Abby Allison

Mr. Speice

Independent Study and Mentorship Program

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<u>Learning Through Teaching</u>

<u>Research Assessment 2</u>

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Subject: Strategy Management Consulting

Works Cited:

Kubr, Milan. *Management Consulting: a Guide to the Profession*. Fourth ed.,

International Labour Office, 2007

http://ksg.vse.cz/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/MC.pdf.

Assessment:

To begin my journey in ISM for management consulting, I decided it was not

only important to know the duties of the job, but how to better understand the path of a

consultant entering the field. Teaching a skill is important because when you know how

to teach, you gain a better understanding yourself.

The chapter from the book I read led me to understand how experienced

consultants teach new consultants. To summarize, the chapter stated each firm differs in

how they train a new consultant, but most firms train the correct mindset and strategies.

In addition, many firms have new consultants shadow an experienced consultant. This information proves ISM will help me in my future. If I shadow a mentor now, I will be one step ahead of other consultants wishing to enter the field. The information modifies my original thoughts on management consulting strategy. Before, I believed the strategies used by consultants would remain the same throughout time, but they actually change quite frequently and must be factored into the teaching of new consultants. This information is significant because if I choose this as my career, I will need to stay updated with changes and adapt. The article also stated many subjects which will help management consultants or should be taken in college by those who wish to be a management consultant. This information had a direct impact on me now because almost all of the studies listed including sociology, psychology, statistics, economics, management and organization theory, are offered at my high school, so next year I can already get familiar with these skills.

In order to gain more knowledge in management consulting, I will take into account the transition from being trained to being a real consultant. It is important to understand they train you for a while before sending you into the field because it will affect earning ability right after college, which I discovered in my last research assessment with starting salary. This information is valuable when creating plan to develop my individual work because after learning how often the management consulting field changes, I need to act quickly on ideas and develop good ideas fast. This new information leads me to question the difficulty of finding a consulting job and the process

involved. Also, I would like to learn more specific information on what you need to know coming into the field to better prepare me for meetings with my mentor. This chapter did inform me of what consultants should learn, but it was very general. It was too broad to take much strong information out of it. The new information I got out of it involving experience, thought-processing skills and how management consulting is constantly changing was helpful.

I hope to take this new information into account during my first meetings with my mentor because in a way I will be in training. Now that I understand more about how to enter the field and training, it will be easier on my mentor and myself to get started with other topics. I wish to ask my mentor about their training experience, any tips regarding learning faster or courses to take now to better equip myself for management consulting in the future.

37.1 What should consultants learn?

A remarkable diversity of personalities, clients, subjects handled, intervention methods and consulting firms' philosophies is a prominent feature of the consulting profession. Because of this diversity, there are probably as many different paths to individual proficiency as there are consultants. As in other professions, some individuals will learn faster than others and achieve higher proficiency, owing to a happy concourse of a number of circumstances: talent, drive, educational background, complexity and novelty of assignments executed, and leadership and support provided by the consulting firm.

The training and development policies of consulting firms, and of the profession at large, tend to respect this diversity, offering a range of choices that permit learning to be harmonized with individual needs and possibilities. At the same time, the profession has aimed to achieve the necessary minimum level of uniformity and standardization, reflecting the common and prevailing needs of consultants at various stages of a typical professional career. Leading consulting firms and professional associations have devoted a lot of energy to these questions. As the profession is a young and rapidly evolving one, and distilling common needs and principles from constantly changing diversity is not easy, the task is far from being completed. Nevertheless, some useful guidance and support materials, outlining the consultants' professional profiles and common knowledge base, are available.[2]

