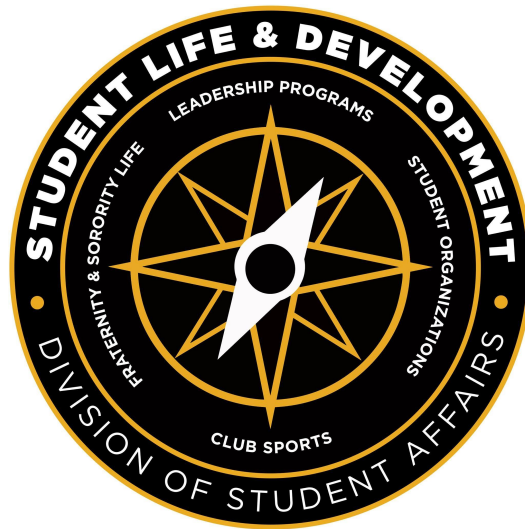


Consultation Report: Student Life Development Department at CSULB



Lily Chen, Chloe Nguyen, Kathy Nguyen

Department of Psychology, California State University, Long Beach

PSY 683: Issues in Organizational Development

Kelly Chiffer

December 5, 2024

Introduction

This consulting project was conducted at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), specifically with the Student Life and Development (SLD) department within the Division of Student Affairs. This department at CSULB is responsible for overseeing the development and management of all student organizations on campus. They work with student organizations to become a campus-recognized student organization, event planning, as well as ensuring that all student organizations follow campus regulations. Their mission is “to develop and provide co-curricular opportunities that cultivate community, ethical leadership, and personal development”. The department consists of three core teams that manage specific student groups: the student life and development team for all clubs and organizations; the fraternity and sorority life team for fraternities and sororities; and the club sports and recreation team for club sports. The department consists of one director, two associate directors, two assistant directors, and seven coordinators. While they all have different titles, all staff members have the responsibility of managing and advising an assigned group of student organizations when entering the position; thus most members in the department are also considered an advisor. The coordinators and assistant directors all have a direct supervisor, who is also known as their lead, and everyone else reports to the director.

Our team chose this organization because one of our team members currently works there, which provided us with easier access to the organization. Our teammate has an established relationship with the department. Hence, a rapport has already been built, allowing the department director to have more trust in us and provide greater support for this project. Our teammate had already previously discussed with their director about the projects they would be working on this semester, so the director had brief knowledge about this current project. To

formally propose conducting the consulting project with the SLD, our teammate set up a quick Zoom meeting with the SLD director, Anna. During the meeting, Anna was informed about who we were, what our project was about, and what we would be doing with the department as a part of our project. The director seemed supportive of what the team would be doing and requested that the team provide a more detailed overview of the project so she could share the upcoming project information with the rest of the SLD team. We also informed them that our team would provide a full detailed report of our findings and suggestions to improve the department, which the director was pleased about.

After the initial inquiry about collaborating with the department on this project, we would update the director of the current steps and progress about every other week. Anna, the director, would also check in with us periodically and ask if there was anything we needed from her. When we began our data collection process, we notified Anna of what needed to be done and coordinated how surveys would be sent out. We informed them of the deadline for when surveys should be completed and what would be done after those surveys. We contacted each member of SLD to schedule meetings to conduct an interview with them. We would also contact Anna if we needed information about the department or sometimes to remind her to send us certain information that we requested. During this consultation process, the team aimed to keep consistent contact with the department to ensure that the clients were included in the consultation and well-informed of each step of the consultants.

