the expense of reducing the number of speakers we can have in a meeting.



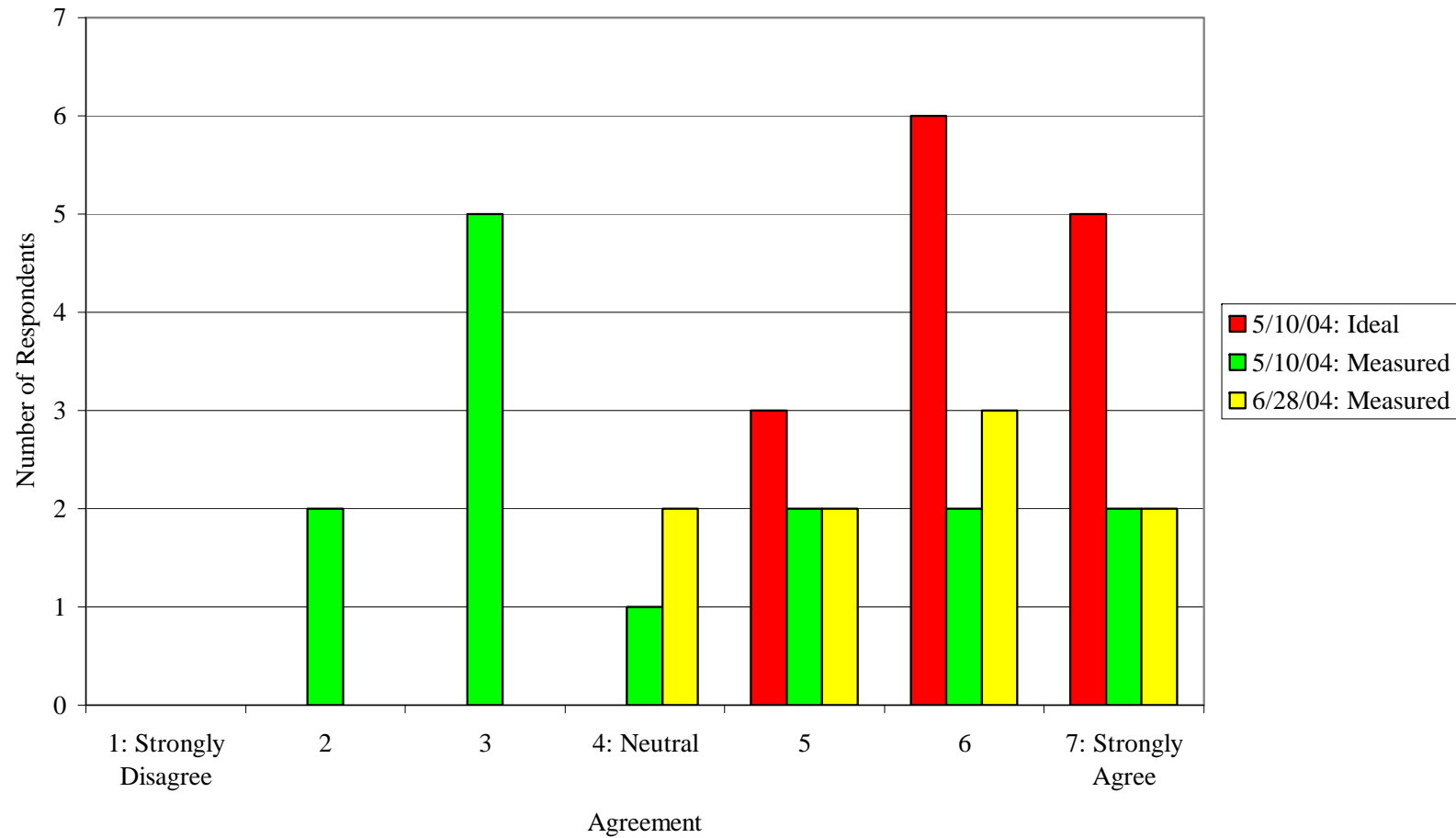
4. I place a high value on learning and improvement of my peer's skills, and my feedback to them reflects this dedication.



