ACTING AS A LONG-TERM CONSULTANT. CHALLENGES FOR THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE[1]

Dagmar Untermarzoner

ABSTRACT

The concept of long-term consultation described in this paper is based on the author's own practice and focuses on a systemic long-term consulting approach becoming increasingly relevant for organizations in a highly dynamic field.

The paper illustrates the role the consultant takes throughout the consulting process by paying careful attention to the client's business, focusing on organization and people at the same time and foster the change cabability of the organization as a whole. Opening the client to the idea of general development of the organization is best done by simultaneously working on four dimensions: strategy, business and management processes, organization structure and people. Consulting projects, or generally organizational development processes, working on only one of these dimensions produce unbalanced results, which in turn risk being rejected or isolated by the system.

Three further aspects of the client-consultant relationship are highlighted: the need for investing in cooperation rather than providing services, bonding with the people in the organization as a role model for change and the integration of strategic and intimate aspects in the relationship and its impact on management learning.

Consequences for the business model of the long-term consultant such as typical patterns in assignments, managing one´s calendar and cooperation with further consultants are presented. Finally, the impact of all these points on the qualification profile of a long-term consultant is illustrated by describing the expertise needed to provide this type of consulting.

INTRODUCTION

The way management consultants work varies considerably and there is no one ideal model which serves all business purposes or the different preferences and views of clients, how to plan and implement change (Caluwé & Vermaak 2003). In this paper I would like to focus on a difference I have seen becoming increasingly relevant through my work in recent years: The difference between acting as a consultant within a defined,

[1] Paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Management Consulting (Academy of Management, MCD Division) June 11-13, 2009, Vienna. Awarded best experience based paper. Published in: The Changing Paradigm of Consulting – Adjusting to the Fast-Paced World. (2011). In the series "Research in Management Consulting". Edited by Anthony F. Buono, Ralph Grossmann, Hubert Lobnig & Kurt Mayer. Information Age Publishing. Charlotte, North Carolina US.

limited and often project-based contract and the more inclusive and comprehensive consulting activities I refer to as long-term consulting.

The majority of consulting contracts include designing and facilitating workshops where a special need for external support is seen, assisting in selected areas where the consultant can contribute particular advice or helping a client master specific critical phases of a change process. In contrast to this, a long-term consulting includes a more integrated and evolving approach where consultant and client create the consulting process together.

This model of consulting makes no claim to being the best one or a logical future trendsetter. It may best be seen as one branch within different roles consultants can take in their engagements. The aim of this article is not to brand a new type of consultancy practice or to criticize existing ones for their shortfalls. Rather it is intended as a contribution to the ongoing discussions of professionalism in consultancy and the addition of some ideas for professional qualifications.

Consultants focusing on long-term commitments in that sense need to consider their professional roles as well as the way they perform their services because this has implications for:

1. the role the consultant takes throughout the process
2. the client-consultant relationship
3. the consultant´s business model
4. the expertise the consultant is able to contribute

1. SHAPING THE PROFILE OF THE LONG-TERM CONSULTANT

Over the last 15 years I have learned, practiced and observed a wide variety of consulting approaches within the management consulting community. Today there are a number of dilemmas which tempt the consultant away from being relevant and real-time. Three ways out of these dilemmas which every consultant knows from personal experience are:

Way out 1: The consultant as “service provider”

“Don’t try to educate your client; do what the client asks for and don´t push your own ideas”; “it is important that the client is satisfied.” Here the consultant focuses only on serving the needs a client stipulates. This approach suits a specific type of client, who knows what he wants and is looking for someone to provide it. He wants consultants to work for him, not with him. Consultants of type sincerely believe that the client knows what he or she needs.

In medicine patients ask the doctor for healing and not for a special treatment. Good doctors don't sell treatments. But senior managers and internal consultants often deeply believe they know what "treatment" they need. I worked in the organizational consulting department of a management institute that provided management training. Most of the clients that called us requested management training to support their change processes. In 80% of these cases training was not the right treatment for their problem, but in this situation I was forced to work "for" the clients, who were totally fixated on training.

