

Essay on developing consultancy skills

[Business](#), [Company](#)



Developing Consultancy Skills

Dealing with stress from work has become a concern that affects the employees' private lives but also their professional results, interfering with the quality of the job performed. This is a rising concern, especially in the large organizations that are dealing with tight deadlines and that give their employees a high level of autonomy and responsibility. This is a problem faced also by Fast Soft Logistics (FSL) company, an organization activating in the logistic industry, providing services for various events. The activities associated with this industry are often highly demanding as the customers' requests are permanently increasing and many times they are not solicited in a timely manner, which makes the pressure heavy, as the employees of FSL must meet the required deadlines. Facing the employers' imposed positioning as a serious company, a partner for trust that never misses a deadline, the employees must also deal with the ongoing customers' solicitations, aiming to satisfy all requests in order to determine the customers to consider Fast Soft Logistic a reliable partner. Considering the fact that the available logistic solutions are limited, the employees are dealing with high stress of meeting their requests, pressured by the employer's exigencies, which holds the workers' responsible if they risk not meeting a deadline imposed by the customer. The high levels of stress that the employees face interfere with their work, as they become more nervous and are experiencing tiresome, because of their over concern, which even generates burnout. Employees who are experiencing stress and burnout are predisposed to making mistakes and in general they are not working at their full capacity, as they are trapped in their own negative emotions related to

working stress, which impede them from seeing efficient manners of solving the problems that they come across with. Therefore, the company FLS is facing employees stress, which prevent the organization from achieving peak performances.

The solution for dealing with this organizational problem would be to hire an external consultant for teaching the organization how to handle the stress that appears in the quotidian activities, in order to reach increased working performances. This consultant should be experienced in working in stress management in previous occasions, preferred in external positions, as employed for international organizations dealing with work stress related issues. S/he should have proven experience in public speaking, which should imply presentations within seminaries trainings, coaching, mentoring in an organizational but also in industry context. Likewise, the consultant that LSF is looking for should be a qualified professional, holding a MA diploma in psychology and to prove additional educational ongoing interest towards non-verbal communication, organizational communication, business performance studies. In addition, the external consultant should show enthusiasm for his/her work, for helping people finding the best in them, with passion, commitment and curiosity for finding people's competencies and abilities, hidden by their emotions or in this case, by their stress. The consultant that will work with LSF should have real people skills, being able to communicate at different levels, to read their gestures or any other non-verbal communication forms, s/he should have active listening abilities, as well as assertive communication competencies. Moreover, s/he should have sociological competencies, to be able to collect information through

interviews or focus groups and to have the needed competencies to interpret the data and propose solutions for dealing with the identified problems.

Justification for External Consultant

The external consultant's expertise will be needed because this problems requires for a competent professional, experienced in dealing with organizational problems, who has the training needed for such a situation and who knows, from experience, how to manage stress and to engage productivity and peak performance (" Optimum Performance. Peak Performance"). Moreover, an external consultant is the best solution for LSF, because the company, as in general the companies facing organizational problems, need outside intervention for spotting the problems and the solutions, in an objective manner. Trying to solve this problem internally, might be an inefficient approach, as the internal stakeholders, very familiar with the working place and with the organizational behavior of employees might not identify problems where they are, but might consider them normal behavior, failing, hence, to identify the organizational problem (Martin, 2005, p. 799). This problem requires specialized expertise and FSL lacks internal resources for dealing with this matter (Scott & Hascall " Inside or Outside", p. 1). The fact that this position requires for proven ongoing interest in the field of coaching, organizational or non - verbal communication, among others, implies that the sought external consultant is credible and valued, as s/he is more up-to-date to the latest business thinking and with the psychological abilities, people skills and public speaking, this person would be better regarded by the top management, due to his/her credentials (Scott & Hascall " Inside or Outside", p. 1). The external consultant has the advantage of

having previously worked for other companies, compared to internal employees, who dedicate their activity to one company, seeing solely the organizational specificities of LSF, which makes him/her more experienced in meeting and managing more diverse situations and in the same time, having more flexibility for coping with the problems met, in order to propose customized solutions for solving the identified organizational problems (Im, 2009, p. 1). Moreover, the company would benefit from the intervention of the external consultant, because s/he could transfer the knowledge gathered through years of practical practice in various organizations to the internal consultants of the company, increasing their skills and competencies and contributing to enriching the internal resources (Cummings & Vorley, 2008, p. 60).

