

RECENTLY PUBLISHED & RECOMMENDED BOOKS ON CONSULTING

REVIEWED BY REES MORRISON

The Advice Business: Essential Tools and Models for Management Consulting

*Charles J. Fombrun and Mark D. Nevins,
Editors (Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River,
NJ; 2004; ISBN 0-13-03-03739) \$84*

The *Advice Business* has good advice for every consultant. It consists of five parts: one about the consulting industry; another about how consultants think; a third on implementing consulting recommendations; case studies of consulting projects; and questions about the profession and professionalism. Its 31 contributors have created a book full of thoughtful observations and suggestions.

For example, chapters on thought leadership define what that elusive term means and talk about how a consultant can succeed as a thought leader. Another thought-provoking chapter admirably sketches a framework for the future of management consulting.

A chapter on a consultant's tool kit discusses six kinds of models, any of which would help consultants analyze problems and diagnose situations. A chapter on thinking like a consultant is excellent, as it walks through such tools as hypotheses, issue trees, modeling, and many other elements of thinking about the client's situation.

Another excellent chapter covers communicating to influence. Since reports embody the communication to clients in many projects, it makes sense that the best consulting reports are written along the way during the

engagements—not at the end. They should be used as thinking tools to help work through the problems and check the logic of what's being done. The chapter concerning managing projects discusses many tools; among them, the project thought plan, the issue diagram, storyboard, and various methods of financial control. The chapter also discusses Gantt charts, the kickoff meeting, and the work breakdown structure. A strong chapter digs deeply into gathering data and diagnosing situations.

Part Four of the book presents eight chapters on different consulting offerings: strategy consulting, strategic sourcing, change management, technology consulting, and others. The experienced consultants who wrote each chapter freely share their approaches and frameworks. The final part of the book ruminates in its six chapters on ethics, lifestyle, roles, marketing, and getting hired. Again, excellent material drills deeply into each topic.

The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: A Practitioner's Guide for Leading Large-Group Change

*James D. Ludema, Diana Whitney,
Bernard J. Mohr, and Thomas J. Griffin
(Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco; 2003;
ISBN 1-57675-248-8) \$29.95*

Three points struck me about this book: (1) How awe-inspiring, yet

rare, it must be to guide change with gatherings of hundreds of people over several days; (2) if you have the opportunity, this book thoughtfully shows you how to succeed at an appreciative inquiry summit; and (3) these summits draw deeply on explicit, humanistic principles.

The first point comes to mind because the book's dozens of examples drive home the breathtakingly broad scope of this unusual offering. An appreciative inquiry (AI) summit brings together all stakeholders, sometimes hundreds of them, for several days. During those days, the key tasks are to identify and leverage an organization's strengths. For example, about 250 people at Deere Harvester Works went off-site for five days. By the end, the group had launched ten cross-functional strategic initiatives to decrease costs, increase quality, improve product cycle time, and enhance working relationships.

A summit focuses on the future, rather than exhuming past problems. All of the discussions search for common ground, and the entire methodology relies heavily on self-management.

Second, if you persuade your clients that an appreciative inquiry summit will meet their needs, this book will be invaluable. The authors have thought of everything you need to know. They emphasize careful preparation. It is vital to identify a clear, relevant, and compelling task, such as the mental health care system that sought extraordinary collaboration: investing in relationships to multiply our impact. In a typical four-day AI

summit, the participants focus first on *discovery* of the organization's positive core and create a positive core map. Day two is *dreaming*, envisioning the organization's greatest potential for positive influence. During the third day, the summit *designs* an organization and processes to achieve that goal. The final day's step is *destiny*, committing to actions inspired by the prior days' insights. The commitments people make at this stage are ones that can be carried out without negotiation, within the time available, and with resources that are under their control.

An excellent chapter explains how to facilitate an AI summit. Primarily, the participants have to believe in the method and want to take part. The authors explain what to do after the summit is over to maintain the initiative and achieve success. At every step of explaining the summit and its tools, the authors provide detailed and comprehensive examples, tables, time lines, and frequently asked questions regarding the topics. The book has an excellent set of notes and references at the end as well as appendices full of useful material. You could not ask for more from a practitioner's guide.

The third point that struck me was the degree to which appreciative inquiry exudes values. Many consultants carry on oblivious to values, or at least never articulate them, but not AI believers. They treasure the contributions of everyone at every level; they value aspiration guiding change, rather than dwelling on weaknesses and problems; they advocate democracy in project management; they believe strongly that all people strive for betterment and seek cooperation toward a common goal, that all of us have reservoirs of skills and enthusiasm. The key is to create a summit

environment that maximizes joy, learning, healthy relationships, self-management, and profound organizational transformation.

Management Consulting: Emergence and Dynamics of a Knowledge Industry

Matthias Kipping and Lars Engvall, Editors
(Oxford University Press, London; 2003;
ISBN 0-19-9267111-1) \$34.50

A thoughtful book that presents new ideas makes reviewing a pleasure. This book, based on a European research project and written by 18 mostly European academics, gives the reader broad and new opportunities to think about consulting. It would be an unusual reader who takes this book cover to cover, but many chapters explore ideas that provoke thought. Here are four that struck me:

■ One fascinating chapter, in particular, introduces a *critical perspective on consulting*; it questions the prevailing view of management consulting as a service dedicated to improving the performance of the client organization. Instead, from a critical perspective, the value of management consulting is highly uncertain and consultants' knowledge is overstated. Consultants assuage a manager's anguish and manage the manager's perception of the value of the consulting service (as opposed to creating real business value). Consultants assure managers that they are important, their skills are critical, and they are in control. This critical perspective should make every reader pause and reflect.