Although the long-term consultant knows that this starting point is not optimal, in many cases it serves as the beginning of a consulting contract which later on may allow for deeper cooperation. As will be described later, moving from service provision to cooperation is not trivial and requires specific attitudes and skills on both sides. Sometimes it works, but sometimes the client doesn't change his mind, although the consultant tries hard to convince him.

Way out 2: Consulting as a "competitive discipline"

Consulting takes place in a highly competitive field and the criteria for what constitutes successful consulting are not clear at all. Two visible criteria for success are the ability to charge high fees and high name recognition (as opposed to delivering top quality service). This is a huge challenge for relevant consulting. "Who earns the highest fees and who is most famous?" This egocentric dream of being number one among consultants is the equivalent of management's fixation on increasing short-term shareholder value. You could even say that success breeds this attitude. Making money is of course a legitimate goal, but as the consulting industry has grown in recent years, so have the desires of consultants to earn ever-increasing fees.

There are two problems with this position: First, less is sometimes more, since small interventions can have substantial impact when they are combined with personal learning opportunities for the clients involved (see Schüller & Untermarzoner 2002). Second, in a more psychodynamic view as developed by Laske (2005), the client is used as an instrument for the consultant's own need gratification.

Way out 3: The consultant as "Guru"

In German-speaking countries there has recently been a considerable tendency towards alternative, sometimes bordering on esoteric methods in organizational consulting. For example: translating the methods of systemic constellation into organizational life is seen as an attractive alternative for many consultants and clients striving toward quick solutions with unorthodox methods. Moreover, my experience shows a growing application of astrological models in consulting processes.

There are of course positive aspects to these alternative methods: they help to integrate "the person" and "values" into the organization and they are quickly developed, which responds to the growing demand for speed in consulting processes. From the viewpoint of psychological expertise, the danger lies in the degree of professionalism. Working with psychological issues requires many years of education in theory, practice, psychotherapy for oneself and supervision.

The strong tendency towards systemic constellation among consultants may be a way out of a psychological professionalization path which is both time-consuming and involved.

On a covert level, the methods mentioned above provide only standardized solutions to organizational problems without helping the client to gain deeper knowledge for mastery of present and future challenges, as these methods must be studied for many years to be successfully applied. At the same time they elevate the consultant to a meta-position where he is not forced to deal with the problems of a symmetric relationship. This mode keeps the client in a dependent position.

ATTITUDES OF LONG-TERM CONSULTING

Long-term consulting is another way out of the dilemma of how to be relevant and real-time. Long-term consulting aims to speed up the process (through working simultaneously on very different dimensions) and to empower the client to take over as soon as possible on a higher level (through consistently combining services the consultant provides with learning opportunities for the client. The key to speed and empowerment is this specific client-consultant relationship.

Long-term consulting orients itself to the client's organization's underlying needs, combined with the consultant's own approach to what sustainable development for an organization can be. In practice this means: paying careful attention to the client´s business, opening the client to the idea of a general development of the organization and integrating strategic, process and personnel development.

PAYING CAREFUL ATTENTION TO THE CLIENT'S BUSINESS

Even when consultants move from sector to sector without specializing, they must pay honest attention to the client´s business. This can be done by exchanging experiences with colleagues, by surfing current internet sites and newspapers, by interviewing the clients about their products and services, and by accompanying the client when he meets his client. However, the challenge here is to learn enough about the underlying logic of the client´s business without going into too much detail.

OPENING THE CLIENT TO THE IDEA - OF A GENERAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION

Opening the client to the idea of general development of the organization is best done by simultaneously working on four dimensions: strategy, processes, structure and people. Consulting projects working on only one of these dimensions produce unbalanced results, which in turn risk being rejected or isolated by the system. Bridging the gaps of strategy, structure, process and people has considerable impact for the qualifications needed (Galbraith 2008). I will refer to this later. Working on all these dimensions simultaneously requires more action-orientation on the part of the consultant.

INTEGRATING STRATEGIC, PROCESS AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

Processes can be perfectly described, but when the staff does not know how to cooperate in processes, those processes will be of no use. The same dilemma arises with strategies that are not combined with learning processes (Lobnig 2009). There are three essential entry points to general development of an organization: the vision, the core competencies and the processes – these three working fields strengthen the identity of an organization. They are "language-builders" that explicitly identify the organization´s heart and soul.