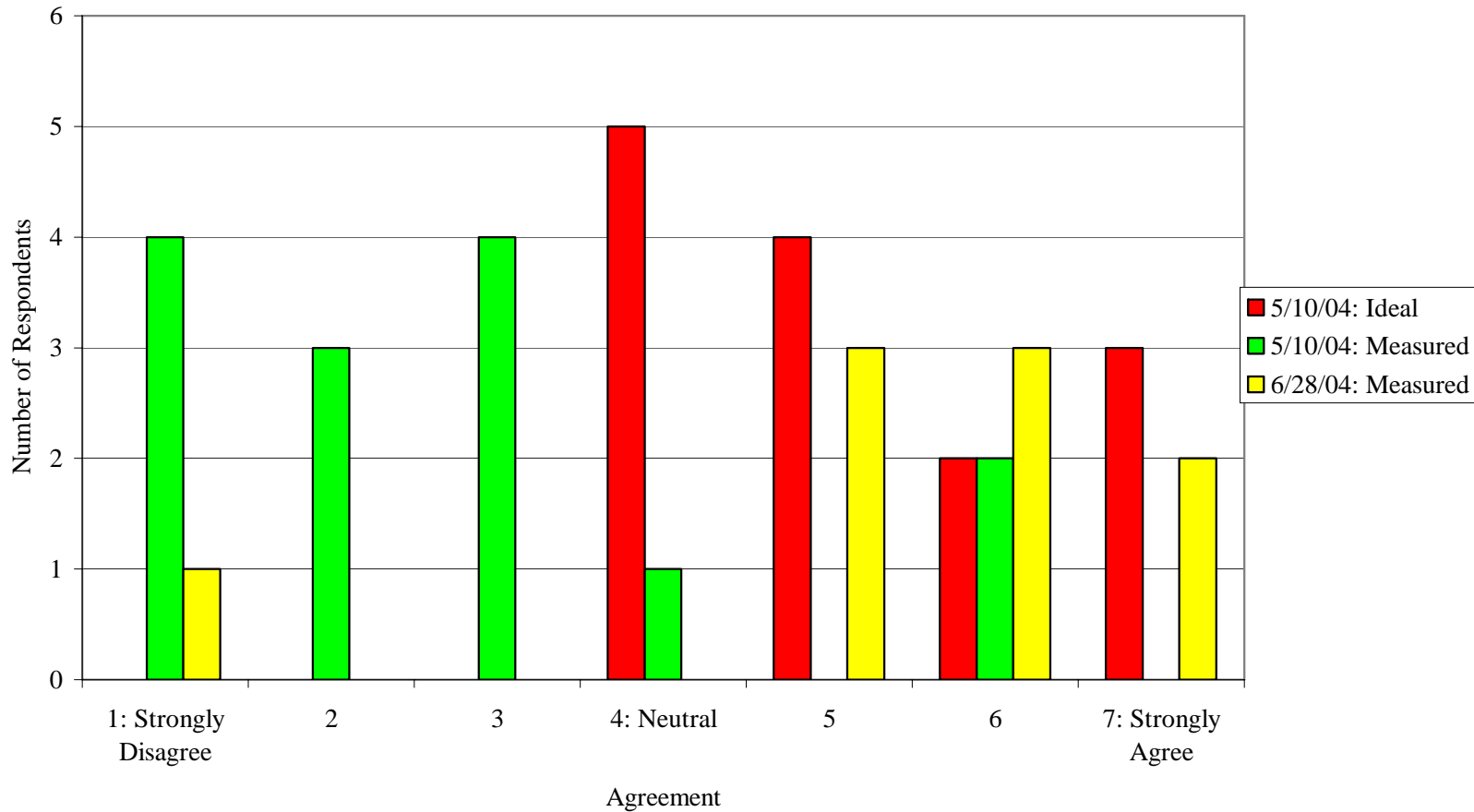
5. My peers place a high value on my personal improvement and skill development, and their feedback to me reflects this dedication.



6. I am able to give "difficult" or "challenging" feedback to a speaker regarding areas they need to work on, because I know the speaker will receive this as a gift towards the improvement of their own personal skills.



7. I know that when a speech I give is signed and approved for credit, it means I have really met the objectives. The club is committed to my growth and learning and will require me to repeat a speech rather than give credit for just completion.



Appendix H: Quantitative Analysis of Results

Text of Survey Question	p of 'No difference' between the Ideal and Measure-1	p of 'No difference' between Measure-1 and Measure-2	p of 'No difference' between the Ideal and Measure-2
1. I consistently give feedback that allows the speaker to refine their behaviors to deliver better speeches. The feedback I give is behaviorally specific, allowing the speaker to choose which behaviors to change for subsequent speeches.	p < 0.00 (Started in non-ideal state)	p < 0.00 (intervention had an effect)	p = 0.03 (ideal not achieved)
2. I make sure that my evaluator and the audience know my specific goals, so that they can provide concrete feedback towards the skills I most want to improve.	p < 0.00 (Started in non-ideal state)	p < 0.00 (intervention had an effect)	p = 0.41 (ideal achieved)
3. I support giving more time and attention to feedback to speakers, even if it comes at the expense of reducing the number of speakers we can have in a meeting. (Methods for accomplishing this to be determined later - round robin Feedback, more than one evaluator, etc.)	n/a ideal is not a normal distribution	p = 0.08 (intervention had no effect)	n/a ideal is not a normal distribution
4. I place a high value on learning and improvement of my peer's skills, and my feedback to them reflects this dedication.	p = 0.02 (Started in non-ideal state)	p < 0.00 (intervention had an effect)	p = 0.24 (ideal achieved)

5. My peers place a high value on my personal improvement and skill development, and their feedback to me reflects this dedication.	<p>p < 0.00</p> <p>(Started in non-ideal state)</p>	<p>p < 0.00</p> <p>(intervention had an effect)</p>	<p>p = 0.84</p> <p>(ideal achieved)</p>
6. I am able to give "difficult" or "challenging" feedback to a speaker regarding areas they need to work on, because I know the speaker will receive this as a gift towards the improvement of their own personal skills.	<p>p < 0.00</p> <p>(Started in non-ideal state)</p>	<p>p = 0.04</p> <p>(intervention had an effect)</p>	<p>p = 0.19</p> <p>(ideal achieved)</p>
7. I know that when a speech I give is signed and approved for credit, it means I have really met the objectives. The club is committed enough to my growth and learning to require me to repeat a speech rather than giving credit for completion of a speech that still needs more practice.	<p>p < 0.00</p> <p>(Started in non-ideal state)</p>	<p>p < 0.00</p> <p>(intervention had an effect)</p>	<p>p = 0.86</p> <p>(ideal achieved)</p>