The costs for hiring an external consultant are usually higher than the salaries of internal employees, but as they work project – based the company is only paying for the external consultants' services once and it remains with its lessons learned (Wills, 1998, p. 84). For LSF, hiring an external consultant would imply the following costs, defalcated on monthly activities:

As the consultant chosen by LSF company to solve the stress related problem that impedes the company from reaching its peak performance, I am assigned of working closely to Robert Milford, the internal consultant selected by the organization for this role. Practically, I will have to mentor Robert in his tasks of reducing the work related stress while rising up the enthusiasm of the employees and motivating them for achieving their peak performances. Robert Milford is relatively inexperienced for this position and this will be a challenge for the mentoring activity.

Mentoring activity implies training and advising as the main tools for educating the mentored in a specific field or, as Shea (2002) perceives it, “ is a fundamental form of human development where one person invests time, energy, and personal know – how assisting the growth and ability of another person” (p. 3).

Hahn Training LLC (2008) refers to mentoring in relation to counseling or teaching, wherein the mentor has the role of sponsoring or supporting for influencing or guiding the mentored individual (p. 1). The same publication finds that coaching implies empowering learning engagement guiding the coachee towards self-actualization and self – realization (Hahn Training LLC, 2008, p. 1).

Following the outcomes of mentoring versus coaching, Amy (2003) observes that here mentoring is a subject, coaching process; mentor shares, coach listens and questions; mentor is focused on development, coaching is focused on the goals that the coachee considers important; mentor is used for passing experience, know how, skills, etc., coaching is utilized for learning and experiencing new information and skills; mentoring “ teaches the employees to fish and helps them find the best spots”, whereas coaching “ helps the employees decide if the fishing is important to them, and if so, helps them find and utilize the best techniques based on their desired results” (p. 3).

Considering these theoretical considerations, my responsibility towards mentoring Robert refer to transmitting my know how regarding managing work related stress and overcoming the emotions and negative feelings associated with work related stress, which impede the employees from

performing at their best. Likewise, the time dedicated to Robert will also imply a full commitment towards making him understand what peak performance is and how companies can achieve it, with practical application to LSF and its organizational behavior and context. Based on Amy's view on mentoring, I should learn Robert "how to fish" and to show him the best spots for this. Translated, I must advise and train Robert on how to solve the work related stress problems in the company for reaching the peak performances, by providing him with a strategy for achieving this objective.

For this specific situation that LSF is dealing with, I recommend the project leader to adopt the participative leadership approach. Participative leadership is a way to say "cooperation pays", as it implies that the leader should be flexible, attentive to the teams' needs and problems, by directly involving in tasks, instilling the members of the team shared values, a sense of purpose, flexibility, tolerance and trust based exchange, by leading from the center of the team (Wexler, 2005, p. 92).

I encourage Robert to pursue this leadership style because the organization needs this leadership approach for solving the work related stress problems. An autocratic leadership that is applied in LSF is useful for maintaining the order and control of the logistic activities and this leadership style is specific to the industry, nevertheless, the lack of flexibility of this leadership style is what actually determined the work related stress accumulation. Therefore, a flexible leadership style, where the leader observes the team and understands its needs and problems is required, for letting the employees know that somebody cares for their issues and aims to change their stress problems into efficient working.

In performing my attributions, I might encounter the resistance to the involvement to consultancy of the project leader or other team members, who might feel uncomfortable with being trained by an outsider. I would cope with such a resistance through naturalness, as I consider it an intrinsic, authentic quality. Should all or some of the team members, including the internal project leader oppose to the involvement in the external consultancy, I would address the problem formally after I would have identified its causes, within the team. By using real life examples, I would determine the team members resistant to involvement that their involvement would change their state of mind, improving their personal lifestyle and their working results, which might also bring additional benefits for them.

Punctually, I would challenge them to discussions determining them to recognize their resistance to the involvement to consultancy and like this, to also identify the causes of their resistance. By demonstrating active listening towards their arguments I would transmit my respect towards their opinions, which would be a strategy for letting them know that I am a professional and that I seek for effective measures, instead of requesting the intervention of the company's management for solving their lack of involvement.

Moreover, knowing that resistance to involvement might come because the team members might not trust the consultancy methods proposed, considering that their methods (of managing the stress) are more efficient, as they are more familiar to the internal environment, I would engage them to open discussions about how they see the problem solved, what are their solutions for tackling the problem. Once they would put their cards on the

table, they would be asked to work in a group and to critically analyze the methods proposed, including the ones that the external consultant proposed. At this point they are already involved in the consultancy project.

A key area of decision making central to the project's success would be to apply techniques of overpassing the identified stress factors, which would require the employees' involvement, as well as the support of the management.

When required to take on this consultancy project, the company's owner and the Top Management were unaware of the stress sources, they only knew that employees' stress is blocking the company to reach peak performances. After organizing interviews with employees from various organizational levels, there was identified this common, stringent problem, specified also in task 1. As the mentoring intervention has found that the LSF company faces work related stress because of the tight deadlines imposed and logistical limitations, the management is required to change its policy of satisfying all customers into satisfying all customers who provide timely information regarding their needed logistical solutions.