Long-term consulting provides one process which integrates the above mentioned organizational issues with personnel development. Many managers focus on strategy work and restructuring, and when these approaches do not find acceptance they call in a consultant. In this situation starting with personnel development of the managers themselves brings valuable insights into why change processes stumble. Beginning personnel development from the top is crucial to making strategies work.

Personnel development requires:

- the development of a business oriented requirement and qualification profile
- a potential analysis based on the principles of self-insight (not testing people but letting them understand their talents and limitations in relation to the strategy)

- managers who take responsibility for creating structures for the learning (not delegating learning to the human resource department)
- individualized development programs monitored through feedback and dialogues between the developers and the staff.

Another reason for combining organizational and personnel development lies in the dynamics of today´s change processes. In recent years It has been my experience that it often impossible to finish a change process with the client organization: most change processes I consulted suddenly took a new direction when they developed further.

There are at least three reasons for changes within changes:

- there are changes at the very top of the organization (new owners, etc.)
- unanticipated consequences occur (people resist, key managers lack skills, products loose selling potentials, etc.)
- goals set at the beginning turn out not to be the right goals after a while

Warner Burke (2008) describes this as the paradoxon of planned change: unexpected situations require “looping back” and recurrently dealing with these new situations. This means that only concentrating on organizational issues is not satisfactory. I also concentrate on the development of key players: finding talented people, supporting them, providing them with knowledge and broad expertise, letting them take responsibility and train their skills practically and get them to collaborate during the change process by teaching them, by shadow-consulting or even by taking management responsibilities in projects. The result is an increased maturity of both the organization and the people involved.

2. INVESTING IN COOPERATION, STRATEGIC AND INTIMATE BEHAVIOUR, BONDING: SPECIFICS OF THE CLIENT-CONSULTANT RELATIONSHIP IN LONG-TERM CONSULTING

When the cooperation between client and long-term consultant begins to comprise more aspects it needs to shift from occasional to continuous involvement. The paradox is, that a long-term consulting process cannot be planned; it must happen step by step and along mastering the different challenges in the consulting process the client-consultant relationship evolves. However the relationship between consultant and client is one of the essential elements for the efficacy of consultancy. Concepts from psychodynamic, developmental and social psychology are of help in understanding some facets of the relationship long-term consultants go through with their clients.

INVESTING IN COOPERATION – SUSPENDING THE AMBIVALENCE

The consulting relationship in most cases is not a linear process; some consulting relationships remain ambivalent for a long time. No sooner has a seemingly reliable cooperation been established than the client suddenly begins to resist the consultant again. This relates to the psychodynamics of the consulting relationship: the change required produces ambivalence on the client's side: he recognizes that help it needed but simultaneously rejects that help, at least to some extent, fearing that it shows limitations or incompleteness in his own capabilities. Ambivalence leads to resistance and the energy of that resistance is projected onto the client-consultant relationship. The greater the resistance, the greater the distance between client and consultant will be.

During the first contacts with a client the consultant must draw an inner picture in order to engage or just treat the symptoms. The following consulting case illustrates the small steps that are taken to shift the client's attitude from requesting services for a single problem to cooperating towards a general development of the organization.

I was engaged by a political organization to help solve a conflict between the representatives of the local political party and their deputy mayor. During the initial consulting sessions I got the clear impression that this organization lacked a vivid vision, procedures for decision-making and skills in team work. Although they worked hard on finding a concrete solution for the conflict, I recognized that solving this problem would not help them to be successful in the future. I saw the conflict between the deputy mayor and the representatives of the party as one symptom of the underlying problem. However it is amazing how organizations sometimes split their problems into different sections and also engage different experts for these different problems. They call for help within their already settled view of the problems and how to solve them; for the long-term consulting approach it is quite challenging to work with such clients. The ambivalence and sometimes resistence towards viewing the problem more broadly or comprehensively are quite high.

In the following consulting session I described the broader picture I felt they had to work on. I told them clearly that they would not be successful just by replacing their deputy or by achieving more harmony between him and the group. AdditionalIy I made them aware that one team member acted in a less productive and even destructive way, taking a position Ruth Wageman et al (2008) recently called a "derailer". According to them, "derailers" are individuals who destroy change processes by working against those processes in the background, being unrecognized or even protected by the management.

