

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE PARTICULARITIES IN THE CLIENT-CONSULTANT RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

Change brings with it new problems, the solutions to which cannot be derived from past experience. Many changes occurring simultaneously and interacting with each other give rise to complexity. The essence of consultancy lies in the twin activities of devising solutions to new problems and in resolving complicated issues. Thus, the greater the rate of change, the greater the demand for consultancy services.

Key words: consultancy, client, perspective, relationship.

Consultancy as both a science and an art. Consultancy as a science provides knowledge, models to enhance understanding, diagnostic and measurement tools. Consultancy as an art is a relational process, an expression of belief and values, and an act of emotional exploration within the bounds of a social relationship.

There are many definitions of consultancy as there are consultants; each consultant and consultancy has their own slant on the work they do. The service provided to business, public or other undertakings by an independent and qualified person or persons in identifying and investigating problems concerned with policy, organization, procedures and methods, recommending appropriate action and helping to implement those recommendations.

Management consulting is an advisory service contracted for and provided to organizations by specially trained and qualified persons who assist, in an objective and independent manner, the client organization to identify problems, analyze such problems, recommend solutions to these problems and help, when requested, in the implementation of solutions. (4)

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The paper was accomplished using information from specialized literature. This paper intends to present the importance on consultancy within agriculture development. Based on bibliographical references, the following indicated: the dimension of relationships, models of

intervention, the purposes from both the client and the consultant's perspective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A consultant is defined as someone who either advises a client (another person or an organization) on the desirability of taking some action, or who assists the client in making a decision and then assists the client in planning or implementing action as determined by the client. Several points are stated or implied by this definition:

First, a consultant works for other people (or organizations) called clients. These clients, or beneficiaries of the consultant's services, can be individuals, groups, or organizations.

Second, a consultant helps these clients achieve goals that the clients, not the consultant, identify. The point here is that the client usually decides what problems need attention or what initiatives need to be implemented, and the consultant is hired to address these.

Third, a consultant provides a specialized skill or expertise that the client, or client organization, is unable to provide on its own. For example, it is common for companies to hire a consultant to train employees in a new computer technology or to conduct a study on a topic in which the consultant, but no one in the hiring organization, has expertise.

Fourth, although consultants may influence decision making by virtue of their knowledge or expertise, consultants usually have little power or authority to make changes. A consultant may

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recommend changes, and even how to make them, but the client retains ultimate authority over whether and which changes to implement.

The success or failure of a consulting project is often determined in large measure long before a contract is signed or anyone has agreed to work together. This is true whether the consultant and client have never met or if they have worked together on many projects. In either case, the first phase of a project—typically the first face-to-face meeting—is extremely important, as this is when the expectations and goals of the project are established. If the consultant and client have never worked together, then the first phase of the project is also when both parties assess whether they will be able to work together effectively and comfortably.

For your first meeting with a client or prospective client to be successful it is essential that you come prepared. You need to know which questions you want to address, as well as how to respond to the client's questions.

The nature of a relationship can be inferred from the way in which it is generated. Once the client and consultant have made it to the stage of face-to-face contact, then other influences exert their effects. As in all relationships, the client–consultant one journeys through various phases. In the interests of encouraging reflection, a framework of four phases is offered for consideration (1),(6):

- Orientation;
- Identification;
- Exploration;
- Resolution.

The client needs help with something they are unable to do or choose not to do for themselves, and the consultant offers assistance and expertise in one form or another in response to this need. In classic terms, the consultant is there to identify, clarify and meet the needs of the client, usually in the form of helping them solve a particular problem.

There are three important themes in consultancy:

- Identifying a problem;
- Recommending a solution;
- Helping with implementation.

These three characteristics of consultancy necessitate different roles and require very different competences on the part of the consultant. Thus, the consultant will sometimes adopt the role of mentor, at other times the role of creator, while on other occasions the consultant is, in reality, a leader.

The client–consultant relationship can often begin before face-to-face contact, especially at the level of the idealized relationship.(3).

The forms or models of consultancy tend to have prescribed or recommended modes of intervention, based on their own implicit or explicit views of what the client–consultant relationship ought to be like.

Some examples of these include client-centred consultancy, process consultancy, coaching, business process re-engineering, structural change, problem solving, action research, product development, market research and so on.(5)

Authoritative interventions are:

- Prescriptive directing, advising, recommending, suggesting, requesting;
- Informative telling, interpreting, demonstrating, giving feedback;
- Confronting contradict, disagree, ask challenging questions, raise awareness.

Facilitative interventions are:

- Cathartic releasing tension, physically stretching, inviting expression of feeling, using humour;
- Catalytic using self-discovery structures, open/closed questioning, reflecting, summarizing;
- Supportive valuing, affirming, appreciating, expressing concern, welcoming.

The consultancy that can think through the purpose from the client's perspective as well as its own is more likely to be successful than one that views things from its own perspective only.

Tabel 1

Consultancy versus client

The purposes from the consultancy's perspective	The purposes from the client's perspective
– Gaining economic benefit from the assignment.	– Gaining economic benefits from the results of the intervention.
– Understanding the real problem or issue the client faces.	– Matching the consultancy's view with its own understanding.
– Making sure that the firm has the competence to deliver a good result.	– Understanding the capabilities of the consultancy firm.
– Convincing the client that this firm is the one to choose.	– Being convinced that this consultancy firm is the best and will deliver the expected value.
– Enhancing the reputation of the firm even if the bid is not won.	– Reinforcing the belief that the bid is not appropriate firms were chosen a bid.

