

“The Consulting Process”

The Eight-Phase Consulting Model, the Human Performance Technology Model, and the Human Performance Improvement Model

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Abstract: All over the world, analysis of business environment (consulting process) is a topic of interest equally preoccupying both companies and their clients. But the gap between theory and reality shows that this practice is still young and that whatever their field, from non-governmental organizations in finance, banking or construction, the difference between success and failure depends on the ability to adapt and change to the needs market requirements increasingly diverse consumers.

To respond promptly and satisfactorily to customer needs, companies must define and recommend solutions that deliver value to stakeholders. Preparing for obtaining and maintaining the quality of services or products offered may be a road that takes you out of your comfort zone, forcing you to widen your knowledge areas, to improve your processes and realize your resources. Deepening analysis of business by understanding the need underlying business, the internal and external environment in which they develop business, they are essential requirements that guarantee success. In a dynamic environment, customers, consumers, and investors do not expect the market. Doing things efficiently and in line with expectations is a challenge that all market players cannot respond properly.

Keywords: Business Environment (Consulting Process), Customer Needs.

1. THE CONSULTING PROCESS EIGHT PHASE MODEL

The book, *consulting on the Inside*, written by Beverly Scott and B. Kim Barnes sets the base of an eight phase process for internal consultants. The authors state that the phases do not have to be followed in a particular order. Consulting is considered by Scott and Barnes as being a “tidy process” which is “more organic and often messy”. (p.55)

The eight phases mentioned in *Consulting on the Inside* are contract, agreement, information and assessment, feedback, seeking alignment, change targets and transition strategies, implementation and the last one: evaluation and learning. Depending on the project, certain steps in the process described by the authors may overlap or skipped. Sometimes certain project may require to revise an earlier phase.

1.1 Phase 1. Contact:

The project is defined as a repetitive process that makes a new amount, unique, well defined in the frame of a specialized organization. The project has the feature, a unique action, specific and new, composed of a logical sequence of activities with innovative character components of a different nature, carried out in a methodical and organized manner incremental manner, starting points and completion point defined, designed to successfully obtain new complex results required to meet the defined objectives. The moment when a consultant is contacted in order to work on a project is considered to be the contact phase for a consultant. According to Scott and Barnes “with your first contact with a potential client” starts the intervention of the future project. There are certain goals that are recommended to be achieved in this phase:

- Build a solid foundation and strong client-consultant partnership

- Explore and gain knowledge about the project
- Determine if the consultant's expertise is at the level required for the project
- Confirm client support and resources
- Begin to build a relationship with rapport and trust

1.2 Phase 2. Agreement:

At this phase an agreement should be initiated between the consultant and the client, which can be either written or verbally, depending on the duration of the project. Scott and Barnes state that the agreement phase "confirms the match between the client's needs and consultant's approach and expertise; defines the goals; establishes the budget; timeliness, and scope of the project; and clarifies the expectations of both the client and the consultant." (p.69)

One of the most important aspects is the language of the agreement, which is mandatory to be specific, detailed and clear, thus making sure that is understood and agreed by both parties: consultant and client.

1.3 Phase 3. Information and Assessment:

According to Scott and Barnes, in the information and assessment phase different tools are used to collect data for the project, such as surveys and interviews. Based on this data collection, findings are analyzed in order to determine the most appropriate intervention for the client system. The purpose of this phase "is to collect and evaluate information on the strengths and weaknesses of the client organization; identify problem areas; collect data on the as-is state; and, if appropriate, analyze the root causes." (p.77)

1.4 Phase 4. Feedback:

At this phase the consultant is reviewing the initial findings and decides whether s/he should proceed-with the project or stop. As a guideline in deciding if consultant should proceed with the project you can use the questions listed in the book "*Consulting on the Inside*"

- Is there a match between your knowledge base and the needs and opportunities in the client system?
- Is there a match between the organizational culture and the approach you bring?
- What alternatives can you offer the client as next steps?

The communication with the client is very important, thus presenting the client the findings resulted from the surveys and interviews and appropriately framing data, an important step that requires careful planning and delivery. In their book Scott and Barnes underline this aspect as it follows "selecting and using key themes; using a theoretical model to help interpret the data; and framing it with opportunities, successes and strengths of the client organization which are essential for the success in this phase." (p.102)

1.5 Phase 5. Alignment:

At this certain phase the client and the consultant revise the initial agreement based on the information gathered in the findings phase. Based on the revision, a system framework is used to plan to change targets but also to transition strategies that concern "the personal transition needs of both members of the client organization and other employees." (p.117) The internal consultant continues to build trust with the client, strengthening the framework throughout this phase.

