

MANAGEMENT CONSULTING JOURNAL



CONTENTS

- 2 Editorial Board.
- 3 So what makes a successful consulting project?
- 5 Consulting Capabilities for Organisational Change.
- 7 The 'World's Newest Profession' is no longer dispensable; what does it mean for consultancy firms?
- 9 Evolution or Revolution?
Alternative assignment scopes.
- 11 Becoming a Consultant.

Editorial Board.

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Welcome to the inaugural volume of the Institute of Consulting's brand new Management Consulting Journal!

Aimed at anyone working or interested in Management Consulting, this new publication will highlight and debate management consulting issues, focusing mainly on those of practical value - exploring the application of concepts and theory. We hope that, in so doing, we can contribute to the positive promotion of the management consulting sector and its practices.

Our editorial article in this first edition looks at what constitutes success in the consulting world. The paper is co-written between myself and Neil Fleming from Challenges Worldwide. Both Neil and I are part of consulting firms which have been nominated to represent the UK in the Constantinus International global consulting awards. Challenges Worldwide fared particularly well last year, securing runner-up. Our paper draws on the Challenges Worldwide experience and aims to shine a spotlight on what 'Successful Consulting' looks like.

Also in Vol 1.1, we're delighted to feature papers from three prominent UK writers on management consulting: Dr David Biggs; Dr Julie Hodges; and Dr Olga Matthias; plus one from a former Chair of the International Council of Management Consulting Institutes (ICMCI), Brian Ing. These four papers bring additional perspectives and contributions to supplement our understanding of the management consulting world - I hope you find them interesting and useful.

The Management Consulting Journal will be published twice a year, with Vol 1.2 coming in November 2018. We welcome articles from both scholars and practitioners alike, and look forward to receiving your contributions. Visit [our website](#) for guidelines and a template for submissions.

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SO WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL CONSULTING PROJECT?

Dr Simon Haslam, FMR Research & Neil Fleming, Challenges Worldwide

Introduction

What constitutes a successful consulting project is a question that has attracted interest from practitioners and researchers alike. Aside from getting the invoices paid, successful projects provide consulting firms with additional benefits and value. Marc Baaij, in his Introduction to Management Consultancy (2014) suggests the evaluation of the success of a consulting project potentially helps a consulting firm in four ways: 1) it offers a reference point by which the quality of the project's deliverables can be judged in relation to the fee charged; 2) it enables the scrutiny of the degree to which it contributed to the value created by the project, compared to, for example serendipitous circumstances; 3) it can provide the data to help the appraisal and development of consultants; and 4) it leads to the creation of learning and credentials for the firm's future work, in the form of reputational collateral, references and knowledge.

How success is measured varies. For some consulting firms, indicators like repeat business or recommendations serve as proxy measures of the standing of the firm in the eyes of the client. Indeed, the rise in popularity of the Net Promoter Score (Reichheld, 2003) is based on such thinking. IBM Partner Sally Cross (O'Mahoney and Markham, 2013) reminds us that success might be determined differently by the consulting firm and by the client. Although the perspectives might be different, ideally a consulting project should be deemed successful from both vantage points. Fiona Czerniawska's work (2006) suggests the determination of success in practice is more artistic than scientific. She draws attention to the paucity of metrics in clients' evaluations of the results of consulting projects. This characteristic increases the subjectivity by which the success of consulting projects is determined, placing greater emphasis to the process adopted and the conduct of the consultants involved.

This paper looks at one consulting project whose success was endorsed by a distinguished panel of experts. Each year, the International Council of Management Consulting Institutes (ICMCI) organizes the 'Constantinus Awards', to celebrate consulting project excellence. The net for nominations is cast worldwide, which results in a rich variety of entries. The Constantinus Awards represents a considered independent perspective of what a successful consulting project looks like. Perhaps not surprisingly, the focus of the attention is more from the external stakeholder vantage point, rather than internal metrics such as project profitability. In 2017, a UK-based consulting firm Challenges Worldwide came runner-up in the global award, having secured the British title en route. With Challenges Worldwide's blessing, this paper explores what success

looks in the eyes of the Constantinus Awards' judges – both the questions asked and the answers given. As a result, this insight may help consulting practitioners reflect on the orientation of their own consulting projects and where emphasis might well be oriented in order to be judged as particularly successful.

Background

Before looking into the particular consulting project that caught the eye of the Constantinus judges, it's helpful to learn more about Challenges Worldwide and the type of work it undertakes. Challenges Worldwide has



delivered private sector development interventions in over 50 developing markets around the world to small and medium enterprises with high growth potential since 1999. Since 2014, as part of a UK Aid programme, it has supported over 1,000 junior business support associates to deliver over 650 consulting interventions with small and medium-sized enterprises across Ghana, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia, amounting to over 90,000 on-site consulting delivery days.

Challenges Worldwide's core consulting staff are augmented by a team of Business Support Associates. These are volunteers aged between 18 and 25, who work directly with Challenges Worldwide's overseas clients. The Business Support Associates receive the Level 5 Certificate

Professional Consulting training from its affiliate organisation Challenges Catalyst, a CMI (Chartered Management Institute) strategic partner in the UK. This is one example of Challenges Worldwide's linkages with recognized pathways around consulting professionalism.

The Constantinus Awards nomination was based on one of Challenges Worldwide's interventions – a project with Boomers International Ltd. This is a company based in Kumasi, Ghana, engaged in manufacturing bamboo bicycles, who were looking to improve operational capacity alongside raise investment and access to new markets, specifically the UK.

Success looks like...

This section examines the nature of success in consulting projects, with specific reference to the lines of enquiry posed by the Constantinus Awards and the responses from Challenges Worldwide.

The nomination form seeks a description of the project. And Challenges Worldwide answered this with direct reference to the consulting cycle. The consulting cycle exists in various forms, from the six-stage process articulated by Lippitt and Lippitt to the three-part one in the recent ISO 20700 Guidelines for Management Consulting Services. The consulting cycle for this particular project was articulated by Challenges Worldwide under the following headings: recruitment and exploratory meeting;

contract development; set-up; data collection and analysis; presentation; implementation; review and implementation.

There are some key observations in Challenges Worldwide's responses, beyond the point of viewing the consulting cycle as a broad-based construct which need to be personalized to the particular consulting situation – in content and terminology.

At the beginning of the consulting cycle, Challenges Worldwide explain the fit between the client context and Challenges Worldwide's own focus and ability to be valuable to the client. Challenges Worldwide look to support high growth potential enterprises in sectors that will contribute to market and community level change. Our three main sectors are: agriculture – one of the largest employers in developing markets; craft – high number of female representation; and alternative energy – providing cheap and/or reliable power supply to communities. With Boomers we immediately saw growth potential for taking part in our programme due to the apparent trade linkages and investment potential to grow the business.

The contract development stage involved a two-step process, which recognizes the pragmatics around scoping terms of reference ahead of embarking on the investigation that forms part of the consulting intervention. Boomers and Challenges Worldwide signed an initial Terms of Reference detailing the three-month intervention from analysis to implementation. Post analysis stage, an appendix to this document was signed with more focused intervention deliverables by Challenges Worldwide's business support associates. In the set-up phase and with the establishment of the project team, Challenges Worldwide staged an Enterprise Seminar as a landmark event at the start of the project with the additional roles of sharing/shaping the project process and facilitating development of communication between the individuals in the Challenges Worldwide team and the Boomers organisation.

In the data collection and analysis phase, Challenges Worldwide employed an approach used by many consulting firms, namely to deploy a proprietary analysis framework, which is nevertheless underpinned by a sound research base. In this case, Challenges Worldwide used a 51-point diagnostic which helps generate data for insight into areas like market analysis, industry structure and production process mapping. As the project moved into the presentation stage, Challenges Worldwide was able to identify a series of six short term recommendations. The merits of 'quick wins' and 'low hanging fruit' with the associated benefits for project momentum and stakeholder buy-in are well recognized in the consulting literature.

SO WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL CONSULTING PROJECT? (Cont.)

The Constantinus Awards nomination form seeks data around the specific benefits achieved by the consulting work. This draws attention to both the importance and difficulties around specific metrics in consulting work.

The first area referred to was the increased revenue/profit generated for the client as result of the consulting work. Challenges Worldwide's response that, having recently completed the project it was too early to determine a different, draws attention to the complications around timescale and causality when looking at outcome-level indicators of consulting work. But of the Challenges Worldwide scope of work included a post project impact assessment, six months after the completion of the work.