Data Collection

Our team is utilizing the group-level diagnostic model, which assesses the dynamics, processes, and overall functioning of teams or groups within an organization. It provides a framework to evaluate how group members interact, collaborate, and perform as a unit rather

than focusing solely on individual or organizational levels. When inquiring about specific issues that the department may be experiencing, the director was not aware of any potential issues; therefore, our team chose to utilize this model because we decided to assess the department's overall effectiveness by analyzing how different roles within the department, such as directors, coordinators, and student assistants, interact and communicate. The usage of this particular diagnostic model also informs us of which data collection methods should be used. For example, we administered surveys to gather information on perceptions of group functioning as well as their general satisfaction with working in the department. We also conducted employee interviews to gain deeper insights into group-level dynamics, including communication processes, task delegation, conflict management, and feedback processes. If issues are discovered from the data gathered, the diagnostic model will also guide us as to what type of interventions should be used to increase the effectiveness of the department. By using this model, we hope to answer questions about how the team understands its goals, the level of trust and cohesion among members, the roles and responsibilities of team members, and how conflicts are managed.

Preliminary Data Collection

Surveys. Our team's initial action plan involved distributing surveys to supervisors and student assistants within the Student Life Department (SLD). These surveys are designed to gather preliminary insights into the SLD organizational climate, providing valuable data to inform our next steps. We created four surveys on Qualtrics based on an existing measure, the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ). The MOAQ is intended to capture the perceptions of organizational members. It collects both "objective" information, based on events and conditions employees have directly observed, and "subjective" feedback,

reflecting their personal opinions and evaluations. Our team divided the work to examine the social domains we wanted to assess.

Two team members collaborated on one survey on Qualtrics, focusing on job facets, specifically assessing job satisfaction, security, and organizational commitment. Another team member designed a survey on Qualtrics targeting task and role characteristics, which evaluated aspects of individual job tasks and responsibilities; this survey was sent to the supervisors and the student assistants. The third Qualtrics survey focused on general attitudes, assessing job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions, and was distributed to supervisors and student assistants. The final survey was intended to examine workgroup functioning, assessing communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, and leadership within the group; this survey was sent only to the supervisors. Two domains (pay and supervisor behavior) were omitted from the MOAQ because the questions were irrelevant to our objectives, and we wanted to prevent employees from experiencing survey fatigue.

The surveys were then emailed to Anna, who played a key role in distributing the surveys to the appropriate supervisors and student assistants. This approach allowed us to reach our target participants effectively and ensured that the surveys were sent to individuals who could provide valuable insights based on their experiences in their respective roles. We set a deadline of October 15th to have surveys completed, allowing a week for participants to complete each survey thoroughly. However, this was not a hard deadline as Anna informed us that all the staff had busy schedules that week. We offered some flexibility and told Anna that we were okay with a two- to three-day delay to maximize the collected survey responses.

Observations. Our team used direct observation as a data collection method to gather insights into the group's functioning, communication, and interpersonal relationships in a

real-world setting. We chose this method because it allowed us to capture natural, real-time interactions and behaviors that could clearly understand how the group collaborates, manages tasks, and engages with each other. This approach helped us to avoid relying solely on self-reported data, which can generate socially desirable responses or inaccurate data. The data collected was primarily subjective, as we focused on interpreting verbal and non-verbal cues, such as attentiveness, problem-solving strategies, and emotional responses. For example, we observed team members celebrating the success of an event announcement by clapping, showing strong emotional support, and positive interpersonal interactions. This approach allowed us to capture the nuances of group dynamics that may not have been evident through other methods. By observing the team in action, we gained deeper insights into how they interact, support each other, and work together to achieve their goals.

Interviews. In our interviews, we focused on key topics such as team functioning, communication processes, task structures, leadership styles, and challenges faced by staff. We created two sets of interview questions to reflect the differences in roles: one for staff members and another for student assistants, who work independently more often than regular staff. Student assistants were asked about their experiences, their views on their supervisor's leadership, and suggestions for improving team cohesion. Due to time constraints, we could not interview everyone in the department. However, we gathered valuable insights and interviewed 11 advisors, including the director and six student assistants. To begin, we interviewed the director, Anna, to gain her perspective on potential issues within the department. Based on her feedback, we refined some interview questions to ensure they were relevant. Although we used a standardized set of questions, we also asked follow-up questions to capture additional details and support a comprehensive diagnosis process.