The alignment phase comprises also strategies, structure, core processes, management systems and culture of the organization.

1.6 Phase 6. Change Target and Transition Strategies:

Using the data collected, the consultant identifies the change targets; as Scott and Barnes would say "it is not the change that can be managed-it has its own speed and direction. What can be managed is the response of the organization and the individuals to the change." (p.106) In order to properly identify that the change target and the transition are successful it is "absolutely critical that top management commits to and understands the change to be implemented. A project success for failure hinges on that support." (p.115)

Systematic thinking is crucial for the successful change, therefore the client must be constantly educated by the consultant; as it is "crucial to look beneath problems or events to identify the patterns and structures that created them." (p.112)

1.7 Phase 7. Implementation:

The action phase of any consulting project is the implementation, where the consultant together with the client proceed to create the outcomes “to make lasting change in the business results, the performance and culture of an organization, a business unit or large department.” (p.121) Scott and Barnes present various types of implementation and strategies among which are mentioned change management, which focuses on the people side of change; but also performance improvement technology that focuses on the “gap between individual and group performance and business needs.” (p.122)

In the book at this phase is also mentioned the management/human resources development (HRD) that targets “individual performers and managers to prepare them for greater responsibility, to update their skills current, or to increase their productivity and effectiveness.” (p.137)

1.8 Phase 8. Evaluation and Learning:

The final phase in the consulting process is evaluation and learning. As Scott and Branes state this phase “is ripe with opportunity to bring closure, to celebrate, to reflect, to learn, and to remind the client system what it has gained.” (p.139) The two authors consider that internal consultants are very important in order to “keep it simple and tie evaluation to the results that the clients care about.” (p.145)

The final phase should be used by the internal consultants to overlook information learned through the intervention and to promote in the organization continuous learning.

2. HUMAN PERFORMANCE TECHNOLOGY MODEL

Chapter 8, from the book *Organizational learning, performance and change* (2000), written by Jerry W. Gilley and Ann Maycunich addresses the human performance technology (HPT). The definition given by Rothwell (1996b, 5) to human performance technology is “systematic process that links business strategy and goals and workers’ abilities to achieve them with a variety of interventions, including environment redesign, learning and training, and incentive system reconfiguration.”

Gilley and Maycunich consider that HPT is defined as an “accomplishment, execution, outcome or achievement.” (p.179); therefore, approaching a range of performance improvement opportunities throughout a systematic, performance focused and data driven view. The main goal of human performance technology is considered by Fuller and Farrington (1999) to be the guarantee that the person that is doing the job has the required knowledge, skills and motivation; in order to be efficient and effective.

According to the authors there are five steps that have to be followed; step one is necessary for the identification of the performance problem that requires evaluation. It is recommended that at this first step you also determine the desired performance that has to be reached and the level at which the problem is situated inside the organization.

The second step is used for the analysis of the problem and the causes that have determined it. The consultant should use the information available in order to create a pattern of possible solutions. According to Rummler and Brache (1992,42-44) the analysis that is carried out should consider three levels inside the organization, as follows:

1. “Organizational level to determine cross-functional processes that prevent appropriate performance”
2. “Process level to determine which process steps are not being performed properly and are leading to poor performance”
3. “Job/performer level to determine what job outputs of which critical jobs need to be improved in order for the key processes to work effectively and produce the desired quality “(Gilley & Maycunich, 2000, p.192)

The third step that the consultant should take relates to the development of the solutions that would improve the performance. In order to do so, the professional consultant should address the root causes in order to close the performance gaps. (Gilley & Maycunich, 2000)

The fourth step is the implementation of the proposed solutions from the previous step. The consultant is very involved at this point with the installation and implementation of the intervention. The Consultant assists at this point with performers, managers, process owner and other stakeholders in order to provide a clear understanding of the desired outcomes of the intervention that is being carried on. (Gilley&Maycunich, 2000)

The final step is the fifth one, which is the evaluation of the intervention. The consultant should gather data about the performance, deciding if the intervention has reached to the desired results or what modification can be made to the proposed solutions in order to obtain the desired outcome.

3. HUMAN PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT MODEL

The main purpose of performance management is to increase individual and organizational efficiency. Performance management is an evolving process where personal skills and organizational parameters improve over a period of time.