In relation to process and output measures, Challenges Worldwide was able to provide data generated with the help of its 51-point diagnostic. This showed improvements for the client in areas like leadership, sales and marketing and product processing. While the determination of quantitative data is not an easy endeavor, Challenges Worldwide's response reminds consultant of the value of having a considered response to question by a transparent method, especially when the consulting work is open to external scrutiny.

Challenges Worldwide was able to explain more far-reaching benefits of its work with Boomers, as the Constantinus Awards sought illumination of more societal impacts of consulting work. With management consultants often being criticized in the press for failing to make positive contributions to society and not being seen a part of the 'case for good'. With what many see as a growing disparity between societal values and corporate behavior, this serves an encouragement to principals of consulting firms to retain sight of a broader responsibility to society and the consulting profession.

In response to questions about societal benefits and long term impact, Challenge Worldwide drew attention to Boomers' work to support human development through job creation and educational development, whilst providing a sustainable carbon neutral and 'green' alternative mode of transport. And the value of enabling children in rural areas to have a better means of going to school; education development and youth employment is the key focus, currently providing bicycles as part of a UNICEF programme.

In relation to improving innovation strength (which is about the client's capability and cultural development), Challenges Worldwide was able cite activity in helping Boomers diversify its product range in the bike and bamboo market though linking to new markets, and introduce renewable energy to their production process as part of investment raise.

A major component of Challenges Worldwide work is capacity building. Its narrative about the Boomers project form referenced its eighty-eight days on client site, and its sixteen CMI (Chartered Management Institute) training sessions. The Constantinus nominations form looked for an explanation of how the learning from the project was



transferable to a wider audience. Beyond the capacity building that formed part of the project, Challenges Worldwide made reference to more wide dissemination of learning enabled by the project. One example – its business support associate teams were able to share CMI learning and implementation across four International markets through its peer to peer learning platform. This allowed young people to engage with different city and country groups, to improve consulting delivery.

As would be anticipated the Constantinus International

nominations form sought feedback on client satisfaction. The Challenges Worldwide nomination included a positive endorsement from the primary client.

The gravity of the client endorsement was added to by some comparative data included by Challenges Worldwide. While a team of consultants might commit strongly and consistently across its projects, a major variable in the success of consulting work (Markham) is the client. Challenges Worldwide was able to report that its project metrics suggested its work with Boomers led to an improvement in operational output for client of 30% above the norm for this type of project.

Conclusions

The experience of Challenges Worldwide helps shine light on what particularly successful consulting looks like. The ability to demonstrate project delivery to agreed objectives seems to be a hygiene factor rather than a distinctive quality in the way success is judged. The Constantinus experience points to three qualities over and above this. First is the presence of recognized good practice in the consulting firm. Challenges Worldwide's submission made direct reference to recognized pathways to developing consulting competence and approaches such as the consulting cycle (the consulting cycle forms part of the new ISO 20700). It may be no surprise that the Constantinus Awards judges were positively disposed toward such formalized approaches which the ICMCI helped create, but the take-away for practitioners is the importance of being able to demonstrate recognized good practice. Second are the characteristics of the project itself. The more eye-catching consulting work is that which is interesting and out of the ordinary. Challenges Worldwide is unconventional in terms of its both business model and project for which it was nominated. Particularly successful consulting is probably distinctive consulting well executed rather than routine work well executed. Third is the importance of wider-value in consulting. Management consultants may not have enjoyed universally good press in recent years, so the merits of consulting endeavors that focus on social justice and a greater good have a particular appeal. It could be said the business world needs to raise its game in the areas of enlightened value, environmental and social responsibility, so consulting projects which help blaze this trail are likely to enhance the reputation of the consulting profession as well benefit the stakeholders for whom they were intended. This was certain a positive attribute of Challenges Worldwide's involvement with Boomers International Ltd.

“ I felt the impact of the Challenges Worldwide Program in that it changed the face of my business. Through that program, I was able to have a better strategy for new markets. ”

Kwabena Danso, CEO, Boomers International Limited.

CONSULTING CAPABILITIES FOR ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE.

Dr Julie Hodges, Durham University Business School
Introduction

To be able to implement and sustain change successfully requires consultants to possess, what is referred to as, a sort of ‘gift’ specific to the consulting industry; a ‘natural consulting skill’ (Kakabadse et al, 2006). It is like being a musician, most people can play badly but it is the people who can play well who can become excellent. To become excellent requires not just skill but specific capabilities: skills; knowledge; attitudes; and experience.

There have been many attempts to define the breadth of capabilities that a consultant needs in order to be considered fully competent with various generic lists (for example, Anderson, 2012). De Caluwe and Reitsma (2010) list ten capability categories which comprise: enterprising; showing resilience; organizing; performing; analyzing; considering; facilitating; influencing; managing; and inspiring confidence. Instead of breadth in a large number of capabilities, some researchers suggest the need for deep expertise in a small number of areas. Kenton and Moody (2003), for example, describe three areas where consultants need to be skilled: personal and interpersonal effectiveness; working as an agent of change; and consulting skills. In a survey of consultants Kakabadse and colleagues (2006) found that the following five skills were necessary to become an efficient consultant: experience; functional skills; ability to listen and question; objectivity; and self-awareness. In order to meet the challenge of consulting Wickham and Wickham (2008) say that the consultant must develop a skill profile that allows them to call upon abilities in three key areas: an ability to manage the consulting exercise as a formal project; the ability to manage the analytical skills necessary to gain an understanding of the client business and the possibilities it faces; and an ability to communicate ideas and positively influence others. Such expertise in a small number of specific areas enables a consultant to build in-depth capabilities rather than be a ‘Jack [or Jill] of all trades’.

Trying to identify relevant capabilities for consultancy for change from the vast lists, which prevail, is a daunting prospect. In an attempt to address this Wilcox and Jenkins (2015) suggest grouping capabilities under the four headings of exploration, envisioning, engagement, and execution. Such groupings are helpful in that they tend to mirror the key stages of most consultancy approaches but are nevertheless vague and generic.

Consultancy capabilities for organisational change

To identify the most relevant capabilities, I conducted a survey with over one thousand consultants from 20 countries and 25 different organisations, along with over 500 client managers from 30 organisations to help identify the key capabilities. Internal consultants

accounted for 45% of respondents and external consultants 55%. The managers were primarily from the private sector (70%), while the majority of consultants who responded specialised in Organisation Development (40%); Human Resources (20%); Technology (15%); Operations (15%); and Finance (10%).

The sample for the study was constructed using professional and informal networks which is an approach regularly employed as a means of gaining access (Gummesson, 2000). A snowball technique was used so that individuals who agreed to participate recommended other potential respondents (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). One danger of “snowballing” is the potential for cloned



respondents with each person at risk of being much like the next in terms of traits, interests or patterns. To prevent this happening ten separate “snowballing” chains were launched, each starting from a different networking source. Participants were asked to rank in order of importance the most relevant capabilities required for consultancy for change. The top ten capabilities identified were: building and maintaining relationships; developing and sustaining trust; managing emotions; gaining commitment and engagement to change; facilitating creative dialogue; resilience; having a tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty; having political astuteness; managing power dynamics; and being an effective communicator. Based on the high level findings from the survey we will now briefly describe each of these capabilities and their importance in conducting consultancy for organisational change based on the survey findings and further research.

Building and maintaining relationships

As one participant pointed out, “Consultancy is about

people and the consultant’s role is to firstly establish a sound relationship with the client and attempt to make them feel comfortable with the consultant and the consultancy process”. This foundation is critical to the openness, sharing, and honesty that are necessary during organisational change (Jamieson and Armstrong, 2010). The need to create a sound relationship is vital. The key to a successful relationship between consultants and clients depends on the proactive behaviour of the consultant, which means that the consultant needs to think even of those needs and requirements of which a client has not been aware, and helps the client to see such needs and possibilities. To achieve this requires a positive client-consultancy relationship which is built on trust.

Developing and sustaining trust

A number of respondents in the survey pointed out that a client’s willingness to share information will depend on how much they trust the consultant. To reinforce the importance of trust, Cope (2010) has developed a helpful mnemonic of TRUST:

- Truthful – the consultant and the client must be truthful to one another.
- Responsive –the consultant needs to engage totally in the client’s world.
- Uniform – a consultant must be consistent in their ideas and attitudes towards the engagement.
- Safe – given some of the emotions a client may feel it is important that the client feels safe working with the consultant.
- Trained – it may sound obvious but it is important that the client believes the consultant is competent in the area of expertise that they are being consulted about. This will be based on their work experience and credibility, and if they are external consultants, then also on the reputation of the consulting firm for which they work.

The ability of a consultant to build trust and gain the credibility of the client is a key factor for building an effective client-consultant relationship.

