

The consultants
responsibility to
facilitate client
decisions



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Management consulting can be defined as the creation of value for organizations, through the application of knowledge, techniques and assets to improve business performance. This is achieved through the rendering of objective advice and/or the implementation of business solution (MCA 2009 as stated in Matthias 2011). Central to the notion of management consulting is the ability to identify a problem, research and recommend a solution and help implement that solution.

The role of the consultant have become central to the life of many organizations, today the question isn't how many companies are using consultants but how many are not using consultant (Pellegrinelli 2002). However the role of the consultant and their impact on the decision making process in client organization has been the subject of many debates. This essay examines the role of consultant in decision making process of a client.

The essay starts by looking at the role of the consultant as a facilitator of the client decision, without altering such decision. Then proceed to look at the <https://assignbuster.com/the-consultants-responsibility-to-facilitate-client-decisions/>

role of consultant as an expert who can be seen as being responsible for the decision and outcome for the execution of project. Furthermore, the two distinct roles are considered side on side and we look at other approaches to decisions making in the consultant client's relationship.

Facilitating Clients Decision

Decision making is one of the most important management decisions, if not the most important of all management activities (Mintzberg 1989 as stated in Buchanan and Huczynski 2010). The consultant goal is to influence decision making in organization, therefore it is pertinent that the consultant understands how decisions are made in organizations. Wickham and Wickham (2008) suggests that there are three major decision making models in practice, the normative decision making model, the descriptive or the prescriptive model of decision making.

Facilitation is the process of providing “ opportunities, resources, encouragement and support for a group to succeed in achieving its objectives, and to do this through enabling the group to take control and responsibility for the way they proceed” (Matthias 2011, p6). Facilitation is a complex, iterative process which enables things to happen (Velden and Leenknecht 2006). At the center of process facilitation is the need to build relationship. The facilitator primary responsibility is to help client with process-type interventions to make decisions.

The goal of process facilitation is to increase the client system's capacity for learning so that it can fix its own problems (Schein 1999). Here the decision-making and action lies predominantly in the hand of the client (Whittle 2006)

with the consultant playing a passive role. Sometimes the consultants may deliberately enroll internal champions to create internal ownership of ideas (Fincham, 2002 as stated in Whittle 2006).

Different authors have used different names in defining the role of the consultant as a facilitator including Schein who called it the process consulting model. He suggested that consultants are facilitators who help to empower the clients to solve his own problem and not own the problem. Similar to the process model is the role of the collaborator (Block 2000 as stated in Cameron and Green 2004). Also, Nees and Greiner defines a facilitator as the friendly co-pilot in their model (Appelbaum and Steed 2005), associating the knowledge based of the facilitator to business experience.

The application of facilitation in practice however, depends largely on what level of change is required and organizational development. Sherwood and Callahan (2006) developed strategic process consulting where they used undergraduates to facilitate the changes in the strategic processes in two organizations with the client making the key decisions but at their level of expertise. Also, Ambler 2006 used a combination of part training/ part facilitation/ part consulting to engage in a consulting project that required managers in client's organization to take more responsibility. Both projects had to deal with facilitating changes in non-technical part of the business. However Stager (1986) and Cameron and Green (2004) argue that facilitation can be useful even in technical field like IT.

There are different assumptions that the process model is built on; first, the client not only helps in making the diagnosis, they also benefit from participating in the diagnosis especially when the problem is a nontechnical one. Secondly, the client has helpful intent and has some problem solving ability, thirdly the client knows the form of intervention or solution that will work best in the organization because he or she understand contextual issues like power and politics in the organization. The client's problem solving abilities is improved upon as clients engage in the diagnosis of the problem and the selection and implementing the solutions (Rockwood 1993). Facilitation is useful when: there are Complex (unknown or conflicting) objectives, the process is complex, there are disagreements, buy-in is essential, multiple inputs are required, Ownership is required and lastly, managing hierarchical issue (Matthias 2011).

