

IN SHORT

RECENTLY PUBLISHED & RECOMMENDED BOOKS ON CONSULTING

REVIEWED BY REES MORRISON CMC

Consulting into the Future: The Key Skills

Karen Lee, Editor (Hodder & Stoughton, Oxon, UK; 2003; ISBN 03-4-085051-5) \$29.95

The 15 chapters in this 164-page book offer thoughtful material by a total of 16 consultants. Each chapter delves into an aspect of consulting and closes with recommended readings and excellent summaries. Let me highlight several chapters that had me underlining, writing notes, and rereading.

Chapter 2 challenges the traditional paradigm of change management: define the change, develop a change vision, design a new organization or new processes, assess current resources, perform analyses, design change implementation and communication interventions, implement. In this old-school approach, project management guides the process and change is done to the organization. This chapter explains a different approach and different assumptions for change management. Of particular interest to me were “rich picture building,” “change role identification and analysis,” “systemic analysis and ‘purposeful activity’ modeling,” and “dealing with resistance.”

Chapter 5 connects consulting and psychology, or more broadly the behavioral sciences, an underemphasized part of consulting. Provocative ideas include shadow issues and undiscussables such as those por-

trayed in the Johari window, with its four quadrants of “known by the person” or “not known” matched against “known by others” and “not known by others.” Other topics are power and conflict, along with achievement and self-image. The chapter helps consultants be aware of the effect that affiliation needs and personality types have on projects. It comes across as new and balanced.

Chapter 7 discusses several frameworks for consultants to consider when they seek to manage change: large-group interventions, chaos theory, and systems thinking as well as “appreciative inquiry.” It describes a number of tools and techniques such as ceremony, storytelling, metaphor, and neurolinguistic programming. All of these approaches move far beyond traditional “write a report” consulting.

Chapter 9 moves boldly beyond formal classroom-based courses and programs. It introduces “experiential grounded learning” and challenges prevailing modes of management conferences. All consultants who train will benefit from the chapter’s ideas.

Most readers will find that several chapters grip them; others will draw a blank. I skimmed consulting on corporate social responsibility, coping with organizational politics, collaboration between diverse consultancy partners, unethical consulting, negotiation skills (which covers capabilities in a few points that are better explained in other books), and the chapter on spiritual dimensions of leadership.

In the end, this book lives up to its title. It presents cogent and provocative summaries of consulting tools that will be valuable to any reader.

Process Consulting: How to Launch, Implement, and Conclude Successful Consulting Projects

Alan Weiss (Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco; 2002; ISBN 0-78-79-5512-4) \$40

This book focuses not so much on process consulting as defined by Edgar Schein and others but rather on the processes of consulting—that is, the nuts and bolts of traditional consulting. The nine primary chapters tackle common consulting activities such as fact gathering, coaching, change management, training, strategy development, and leadership enhancement. With such a broad agenda, Weiss necessarily treats major topics briefly.

In six pages on focus groups, he gives six advantages of them and three disadvantages. As usual, he lists steps to a successful focus group. For example “do not allow supervisors or managers to select participants”; choose them at random yourself. Or “invite to any one session about three more people than you need.”

For interviews, he devotes two pages to such tips as: the interview situation should be private so that no one can be seen arriving or departing;

leave enough time between interviews so that participants don't cross paths; and ask everyone the same questions (even though follow-up questions can pursue different directions).

Surveys take six pages. "You're always better off learning a great deal in a few areas than a little bit in a great number of areas."

Weiss doesn't hesitate to call 'em like he sees 'em. He opposes consultants being certified, harbors little respect for psychometric tests ("Many popular instruments today are simply nonvalidated horoscopes and little more") and excoriates "insipid and simplistic SWOT." On the positive side, "strategic profiling" is the way to develop strategy. Likewise, on change management you can learn the "five key steps to implement successful change projects." All you need to do is define the current state; define the future state; determine key sponsors and implementers; digest environment, feedback, and rewards to support the change; and review progress against metrics. Now you know.

Chapter 7 packs into its 18 pages some strong ideas. "No training or formal instruction of any kind should ever take place without clear learning objectives, which is in turn based on a behavioral change that can be measured and that influences performance." In the same chapter, he lists the five steps that help adults learn the most: discuss the desired outcomes, allow practice, give feedback, apply skills on the job, and reinforce the entire process.

This is vintage Weiss—never in doubt, blunt, and usually useful. Much of what he observes comports with common sense, such as his rules for accepting data such as his rules for accepting date. Weiss loves lists, such as the five most common client obsta-

cles to a project, ten steps to launching a project without being sunk, or Alan's ten tricks to avoid cowing others.

Entire books are written on topics Weiss handles in a few pages (teamwork in two, for example), which could be a criticism of this once-overlightly approach. But he mixes in enough practical experience so that any consultant will find something of use in the book.

Relationships That Enable Enterprise Change: Leveraging the Client-Consultant Connection

Ron A. Carucci and William A. Pasmore (Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer; San Francisco; 2002; ISBN 0-7879-6080-2) \$35

Both authors are partners at Mercer Delta Organizational Consulting, and their book is one of 11 in a series from the publisher on organizational development and change management consulting. Carucci and Pasmore write for consultants who wish to be effective in helping their clients change. They anchor their advice on six premises of a consultant-client relationship that are essential for the consultant to bring about sustainable change. This "Relationship Intelligence" (rQ) outstrips technical consulting ability in making one a success. Core elements of rQ highlight the four early chapters of the book:

- Build the leaders' trust in you as a consultant, in part by telling the truth.

- Invest your personal self in committed service to the client and his or her success, which builds the leader's sense of significance and confidence.

- Confront tough issues with courage and hold your client accountable

(point out the emperor's dishabille).

- Advocate on behalf of your client personally and within the organization.

Furthermore, combine those four building blocks with a collaborative approach and hone your interpersonal agility to make the most of your capacity to influence. Often you must change your style to be most productive.

After the chapters on these points, the book brings together six observations about OD consulting and change management. A lengthy self-assessment at the end of the book tests you on your rQ. Each chapter stocks some useful practices and summarizes them deftly at the end.

This book offers quite a lot to the reader interested in building close relationships with clients. The basic point is that "expertise consulting" lacks what this flavor of OD change management consulting has. Transactional consulting arrangements wither because there is no close personal relationship.

All the examples take place over months or even years of consulting assistance. Deliverables are rare; astute advice plentiful. The consulting is one-on-one, intimate coaching meshed with counseling and always wrestling with BHAG (big, hairy, audacious goals, as Tom Peters has put it) challenges. The cost of the consulting interventions never comes up, although it must be significant.

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