Managing Emotions

Participants emphasised that the relationship existing between consultants and clients involves an emotional dimension that must be managed. In support of this the relationship between the consultant and the client has been described as an ‘emotional duct’, in which the consultant has to learn to ‘recognise, deal with and respond to the client’s emotions’ (Stumpf and Tymon Jr, 2001: 49). Lundberg and Young (2001) go as far as to say that consultants who are called in to provide expertise and solutions on pragmatic problems such as change, are in fact

implicitly called in to provide emotional support. Indeed organisational change is not only about dealing with the change but also about dealing with feelings and emotions of the different members involved in the process (Hodges, 2016). This is important to recognize because the consultant needs to avoid finding themselves in a situation where, although a good piece of consultancy was delivered the client is disappointed because emotions were not managed carefully.

Emotions are involved throughout a consultancy assignment, hence consultants must be able to create a climate where clients feel that they can trust the consultant. However, in order to reach such a stage, the consultant must dedicate their full and undivided attention to the client and their objectives and place the client’s interest ahead of their own. This involves consultants carefully managing and understanding their own emotions as well as those of the client. So consultants need to be aware of their own abilities and emotions and know their strengths and areas for development.

Gaining commitment and engagement

Getting commitment to a change is part of the process of engaging people in organisational transformations (Hodges, 2018). A consultant who is trying to help an organisation to go through a transformation, needs to help people not only to understand it but also to engage and be committed to it. Participants in the survey described this in terms of ‘getting buy-in’ for change. Engagement and commitment need to come primarily from the client but also from key stakeholders. For example, frontline employees are the ones responsible for behaving in ways conducive to proposed change and often have to learn new ways of doing things. Commitment to change is therefore an important enabler of change, if employees are not engaged then very little will change. One way to build commitment is for consultants and clients to create an environment in which the people most affected by change have a role in shaping it. This involves helping individuals to understand what the rationale is for the change. Involving front-line staff in the diagnosis and joint problem-solving in order to identify solutions will help to gain commitment at an early stage because people are more likely to react positively if they have been involved in defining the solution rather than having them imposed on them.

Resilience

Survey participant stressed the need for consultants to be resilient. This requires developing an ability to think positively, maintaining perspective, developing a strong network of supportive relationships and taking care of

CONSULTING CAPABILITIES FOR ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE. (Cont.)

one's mind and body. In an article entitled, 'Increase your resilience to change' Proctor (2014) identifies the characteristics of resilient people as optimistic, self-assured, focussed, open to new ideas, willing to ask for support, structured and proactive. These components of resilience all play a vital role in enabling consultants to manage stressors in a proactive, adaptive and positive way. Resilient consultants are able to draw on these qualities at the right time and understand when, for example, being proactive is more important than seeking support. Resilience can help to maintain higher performance levels, improve a consultant's sense of wellbeing and aids them in coping with fluctuating emotions. It also helps them to deal with different types of clients and organisational transformations within different contexts without being overwhelmed.

Tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty

Participants emphasised that consultants must be able to cope with ambiguity and uncertainty. Ambiguous situations can be defined as completely new situations with no familiar cues or precedents, or as apparently insoluble situations which cannot be solved in the usual way. Such ambiguity creates uncertainty and is uncomfortable and can lead to individuals wanting to quickly resolve issues. The desire to achieve quick solutions may be compounded by a client who questions the capability of the consultant when the consultant responds to the client's 'what's next' questions with 'I don't know' or 'I am not sure where this is going at present'. Rather than agreeing a quick fix tolerating ambiguity means being comfortable during a period of uncertainty and taking time to delve into the root causes of an issue.

Political Astuteness

Just providing the right solution is not enough; survey participants highlighted that consultants have to be able to deal with the politics within the client organisation. Organisational politics are often described as a turf game involving a competition of ideas (Buchanan and Badham, 2009) which consultants may be forced to play. Politics are, however, a naturally occurring phenomenon in organisations and are often resistant to attempts to stifle or eradicate them. Rather than attempting to do so, the more effective response is for consultants to recognise and address them when appropriate. There is, therefore, a need to learn how to read the political context of a change initiative, its political manoeuvring and informal social network, in order to bring about the desired outcomes.

Managing the power dynamics

Participants in the survey emphasised that consultants need to know where the power lies when dealing with organisational change, which means not only 'positional' (appointed) power but also 'relational' (people) power, since without this knowledge the progress of change can be severely impeded. Consequently it is important to know who has power, how to recognize how other people exercise their power and what power tactics to use. Robbins and colleagues (2010) have identified nine distinct tactics from the research which are:

1. Legitimacy - relying on one's position of authority and stressing that a change is in accordance with organisational policies and rules.
2. Rational persuasion - presenting logical arguments and factual evidence to demonstrate that a change is reasonable.
3. Inspirational appeals - developing emotional commitment by appealing to an individual's values, needs, hopes and aspirations.
4. Consultation - increasing an individual's motivation and support by involving them in deciding how the change will be achieved.
5. Exchange - rewarding an individual with benefits or favours in exchange for supporting a change.
6. Personal appeal - asking for compliance based on friendship or loyalty.
7. Ingratiation - using flattery, praise or friendly behaviour prior to making a change.
8. Pressure - using warnings, repeated demands and threats.
9. Coalitions - enlisting the aid of people to persuade an individual or assuring the support of others as a reason for an individual to agree to a change.

“ Some tactics are more effective than others. Specifically, rational persuasion, inspirational appeals and consultation tend to be most effective, while pressure tends to backfire and is the least effective tactic. Consultants need to actively use such tactics to effectively manage the power dynamics in a client organisation. ”

Creating effective organisational change conversations

The ability to create organisational change conversations is a core element of consultancy for change which survey participants highlighted as a key capability. This can be achieved through effective listening, questioning and summarising.

Listening

Consultants need to be careful not to scare clients with an uninterrupted flow of words and ideas but rather should take time to listen. Tuning in and listening actively will connect a consultant more to their client. Listening is a complex activity that involves different modes - 'listening about' and 'listening for' (Brownell, 2015). 'Listening about' is often value laden and may lead to questions such as, "Do I like what this person is saying?"; "Do I believe it?"; "Do I have evidence to refute it?" 'Listening for', on the other hand, is often about hearing possibility and opportunity: "What are they saying?" "Do I understand it from their perspective?"; "How does that relate to what I know". 'Listening for' is listening actively without judgement. Active listening involves paying attention to the client, without interrupting but instead making sounds occasionally to indicate understanding or encouragement, maintaining eye contact, looking interested, being interested and being at ease. It means that the person talking feels that the listener is fully present and not being distracted, such as by checking their phone for messages. Listening also means being aware of the non-verbal behaviour of the speaker, noticing their emotional cues, such as facial expressions which can provide information about how the speaker is making sense of the discussion and allow the consultant to tailor their responses and questions. Consultants should also listen for 'pings' or 'hooks' to enable them to identify what to hang their next question on, such as the person saying, 'I have always had concerns in that area'. Active listening is closely tied up with questioning.

Questioning

Effective questioning involves asking open questions (such as when, where, what, how) to obtain more information and using reflecting and closed questions (for example, is that right?) to obtain confirmation. If a client does not answer a question immediately (especially an open-ended one), consultants should not rush in and fill the space - there is power in silence, especially with level three questions when the client is likely to need time to think about their answer.

Summarising

Along with listening and questioning consultants need to summarise or paraphrase what has just been said and also recognize feelings, for instance 'You seem very angry about' of 'So, let me reflect back to you what you have just said to check that I understand correctly...' Summarizing is also a good technique for moving a conversation forward. Listening, questioning and summarising may appear to be basic skills but are very powerful if used effectively and actively - which can be harder to do and thus requires practice and patience.

Summary

There are a variety of capabilities that must be grasped in order to become an efficient consultant. In this article we have highlighted the importance of capabilities required by consultants which are: building and maintaining relationships; managing emotions; gaining commitment and engagement; being resilient; having a tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty; being political astute; managing power dynamics; and facilitating effective organisational change conversations. The level of expertise and the mastery of certain skills will fluctuate in relation to the level at which consultants operate. Consultants operating at a strategic level will need to have a depth of experience in the relevant capabilities; while those working at other levels will need to demonstrate the core levels of skills, tools, techniques required; for those who are relatively new to consultancy they will need to build experiences to develop a full portfolio of skills, tools and techniques to operate at higher levels. The relative emphasis on each capability will depend upon the situation, but all are vital in consultancy for change.

The research provides us with some practical implications for the development of consultants. First, the capabilities identified provide a helpful framework for consultant trainers to use in development activities. Second, consultants can benchmark themselves against the capabilities and identify their strengths and areas of development; and third, they can be used to enhance internal consultancy skills.