Advantages of the facilitator model includes that it offers new approaches to solutions. Secondly, they are able to spot risk and focus on issues not agendas and, they are able to see potential for wider application NCAS (2006). Also the process consultation model is important for building long term relationships because it focuses on the future of the organization client and also helping to build the required expertise in the client's organization. Matthias (2011) suggests that the process consulting model is most useful in achieving long term result.

Buckenmyer and Stough (1998) argue that the concepts of empowerment, participation and involvement are not always 100 percent positive. One consequence of unbridled empowerment can be dysfunctional organization.

Also processes facilitation exposes clients to the risk of group think and <https://assignbuster.com/the-consultants-responsibility-to-facilitate-client-decisions/>

group polarization which does not lead to the optimal solution being chosen (Buchanan and Huczynski 2010). Facilitation is more time consuming than content models (Stager 1986), and sometimes clients crave quicker and proactive intervention (Whittle 2006).

Expert decision making

The alternative approach to client consultant decision making argument is to understand when the client places the decision making powers to the consultant. The concept of consultant having decision making power or significant influence in decision making is plausible when the consultant plays the expert role. Edgar Schein developed content models which are divided into the purchase of expertise model and the doctor-patient model. Schein purchase-of-expertise and doctor-patient models are similar to Block's expert and pair-of-hands roles of the consultant respectively. Appelbaum and Steed (2005) suggests that Schein's content models are similar to Nees and Greniers model for role of consultancy. They link the mental adventurer to the expert role, the strategic navigator, management physician and system architect to the doctor-patient model.

The purchase-of-expertise model suggests that consultant needs to provide some type of expertise; this model allows the client to remove themselves from the problem (Rockwood 1993). This model is useful when the problem is straightforward and client organization does not possess the needed expertise (Schein 1978). In the expert role, the client delegates full authority to the consultant to plan and implement the changes. Decisions are made by the consultant on the base of his or her judgment, Client responds only when asked to. The goal is to solve the immediate problem (Cameron and Green <https://assignbuster.com/the-consultants-responsibility-to-facilitate-client-decisions/>

2004). The expert role is a specialist area (Witham and Witcham 2008) and requires technical knowledge Werr and Linnarsson (2001).

However, the problem of the purchase-of-expertise model is that it places enormous responsibility on the client to diagnose the problem properly and the also difficult to use when the problem is tricky and difficult to diagnose and the consultant is not held responsible for wrong consequences (Schein 1978). It is doubtful if any expert body of knowledge exists in management realm (Williams and Rattray 2004), and the consultant doesn't know everything (Stager 1986). Another problem with the expert approach is that the client is distanced from the process of problem solving. They also downplay the role of power and politics in the client organization. In addition, placing decision making in the hands of the client may create a superior/inferior relationship, which is offensive to some clients (Stager 1986).

Role of clients

There is no doubt, that there exist different client roles in consulting project, however authors like Appelbaum and Steed (2005), Pellegrinelli (2002) argue that in reality the question of client is ambiguous and problematic. However, Schein (1997) proposes a model to understand different types of client relationship, he identified five types of clients: The first is the contact clients, the individual who is first contacted by the consultant; the intermediate clients, the individuals or groups who gets involved in different activities as project evolves; the primary clients, is the client who ultimately " own" the problem and they are the ones who are responsible for paying the consulting bills. The unwitting clients are the clients who will be affected but who are <https://assignbuster.com/the-consultants-responsibility-to-facilitate-client-decisions/>

not aware that they would be impacted. The indirect clients are members of the organization who are aware that they will be affected but who are unknown to the consultant. Ultimate clients; are those whose welfare must be considered, they include the total community and the total organization.

This raises the ethical dilemma as the consultant needs to be able to manage the different types of clients and their different interest, influence and level of participation. Pellegrinelli (2002) suggests that facilitation model requires the consultant to be far more conscious of their various clients and stakeholders while the expert model, the interest of the senior manager commissioning the work tends to suffice. Also not all interventions are assumed to be helpful. The very presence of a consultant, and even mere data gathering changes things for the client/subject, and/or their stakeholder (Williams 2001). Also the fact that the facilitator does not own the problem raises the question of the contribution of the consultants (Wickham and Wickham 2008). Regardless of the mode of consulting employed, the consultant runs the dilemma of choosing between what needs to be done and what the paying client expects to be done (Williams 2001).