Objective Measures. To provide quantifiable and unbiased insights for our analysis, our team sought to collect objective measures in addition to subjective data. Specifically, we focused on three key metrics: turnover rates, individual performance evaluations, and student learning outcomes within SLD. We received turnover data spanning May 2018 to April 2024, detailing the number of positions filled versus vacancies each year, along with the reasons for employee departures. We were also provided with individual performance evaluations, which are conducted annually for advisors only. Lastly, we were given student learning outcomes, which were essentially goals developed for the department. These are another key measure that provide a way to gauge the impact of SLD's programs on students. These outcomes emphasize key areas such as communication, personal development, citizenship, leadership, and critical thinking. These outcomes serve as a framework for assessing student growth and engagement across various programs.

Analysis

The first portion of data was collected through our department meeting observations. Two of our team members attended a staff meeting conducted by the SLD department, and notes were taken during this one-hour session. The SLD team focused on discussing ASI (Associated Students Incorporated at CSULB) funding and student organization registrations. A lively discussion was observed regarding the approval process and the logistical aspects of the applications. The atmosphere was positive, as team members supported each other by celebrating the announcement that 93 students would attend the upcoming Leadership at the Beach event. Throughout the meeting, the team appeared to actively listen to one another, and team members felt free to share any ideas or suggestions when asked. There were instances of distraction, particularly among team members seated in the back, who appeared more disengaged and were

seen texting on their phones. During one part of the discussion, a team member raised concerns about the mental health simulations that needed to be completed by Friday, expressing that they were lengthy. In response, the director suggested improvements, including enhancing text readability and reducing the time required to complete the simulations. The team shared jokes about how it might take five hours to finish, which helped create a relaxed environment and revealed a sense of psychological safety shared by the team. Overall, the meeting reflected a blend of productive dialogue and collaborative problem-solving amongst team members.

Following the collection and analysis of data from observations, our team also finished gathering the data for our surveys. We analyzed the quantitative data from the Likert scale measures as well as the qualitative data from the open-ended questions. The scale measures indicated that members were generally satisfied with their jobs, teamwork, and the work environment. For the open-ended questions, our team coded for any themes present in the answers. In general, members of SLD seem satisfied with their roles and the work environment in which they work. The open-ended questions brought up issues or challenges faced by the team were typically resulting from the external environment, such as other departments or campus-wide policies, rather than group functions themselves. One member had disclosed that “administrators keep adding work /responsibilities to our roles without removing other tasks. It becomes too overwhelming to be able to do very good work when we are overburdened”. Another individual wrote that they were “dependent on other departments in order to move forward with servicing students”.

Though, one common issue about group functioning was also brought to light. A couple of individuals mentioned that sometimes some staff do not complete tasks on time or do not put in the same amount of effort as others. The qualitative and quantitative questions from the

surveys, in addition to the observations, provided exploratory information into the group dynamics and functions of the department. Thus, our interview questions were developed to gather more in-depth information and uncover any potential issues affecting team performance.

To expand on the information gathered through the observation and surveys, the team interviewed members of the department. An analysis of this interview data was conducted through the process of qualitative coding. The team coded for several themes relating to group-level functioning, such as group norms, communication processes, group conflict management, task delegation, and a few other components related to group functions. Through the interview answers, many staff members expressed satisfaction with the team and felt that everyone worked well together. It appeared that the department created an environment and culture where everyone felt safe and welcomed to their thoughts and ideas. Multiple members mentioned an “open door policy” that the director and associate director supports, where staff are always welcomed in their offices to ask questions. Thus, communication within the department is open, and everyone feels supported by their peers and supervisors especially during challenging or stressful periods at work. Individuals wrote that during stressful times they would check in with one another and offer help if needed.

In terms of conflict management, interview data suggests that conflicts affecting team performance will often be addressed by Anna to the team and if a conflict involves a specific coordinator, then their corresponding lead or Anna will speak with that coordinator. When team members do not meet expectations, some staff members are more confrontational to provide feedback but some may not be as vocal. However, there are informal feedback processes in place so staff members can check in with the director or associate director on projects and receive feedback if needed. Leads will also have more consistent check-ins with their coordinators.

