

# How to Manage Consultants Part II

By Igor Popovich

Consulting is a short cut to top management positions. As a consultant, an ambitious careerist liaisons with senior management on a regular basis, while working on important problems in which those managers have direct and personal interest. This will make him known and establish bonds with clients, so next time those managers need a professional to fill some permanent senior position - the choice will be obvious.

Politicians become politicians by being elected for the office. Doctors become doctors by graduating from a medical school. Consultants become consultants by telling someone else they are consultants.

## ***What Kind Of People Consulting Companies Want To Employ?***

*It requires a very unusual mind to make an analysis of the obvious.*

A. N. WHITEHEAD

First, consultancies, like all other employers, prefer candidates who are already in jobs. They want ambitious people who are looking for better, more challenging and rewarding careers, not people who do not even have a job. On one side they look for independent thinkers with well developed reasoning ability, while not being too independent and egalitarian, because in that case it would be difficult for individuals to accept and adapt to either the firm's culture and values or to those of its clients. Being a self-starter is a definite requirement, as is the ability to work efficiently in a team environment. These may sound as opposing requirements, but they certainly reflect another duality of the consulting profession. Freelance consultants work alone most of the time. Loneliness is one of the consultants' biggest problems. This is especially so for freelancers. They don't belong to the organisation. They are outsiders. As employees of consulting firms, consultants are more likely to work as members of a team.

Controlled aggressiveness and the ability to handle client's negative or hostile reactions with calm and composure are amongst most valued psychological traits of potential candidates. A "multitasking mind", which is a rare ability to keep all aspects of a problem or an issue in one's mind at the same time, is an extremely valuable quality, particularly at more senior levels, where assignments are complex and issues clouded. Candidates also have to be able to comfortably operate in unknown environments and have the capacity and personality to quickly develop productive and comfortable relationships with clients and other members of a project team.

Bimodal thinking is another quality of top consultants, who are able to deal with both macro and micro issues. Analysing problems and issues within a client's organisation requires broad, macro views, while the application of solutions calls for a detailed, micro approach, with attention to detail.

It was said that consultants' job is to see possibilities and opportunities before they become obvious to clients and then to explore those possibilities. That talent is certainly an asset for an individual, especially for management consultants. Systems thinking, where the ability to comprehend the whole, not just the parts, and the ability to integrate goals, ideas and requirements into an overall plan is a quality of paramount importance, the very one that is sadly lacking with many consultants at the bottom of consulting firms hierarchies.

All of the traits mentioned so far can make a consultant, but they can't make a good consultant. The quality that makes a good consultant is intellectual honesty. This means telling clients the truth even if truth often hurts. It also means putting clients' interests first and doing one's best to deliver what was promised, even if that means loss of profits, uncompensated overtime and sleepless nights.

# Who Is Who In A Consulting Company

*Every successful enterprise requires three men a dreamer, a businessman, and a son of a bitch.*

PETER MCARTHUR

There are two basic approaches consulting companies use to get an assignment. The first one is a specialist's approach. Their message reads: "You people need some help in this area, which happens to be our speciality. We can do all these wonderful things for you and solve this particular problem you have."

The other approach is used by generalists, the multidisciplinary practices who can deal with various aspects of management, accounting, engineering, law, or whatever their niche is. They say: "We can help you restructure your business, streamline it, make it more effective and profitable."

Our broad experience base and system integration approach to problem solving will not only make sure the issues are addressed individually, but we'll also look at how those issues relate to each other and how you can organise and position yourselves in order to maximise your strong points and neutralise the weaknesses."

As in any organisation, consulting companies employ people with different personalities, of various backgrounds and experience and their roles in a consulting company are therefore different. Formally, they all do the same tasks, so those differences are often transparent to clients, but behind the scenes, their personalities surface and each acts as a cog in a smoothly ticking (well, most of the time) consultancy machine.