Usually these are persons with a high reputation within the organization. On the surface they add value to the organization, but underneath they are driven by opposing energies and sometimes also by destructive behaviour. After I presented my hypotheses the group was shocked, but some of them seemed to understand. However, after I left I was not sure whether they would break the consulting contract with me or continue. Shortly after that event, I talked with colleagues about their experiences and found out that other parts of the organization also operated in that way. Two days later "Peter", the group leader, called and asked me to continue to work with them. I asked "Peter" to meet before the next session as I wanted to discuss with him the broader picture of their situation and the general steps I felt they would need. This led to shared assumptions between him and me and to a basis for determining the next steps in the process. The next meeting was quite different – the backstage powermaker was present and showed constructive aspects, so he earned trust also from members who had been worried before. With the help of a highly structured design every member could talk about his concerns and the chances and risks of different conflict solution strategies.

INTEGRATING INTIMATE AND STRATEGIC INTERACTIONS

A second ingredient of a productive working relationship I also consider to be relevant for long-term consultancy was presented recently by Edvin Nevis (2008). Nevis emphasizes that productive and sustainable relationships in the workplace are built on a combination of intimate and strategic interactions. This combination is specifically significant for overcoming change initiatives that become stuck, as stagnation of change processes rarely originates at the content level.

To work on stagnating change processes it is necessary to build a more long-term type of relationship – between managers and between the managers and the consultant - which allows them to delve deeply enough to diagnose what does not work and find ways to overcome this. Managers and consultants who have problems with combining strategic and intimate aspects also have trouble succeeding with their change initiatives. I want to illustrate this using one case exemplifying that the inability to maintain a long-term relationship between the key client and the consultant is at the same time a symptom of a stagnating change process.

I was engaged after a long consulting project by a well known international consulting firm was finished. It was obvious that almost everything was done: they had a well defined strategy, an interesting vision, a set of projects to meet the goals. The top executive, "Mark", asked for help because the newly merged top management team seemed not to be as productive as they should and the staff asked for more orientation.

I started with two interventions: on the one hand whole-system meetings to initiate a dialogue between the two newly merged units and on the other hand a potential analysis of each top management team member to produce some insights into the dynamics of the people at the top. For both activities it was not possible to develop a long-term relationship with the key client. It would be easy to say it was my fault, but I want to show that the relationship dynamic is just a symptom of problems throughout the organizational change.

After the first meeting between "Mark", the human resource manager and me, where we discussed the basic approach and general steps needed, "Mark's" secretary called and told me I could start. From my point of view, there were several open questions to discuss with "Mark". Interestingly, he had the idea that I would start my work without working out the details of the process with him in advance. This led me to believe that "Mark" focused on a strategic relationship and asked me as consultant to work for him, not with him. So I asked "Mark" to design the consulting process together with me. During this session we worked together very well, he told me about his ideas and I saw a chance to develop also an intimate relationship. I hoped also to initiate such a dialogue between him and every member of the team.

The evaluations of the potential analysis of the managers showed clearly some development needs and indications why the change processes were not advancing as planned. After holding his first individual face to face meetings with each member of the management team "Mark" suddenly explained that he would support the development, but not take the responsibility for the necessary steps being taken. The basic assumption was: we are all well educated managers, we are "ready" and it is each individual´s responsibility to take the next steps. It is easy to imagine what happened: some members of the management team tried to take steps accordingly, but a guiding and protecting hand was missing.

As a next step a team meeting was planned to share the results and conclusions for steering the change. This next step has never been taken. As "Mark" did not openly share his strategy there was no chance for dialogues about the change within the planned whole-system meeting or even with the team of managers. "Mark's" career was highly successful; the integration process was not.

As a conclusion I would argue that "Mark's" personal limitation in building the more intimate parts of a relation was the essential limitation for the whole process. The kind of relationship he evidently allowed for was working for him, but not with him, and in that sense he clearly preferred unilateral strategic relationships with others. With this type of behavior, "Mark" is a typical example of a certain type of manager: well educated, but keeping some of his driving ideas of change in the background. With this partial intransparency he maneuvers his team into a position where certain aspects of power remain untapped. Thus, collaborating with that type of client restricts the efficacy consultancy can provide the organization – although perhaps not for the key client himself.

