
The Seven Cs of Consulting: Your Complete Blueprint for Any Consultancy Assignment

Mick Cope (*Financial Times/Prentice Hall*;
2000; ISBN 0-273-645110) \$29

REVIEWED BY REES W. MORRISON CMC

Mick Cope, a consultant in England for the past 15 years and with CatalystDevelopment at the time of publication, describes in *The Seven Cs of Consulting* a comprehensive framework for delivering value through sustained change by an objective agent—his definition of consulting. According to Cope, every consulting project proceeds—or should proceed—through his seven stages, albeit varying in each project by emphasis, timing, and detail. His book lays out a comprehensive framework for consulting as well as a storehouse of tools for consultants.

Structure of the Book—Seven Stages and Seven Components

Devoting 15 to 25 pages to each stage, Cope explains the overall framework and his seven stages. *Client*—Understand who the client is, how she views the situation, what he would like to accomplish, and what value you—the consultant—can

deliver for fees acceptable to the client. *Clarify*—Understand the problem and the holistic system in which it exists, along with the necessary participants in the change process and the risks that may buffet a project. *Create*—Create a plan (proposal) for how you will undertake the change process. *Change*—Think through what Cope refers to as the “soft issues,” such as energy, engagement, system dynamics, and resistance, so that the plan you create will succeed. *Confirm*—Ensure that positive change has taken place, mostly by measuring details. *Continue*—Imprint the change on the client organization so that the client will sustain the improvement. *Close*—Close the engagement with the client.

The initial four stages will resonate with every consultant—know what your client wants, how your situation stands broadly, where you can intervene, and what the results are supposed to be. All well and good.

But this reviewer was struck by the final three stages. Cope maintains that it is the obligation of the consultant to make sure that the client advances with the consultant’s recommendations (*Confirm* and *Continue* stages). Moreover, it is the obligation of the consultant to end the client’s dependency on the consultant, the *Close* stage. Those facets of con-

sulting, Cope maintains, are as important as the preceding four stages.

This reader, for one, has never tried to have a client pay for determining whether the project achieved its goals. Nor has it been a necessary measure of success that the client adopt all the recommendations of the consultant. Finally, that Cope views weaning a client from the consultant as a major task suggests a level of involvement most consultants can only aspire to. Most consultants want to become a reliable mainstay of their clients. Still, Cope does not stop with his framework of stages.

Cope carries his seven-stage structure miles farther. Each of the seven stages cohabits with seven subelements and diagnostic tools. Here is the storehouse bursting with ideas for consultants. For example, in the second stage, when you *Clarify* (“understand the real issues”), you invoke *Diagnosis*, *Shadow*, *Culture*, *System construction*, *Stakeholders*, *Lifecycle risk*, and *Feedback*. Cope sketches each of these aspects of the *Clarify* stage.

To further emphasize each stage, Cope highlights what he calls “back-pocket questions,” inquiries that will help the consultant proceed more effectively. Of the seven questions in the *Change* stage, the one for the element called

“Stream Owners” is “Have I found clear owners for the solution? Do they have the capability and desire to own them?” The back-pocket questions help pinpoint what a consultant should focus on while working through that technique. Fortunately, all of this elaborate structure comes together in a removable card that is stitched into the back of the book.

Fertile Ideas

The very structure of the book—multiple stages and components—means that it offers ideas about consulting across a wide field. True, its 7-by-7 structure makes for a few forced subelements, but it also sprinkles the pages with ideas, and many of them will instruct even the most experienced consultant.

The *Seven Cs of Consulting* will reward every reader with new ideas for how to consult more effectively. At the risk of sounding naïve, let me note some ideas that I stored away from the book: Have the *client* commit to certain actions during the project; previously, in proposals only the consultant committed to complete tasks. Start fact gathering from the most senior level. For example, this reviewer works with law departments and almost always interviews members of the department before talking with the General Counsel. In other words, I strive to develop my own sense of the issues in the department before hearing from the General Counsel. Cope argues the opposite: learning about the problem and its source from your client *before* you begin with detailed fact finding. A third novelty: Cope operates in a world where the consultant signs a contract with the client, and only then proposes how to address the client’s problem. This reviewer uses a proposal for both purposes—as a road map to the project and as a commitment binding on both sides. Cope makes much of having clients keep personal logs “to observe themselves and to record what actions they take, to whom they talk and what they think about certain issues.” A final idea, new

for this reviewer, was that of “storyboards”—a “sequential model of both text and pictures that describes the journey a change might take.” In short, every consultant who reads this book will underline some new techniques or twists on old standbys.

Aside from the cornucopia of ideas, the book presents a raft of “concept visuals”—simple graphics that drive home a point. Concept visuals are a solid technique for consultants who write or give presentations, and Cope creates many of them (dare we say copiously?). The “change ladder” is but one of dozens of examples, as is the “energy map” and the “Change U Loop.”

Cope delivers on his promise to create *frameworks* for understanding consulting. He adores taxonomies. He makes distinctions between, say, types of change and gives each type an alphabetic name: Accidental, Backstage, Controlled, Debate, and so forth. (In general, Cope is addicted to the number seven and to mnemonics for his lists: Artifacts, Beliefs, Controls, Discourse, Energy, Flow, and Generative are all grist for the Cultural stage mill.)

Back to taxonomies and distinctions, where we could choose from many. He divides projects into hard projects and soft projects, with the former delivering tangible, visible outcomes like a new computer system and the latter delivering change in people’s behavior. He then overlays the model of forced change and chosen change. Immediately, a two-by-two matrix contrasts and compares hard and soft projects that are forced or chosen. Other examples include a model for gathering data based on “outside-in,” which uses a hypothesis and analytic checklist, and “inside-out,” which derives emergent patterns out of the data process. Articulating models and delineating differences between kinds of consulting issues and practices marks a strength of *The Seven Cs of Consulting*. At the very least, they should make the reader re-think his or her approaches to consulting.

Underlying Assumptions

The book rests on a number of underlying assumptions, each of which influences the value of the material. Here are five: (1) Cope assumes mostly the situation of one consultant assisting one client who doesn’t understand the core problem(s). Thus, he talks at length about filters, all of which is intriguing but none of which matters much in a multiperson, multiclient project. (2) He also advocates thinking about everything before acting, a cerebral approach. But some kinds of consulting involve doing something, like surveying clients, that doesn’t warrant deep thought. (3) Cope rarely mentions competition for work. Instead, it is as if the client has come to the consultant and pleaded with the consultant to help with an identified problem. In fact, Cope writes more about consultants needing to turn down work than about the challenges of finding and selling work. Nowhere does he deign to say much about fees and costs. (4) The reader will note a fourth characteristic of Cope’s view of the consulting world—large projects lasting a long time. Not everyone works in that context. (5) Cope also assumes that projects are strategic and high level.

Conclusion

The Seven Cs of Consulting offers much to the experienced consultant. Newcomers to consulting might have some trouble recognizing the value of the framework and techniques, but consultants with more experience should appreciate the intellectual perspective of the framework, learn from the plethora of techniques he arrays, and enjoy the method of presentation and structure in the book.

Rees W. Morrison, Esq., CMC is a principal in the Law Department Consulting Group of Altman Weil, Inc., New Jersey. He is the author of *Law Department Benchmarks: Myths, Metrics, and Management (2nd edition; Glasser LegalWorks, 2001)*. Contact him at rwmorrison@altmanweil.com.