There are many different approaches to management consulting, and these affect how knowledge is applied. Four styles of consulting are described here:

Task - This is the independent investigation of a problem or issue a client is facing, leading to the collection and assessment of evidence, analysis, conclusions and recommendations.

Process - As its name suggests, this approach to consulting is concerned with making processes more effective rather than with problems such as where the client should build the new factory. The consultant's role may be to give hands-on help to improve the process.

Knowledge transfer - This requires the skills of both the task and the process consultant, plus some coaching and counselling abilities. Here the consultant works with the people in the organization, transferring the methods needed for the assignment to them and helping them to interpret the results and reach decisions.

Adviser/counselor - This approach provides expert knowledge, on a day-to-day basis, helping managers to reach the best decision on a variety of issues as they arise. (2)

Many consultants - Often the good ones, have an on going identity crisis. Are they experts, counsellors, salespeople, trainers or what? Being an effective consultant requires that you have a fluid identity, or even several different identities or roles, and the capacity to flow seamlessly from one to the other. Multiple roles or identities, while essential for good consultancy, are also a hazard if managed badly and can lead to considerable confusion and conflict in the relationship between client and consultant. For example, if one day you are negotiating hard over fees and the contract and the next you are acting as facilitator or counsellor to the same person, the potential for transference or interference of one relationship dynamic with the other in an unhelpful way is immense. Possible consultant roles include guide, mentor, friend, troubleshooter, shadow consultant, problem-solver, evaluator, confidant, project manager, systems analyst, role model, guru, designer/innovator, report writer, critical reflector and so on.

Technical expert - The 'expert' role is one of adding value by exhibiting knowledge and a high level of competence in an area of expertise. Often this will entail doing something on behalf of the client, such as designing a new system, training staff in a new skill, acting as a trouble-shooter in areas beyond the client's current expertise or where it is more economic to hire it in from outside. Little collaboration is involved, other than the client facilitating and monitoring the actions of

the expert. The consultant's expertise may relate to either content or process, and when the consultant is hired for, or speaking from, this role, they are expected to speak authoritatively and will commonly use prescriptive, informative and occasionally confronting interventions. The expert role needs to be used in the full knowledge that the client is free to avail themselves of or reject advice or guidance, and such advice is best given with a view to eventually enabling autonomy in the client system. That is, you are authoritative with a view to the client becoming authoritative for themselves. Problems often arise when the expert is so focused on the 'expert task' that they fail to take account of the impact of their consulting on people affected by their work.

Counsellor - This role is becoming more common in the repertoire of the consultant, especially for those focusing on people issues. Depending on the approach, the role may focus on releasing the inherent potential of the individual or helping the client solve their problems and meet their needs. The relationship can often be problematical in that consultants using this role can often experience conflict about who the real client is, and may feel torn between the expressed needs of the client and those of the contracting manager. Maintaining appropriate boundaries, both in contracting and practice, is crucial to building the necessary trust with the client – more so, if you are an internal consultant.

Advocate - Some believe the consultant should retain a neutral stance and not become an advocate or source of influence. Being a process advocate is often seen as more acceptable these days than a product or solution advocate. Many consultants are hired for their know-how, which is needed to help clients generate their own solutions. Advocacy is also sometimes necessary to support and strengthen people within the organization, and the consultant will need to be acquainted with a range of influencing strategies and behaviours.

Coach/educator - This role has become central to all forms of consultancy that have change within and via people as part or the whole of their aims. Transfer of learning and expertise from consultant to client has become one of the key benchmarks of successful consulting and this is crucial if inappropriate dependency on the consultant is to be avoided.

Researcher - The role of researcher has often been reduced to one of fact finding and diagnosis. This idea has been reinforced by the common practice of consultants generating data and solutions, but not being involved in their practical implementation. Both the consultant and client in a

collaborative relationship aimed at generating the focus of research, gathering data, making sense of it, implementing solutions and evaluating them in successive cycles of action and research.(7)

CONCLUSIONS

Most change occurs via people, and they have their own personal needs that must be fulfilled. The consultancy project and work are part of their lives, although the tendency is to see the people as part of the consultancy project and thus forget the broader backdrop of their humanity and the impact the project might have on them.

The contribution that consultants make in spreading new ideas, and providing methods to turn them from academic theory to practical advantage, is very real.

The speed with which the business environment is changing carries with it a number of implications for the consultancy industry.

To remain effective, consultants need to be fully aware of the major trends and able to assess the impact of these on the strategic positions of their clients.

Consultants must develop considerable competence in the field of change management if they are to be of real value to their clients. Successful implementation in today's climate calls for great sensitivity to the various causes of

resistance to change, sensitivity of a kind that comes with considerable experience of change management in a range of situations.

They must also develop other skills in such diverse fields as IT, working across cultures, using psychometric tools and survey research methods.

Finally, the consulting firm itself must adapt to new environmental pressures and opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was supported by the project funded through the Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013, Contract no. POSDRU/107/1.5/ S/76888

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