Further information on capabilities for consultancy can be found in Hodges, J. (2017) Consultancy, Organisational Development and Change. London: Sage.

THE 'WORLD'S NEWEST PROFESSION' IS NO LONGER DISPENSABLE; WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR CONSULTANCY FIRMS?

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Introduction

The research presented in this paper provides a client perspective into an industry which permeates modern corporations and strongly influences their economic performance, and arguably the global economy. The paper outlines the decision-making sequences, the operational processes and the institutional influences involved in the engagement of management consultants. In doing so, the research demonstrates how clients maximise management value by establishing consultants as a cornerstone of management decision-making, embedded in organisational contexts, influencing and influenced by institutional norms.

From its beginnings in early twentieth century America, the management consulting industry has evolved to become a worldwide phenomenon. Kennedy (2010) has estimated that in 1975 the worldwide consulting market was \$4.8bn and had grown to \$305bn by 2012 (Marketline, 2013), showing 13,000% worldwide revenue growth without inflation correction (Plunkett, 2014). The UK consulting industry is worth around £12bn and employs more than 80,000 consultants (IoC, 2017). Despite these figures, Management Consultancy is an industry beleaguered by contradictions and prejudices (Ernst and Kieser, 2000), remains a mystery to most outsiders (Buono, 2015) and is perceived negatively, fuelled by publications such as Kihn (2005), Craig and Brooks (2006) and Kirkpatrick et al. (2018). Reinforced by regular bad press (Hari, 2010, Economist, 2013, Hope, 2016, Gapper, 2017) the consultancy industry is regarded warily. Such views do not align with the plain economic fact that consultancy growth, as in any service industry, hinges on client satisfaction.

This research seeks to understand what makes for good consulting, how clients decide who the good consultants are for given assignments, and what, if anything, this means for consultancy firms. Consequently, questions regarding management consulting services arise. They are:

- (RQ1) How do clients define good service?
- (RQ2) What makes clients choose who they choose?

The research questions are answered through primary data from interviews with 60 people across 16 global utilities and financial services firms, being the largest buyers of consultancy services (Marketline, 2016). Semi-structured interviews provide context and depth of information. The analysis is interpretive and provides an industry-wide perspective of what drives client behaviour and how the findings are useful for consulting firms. Historical context, which lays the foundation for the empirical analysis, is provided by an examination of secondary sources including historical data.

The Emergence and Growth of the Consulting Industry

Advisors have existed throughout history, providing the rich and powerful with advice, nominally independent and sometimes strategic (Schein, 1999, Furusten, 2013, O'Mahoney and Markham, 2013). Consultancy has been described as 'The creation of value for organizations – through improved performance, achieved by providing objective advice and implementing business solutions' (MCA, 2017) and 'a point of reference and a source of innovation for organisations and institutions across Europe' (FEACO, 2017:4).

Three strands of value creation and innovation converged in the first half of the twentieth century to create the modern management consulting industry (Kipping and Engwall, 2002). Taylor (1911) pioneered what became known as Scientific Management which was expanded by Gantt, Emerson, Bedaux and others. Firms such as Arthur D Little arose from collaboration between large companies and leading engineering universities, examples being AT&T, Du Pont, GE, and Standard Oil, with Carnegie Mellon, MIT and Stanford (Panetti, 2007). Collaborations expanded from technical to managerial, and firms became transmitters of managerial ideas developed in myriad organizational settings (Kipping, 2002, McKenna, 2006).

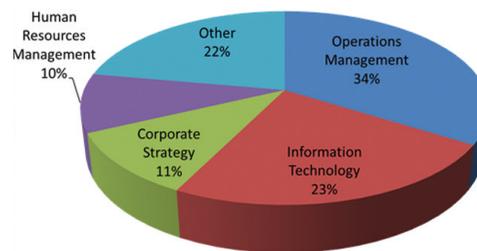


Figure 1: United Kingdom management & marketing consultancy market segmentation: % share, by value, 2017 (Marketline, 2018)

Accounting firms expanded their work from monitoring costs through cost-accounting to lowering costs through work study, technological developments and any other managerial technique, laying the foundations for the corporate governance infrastructure in existence today (McKenna, 2006). In the second half of the century another new consulting market was created. When GE engaged Arthur Anderson in 1953 (Osborn, 1956) to oversee the installation of the first computer used specifically for business, the IT consulting industry was born.

These foundations have embedded the industry in the economic activity of organisations. Clients continue to use

management consulting firms for a broad range of services, from help in articulating strategies to implementing large-scale IT and operational change programmes.

Figure 1 shows the UK management consulting market in 2017, which generated fees of \$13,752.2m (Marketline, 2018). The largest spend is on Operations Management, showing clients' continued focus on dealing with immediate operational/business challenges with economic impact, and remaining true to the first two founding strands of the industry.

Academia and Consulting

By the 1990s the study of management consulting was attracting academic attention (Dawes et al., 1991, Alvesson, 1993, Sturdy, 1996, Clark and Salaman, 1998, de Burgundy, 1998, De Jong and Van Eekelen, 1999). Consultants' contributions to organisations success provided a rich stream of research, largely focused on interactions with clients and the structuring and dissemination of consultant knowledge. 'Critical' perspectives became widespread, presenting consulting as systems of persuasion, rhetoric and performance (Berglund and Werr, 2000, Ernst and Kieser, 2000, Clark and Greatbatch, 2002, Fincham, 2002, Kieser, 2002, Clegg et al., 2004, Johansson, 2004, Sturdy et al., 2006, Kitay and Wright, 2007).

There were also specific insights into the operations of consulting. Sturdy noted that when choosing consultants, clients tend to be ambivalent, both positive and critical, of the service (1997:402). Armbruster (2006) observed that consultants provide advice on demand-intensive issues which are not people-specific, making them outsourceable. Malhotra and Morris (2009) reflected that clients require customised solutions which take the form of intangible applications of complex knowledge. Muzio et al. (2010) opined, not unreasonably given the fees generated, that consulting services are costly.

Inherent complexities of buying consulting services

The nature of consulting is fluid since intangible applications of complex knowledge make reconfiguration possibilities infinite. Judging its performance and quality therefore is difficult and open to multiple interpretations (Ernst and Kieser, 2000, Lowendahl et al., 2001, Hill et al., 2009, Sturdy, 2011). Another complication is that without legislative compulsion to purchase, consulting is a dispensable, discretionary service, commissioned on an ad hoc basis (Patterson, 2000, Armbruster and Glueckler, 2007). Clients might choose to use internal capabilities, do nothing or reject one firm in favour of another (Kitay and Wright, 2007, Sturdy et al., 2013).

Given the exponential rise in fee-generation since the

industry's inception, it appears that 'doing nothing' is rarely the favoured client option, certainly not in the longer term. In order to understand what tangible and intangible requirements clients have of their consultants, a client perspective was sought. Concepts of 'Ways of Knowing' (WOK), 'Ways of Working' (WOW) and 'Ways of Being' (WOB) emerged. When successfully combined, they present a well-fitting customised package to prospective clients and are a key outcome of this research.

Research Method

In order to answer the research questions set out in the introduction, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Senior executives who had experience of buying consultancy services were purposively approached. Asking them to reach out to others in their organisation, or colleagues who had moved to other organisations, the final participant count snowballed to sixty people representing sixteen companies. The participant role profile was 50 Directors/ Heads of Function, 7 were manager level, and 3 were leaders (2 Chief Executives and a Chairman).

Participants were asked questions covering the following areas: what they looked for and expected from their consultants, and how they decided who they would work with. Individuals were anonymised by industry and company. Interviews were recorded and transcribed when all had been completed. Data analysis was carried out using NVivo software for capture and coding.

A 'grounded-theory lite' approach was adopted for the thematic analysis, as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interestingly, the first 6 interviews provided 80% of the codes. Saturation was therefore achieved at the halfway point, adding to the generalisability of the insights as well as robustness.

Findings

The findings presented cover the key features from the 60 interviews and address the two research questions. The interviewees all provided similar, business-embedded explanations about the value consultants brought to their organisation (Table 1), making the choices who and how, not whether or why.

REASON	DEFINITION	%
Expertise	Knowledge you do not possess, be it knowing how or knowing what	36%
Externality	An external perspective, be it geography or industry	25%
Extension	An injection of extra resource	24%
Endorsement	Decision legitimisation or de-personalisation	15%

Table 1: Consultants' value-add

THE 'WORLD'S NEWEST PROFESSION' IS NO LONGER DISPENSABLE; WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR CONSULTANCY FIRMS? (Cont.)