In our understanding of the consultant roles and decision making, it is important that we identify who owns and makes the decision. Bartecko (2010) argued that the clients should not allow the consultant make decision for them, she attributes the failures of many projects to the lack of ownership on the project. The expert role can be susceptible to the risk of being used as rubber stamp and tools in the hand of senior management especially when making tough decision (Shapirro et al 1993). While the facilitator can also be used to push management's agenda to the group and <https://assignbuster.com/the-consultants-responsibility-to-facilitate-client-decisions/>

the facilitator can manipulate the group (Matthias 2011) however, the purchase of advice can be interpreted as a sign of managerial ineffectiveness or if consultants renew the management concerns they were enlisted to lessen (Whittle 2006).

Organisational Learning

The knowledge and the learning objectives of the client have impact on what role the consultant wants to play and how it is received within the organization. One of the key requirements sought by clients is that the consultant must be knowledgeable (Minter 1994). The expert model is seen as a specialist area and it is known to be technical (Wickham and Wickham 2008). The facilitator seems non-technical and deals with the soft skills in organization (Cameron and Green 2004). The authoritative leaders or expert can make the consultant appear arrogant and insensitive in the eyes of clients (Shapiro et al; Clark and Fincham, 2002 as stated in Whittle 2006). Werr and Linnarson (2001) also opine that the traditional expert role creates a dangerous situation where the client loses knowledge to the consultant making them dependent on the consultant. From the foregoing it is arguable that the consultant facilitating helps build and retain organizational learning. The lack of success in consulting process isn't so much the lack of experience but not understanding what it is to help someone and not operating by those principles (Schein 1999).

An example of the failure of the expert model of changing client's decision can be seen with the Nett positive, a Business Analysis consulting company from India taking on a project in FCMB a bank in Nigerian. Nett positive took the expert role and were trying to reintroduce an online performance <https://assignbuster.com/the-consultants-responsibility-to-facilitate-client-decisions/>

management system which was the brief from the bank. However, they had two problems that beguiled the project, firstly they ignored the power and conflict in the organization and secondly they were seen to be protecting the interest of the contact client and not the primary contact. As the expert moved to try and develop the data needed as required by the client, the client decided to challenge the knowledge in-house to design the same system. So a cross functional team from IT, Finance and Sales was formed and given the mandate to design the task. Eventually the new performance management system was designed and the contract with Nett Positive was cancelled.

Bridging the different Approaches

While authors like Schein as stated in (Rockwood 1993) and (Velden and Leenkert 2006) suggest that consultants' decisions often time lie between facilitating and expert mode based on the situation and context. Schein however proposed that what is important is that all consultant and client relationship should be based on helping the client. Schumacher (n. d.) identified three new approaches to consulting. The first is the complimentary consulting which tries to integrate the expert and process consulting modes in a complete and cooperative manner. The integrated consulting was developed based on shared understanding of communication, feedback mechanism and reflection loops. However, the integrated approach does not have concrete realization in practice (Schumacher n. d.). The third modus of consulting is the client ownership-role of his problem and does not delegate to the consultant. The consultant only offers cooperation architecture and acts as sparring partner. However for long term stability of organizations,

any model that places the decision in the hands of the client and the consultant as a partner is arguable better.

Conclusion

Facilitating client decision is all about the consultant helping the clients to make accurate decision. The strengths of the argument for the consultant facilitating clients decision is that the client was part of the process that developed the solution. On the other hand the consultant can change client's decision by taking on the role of the expert, in this mode the decision actually lies in the hand of the consultant however the effectiveness of this method is contentious. However the consultant that chooses to facilitate needs to be able to manage the different client's roles in the organization without being seen to be protecting the interest of any group. Facilitation helps the consultant to ensure that the client grows the knowledge required to make good decisions.

Lastly the FCMB, net positive case was studied to see the failures associated with the consultant trying to change client's decision instead of facilitating it. This example further reiterates the fact that for long term sustainability and growth of the client-consultant relationship, the consultant should encourage facilitation instead of trying to change the client's decision.