Elements of consultant competence

Generally speaking, a consultant's competence can be described in terms of personality traits, aptitudes, attitudes, knowledge and skills. These elements of competence are interlinked and influence each other.[3] Personality traits and aptitudes were mentioned in the previous chapter in the discussion on recruitment criteria. Traits determine how a person will react "to any general set of events which allow the trait to be expressed".[4] Thus, traits define a typical thought pattern and resultant behaviour characteristic of a person in a variety of situations. Examples of personality traits are propensity to take initiative, ambition, flexibility, patience, self-confidence, shyness, and the like. Examples of aptitudes are manual dexterity or linguistic ability. Attitudes are a person's feelings for or against certain issues, and therefore

they reflect values that a person holds. They concern matters of human preference and result from choices between competing interests. Examples of attitudes or values are a preference for oral rather than written communication, tolerance of other people's religious beliefs and cultural values, or preference for having people of certain nationalities or technical backgrounds as direct collaborators.Knowledge is retained information concerning facts, concepts, relationships and processes.5It is useful to distinguish between general and specialized knowledge. In consulting, general knowledge concerns economic, social, political and cultural processes, institutions and environments that constitute a general background for consulting interventions in specific organizations or systems. There are then two sorts of specialized knowledge. ==The first concerns the object of consulting, i.e. the consultant's special sector or technical area of intervention.== Examples of sectors are manufacturing, banking and insurance, while examples of technical areas are marketing, production organization, job evaluation and corporate strategy. ==The second area of knowledge concerns consulting per se – its principles, processes, organization, methods and techniques.==

Skill is the ability to do things: to apply knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes effectively in work situations. Skills too can be broken down into several groups. Some of the consultant's skills will be generic, e.g. social and cultural skills. Other skills will be common to consultants and their clients (managers and entrepreneurs). The difference will be in the required breadth and depth of mastery of certain skills. Probably the consultant will be more skillful in interviewing and providing advice than a typical manager, but may lag behind managers in the skills of organizing, coordinating, mobilizing people and speedy decision-making. There are, then, the skills that are particular to consultants, advisers and other helpers whose job has been described as "getting things done when you are not in charge".6 These professionals have to be competent in assessing the problems and opportunities of organizations for which they are not responsible and where they have not worked, developing and presenting proposals, providing feedback and reports to decision-makers and their collaborators, and so on.Training and development of consultants 801

The difference between the content and the level of competence is signifi-cant. Thus, various elements of managing consultancy projects are listed among key consultant skills and components of their body of knowledge. However, there will be a difference in the required level of this competence between an entry-level consultant and a partner supervising several major projects. This difference will have to be duly reflected in training programmes for various levels of consultants.

A body of consultant knowledge and skills

In Chapter 6 we referred to a defined "body of knowledge" – an overview of the areas of generic competence of a mature and experienced management consultant. As a rule, such a document will indicate common threshold competencies, not those required for doing a particular job or achieving superior performance.7It is useful to refer to a complete text of a body of knowledge in designing a training programme for consultants. However, it is important to remember that these documents are not intended to lay down the scientific foundations of consulting as a field of learning. The reader may well conclude that, in his or her particular context, other topics should be covered in training, or the topics listed should be grouped and presented in a different way. Irrespective of differences in terminology and layout, the principal areas covered in a common body of consultant knowledge will normally be close to those outlined in box 37.1. The multidisciplinary nature of consulting is obvious, as the topics listed draw on sociology, psychology, statistics, economics, management and organization theory, and other disciplines. Some topics are confined to the description of good or best experience without aiming at scientific analysis and theoretical justification.

Substantive area of expertise and the business environment

Training and development in the substantive areas of the consultant's expertise and in the wider business, institutional, legal and social environment are becoming ever more important. There are several reasons for this. New recruits to consulting may have an excellent technical background but a rather narrow perspective and limited knowledge of the environments in which businesses operate. As they progress in their careers and accept more complex assignments, many consultants need to master new areas and widen their knowledge base to cover areas outside their original background and main area of competence. Another reason is the extremely high speed with which management concepts and techniques emerge, gain importance and popularity, and become obsolete – to be replaced in many cases by other concepts and techniques. This race for originality and novelty forces consultants to be always fully up to date and well informed. While it is not easy to recognize the difference between essential state-of-the-art developments and passing fads, a management consultant cannot afford to answer a client enquiring about a new technique:

"I've never heard of it", "You can ignore it, it's not important to you", or "Our firm does not use this technique". Furthermore, information and telecommunications technology is omnipresent and rapidly changing in all sectors and functions of management.Training and retraining in IT and its management applications have therefore become a standard part of any consultant development programme.