'Time compression economies' of speed and quality were reported as important factors, because 'it doesn't make commercial sense to have that kind of skill in permanently'. Views and insights from competitors or other industries are a useful input, bringing 'external benchmarking experience and know-how into different organisations'. An 'extra pair of hands' was a frequent consideration too, enabling ring-fencing of internal resource for 'commercial top priority' activities while consultants 'backfill the 'business-as-usual' side of activity to free up internal staff'.

The 'take your watch to tell you the time' apocryphal perspective of money-grabbing consultants is seen as independent assurance rather than a charlatan activity, whether for internal or external purposes: 'if you're buying people to come in they [the Board] tend to listen more'. Respondents were open about the scapegoating aspect or de-personalising of an unpleasant or difficult course of action. An alternative, 'dark side' to buying consultancy also emerged: 'for managers with fat budgets and limited capabilities, consultants are obviously quite an attractive option', on the lines of a comfort blanket or an addiction, where the removal of the habit becomes almost unthinkable.

Good consulting service

There were common themes regarding quality and service. Good service is unequivocally about delivering what was promised, regardless of what is actually in the contract.

There is a taken-for-granted expectation that consultants are highly educated and have the expertise to deliver what is needed. This reflects a common acceptance that consultants are acknowledged as expert in collecting and codifying knowledge and applying it appropriately. External perspective is important but is over-ridden by sector and company-specific content expertise which clients expect to be transferred to the business:

"What I want and what I expect now is to look outside of our sector and think 'what's happened in telecoms, what's happening in'... UPS and TNT and all the delivery firms... Our expectation now is we've got to look out of industry and we expect those guys to do that for us, you know, and bring it in."

This aspect of consultant knowledge and the ability to apply it was labelled 'ways of knowing' (WOK), also linked to the firm and its way of codifying knowledge for subsequent dissemination and reuse.

Other taken-for-granted features are that the consultant is a hard worker, available, highly accommodating, and goes the extra mile. They are also serious, knowledgeable and fun:

"I want the perfect person. I want the person I'd have a laugh with. I want the person to be serious and deliver and

drive it really hard. I don't want it to be because we're paying the bill. I want it because they enjoy what they're doing and they get a buzz out of delivering real value."

"You're buying high-calibre individuals, top-notch people, who can deliver really outstanding excellence in every aspect of everything that they do...down to the way that the people look...the way they speak, ... present themselves... and the team... And we also look for excellence in work."

"High commitment, rapid dissimulation when they get on the ground, you know, coming in effectively, very quickly, good communication and to have the level of proficiency that they've declared in the sales process."

This needs flexibility and a strong work ethic to ensure responsiveness in the form of 'get on and do it', independence, empathy, tenacity and task-focus. Decisiveness and integrity are key and should also result in challenging client thinking. This was labelled 'ways of working' (WOW).

What makes clients choose who they choose?

There is a mechanical, process aspect to purchasing and a personal, intuitive one. The mechanical process takes place in two stages. Procurement is the first, longer-term, stage. Framework agreements are established over a fixed planning-cycle of usually 5 years, to comply up-front with European Procurement Directives legislating for open and transparent procurement practices for regulated and public sector organisations. An expensive, time-consuming process taking from 4-6 months, the benefit is a list of pre-qualified suppliers (PSL) with a broad set of skills available at an already agreed rate. The second stage is the actual buying. It involves approaching selected companies from the PSL with a defined requirement and a request for proposal (RFP). The buying team, composed of departmental subject specialists and buying specialists, embarks on the decision-making process, sifting through proposals and subsequent presentations.

The mechanical choosing of the successful firm is based on weighted criteria, typically incorporating cost, people and experience. The actual choosing is about 'gut feel', a sense they could work with the individual consultants:

"It's difficult to describe the cultural stuff about how they work and how they would work with us and I think that's quite a big piece and it's not always easy to articulate."

"It's a heart-over-head call."

Not that the decision process is irrational but more that the 'branded firms' are difficult to differentiate between, so choice is shaped by connections which resonate and enthuse, expressed as 'chemistry' and 'gut feel'.

"Ultimately consultancies are people, so whether it's a blue chip top five or a mid-range firm I've still had examples of good people within them and bad ones, and part of the client role is to know the difference."

What really matters is when consultants offer "a marriage of convenience rather than a marriage of intent." This was labelled 'ways of being' (WOB).

Discussion

Management consultancy has evolved significantly since its modern-day inception. Previous research suggested clients have little if any experience in buying consultancy services. The generally accepted view was that consultancy is infrequently commissioned, relatively discrete and of an ad hoc nature (Armbrüster and Glückler, 2007, Sturdy et al., 2013). When consultancy was bought, it was because clients had fallen under the spell of storytelling by gurus adept at impression management (Clark and Greatbatch, 2002, Johansson, 2004, Kitay and Wright, 2007). The findings from this research refute that. They indicate consultancy is embedded in client organisations and that clients buy pragmatically. Consultants are used for short-term, specific operational input (Figure 1), for specific reasons (Table 1). This confirms that choosing consultants is focused and results-oriented, rather than ambivalent (Sturdy, 1997). 60% of the respondents indicated consultants were needed because their organisation did not have the manpower or the specific knowledge to carry out a required task. This highlights the continued specialisation of labour in the economy as a whole, as begun by Taylor in the 1900s, and identifies consultants as 'agents' of management (Fincham, 2002).

The effective application of knowledge garnered from multiple industries, rapidly disseminated using proprietary tools, techniques and competencies is the depiction of the successful consultant. Consultants provide structured exploration of ideas within their own and client workplaces. This is ways of knowing (WOK). Ways of working (WOW) represents the customization of the knowledge offer with the social dimension that promotes partnership, collaboration and fit of working style. Ethos, trust and an expectation of comradeship and enjoyment is crucial to winning business, and is labelled ways of being (WOB). Successful blending of structured social and organisational activities (Sturdy et al., 2006) remains core. Further evidence pointing to the industry's institutionalisation is found in how consulting services have become embedded in client routines by nature of clients' procurement, planning and purchasing processes. An infrastructure for formalised cyclical procurement practices exists. The framework process highlights the long-term thinking driving the use of consultants and how their

engagement is now part of 'business-as-usual'. The buying process reflects how consultant input permeates organisational thinking, making consulting only nominally a discretionary service. Consultancy spend forms part of the annual budgeting cycle as well as for ad hoc business issues.

Conclusion

This paper set out to answer two questions:

(RQ1) How do clients define good service?

(RQ2) What makes clients choose who they choose?

This study identified three essential 'soft' components that must be in the service offering for it to be successful. These were Ways of Knowing (WOK), Ways of Working (WOW) and Ways of Being (WOB). These respectively represent the knowledge management processes so effectively developed in all successful consultancies (WOK), and largely taken-for-granted by clients; the need for both client and consultant to recognise in each other common approaches and processes that will not clash and will facilitate effective collaboration (WOW); and that intangible 'gut feeling' that they share common values, have chemistry to work together well and will go the extra mile (WOB). The analysis has shown how management consultancy has become institutionalised in client routines through formalised purchasing. Whilst this may erode ad hoc projects, it increases security of pipeline for consultancies. Questions are about what is bought, when, and from whom, rather than whether to buy. Uncertainty remains because no consulting firm is guaranteed to win any particular contract. Client choice may appear less dependent on relationships than previously, but it is still predicated on 'gut feel' informing service experience and people evaluation. For consultancies this should fuel creativity, perpetuate the advancement of new ideas and further insights to be safely tested and shared with clients. The combination of historical and current perspectives of consulting presented in this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how management consultancy has developed and why it continues to thrive. Consultancy is a 'must-have' service even without statutory requirement. The empirical research highlights that despite a generally critical stance in principle, in practice clients see consultants' contributions as necessary and supportive to their overall goals. Purchasing, previously based on what could have been described as 'old-boy networks' is now transparently focused on more objective performance contribution to business success. However, the personal, with subjective judgements around 'gut feel' and how client and consultant could work together still hold sway during the supplier selection process. The challenge for today's consulting firms is to systematically demonstrate WOK, WOW and WOB.

EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION? ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT SCOPES.

Brian Ing

Introduction

This is an exploration, based on similar concepts derived for the physical sciences by Thomas Kuhn, of the nature of change consultants propose for their clients. A distinction is made for assignments which are revolutionary and those which are evolutionary. It is noted that the latter strongly predominate and of themselves alone provide the benefits which justify the existence of our management consultancy profession. Finally, the position of a consultant proposing change which could be of either category to an organisation is discussed.