Projects or tasks are typically assigned by Anna or the leads according to individual abilities, experience, or opportunities for career growth. Team bonding events were discussed by many individuals in the form of staff retreats and ice breakers that occur during staff meetings. The staff retreat is typically a two-day event, where one day will be reserved for professional development and the other day will be reserved for fun activities that help bring the staff together. Outside of the workplace, some staff members may have social events, but it is not very often, with one individual noting that “sometimes it’s better to keep work-life away from personal life”. Another individual mentioned that there used to be more social events, but since COVID, some traditions have been lost.

An additional section was coded and identified as “external issues”. Items coded in this section included information highlighted by staff at SLD in which they felt hindered their ability to perform their roles effectively and the team's overall performance. Two individuals noted that there are challenges in following university policies when working with student organizations, with one individual stating that “we have to follow those policies...even though we don’t agree with it sometimes”. Some of those policies may come from administrators at the university or directives from the President of the university. Another individual mentioned that “working with state agencies makes it difficult for some things to happen” with some examples pertaining to hiring or purchasing equipment.

Lastly, the data gathered from the objective measures provided a different lens for examining the team’s effectiveness. In analyzing the turnover data, it was discovered that about half the team at SLD left during the period of COVID-19. One primary reason was that the department was required to return to in-person work, and there was no remote option offered to staff. Due to some staff members having relocated during this period, those who relocated did

not want to commute or relocate back to the Long Beach area. Others left the organization due to low pay, while others applied to higher positions within the university for career growth opportunities, as opportunities for promotion were limited within the department.

Another type of objective data we gathered was the annual individual performance evaluation, more specifically utilizing the information about the goals set by individuals and if they were being met. While the department was not able to grant us access to the individual performance evaluations, we were provided answers as to whether or not individuals had met their set goals for the year of 2023. The director reviewed the data and informed us that all staff had met their goals for that year. In addition, we gathered information about the department's goals. Goals were developed surrounding five main components: communication, personal development, citizenship, leadership, critical thinking and ethical reasoning. However, when asked if the department has conducted any evaluation of these goals, it appeared that there was not a system in place. The director had informed us these goals were created prior to COVID but after COVID, the department had other internal issues that affected the department's operations, such as the lack of staffing. Thus, these goals were only revisited in the past year, and the department has finally found the time and resources to dedicate to this project.

Conclusions

The overall conclusion from the interviews found that the team had worked quite effectively with each other, with some minor issues related to the team but major issues were primarily due to the external environment of the group. Anna, the director of SLD, notes that the department's challenges primarily stem from external factors, including national and social issues. Working with state agencies often creates additional hurdles, making it difficult to accomplish certain tasks efficiently. For example, even something as straightforward as

purchasing a light tower can take months to process. She adds that many directives come from university leadership, including the president. These leaders set expectations and assign tasks that employees are required to fulfill, even if she doesn't always agree with them. Therefore, it may be beneficial to reconsider the management processes at the organizational level. Perhaps more involvement from directors of each department when making decisions is needed, or more communication from administrators regarding decisions will be beneficial in allowing directors or supervisors of each department to plan for changes. Brian, the Associate Director of Club Sports and Recreation, has expressed how he wants to hire third-party medical staff and athletic trainers to support student groups. However, he faces a recruitment issue because independent contractors cannot be hired for these roles.

Additionally, it appears that another issue from an organization or division-wide level may be due to interdepartmental conflicts. Interviews and surveys suggested that when working with other departments, there are slow response times or that the other departments are not performing their job efficiently. Sometimes, these departments must work closely together to help the student organizations. As a result, delays from other departments will also cause the SLD department to slow their work and decrease their efficiency with assisting their student organizations. When departments are interdependent on one another, it is crucial that the communication between departments is effective and well-coordinated to enhance the successfulness and efficiency of the overall organization.