BONDING WITH THE PEOPLE IN THE CLIENT´S ORGANIZATION

A third concept I find quite instructive for generating insights about mastering the relationship with clients in a long-term perspective is bonding. Originally formulated within maternal developmental psychology, it describes how relations can be empathetic without the partners becoming entangled with each other. How does an external expert commit to his client´s organization while keeping the distance that allows him to step back whenever needed? By bonding with the people in the client organization.

Why is bonding needed? Change requires relationships that can be maintained while risks are being taken. Nowadays managers are having more and more trouble bonding with the organizations for which they work for only a couple of years; they bond to their networks rather than to their companies and do not connect emotionally. It is important for them to learn to bond quickly even if they do not intend a life-long relationship. Here the consultant acts as role model.

Committing to the client´s organization means bonding with the people and is a process the clients themselves do not observe directly. The long-term consultant is interested in the people he works with without becoming their friend. Clients often believe that friendship is the easiest and fastest way to bond and invite consultants who are in the field for a longer period of time to be friends.

What helps the long-term consultant to keep the proper distance is rather to avoid small talk about private issues with clients, carefully limiting informal times together, but being deeply interested in their development as professionals. The consultant often pays more attention to their development than they do, because they are concentrating only on the current project. For a long-term perspective both developments – the organizational and the personal – go hand in hand.

A special challenge long-term consultants face is bonding with "difficult" or aggressive individuals in the client system. Such clients can create an adversarial environment for the consultant´s work (Ahlers-Niemann Arndt et al 2008). The consultant has to make clear that he will not accept such treatment of himself or of the other members of the group during the sessions. The consultant behaves assertively but not aggressively towards this aggressive person, continuing to offer to build a relationship. The difficulty lies in keeping the offer open while the client continues to fall back into aggressive behaviour. Being able to understand and deal with such neurotic tendencies of managers as brilliantly described by Motamedi (2008) is a central issue and a challenge of organizational consulting.

3. THE CONSULTANT´S BUSINESS MODEL - IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT ASPECTS OF RUNNING THE BUSINESS

Practicing a long-term consulting approach also has consequences for the business related aspects of consulting. Some of these consequences with which I have had in-depth and sometimes quite challenging experience in my long-term projects are described in detail below.

TYPICAL PATTERNS IN ASSIGNMENT

The first point to be considered is the type of contract on which long-term consultancy is based.

The assignments I have encountered in long-term consulting in recent years have varied considerably, but overall there seem to be some typical patterns in the assignment of consulting:

- the whole consulting process lasts between one and four years
- there are phases of intensive involvement and phases of occasional involvement
- the leading consultant’s assignment varies between one or two days and as much as 7 to 9 days per month
- the lead consultant’s interventions range from one-hour meetings to two-day workshops, from 5 to 15 meetings per month, and from 5 to 20 people from the client organization attending
- the number of further consultants engaged for different roles (consulting a special project, coaching a manager, providing specific training activities, carrying out assessments, eg.) ranges from 1 to 7
- these contributory consultants/trainers invest between 2 hours and 5 days per month

Working in long-term consulting processes requires that both the consultant and the client organization have the capacity to invest considerable time and energy in one project. On the client’s side sufficient funds need to be available for consulting, and a purchasing model allowing for a flexible and non-bureaucratic process is of more help than a contracting process, where the content as well as the expenditures have to be approved beforehand in some complicated processes. On the consultant's side, on the other hand, sufficient time and energy is needed for implementing an extensive cooperation within a limited period of time.

DIFFERENT PHASES

When going through a long-term consulting process I regularly experience different phases of work calling for different types of consultative interventions.

The patterns can be summarized as follows:

1. create a highly structured process design at the beginning, combined with training of talented people
2. instruct talented key people as internal project managers
3. empower talented people to do your job step by step
4. step back but keep time free for the client – knowing he will call you soon
5. help in times of crisis and chaos
6. help to get things off the ground, really done or finished (do the work that is not finished)
7. be regularly available for feedback and additional help

TYPES OF CLIENTS

Long-term consultation is not possible with all types of clients in all industries. Besides the aspects already explained involving psychodynamic relations, there are also some aspects which rise to the surface when a perspective on business dynamics is applied. To put it bluntly: long-term consultancy calls for clients who are already well developed in terms of their sensibility to the importance of development processes in the company.