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Box 37.1   Areas of consultant knowledge and skills

Orientation to management consulting

- Nature and objectives of consulting; consultants and clients; consulting and change

- Basic consulting styles and approaches

- Types of consulting services and organizations

Consulting and other professions

- Management consulting as a career

- Organization of the profession

- Professional ethics and conduct

- Historical development, present position and future perspectives of consulting

- Professions close to consulting (audit, legal advice, training, etc.)

Overview of the consulting process

- Framework and stages of a consulting assignment (project)

- Entry

- Diagnosis

- Action planning

- Implementation

- Termination

Analytical and problem-solving skills

- Systematic approach to problem-solving in management and business

- Methods for diagnosing organizations and their performance

- Data collection and recording

- Data and problem analysis

- Techniques for developing action proposals

- Creative thinking

- Evaluating and selecting alternatives

- Measuring and evaluating project results

Behavioural, communication and change management skills

- Human and behavioural aspects of the consulting process and the consultant–client relationship
- The client's psychology
- Behavioural roles of the consultant and the client
- Consulting and culture
- Techniques for diagnosing attitudes, human relations, behaviour and management styles
- Techniques for generating and assisting change in people and in organizations

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- Managing conflict
- Communication and persuasion techniques
- Teamwork and the conduct of meetings
- Using training in consulting; assessing client training needs; designing training programmes
- Management and staff training concepts and techniques
- Courtesy and etiquette in consultant–client relations
- Effective report writing and presentation

Marketing and managing assignments

- Principles of marketing in professional services
- Marketing approaches and techniques
- Consultant selection criteria and procedures
- Proposals to clients (planning, preparation, presentation)
- Consulting contracts and their negotiation
- Fee setting
- Structuring, planning and staffing an assignment
- Managing and controlling an assignment
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Reporting to the client and to the consulting firm
Managing and developing a consulting practice
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Considerations in establishing and structuring a consulting firm; legal forms
•
Economics and strategy of a consulting firm
•
Governance, organizational culture and management style in professional firms
•
Knowledge management
•
Recruiting, developing and remunerating consultants
•
Financial management of the firm
•
Operational management and control; monitoring performance
•
Leading and coaching consultants
•
Quality assurance and management
•
Professional responsibility and liability
•
Information technology in professional firms
•
Internal administration and office management

Consultants who specialize sectorally need to keep abreast of sectoral developments, including sector-specific technologies, principal products, leading producers and distributors, competition, restructuring of firms, economic trends and prospects, employment and social issues, environmental considerations and the like.

Consultant development matrix

The consultant development matrix in figure 37.1 gives a rough idea of how training needs change in the course of a typical consulting career. To simplify, three stages in the career are shown (initial, advanced, managerial). Between these stages, there is a shift in emphasis from basic, operational and methodology issues, which dominate initial training, through assignment (project) marketing and management (which includes leading teams of consultants), to practice management and development. As indicated in the matrix, owing to the rapidly changing state of the art in consulting, every area requires updating at all levels of the hierarchy.

Impact of the firm's strategic choices

In Chapter 28 we stressed the need for consistency between the consulting firm's basic strategic choices, and the training and development of its professional staff. Although some common basic training has to be given to all consultants, firms do not normally develop their staff to make them more

competent in general terms, but to fit the firm's particular profile and to understand and implement its strategy. Strategies can be very different, and so will be training policies and programmes. For example, firms engaged mainly in the development and installation of management systems will provide a great deal of formal and structured staff training in the design and application of these systems. Firms practising action learning and process consulting as their principal intervention technologies will put more emphasis on behavioural, communication and human resource development approaches and techniques.