At the individual level, student assistants reported that the job sometimes lacks skill variety, particularly during slower periods at the front desk. On slower days, there aren't enough tasks to keep them engaged or provide opportunities to develop a wider range of skills. While their main responsibility is to assist at the front desk, conducting an individual-level analysis

may help to identify ways to incorporate more variety in their tasks. Additionally, some members expressed concerns about the limited skill variety in their roles. Specifically, they highlighted that the counseling aspect of their position is challenging. There is a lack of training in counseling, which makes it difficult for them to provide the right advice to students. When it comes to de-escalating conflicts, some members feel unprepared and unsure of how to handle situations effectively. From the interviews, we concluded that there may not be any imperative issues on the group level but the department may benefit from conducting an analysis on the organizational or individual level to address other issues collected from the data.

From analyzing SLD's turnover rates, we noticed that employees were leaving SLD for higher-paying or more senior positions. This pattern could indicate competition within the university system where employees are drawn to better opportunities at other campuses offering greater career advancement or financial benefits. The private company remote work trend was another notable external factor. This shift reflects a change in employment preferences toward more flexible work options, particularly post-pandemic. For many individuals, remote work is a more attractive option to traditional office settings, allowing for more autonomy and convenience. This trend poses challenges for SLD to create a work environment that can match the flexibility and benefits of private sector jobs. These factors highlight the need to focus on retention strategies and adjust to employee needs in a competitive market.

Performance evaluations of individual staff members suggest that the team is functioning successfully, as all members have appeared to have met their individual goals in 2023.

Individuals' success in their respective roles may indicate an effective team because their primary roles and responsibilities involve working with other team members. Individual success would also indicate that working as a team has not hindered individual performance but rather enhanced

their performance individually. Some individuals in the interviews have noted this occurrence. However, we were unable to receive objective data for evaluating team success since there was no evaluation of the team's goals. This highlights a need for a performance evaluation in regard to the team. Implementing a performance evaluation at the group level will provide a better idea about the group functions. The team's main goals are assisting with student organizations, so exploring how the student organizations functions can provide additional insights into how the team is making an impact.

Recommendations

Team Performance Evaluations

After the consulting team's diagnosis of the SLD department using the group-level model, it was discovered that while the department had set goals or objectives for the team, there was a lack of performance evaluation systems for those goals. As a criterion to measure team functioning, we suggest evaluating the operations of the student organizations, such as how active student organizations are, any university policy violations, and the impact that student organizations have on the university/community. One way that SLD can evaluate the group-level performance is through short surveys that can be conducted annually or every semester as a check-in point for the group. Conducting surveys with all group members allows the organization to access aspects of group dynamics such as team functioning, group composition, group norms, etc. The survey can focus on how effectively the group collaborates to achieve goals, how well responsibilities are distributed among members, and the level of satisfaction with the group's leadership and decision-making processes.

Another approach to evaluate group-level performance is by peer reviews, where other student organizations can assess the SLD department's group effectiveness. Student

organizations on campus, including various clubs, club sports, fraternities and sororities, and the Leadership Development Program, can play a crucial role in evaluating the performance of SLD. These organizations can provide feedback on how effectively their advisors have assisted them and identify additional support they would like to receive from SLD. More objectively, the extent to which student organizations adhere to university policies can also serve as a reflection of SLD's performance, as it indicates how well the department is guiding and supporting these groups in maintaining compliance with university standards. Encouraging this collaborative evaluation fosters a sense of accountability and promotes a culture of constructive feedback. This peer based approach allows student organizations to view their performance from an external perspective, which can highlight strengths and areas for growth that may not be apparent internally.

Alternative Diagnostic Model

Since few challenges were identified at the group level, our next step is to reconvene with stakeholders to discuss exploring an alternative diagnostic approach, such as focusing on the organizational or individual level. Our team believes using a different diagnostic model would be more effective in analyzing the data. At the individual level, our team can help address the lack of skill variety for student assistants, as this emerged as a key issue. One way to address this is by offering training and development opportunities, allowing student assistants to take on additional roles and responsibilities. We can also recommend job rotations to stakeholders so that students gain exposure to different aspects of the job.

At the organizational level, one of the structural issues we've noticed is that some departments aren't working as effectively together, or there's too much dependence on certain departments. For example, slow communication between departments can delay processes.