Furthermore my experiences show that they

- run their business in a dynamic and prospering sector (or industry)
- have high ambitions and take high risks with their business
- have a clear professional vision about the client-customer relationship in consultancy
- have high expectations regarding commitment and operational availability of people working with them

- are highly interested not only in implementing facts but in learning through the consulting process

MANAGING ONE´S CALENDAR

Successfully managing a career as a long-term consultant means successfully managing one's calendar. Consultants grow up with the idea that being a successful consultant/trainer is equivalent to having a fully booked calendar.

This probably relates to the second position described above: paradoxically consultants feel safe when they have little time left for clients.

However, the practice of long-term consulting requires professionals who are also sometimes available at short notice. Long-term consulting means taking a great deal of responsibility for complex process whose length and direction cannot easily be predicted. The consultant must hold significant amounts of time open in his calendar in order to be available to clients at short notice. A good long-term consultant has a calendar which is never fully booked over a long period; he can always make an appointment within one or two weeks.

The nature of long-term consulting is such that it cannot easily be combined with extensive training activities or a lot of other parallel activities. Also, the number of clients the consultant is able to work with in long-term processes is limited. The demands on the consultant's energy level must also be carefully considered. The consultant cannot give top quality performance all the time. The time to recover from an intensive session is easy to underestimate, so combining different activities can be both challenging and dangerous.

A colleague recently commented to me that her calendar was only full for the next two or three months and that this bothered her; she was worried about the future. I replied that I had the same open calendar and believed that it was necessary for consulting. The consulting projects I am engaged in are normally not planned half a year in advance. Usually I step in when processes get stuck, conflicts have arisen or there is a sudden change in a company's situation that requires immediate external help. She was happy to hear that this is not unusual for long-term consulting.

The paradox described below of stepping back and being available for the client when needed is also challenging for the consultant´s business:

After one year of cooperation the consulting process came to an end and I stepped back. I told my clients they could always call me when they felt they needed help. One manager asked me: "But how can we be sure that you will have time for us, when you engage in your next project?" This was a legitimate question which I considered for quite some time before coming to the conclusion that there is an implicit, perhaps even an ethical expectation on the client´s side that the consultant would be there when needed.

At that time I was starting processes with new clients, and also in these new projects it was not clear at the beginning how much time I would need.

Just as there are busy periods with more intensive commitments in different processes and perhaps training commitments at the same time, so slower times must be planned far in advance. This way of running a business is very different from regular work schedules and more similar to professions with project-oriented jobs such as experts in the film industry. To be able to perform well over a long period, this cyclical involvement is crucial. Consultants who try to maximize the level of their capacity utilization run the risk of becoming consultants of the earlier described position 2 or, when they run out of energy, position 1.

STEPPING BACK AS DEVELOPMENTAL INTERVENTION

Today more and more managers and experts have proper education in managing change and/or in organizational development, there is more internal capacity to carry out such processes. The educated client has theoretical knowledge and the consultant can help him to put it into practice effectively. On the consultant's side this means stepping back earlier and incorporating the model of empowerment into one's own practice. Stepping back is especially necessary when the talented people within the organization feel ready to take responsibility for the work the consultant has been doing so far.

This process of empowerment goes hand in hand with a developmental crisis from childhood: the "I want to do it myself" threshold. Ambitious managers are especially eager to manage the change themselves in order to "harvest the fruits" of their organizational change. It is a special challenge for the consultant not to be the one who has "done" it. My experiences show that the more ambitious the managers are, the more necessary it becomes for the consultant to keep time available to step in again when the activities lose direction.

But applying an empowerment approach does not only mean turning away and letting them try, but also focusing on integrating as much know-how transfer and learning as possible in the interventions carried out.

EXPANDING THE CONSULTANT´S TEAM

As consulting processes on a multidimensional level overreach the capacity of a single consultant, long-term consulting professionals seek cooperation with other consultants or trainers. This type of network building is essential, as it allows coordinated action and adjusted approaches. Unbalanced action of consultants leads to confusion and splits within the client system and may hinder progress.