‘Change Agents’

At one time it was quite popular to call management consultants ‘change agents’ (Tisdall, 1982). Perversely Paradoxically at that time it was relatively rare for management consultants to be involved in implementing change, even advising on how to implement change. In some countries, the professional body expressed a strong opinion that implementation was not part of the professional scope of a management consultant. The term, ‘change agent’, faded from use, arguably through its association through the word ‘agent’ implying action and getting things done. However, for our purpose today the alternative title for what we do stresses that a high proportion of our professional efforts are involved with change. Of course, more recently consulting on implementation (perhaps given a different nomenclature such as ‘strategy deployment’) and actually being involved with implementation of change (and we now have many practices specialising in change management) are part of the main stream of consulting practice. But the basis of all work is change in all its forms, expected, to be defended against and perceived.

We have a whole taxonomy of types of change. Be it strategic or tactical. Be it radical or piecemeal. Both of which are binary choices. Others are a more scaled variable, such as changes affecting small proportions of an organisation in gradual steps to a change affecting the entire organisation.

This conceptual paper concerns a one such binary descriptor and its use in a consulting practice: evolution or revolution.

Thinking from elsewhere

As a young profession, we have been profligate resourceful in acquiring as our base knowledge, the knowledge, insights and techniques from many other professions. The obvious ones were production management, finance, marketing, information technology which clearly related to the business fundamentals of the organisations which were our clients. But a much wider

range have fed our base, such as psychology, sociology and anthropology. The competent management consultant will have a collection of tools and knowledge from a wide range of other professions.

This article is based on applying some understandings derived for the hard sciences by Thomas Kuhn in his book ‘The Structure of Scientific Revolutions’ (1962). To simplify his now widely accepted thesis is that most science practised by its professionals is ‘normal’ science. That is to say, the situations being addressed with tools and accepted theories and laws. The very high proportion of all science work is of this form. However, using accepted wisdom and applying to whole range of phenomena and situations will occasionally reveal where the application of accepted ideas does not result in agreement with what happens in nature. Initially, these unexpected circumstances are treated as oddities, often with the expectation of an improved use of a wider range of accepted knowledge will resolve the apparent puzzle. As more and more of these unexplained phenomena are found, the science community becomes more unsettled and is ready to consider that maybe that all about the situation is not known. Suddenly, one person (or a small group) comes forward, almost bursts through, with a totally different explanation (sometimes requiring the questioning or replacement of what had until then been accepted wisdom). Thomas Kuhn coined the phrase ‘paradigm shift’ to describe this fundamental move in thinking (Kuhn, 1962).

The classic example in physics is Einstein’s Theory of Relativity replacing the two hundred year old Newtonian position on relativity. In the world of physics this was such a fundamental change that we still talk of it today over a hundred years later. At the same time quantum theory was born. Modern Physics’ became the accepted approach instead of ‘Classical Physics and the application of these new ideas can be said to have defined the last century’s progress. Truly justifying the term Kuhn applied – ‘revolution’.

Evolution and revolution

In scientific disciplines these revolutions happen quite rarely (although in the biological sciences, it seems the gap between revolutions is shrinking). So are such dramatic revolutions in thinking and practice also so rare in the fields of the clients of management consultants? There are only a relatively small number of sciences and they are global. Business and organisations cover different sectors, different marketplaces, different cultures and economies. We show later some recent examples of revolutions in our world.

But these are still the minority of assignments, normal accepted practice is applied over and over again to achieve incremental improvement in performance (where that is much wider than just financial performance) for

organisations. This type of assignment will be referred to as ‘evolution’ taking as it does the original organisation and amending it in selected ways to achieve the improvement in performance.

The remainder of this article will use the evolution or revolution descriptor of change and discuss the implications for practising management consultants.

Revolution examples

A classic revolutionary change assignment started with the question ‘what business are we in?’ (Levitt, 1960). Examples are legion of the result of answering this question has changed the focus of attention from what the organisation does (eg. fly aeroplanes) to definitions of what the customers obtain from dealing with the company (eg. able to get to different places to do business, learning, or tourism). This apparently simple change of central intent affects the organisation throughout in fundamental ways. The initial use of this question was a revolution in consulting practice.

‘Get the customer to do the work’ and other advantages from getting customers, clients and those interacting with the organisation through using the internet, speeding response times, reducing costs and, with good design, improving satisfaction are now so common place. But for the author of this article it was regarded as a sackable offence for predicting for customers of banks in the 1970s they would want to electronically query their data held by the bank. This was after hearing what had been achieved with ARPAnet. This research network was improved and renamed Internet.

There are many other examples. Some are innovations in technology having a wide and dramatic impact (see for instance the provision of VisiCalc, an early spreadsheet program, on an Apple II) others are changes in cost points that dramatically enable changes in business practices (qv. the PC, the photocopier, and the mobile phone). These examples do not arise within the management consultancy profession. However, as happens often, it is our profession that learns from early adoptions of these new approaches the firms consolidate experience into best practice and guidance for others to follow.

The revolution in business practice may be led by a concept, an idea or even a mantra (even if delivered via hardware and software). For example, just in time supply chains, quality management, ‘client-server’ computing, cloud based computing, ‘stick to your knitting’.

More recently, we have become familiar with the phrase ‘disruptive change’. Totally new ways of satisfying customer requirements are achieved through the use of emerging technology. Who would not describe the impact Amazon has had, initially on book selling but now all

aspects of retail, as anything else but ‘revolutionary’? It is interesting to note that often these disruptive revolutionary changes are achieved by new organisations, not by those organisations currently serving the customers. Perversely, these disruptive changes in the business environment require management consultants to use their normal approach to new ideas. That is to understand the matter, its impacts on businesses, the responses they should make and the ways of achieving those changes. We need to review what others have done and learn and consolidate all into our advice to clients. Something we have been doing for every change in doing business since we were organised as a profession.

“ There have been many examples of revolutions in the overall business, including the third sector, world. But no matter how many there have been, the number of assignments performed by management consultants that can be considered revolutionary are relatively very small compared to the vast majority of assignments which can be classed as evolutionary. ”

Often, revolutionary new approaches are developed by a small group of individuals. They may be academics, business commentators or even a consultant with an idea. Once the idea is first defined and has limited exposure outside the original experimentalists, it is often that niche boutique consultancies work with early adopter clients to refine and confirm the approach. Once some success is achieved, it is common for the large practices, who are always seeking to be able to introduce new ideas to their clients and have the resources to be able to service quickly a wide range of clients. At the same time business schools take notice and start research. A couple of years later, the topic is introduced into the courses, especially the MBA, and gradually managers in business become aware and later proficient in the use of the approach. The sales of the approach by the large consultancies decline from their peak, but at the same time consultancies specialising in, and expert in, the new approach start selling to the managers now fully aware if not competent in the new approach. Latterly, consulting services are still sold where the business does not have sufficient resources although the managers are now fully trained and competent in the approach.

EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION? ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT SCOPES. (Cont.)

Thus the new approach has, like any service product, a product life cycle. It is only at the very early stages that the approach can be usually described as revolutionary. Soon, typically in the early period of adoption by the larger consultancies, the approach is properly defined as accepted business best practice and the assignments are classified as evolutionary.

Evolution examples

Almost all assignments use accepted knowledge and practice to advise and implement required change in clients. Some might still have a dramatic change on the client organisation. Often a marketing strategy assignment can lead to completely different futures for a client and its staff. But the basis of the suggested change is still accepted practice: just that this has been applied to the situation of the client.

Business process improvements, cost engineering, staffing number reviews are all examples of evolution projects. The organisation, or part of it, is evolved from its current state to an improved one. It is the stock in trade of most consultants. The assignments can still be exemplary, the client interaction and the overall assignment can be superb, even prize winning in national and international competitions. This is the bulk of the benefits brought to the organisations across the world that justifies the investment in using consultants. Indeed, the cumulative benefits more than justify the existence and practice of management consultants. The assignments might not be as exciting, but they are valuable and valued.

Without a single revolutionary assignment, our profession is justified by the benefits derived by these assignments. The average multiplier of the consultancy fee to the benefits obtained, has been estimated many times but no study has found the costs to exceed the benefits. This is a replica of the conclusions reached by Thomas Kuhn. 'Normal' science had and continues to produce economic value far in excess of the total costs of the scientists working with accepted practice and theory.

But...

The Client View

All the above is predicated on the view of the consultant. Revolutions, in the sense of ground-breaking paradigm shifts, come rarely. Once they have been understood, they soon become part of our toolbox for what we see as evolutionary change.

But clients can, but not always, become so focused on their

organisations that they are unaware of some new thinking. They can also be so involved with the logic, rationale, history and culture of their organisation that their resistance to change is heightened. Working closely with colleagues within the organisation can produce a 'group-think' (Whyte, 1952) that what they do is the right way to proceed. A consultant proposing a change based on the accepted norms can be reviewed as proposing an unexpected radical change. Or to use our terminology, a revolution.