- **The Rainmaker.** He's an ambassador. He travels, keeps in touch with clients and, most importantly, brings the business in. He's a figurehead, a symbol of the firm. His task is to keep the reputation up and to keep up the appearances. The only problem is that he doesn't do any consulting. He's just a bait for attracting clients' attention. The actual work is done by others. His second task is to create the right kind of atmosphere in which Mavericks, Brainstormers and other can work to the best of their abilities.
- **The Spokesman.** He's the negotiating arm of the firm. Usually a lawyer, his legal background gives him a strategic advantage in dealing with client firms, whose managers in most cases aren't lawyers. Being outspoken and articulate, rhetoric is his cup of tea. He conducts reviews and meetings and is responsible for smoothing the rough edges when things aren't progressing as planned.
- **The Maverick.** He's the leader of the project team, the engine that keeps the consulting machine moving. His drive, enthusiasm, persistence, resilience and tenacity keep projects from stalling or sidetracking. Usually, the most experienced and trusted member of the consulting team. He reports directly to the leader and the rainmaker, and is personally responsible for the whole assignment. He's the dynamo, the one who makes progress and makes sure the deadlines are met.
- **The Analysts.** Their task is to analyse and disseminate ideas, proposals and concepts, because this is exactly what clients do when evaluating consultants' work. The analysts serve as internal quality controllers, who put to the test anything that goes out to clients. Their main task is to pick up flaws, omissions, errors, inconsistencies, fallacies and other potentially harmful or embarrassing imperfections.
- **The Brainstormers.** Brainstorming is a creative, intuitive and imaginative activity. The brainstormers are creative think tanks. Their task is to come up with new, more efficient and unorthodox ideas. Some call them devil's advocates. They are the outsiders who challenge the insiders' way of thinking, the ones who bring in fresh approaches and unbiased views.
- **The Organisers.** In hospitals they call them matrons. In police stations, sergeants are the equivalent, because this is what the organisers do - organise. People, resources, time, clients, meetings, projects.
- **The Detailers.** Their main tool is a fine toothed comb, with which they sift through contracts, designs, drawings, reports, recommendations, correspondence and other deliverables to clients. Their main task is to make sure everything's right, down to the finest detail. People who are good in mastering concepts, ideas and trends usually aren't very thorough when details are in question. Many clients, on the other hand, either intentionally or unintentionally, pay special attention to small things, which can spoil the big picture. The shrewd consulting companies know that and employ detailers who make sure nothing is left to chance.

- **The Concept Men.** They are the visionaries, idea men who live in a world beyond trivialities and technicalities. They produce concepts, notions and ideas to be further evaluated, elaborated upon and applied by the analysts, mavericks and detailers. Then they are sold to clients by the rainmakers and spokesmen.
- **The Prostitutes.** These people don't care what they do, as long as the rewards are substantial. For them, there is no unpleasant, unethical, immoral or improper tasks, just well paid and poorly paid assignments. They prefer the well paid ones. They usually get the less glamorous tasks, the ones everybody else in the firm shies away from. Although officially the prostitutes operate behind the scenes, far from the inquisitive clients' eyes, they hold important positions. Managers like people who will do the dirty washing for them, and consulting firms are not an exception.
- **The Foot Soldiers.** Members of the "elite" consulting troops. They interview employees, customers and competitors, gather and sort tons of information, prepare data tables, charts and graphs, check drawings, plans and previous studies. They are the bees who bring pollen into a consulting beehive, to be processed and fermented into sweet, sticky honey, to feed the hungry clients' mouths.
- **Freelancers.** "Free lance" is the term that originates in medieval times. Knights who were in no permanent personal service to kings, lords or other feudal aristocracy, set their lances for hire. They would fight for anyone who paid the requested price. These mercenaries owed no permanent allegiance to anyone and were free to choose who they wanted to work for and how they wanted to live their lives. These days freelancers operate mainly as independent consultants, but they also often subcontract to other consulting firms.
- **Support staff.** Office work in a consulting company doesn't differ much from that in other service orientated companies. The clerical and secretarial staff handle typing, note taking, inhouse publishing (printing, binding, photocopying) and other standard administrative duties. Accounting staff take care of accounts payable, accounts receivable, payroll, etc. regardless of their title, their main task is to support the professional consultants, so they can function with utmost efficiency and profitability for the firm.