Having at one's disposal a network of consultants and trainers is essential, primarily based on knowledge they add to the tasks to be accomplished – not how well they are acquainted with the lead consultant. Multi-dimensional change processes require a number of experts who are able to cooperate, each in his or her specific way.

In my projects I have encountered some rather practical challenges in forming these types of cooperations with colleagues:

- timing of training activities is crucial. Training for social and organizational skills in fast change processes is not planned a year in advance. When planning starts, implementation should take place immediately after decisions are made. On the other hand, professional trainers that can be available at short notice are not easy to find. Usually trainers fill their calendars far in advance in order to feel financially secure.
- a long-term consultant recruits the best expertise for each process, as the combination of expertise in the required area and cultural fit of cultures and personal approaches. In many instances this means building new relationships. This in turn carries the risk that the consultant does not fully know the potentials or the limits of the trainer/consultant engaged. It is therefore necessary to be ready for a lot of background discussions.

But there are also some underlying psychodynamic aspects within these types of cooperation:

- independence and alignment: the contributory trainer/consultant has to work in his way while at the same time aligning with the general approach. This requires an attitude of cooperation with mutual interest, curiosity, respect and help. It is not helpful to reduce conflicts to an internal hierarchy among the consultants. It is more about playing one's part and searching for the broader rhythm of the whole process: As not every contributory consultant also has experience in the role of long-term consultant, they sometimes also need help to understand the context of a long-term consulting process. This means that the lead consultant has to talk extensively about the approach and establish a unique cooperation. Not every issue can be worked out in detail, so it is crucial to get a feeling for each other, for what is really important to share and what not.

- handling the ambivalence: Clients tend to split their ambivalences towards the consulting team. Consultants must be very conscious of this process and not become involved in it, which is only possible when a truthful dialogue and openness in the cooperation within the group of colleagues exist.
- multi-oriented relationships between clients and consultants: in a broader process there is no single client-consultant relationship. Every contributory consultant should align his interventions with the others in respect of content, importance and number of hours spent.
- acting wholeheartedly, quickly and cost-consciously at the same time: Multi-dimensional processes create a frame of how consultant´s days must be invested overall. This requires creativity in order to design each single process faster. It also requires modesty in order not to sell as much as possible. Extendend analysis and diagnostic phases are inadequate, and not every service requested by a generous client is really necessary. Using internal resources and sometimes taking action instead of spending more time on a well-designed process is crucial.

Business-dynamic aspects of cooperation: Contributory consultants/trainers need to commit themselves fully as entrepreneurs for the client but not to expand their involvement more than necessary. Structuring the contract between the lead consultant and the contributory consultants is critical.

There are four models of accounting:

- the lead consultant does the complete accounting for the consultant's team and allocates the expenses arising accordingly
- the lead consultant runs a "business" assigning other consultants
- the contributory consultant is asked to account for himself and deliver an agreed contribution to the lead consultant
- the contributory consultant is asked to bill the client directly

It is important to consider that each method of accounting sends a different message to the client and creates a different psychodynamic situation between the consultants. The long-term consultant has to decide after careful consideration which of these is the proper mode for the assignment given.

COPYRIGHT: OWNERSHIP OF IDEAS AND CONCEPTS

At its best, long-term consulting means that clients identify with the models proposed by the consultant. The consultant's model becomes their model and they are proud of it. On the one hand this is good; on the other hand the copyright is in infringed when ambitious managers sell the models to other audiences as their own.

Cooperating over a long period means that sometimes the consultant enhances his own models while consulting. This way of cooperating opens the competition dynamic in the client-consultant relationship. Making the copyright clear to the client helps to demystify the use of knowledge in business work and allows for clarity in the client-consultant relationship.

The copyright question works both ways, however: when consultants publish projects or insights they have gained throughout a project they should recognize the special input they received from their clients, especially from highly educated clients on organizational issues, and should talk with them about this even if it increases the consultant's vulnerability.

4. QUALIFICATION PROFILE OF THE LONG-TERM CONSULTANT

The core competencies for long-term consulting as described here derive from the model of process consultation and helping developed by Edgar Schein (Schein 1998, 2009). Experienced consultants know that truly being able to perform according to the model of process consultation requires many years of intensive education accompanied by extensive professional practice.