■ The *gurus* chapter presents another thoughtful viewpoint: The manage-

ment advice industry is an interrelated community of knowledge entrepreneurs and organizations that includes management consultants, mass media, business schools, and management gurus. One of the chapters presents research findings about these collaborative and competitive relationships. For instance, gurus do not generally conduct organizational analyses or present reports with recommendations that they subsequently implement. They instead offer advice to managers in their best-selling books and live presentations on the international management lecture circuit.

■ *Fashion theories*: This body of research explains how consultancies create, market, and thrive on novel management ideas. Each new management concept promises a simplification of the manager's task and more effective management solutions. What makes these chapters worthwhile is their perspective on the deliberate manufacturing of breakthrough notions for managers, such as reengineering, TQM, lean manufacturing, and Six Sigma.

■ The chapter on *the burden of otherness* explores the ramifications of the fact that consultants come from outside the organization. Two case studies show how consultants' otherness often causes clients to resist them. All consultants need to balance this separation against goals of partnering.

Picking four concepts from this abundant collection leaves much unsaid. Being the fruit of academic research, this book has the advantage of presenting new and challenging perspectives on consulting. On the negative side, its writing style and focus on research make it sometimes dense and far from practical. For example, two

chapters detail consulting interventions in several businesses, yet reach mostly abstract conclusions. Chapters on the development of consulting in France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, and Australia have specialized interest. Yet some will find these rarely reported topics stimulating, and everyone will find in *Management Consulting* numerous ideas to extend and challenge their current thinking.

The Rainmaker's Toolkit: Power Strategies for Finding, Keeping, and Growing Profitable Clients

*Harry Mills (AMACOM, New York; 2004;
ISBN 0-8144-7216-8) \$22*

Harry Mills, the chief executive of a consultant training firm, organizes his book on client relationship marketing around key words that begin with R. Each R addresses one of the symptoms of marketing deficiency syndrome, which afflicts many underperforming consulting firms. Among its symptoms, Mills points out the number of partners in consulting firms who kid themselves that they have a distinctive advantage over their competitors, the risky reliance on a few loyal clients when the number of at-risk clients is actually very high, the lack of defined strategies for high-value clients who account for most of the profits, the inability to jettison loss-making clients, serious deficiencies in rainmaking talent, and lack of a distinctive brand.

Mills says that his model, when implemented, consistently deliver[s] double-digit profits and growth. *Retain*

your high-value clients, for example, and *reacquire* your valuable inactive and lost clients. Other R elements include *referrals* from clients, effective *rainmaking*, and *related sales* such as cross-selling. As to *revitalization*, he urges consultants to become gurus, write best-selling books, and differentiate the way they deliver their services. The chapter on *regeneration* collects basic ideas on marketing: seminars, speeches, quotations, articles, direct mail, and newsletters.

In the midst of his R model discussions, Mills offers his views and statistics. He opposes generalist consultants, believing that market specialization is a proven winner. As to pricing, he holds that since buyers of professional services often have few objective ways of comparing good service and great service, high price is often the critical determinant in defining excellence. Running small-group seminars is arguably the most effective way of impressing high-quality prospects. He claims that the potential cost of a client's problem, left unsolved, should be approximately five times the fee you can charge to solve it. Without citation, he states that the odds of successfully selling to lost clients are one in three, the odds of selling to a fresh prospect are one in eight, the leader in a niche can charge 20% more than its number-two rival, between 20% and 40% of typical professional firms' clients are considering defection, and it takes 8–10 hours of coaching to put on a good, professional presentation. Did you know it takes approximately 10 minutes to make a point? So don't try to cover more than three points in a 30-minute speech. Caliper research suggests that [only] one in four pro-

essionals possesses the psychological traits to sell well.

At the beginning, Mills urges consultants to carefully analyze all their clients according to profitability, size, loyalty, and projected profits. This book, like nearly all books on marketing for consultants, urges the consultant to track nearly everything about past, current, and future clients. Then figure out what services to offer, set priorities, and execute a disciplined plan over time. He makes it sound easy; in fact, it's very difficult to do that well. The book offers many checklists, self-tasks, and examples of materials that will help carry out the marketing program. Each chapter closes with a one-page summary of action steps to take.

This book has many patches worn bare from other writers, such as how to give a good talk, get published, close sales, and negotiate. Mills has packaged commonplace ideas, has used every glitzy technique available, and leaves the reader with an unarguable set of objectives. He has carefully written sound bite-size paragraphs with ample white space, catchy headings, and imperative recommendations. All in all, *The Rainmaker's Tool Kit* is sometimes shallow and breaks little new ground, but it is nonetheless a credible overview of marketing that provides many useful ideas for beginners and reminders for those who have more experience.

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