Therein lies the potential for a delightful irony. The consultant sees the change as complying with known

norms and expectations, and the client sees it as a fundamental change to an organisation not yet prepared for so widespread or fundamental change. This can influence the consultant's communication with the client during the process of gaining the assignment. Bearing in mind that the client view is based on their perception, it will be for them a true revolutionary change.

Which assignment to do?

Marketing people distinguish between 'need' and 'want' for deciding marketing approaches. Until a need becomes a want, there is little point in trying to market or sell the

product or service. But with consultancy a third consideration arises. What type of assignment will I be able to convince the client to buy? The process from initial engagement, investigation and exploration of the requirements for consultancy, there is often an extensive dialogue and interaction with the client. Some say, there is often more consulting depth in the sales process for an assignment than in performing the resultant assignment.

An example of a dilemma posed in the past when BPR was fashionable will suffice to illustrate the choices for the consultant. An organisation may be considerably underperforming its competition, or in danger of becoming so. The need is probably for a radical change. The person interacting as the lead client contact with the consultant may have different views on the level of change necessary from others on the board. They may be aware of the growing reputation for BPR implementations causing job losses, while the vested interests of the individual client may be a factor, the risks associated with revolutionary assignments is higher than evolutionary one; but the benefit is potentially much higher too.

In essence, the consultant needs to consider the needs and wants of the organisation and the process of the procurement of the consultancy in order to decide what should be offered. In the worst case, the consultant will decide that what is required is not going to be procured. This may cause the ethical consultant to withdraw (see ICMCI Code of Professional Conduct). Being able, as a consultant, to make the necessary choices and prepare the client for the suggested assignment proposal is a key consultancy competence.

Those interested in overall consulting competences should see the ICMCI Competence Framework: the requirements of consultants interacting with clients in the provision of a management consultancy service have been recently defined in the ground-breaking new ISO standard, ISO20700 (obtainable from ISO and all national Standards Bodies) which is the first 'service' standard to be written for any profession or service provider. The considerations for a competent professional management consultant in deciding which service to offer are extensive and complex, and would be the basis for many future articles.



BECOMING A CONSULTANT.

Dr David M Biggs, , University of Gloucestershire

Introduction

A number of different authors have highlighted the need for postgraduate students to be work ready for a career in consulting. This paper examines a cohort of 21 MSc students from a UK based University and how they addressed this issue through an assignment geared up towards this aim. The completed assessments ranged in terms of the strategies the students used to assess their development needs for a career in consultancy. Strategies used consisted of: competency analysis, SWOT analysis, psychometric tests, use of the British Psychological Society consultancy cycle (from the Qualification in Occupational Psychology) and use of consultancy cycles from other sources. Interestingly there was a lack of consistency between students in terms of what strategies they chose to be future consultants. This research is useful because it systematically demonstrates which strategies may be used by postgraduates to identify the skills and behaviours they need for a consultancy career.

I want a job as a consultant

On completion of their first degree countless students want to embark on a career in consulting as it is a challenging but worthwhile venture. Nevertheless, consulting is a competitive industry. Inside Careers (2018) in partnership with the Management Consultancies Association (MCA) and the Institute of Consulting (IC) state that graduates must have a strong academic background with a minimum of an upper second class Honours degree or equivalent to have a chance of embarking on a career in consulting. Also needed are good interpersonal skills and a whole range of different behaviours such as: analytical capability, leadership, resilience, communication and technical skills (Inside Careers, 2018). Indeed, many students embark on a postgraduate degree that may help them develop

these additional behaviours and skills. Universities have capitalised on this and produced postgraduate programmes that encourage a student's employability.

In the 1950s, consultancy firms recruited the best and the brightest talent from the Business Schools who were graduating with a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA). This practice has changed somewhat nowadays and a variety of professionals from engineers through to occupational psychologists go into the consultancy field (Biggs, 2010). This is due to the attractiveness of the career not only in terms of variety of work but also in providing a real chance to practice knowledge learnt from University in a variety of organisations and businesses. Indeed, consulting gives you privileged access to small, large, public sector and private

sector organisations.

Skills and behaviours needed as a consultant

The skills and behaviours needed for a consultancy role are essential to develop to be successful as a consultant (Appelbaum, 2004). Skills can be taught and can range widely in consultancy practice. They can range from the so called soft skills like interpersonal communication through to more technical skills such as project management or data modelling skills. This is obviously dependent on what type of role and work a graduate wants to go into and how they can add value to their client using their own specific discipline.

So identifying skills as a potential consultant is essential in gaining employment. Identifying skills can be done fairly simply using a tool such as a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. Or it can be further augmented by learning more specific skills sets either from a technical side such as PRINCE2 Project Management or through specialist qualifications in consultancy.

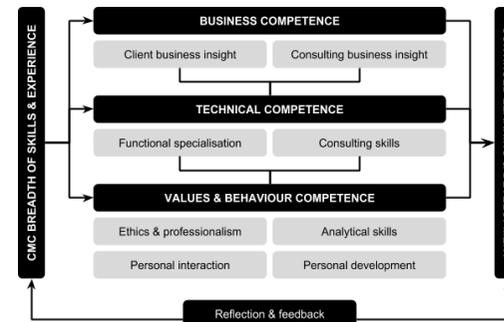
Skills are important in consulting but as Inside Careers (2018) reminds us, so are behaviours such as interpersonal skills. Occupational Psychologists work in analysing the behaviours that are important to good employee performance. Behaviour is not a theoretical construct but observable through evidence. It is what an individual "says" or "does" or the opposite, what they "don't say" or "do" when something is expected of them. These behaviours are often put together as a competency but several competencies often form a competency framework linked with effective or superior performance (Ballantyne & Povah, 2004). A competency framework should ideally encompass all of the behaviours necessary for effective performance in a particular job role (Bowler and Woehr, 2006).

Two competency frameworks useful in examining the behaviours needed for effective performance as a consultant are the International Council of Management Consulting Institutes (ICMCI) Certified Management Consultant (CMC) competence framework and my own eight consultancy competency framework (Biggs, 2010). The ICMCI CMC competence framework has eight competencies in total, clustered into three broad themes of Business Competence, Technical Competence and Values and Behaviour Competence (see Figure one). Interestingly, this framework combines both skills such as analytical skills and behaviour.

Other approaches are more purist in terms of separating behaviours and skills. Skills as mentioned earlier can be developed, whereas behaviours are more innate and are

harder to change so occupational psychologists often separate the two (Biggs, 2010). In terms of the eight consultancy competency framework, this utilised two job analyses from consultancy firms and a meta-analysis of the competency framework literature (Woehr and Arthur, 2003).

Figure One: Certified Management Consultant Competence Framework (ICMCI, 2014)



Both of these competency frameworks have many similarities. Either of these frameworks, or others from specific consultancy firms, can be used to examine a person's repertoire of behaviours. This can then lead to an examination of those behaviours at an individual level leading to a list of development needs. Biggs (2010) is probably more apt for entry level consultants as it is meant for a graduate market concentrating on building up behaviours through experience performing activities. The ICMCI framework is good for a professional market as it is orientated towards the Certified Management Consultant qualification and develops through stages all geared towards improving consultancy competence through initially developing a client business insight, through to delivering achievable and sustainable results through personal interaction and development.

Given that there are academic sources of information directly geared towards the graduate or postgraduate seeking a career in consulting, this paper was interested in what students actually do, when given the opportunity to assess themselves ready for a career in consulting. This competency framework is shown in Figure two.

Figure two.

Communication

The extent to which an individual conveys oral and written information and responds to questions and challenges

Influencing others

The extent to which an individual persuades others to do something or adopt a point of view in order to produce desired results and takes action in which the dominant influence is one's own convictions rather than the influence of others' opinions

Organising and planning

The extent to which an individual systematically arranges his/her own work and resources as well as that of others for efficient task accomplishment; and the extent to which an individual anticipates and prepares for the future

Problem solving

The extent to which an individual gathers information; understands relevant technical and professional information; effectively analyses data and information; generates viable options, ideas, and solutions; selects supportable courses of action for problems and situations; uses available resources in new ways; and generates and recognises imaginative solutions

Teamwork and consideration of others

The extent to which an individual considers the needs of others, participates as a member of a group and is aware of the impact and implications of decisions relevant to others

Leadership

The extent to which an individual takes on the responsibility for providing focus to a team and develops members of that team

Drive

The extent which an individual originates and maintains a high activity level, sets high performance standards and persists in their achievement, and expresses the desire to advance

Tolerance for stress/uncertainty

The extent to which an individual maintains effectiveness in diverse situations under varying degrees of pressure, opposition, and disappointment

BECOMING A CONSULTANT. (Cont.)

