

## Three Types of Consultants – Which One(s) Are You?

After one has worked with another organization or community for a while, one generally gets a pretty good idea of what they would do if he or she was in charge. The problem for most change agents is that they are **not** in charge. So how do they get the managers of the organization, or leaders of the community, to do what the change agent thinks best?

Let's look the problem another way, based on consulting skills. Why consulting skills -- two reasons. First, consultants can't give their clients money to follow their suggestions (such as donors can). Second, consultants are like change agents in that they are not in charge of anything and have no managerial control. Both facts require consultants to learn other ways of becoming effective. The ideas and concepts presented below are basically from Peter Block's *Flawless Consulting*. This book is required reading for anyone working as a consultant to another organization.

### The Consulting Process

Let's look at the consulting process; there are five basic steps. First, there is entry -- getting to know the client and understanding the client's problem(s). Second, there is data gathering concerning the problem(s) faced by the client. Third, there is analyzing the data. Fourth, there is creating solutions and deciding to implement one. Fifth, there is the actual implementation of the solution. In all consultations, someone goes through each of these steps. However, *who* undertakes *which* steps depends greatly on the role the consultant takes in the process.

### Three Roles the Consultant Can Take in this Process

There are at least three strategies consultants can use to deal with the fact that they do not have managerial power. First, the consultant can take the role of "**expert**". Second, the consultant can take the role of "**pair of hands**", and third the consultant can practice **collaborative** consulting.

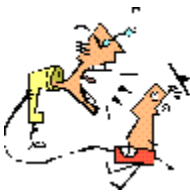
## The Expert Role

When a consultant takes the "expert" role, he/she basically manages the consulting process. The consultant plans the data collection, analyses the results, and decides on the best solution for his/her client. The client's involvement in this process is minimal.



There are a variety of weaknesses in this process. First, that the consultant, as an outsider, can never really know what is happening within the client's organization or community. Without insider information and input into the consulting process the accuracy of the consultants diagnosis and solution are purely hit or miss. Second, there is minimal skills transfer from the consultant to the client. Even if the consultant solves the client's problem, the client has not learned the process to solving such problems in the future. Finally, it is very easy for the expert consultant to develop solutions based on his or her personal beliefs and skills. Such solutions generally cannot be implemented by someone else in the way envisioned by the consultant.

Moreover, if the client buys into this role, then the client gives up his/her managerial prerogative in order to do what the "expert" consultant says to do. This is a nice position for the consultant, as the consultant can make decisions for the organization but, not being a member of the organization, does not bear any of the consequences of those decisions.



The results of this type of consulting are often long reports and no follow up action. My feeling is that after this type of consulting, the consultant knows exactly what he/she would do if she were a manager, but the client is only left with lots of paper and recommendations. Then the client has to study the report, going through all the recommendations for him or herself, in order to figure out what he or she will actually do. That is, of course, if the client feels they have the time to read the report.

## The "Pair of Hands" Role



The "Pair of Hands" Role is just the opposite of the expert role. In this case, the client collects and analyses the data and determines the solution, and then has a consultant implement the solution. The weakness of this type of consulting are also the opposite the weaknesses of expert consulting. In this case, the client does not receive any of the benefits of the consultants skills and observations. So, again, there is no skills transfer or development of the client's organization or community. The underlying assumption here is that the client has correctly diagnosed the problems he or she is facing and does not need any input from the consultant, just a "pair of hands" to implement the solution.

The result of this type of consulting may be a completed project, but there has been no skills transfer. The client organization will still lack the skills brought by the consultant. Therefore, to fix, upgrade, or recreate the consultants work, the client will need to bring in another consultant.

## Collaborative Consulting -- Partnership

What Peter Block calls collaborative consulting, I call Partnership. The basic goal of this type of consulting is to **share** the responsibility of the consulting process. In other words, the client and consultant share in designing data collection, share in collecting the data, share in analyzing the data, share in generating possible solutions, and then, the client takes the responsibility in choosing the solutions to implement.



There are three major advantages of this type of consulting. The first is the consultant and client can pool the skills, knowledge, and experience in order to define and diagnose the problem and then develop appropriate responses. In this process, the consultant contributes his or her skills, knowledge, and perceptions, and the client contributes his knowledge of the organization and its workings. Combining these often brings new insights to bear on the problem and solution. The second advantage is that the client can learn from the consultant the process for dealing with organizational problems. This means that the next time a similar problem arises, the client will be able to deal with the issue without having to call in an outside consultant again. Finally, in collaborative consulting, the client maintains his responsibility as manager and *does not* give that responsibility to the outside consultant.

The result of this type of consulting is a client who has greater understanding of the issues at hand, who understands how the agreed upon solution will solve those issues, and who is **ready and committed to implement the solutions** him/herself.

Excerpt from *Flawless Consulting* by Peter Block (edited)