Addressing this problem should be a common task, bringing together top management and employees representatives, wherein the employees share their needs and the management listens, then the management informs the employees about the organizational goals and how they will be adjusted to the employees' needs. After this negotiation phase, employees will be learned how to deal with stress by adopting a more relaxed approach and a strategic thinking on how they could solve the encountered problems in a timely manner, while enjoying the benefits of their autonomy. Within stress

management mentoring, the counseling team, along with the lead of this team will learn how to deal with their stress, through neurotherapy (also called neurofeedback and biofeedback), a therapy aimed at imposing a brainwave for changing the negative emotions related to stress into positive emotions, meant to increase the employees self - efficacy by determining them to experience and benefit of increased cognitive function as the stress levels decrease (“ What Is Neurotherapy?”).

Therefore, neurotherapy is the main key of the consultancy intervention, providing the company with experienced practice meant to change stress into peak performance. At the end of the session, which should take around three months, the results will start to show, although a positive feeling and an improved organizational behavior will be senses much earlier.

In supporting this decision, of applying neurotherapy as a tool for dealing with the stress, there were consulted various sources of information for understanding that this is the most suited approach for FSL. The initial information was received when the company asked me if I could provide a consultancy for dealing with stress that interferes with the company’s goal of reaching peak performances. Right at this point I understood that the company is dealing with work related stress. Later, the employers complained about the fact that the employees’ stress is daunting to the company, as the employees are not motivated and do not have the resources to reach peak performances. Therefore, the second information was that the employees’ work related stress was not allowing for the company to reach its peak performance, which was its objective. These information were obtained in a formal setting, within phone conversations

and face to face meetings, which imposed accuracy, reliability and credibility.

Another source of information were the employees' representatives, which complained about the tight deadlines and the pressuring working environment, and this is how I found the source of the work related stress: the working conditions and the unrealistic deadlines. The information were obtained from one on one formal interviews, which were next compared in a group session context and determined that the cause of stress was similar to most interviewed employees. This makes the information obtained relevant for determining the consultancy training tool most suited for addressing the employees' work related stress that impede them from performing at their best.

Therefore, interviews, focus groups, face to face meeting and telephone conversations were the formal sources of gathering the information required for the decision – making process regarding what consultancy strategy should be used. However, the formal approach was seconded by the informal approach, where various employees were addressed in informal setting (during lunch time, at the coffee, while smoking a cigarette in the smoking area) in a friendly manner, for reaching at the heart of the problem. Hearing the employees discuss about actual cases where they were forced to work many extra – hours for solving the logistical problems, for running with the logistic equipment from one side of the town to another, in order to meet the imposed deadlines it summed up to the general opinion regarding the sources of the employees' stress: the working conditions. Likewise, their fear of not meeting the deadlines and of being penalized in consequence was self

- destructive, as the employees were acting irrationally, not thinking straight, because they were dominated by stress and fear. This information was observed, during the employees' working activities, as they were speaking with the customers on phones or among themselves, trying to come out with the best solution.

Another source of information for determining that the neurotherapy is the best suited solution for tackling with FSL's situation was identified following a sketch organized within the counseling team, wherein employees of the company were asked to play the role of: the FSL employee, the FSL customers and the FSL managers. Although it was a sketch, the pressure level of the employees was felt and it could also be sensed the team members' focus on how not to mess up, fearing the consequences of responding to bosses, rather than how to efficiently and productively solve the problems. The neurotherapy was easily identified as the decision that needed to be made for solving this problem, based on this source of information.

Addressing several of FSL's main customers and several of its new customers was another source of information for deciding upon the consultancy method to be used. Through comprehensive interviews with the representatives of these companies that maintained the contact with FSL, there was understood the very tight timeframes and the chaotic mode of requesting FSL's services. An unorganized, unplanned mode of working was detected and there was immediately sensed the need for defining strict working procedures for solving these problems, as a strategy to change the negative emotions that were previously caused by the lack of working

procedures, with positive, can – do attitudes, sprung out of an organized, procedural working environment (specific to neurotherapy).

Therefore, the sources of information were the managers, the employees, and the clients. Through phone or face to face interviews/meetings, brainstorming, workshops, sketches, focus groups, I was able to identify that the neurotherapy was the decision that needed to be made towards managing the employees' work related stress problems and replacing them with positive thinking and efficient modes of acting. Managing the employees' work related stress through neurotherapy aims to bring visible significant results in the company's productivity, reaching its peak performance in between 3 and 6 months once the consultancy program commences, having more committed and more efficient employees, as a result of the decreasing of their stress.

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