The long-term consulting approach described here adds further practical challenges which are essential to the consultant's qualification profile:

- broad experience of understanding and intervening in all four dimensions of corporate development (strategy, processes, structure and people)
- being able to learn quickly about industries and products on a general level
- having the creativity to produce more than one benefit at a time: for example, a process designed for change results in a handbook for managing the process in the future, while at the same time the people involved learn how to carry out the change and a working structure for managing similar processes is developed
- having management skills (being able to set goals, take action and fill in for lack of managerial action in the client's system) and at the same time being able to step back when necessary

- being highly oriented to developing easy but sustainable structures and people in a long-term perspective
- understanding the psychodynamic of people in change and being able to intervene at a psychological level
- recognising the developmental stages of key managers and designing change they really can sustainably achieve: "The chain is only as strong as its weakest link"
- being able to bond quickly with the client system without overstaying his welcome

Given the nature of these skills, it is obvious that they cannot be acquired by the usual methods of teaching. Perhaps even more importantly, some of them are more ethical than technical and thus require dialogues with inspirational people and ongoing self-reflection so that this type of knowledge/wisdom can emerge.

5. FINAL REMARKS

The role of a long-term consultant is one aspect of the dazzling field of management consultancy which has not yet been extensively described. The style of long-term consulting described here has emerged during intensive work with a number of clients in various industries in the last years. If colleagues and/or researchers share some of these ideas and experiences, I would be happy to participate in a process of collective inquiry on this subject.

REFERENCES

Ahlers-Niemann, Arndt et.al (2008): Organisationslandschaften. Sozioanalytische Gedanken und Interventionen zur normalen Verrücktheit in Organisationen, EHP Organisation.

Burke W (2008): Organizational Change. Theory and Practice. Los Angeles: Sage Publications

Caluwé L, H Vermaak (2003): Learning to Change. A guide for Organizational Change Agents. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Galbraith J (2008): Organization Design. In: Cummings TG (Ed): Handbook of Organization Development. Sage Publications.

Laske O E (2005): Measuring Hidden Dimensions. The Art and Science of Fully Engaging Adults, Metford: IDM Press

Lobnig H (2009): Strategy work in an international setting: entangling top-down and bottom-up approaches via continuous conversations, learning cycles and semi finished instruments. Paper at the 4th International Conference on Management Consulting of the Academy of Management, June 11-13, Vienna

Motamedi K (2008): Seven Neurotic Styles of Management. In: Graziadio Business Report Journal, Pepperdine University West Los Angeles Campus

Schein E (1998): Process Consultation Revisited: Building the Helping Relationship. Mass: Addison Wesley.

Schein E (2009): Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Wageman R, DA Nunes, JA Burruss, RJ Hackman (2008): Senior Leadership Teams. What it takes to make them great. Boston: Harvard Business Press

Newis EC (2008): Connecting Intimate & Strategic In Organizations Interactions. Paper presented at the OD Network Conference: "Advancing the Theory and Practice of OD", Oct 19-22, Austin, Texas

Schüller A, D Untermarzoner (2002): Verzicht als Option in Beratungsprozessen. In: H Lobnig, J Schwendenwein, L Zvacek (Hg.): Beratung der Veränderung - Veränderung der Beratung. Neue Wege in Organisationsentwicklung, Training und der Gestaltung Sozialer Systeme, Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: MAG. DAGMAR UNTERMARZONER

Master's degree in psychology, University of Vienna; trainer and organizational consultant since 1989, many years of experience as project manager and researcher at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research and Continuing Education, internal management trainer for Creditanstalt, organizational consultant and trainer for Herstein International Management Institute, co-founder (2001) and managing partner of Lemon Consulting. Full member of the Austrian Association for Group Dynamics and Organizational Development. Faculty member of the Danube Business School at the Danube University Krems.

Areas of professional work: consulting on change processes (integration of strategy, process, structure and personnel development), assessment and development of potential (managers, experts and staff); training for executive managers and HR professionals. Publications in the area of organizational change and culture.

www.lemon.at
untermarzoner@lemon.at