Method

• **Participants**

Participants were obtained from a cohort of MSc Occupational Psychology students undertaking a consultancy skills practice module. All 21 students had submitted assignments creating a 5,000 word comprehensive portfolio critically analysing and reflecting on their existing skills and any gaps to be addressed going forward as a consultant. Students had volunteered their work to be assessed by the programme team and the external examiner. Confidentiality and anonymity was assured as the analysis of the data would not reveal any specific participant details.

• **Materials**

The materials available for the purposes of this research included the portfolios written by each individual participant, group PowerPoint presentations and feedback from the external consultants involved in the groups presentation, external examiner and programme team.

• **Design**

The design was quantitative in that content analysis was used to categorise the strategies of the students in preparing for a career in consulting. This methodology has been used in other similar studies (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007).

• **Procedure**

The assignment material relevant to this research was gathered and categorised in terms of types of materials available. While the PowerPoints and video materials were considered, the portfolio assignments were the most relevant source of material for the study. These were analysed in terms of their content, which is detailed below in our results section.

Results

The results of the study demonstrated that the participants adopted a number of different strategies for analysing themselves in preparation for a career in consulting. Table A exhibits the main strategies employed. The most common strategy was use of the SWOT analysis with 14 of the 21 students completing this on themselves. Competencies were also employed with ten students assessing their behaviours. All but four students had used a consultancy cycle to illustrate how they could develop. Interestingly, the main source of this came from the stage 2 qualification in occupational psychology (QOP) by the British Psychological Society. However, other sources (Biggs, 2010; Block, 2011; Cockman, Evans, & Reynolds, 1992; O'Mahoney & Markham, 2013; Sabari, 1977; Stevens & Campion, 1994) were used looking at the consultancy cycle either separately or in combination with the QOP consultancy cycle. A surprising strategy was seen with six of the participants, who used psychometric instruments as feedback for their assessment of their development needs.

Some of the strategies excluded from Table A were used feedback on previous consulting based assignments completed by two participants. And one student innovatively used the Johari model of feedback to analyse themselves from their own perspective and the perspective of others (Luft and Ingrams, 1955).

Discussion

The world of consulting is fascinating and offers a stimulating career. Students are attracted to it as they can develop themselves as professionals and occupational psychologists are no exception to this. The identification of skills and behaviours is arguably the first step to take in this endeavor. Universities keen to improve the employability of their students have encouraged this practice. Indeed, postgraduate degrees often have a consultancy skills or professional skills module. This study specifically examined which strategies students would use to prepare themselves for a career in consulting. Interestingly, a range of strategies were used.

The SWOT analysis was by far the most common method that students used to assess their development needs. Not all the participants completed a SWOT analysis and those that did not tended to use an alternative, such as a competency framework. The competency framework was used by half of the sample who demonstrated their ratings of their behaviour in a systematic way (Biggs, 2010).

The six students that did not use a SWOT or competency framework relied on reflective practice to assess their development needs.

A consultancy cycle approach was used by all but 4 of the students. The most common consultancy cycle used was from the British Psychological Society's QOP doctorate qualification (BPS, 2017). The outline of which is given in

The rating of this was also relatively easy to grasp as being either acceptable or non-acceptable (See Table B). The consultancy cycle was used to illustrate what gaps in the participants skills, behaviours and knowledge they had. This was useful in assessing their potential development needs, that they could work on either while at University or in their entry level employment.

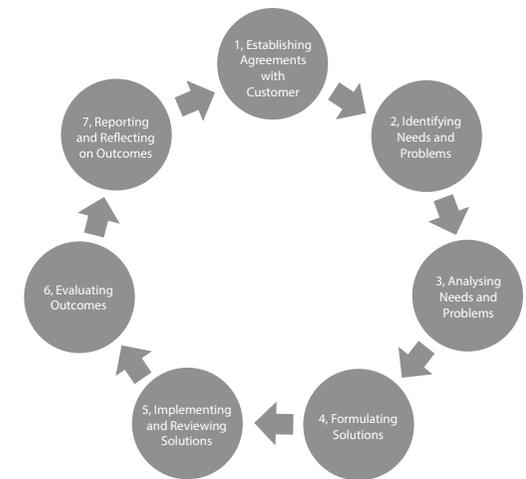


Figure Three: Consultancy cycle (BPS, 2017)

	Used SWOT analysis	Used Competency Framework	Used BPS guidance	Other consultancy cycle used	Used Psychometric tests
Totals	14	11	10	86	

Table A: Results of the content analysis

BECOMING A CONSULTANT. (Cont.)

ACCEPTABLE

Establishing Agreements with Customers

Details how agreements established with the customer? A meeting to discuss your role? Responsibilities? What the project involves? Time frames
Outlines agreements made with the customer – what agreement did you come to.

Identifying Needs and Problems

Details how needs and problems were identified. For example through discussions with the customer, meeting with stakeholders, a needs analysis. Outlines what the needs and problems were.

Analysing Needs and Problems

Outlines how the needs and problems were analysed such as through analytical tools, analysis of data etc.

Formulating Solutions

Based on what you have found so far from the analysis what are the potential solutions, how were these formulated? Based on what information? Literature?

Implementing and Reviewing Solutions

This is the implementation stage. What was implemented and how? How was this reviewed to ensure what you implemented is working? Were any changes made?

Evaluating Outcomes

How was an evaluation conducted to ensure you met the project outcomes agreed with the customer? What was found? Sometimes a client will not pay for an evaluation, but you can evaluate whether the outcomes agreed with the customer have been met and explain how you have evaluated this.

Reporting and Reflecting on Outcomes

Reporting on outcomes may involve the writing of a report, a presentation to the client etc. Reflecting involves you reflecting on the outcomes of the project, what you would change if faced with a similar project in the future, any issues you had, what worked well.

NOT ACCEPTABLE

Establishing Agreements with Customers

Provides insufficient detail on how the agreements were formed, what the agreements were etc.

Identify Needs and Problems

Lacks detail of how the need and problems were identified – may just outline what the needs and problems are.

Analysing Needs and Problems

Does not outline how the needs and problems were analysed. May just identify the outcome of the analysis.

Formulating Solutions

Does not outline how solutions formulated but may just outline what the solutions are. Lacks details on what information was used to formulate the solutions.

Implementing and Reviewing Solutions

Not enough detail provided on what was implemented, how and why. May outline the implementation but not detail how it was reviewed, whether any changes were made.

Evaluating Outcomes

Lacks detail of evaluation or the candidate is not able to conduct an evaluation due to the client not wanting one.

Reporting and Reflecting on Outcomes

Lacks sufficient detail. For example may state they have developed a report but not what was reported. May outline the reporting aspect but not the reflecting on outcomes.



Psychometric tests were also used by a small number of the sample to illustrate areas that are often hidden but can be revealed through psychometric evaluation. This information did supplement the strategies used by the students in gaining skills necessary to become a consultant by providing scientific information about personality traits, preferences and even their team roles. Again, given the sample consisted of trainee occupational psychologists it is not surprising that they used psychometric evaluation.

Conclusions

This paper extends current knowledge in the area of consulting by exploring the strategies employed by postgraduate students in preparing themselves for a career in the industry. Students used a mixture of behavioural and skills techniques to determine what they needed to develop to become a consultant. Behavioural techniques almost exclusively consisted of using competency frameworks to investigate their prior actions in terms of what contributed towards prior achievements. In terms of examining skills, the SWOT technique was used examining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that the individual faced. Most students also used a consultancy cycle to illustrate what development needs they may have. The consultancy cycle of choice was predominately from their professional body. However, other sources of information put forward by academics were used either instead of the professional body's cycle or as a compliment to this progression. More advanced students also used psychometric testing to look at their personality traits or team orientation. Again this knowledge was intertwined with the other evidence gathered leading to a thorough assessment of the students development needs for a consultancy role.

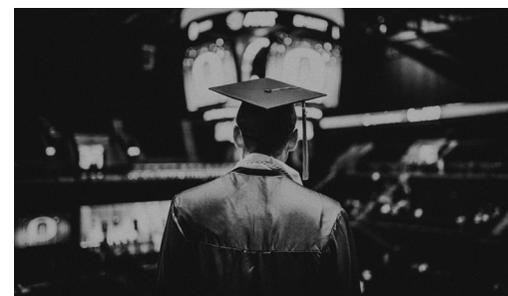


Table B: Assessment criteria for the BPS (2017) QOP consultancy cycle