When SLD teams rely on other departments to move forward, these delays can affect the overall performance of SLD members, making it harder to get things done quickly and efficiently. To address this at the organizational level, implementing clearer communication protocols and streamlining interdepartmental workflows can help reduce delays and improve overall efficiency.

The Positive Model

We recommend using the Positive Model to enhance the team's strengths. The Positive Model effectively strengthens a team's strengths and improves its overall dynamics (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). This model emphasizes identifying and enhancing positive behaviors, values, and practices within a team rather than solely focusing on weaknesses (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). We suggest this model because the team can build a stronger foundation for collaboration, communication, and problem-solving by concentrating on what is already working well. We propose using the Positive Model because it encourages a shift toward a growth mindset, helping team members recognize their achievements and leverage their strengths for continued success (Dweck, 2006). We recommend it because it fosters an environment where team members feel empowered, supported, and motivated, leading to increased innovation, trust, and cohesion. In addition, we suggest using this model because it helps create a positive cycle where each success further reinforces the team's norms, creating a self-sustaining improvement process.

To begin the implementation of the Positive Model, we recommend that the team follow a structured process involving several key phases to strengthen their current strengths and foster further growth. Firstly, in the initiation of the inquiry phase, we suggest that the team start by asking, *What can we improve?* Given the existing supportive environment—such as checking in during stressful times, creating psychological safety, and celebrating personal milestones—we propose refining these strengths for new areas of collaboration. This could involve applying

these practices to cross-functional teams or new projects, ensuring that all members feel equally supported and engaged in collaborative efforts. Research has shown that creating psychological safety, where team members feel safe to express ideas and concerns, directly impacts team effectiveness and fosters innovation (Edmondson, 1999). To further enhance these strengths, we recommend focusing on key aspects of team functioning that directly contribute to a more collaborative and effective environment. These include open communication, conflict resolution, and collaboration, which we suggest leveraging to strengthen the team's overall performance. For example, we propose holding problem-solving workshops to build open communication and conflict-resolution skills within the team, boosting cohesion and ensuring everyone's input is valued.

Further, during the Inquire into Best Practices phase, we suggest that the team investigate how other successful organizations have fostered similar supportive cultures, gathering stories of how they maintain psychological safety, communication, and creative collaboration to create a pool of information that can be applied. Based on the Positive Model, we recommend discovering themes from these best practices, allowing the team to see the commonalities contributing to success, reinforcing their current norms, and providing a foundation for growth (Cameron & Green, 2015). Additionally, we propose exploring how other organizations handle group functioning, including feedback mechanisms and conflict resolution, which will offer valuable insights into improving their team dynamics and processes. Further, in the Envisioning a Preferred Future phase, we suggest that the team imagine a future where these norms, strong communication practices, and effective group functioning are deeply ingrained. This could involve expanding their practices to include more structured team-building opportunities, enhanced conflict resolution strategies, and cross-departmental collaboration, thus strengthening

their bonds and improving overall team dynamics. Finally, we recommend that the team move into the Design and Deliver Ways to Create the Future phase by developing actionable plans, such as creating new initiatives to strengthen group norms, improve communication practices, and refine conflict resolution strategies. By consistently implementing and assessing these initiatives, the team can ensure continuous improvement, further enhancing their supportive culture, reinforcing positive group norms, and improving team functioning for long-term success.

References

- Cameron, K. S., & Green, M. (2015). Making sense of change management: A complete guide to the models, tools, and techniques of organizational change (4th ed.). *Kogan Page*.
- Cammann, C., Fichman, M., Jenkins, D., & Klesh, J. (2008). Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire--Job Satisfaction Subscale. *PsycTESTS Dataset*.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/t09214-000>
- Dutton, J. E., & Heaphy, E. D. (2003). The power of high-quality connections at work. In K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton, & R. E. Quinn (Eds.), Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline (pp. 3-38). *Berrett-Koehler Publishers*.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (2007). *Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths*. *Sage Publications*.