The operational objective of performance management is continuous improvement, measured by all the relevant indicators and seen in the context of value-added manufacturer firm which provided consumers (customers) superior service and excellent products compared to competitors.

In the book *Human Performance Improvement* (2000), by William Rothwell, Carolyn Hohne and Stephen King, the role of the analyst is described but also in Chapter Two is mentioned how the use of Human Performance Improvement model can identify performance improvement inside the organizations.

The keywords of HPI are:

- A planned common framework of objectives, standards and tasks / skills required: the core of performance management is the agreement between manager and employee regarding expectations for these items; to a very large extent performance management is the management of expectations;
- Process: performance management is not just a system of forms and procedures; action means that employees must undertake to achieve results day by day and improve their performance and others;
- Shared Understanding: To improve performance, employees must have an understanding of the accepted level of performance and proficiency required;
- An approach to people management and development: management performance is centered on three aspects; First, on how managers and leaders of the team work effectively with those around them; secondly, on how employees work with managers and their teams; Third on how you can develop employees so as to improve their knowledge, skills and experience levels of their competence and performance;

Output: Finally, performance management means employees achieve success in the workplace by being able to use their full abilities, to realize their full potential and maximize their contribution to organizational success.

Performance management has been approached as a "control loop", linking strategies and organizational goals, performance measurement, training for performance, guidance and leadership performance and rewarding performance. From this point of view, the performance management cycle never closes completely.

The process is both evolutionary and iterative. As a result, the components of a performance management system should not be seen in isolation ever, and the results should be the basis for establishing the company's development objectives. Only by closing the feedback loop, can this human resources strategy become an integral part of the company. Staff achieving the objectives of an organization must be congruent with the goals of the organization.

Performance management is achieved through a variety of tools and activities within the different levels of the organization. These may include: strategic planning; defining objectives, priorities and organizational values; identifying and using appropriate performance goals and measures for the organization, key processes, functions and employees; evaluation; personal development plans; different payment systems by performance.

4. SIMILARITIES OF THE CONSULTING EIGHT PHASE, HPT AND HPI MODELS

All the three models presented above have many similarities. The models have in common the following aspects:

- The main focus is the identification and analysis of the main problem that is leading to poor performance.
- All models are systematic processes that identify the performance gaps in the actual situation with respect to the desired one.
- The models are data driven; which means that the information gathered inside the organization is examined in order to determine the root cause of the performance problem.

- Each model focuses on determining the best intervention solution and the analytical tools through which the performance problem can be solved.
- All three models have in common the evaluation and learning as an important tool for reaching the desired performance.
- Linking strategy is used in order to reach the business goals.
- Rewarding the staff when the intervention has been finalized is an important aspect in all the models; coupled with the support offered from the leadership.

Another similarity between the three models is the fact that both consultant or analyst spend a large amount of time in collecting data from different sources inside the organization and analyze it in order to determine the root of the problem that is creating the gap between the current performance and the desired one.

It is underlined in all the models that after the problem is determined and all the parties involved in the project agree upon it; the consultant or the analyst depending on the model should determine the intervention framework that is suiting best in that particular situation. The success of the intervention is the communication between the leadership and personnel. Passing over certain steps or proceeding too quickly, may lead to a misdiagnosis of the causing problem therefore wasting time for the organization but also efforts and resources.

5. DIFFERENCES OF THE CONSULTING EIGHT PHASE, HPT AND HPI MODELS

In the book *ASTD Reference Guide to Workplace Learning and Performance Volume I* (2000), Rothwell (1996) describes HPI as “the systematic process of discovering and analyzing important human performance gaps, planning for future improvements in human performance, designing and developing cost-effective and ethically justifiable interventions to close performance gaps, implementing the interventions, and evaluating the financial and nonfinancial results.”

Performance management is a continuous activity piloting transformation inputs into outputs to be done effectively and efficiently. First, piloting means to identify and implement ways to collectively learn: to act as a team in a manner efficient and based on the philosophy of having at every step more efficient results than the previous step. Secondly, this piloting of change is carried out continuously by two functions: complementary deployment strategy through ongoing operational rules of engagement), and that the results and knowledge must be capitalized in order to enrich reflection on targets (storage and use experience).

Another difference between the three presented models is the fact that the eight phase consulting model is used in an internal consulting process. This type of model requires building a strong client relationship, creating good communication between the internal consultant and client and obtaining thus leadership support during the intervention.

While the HPT model is a more results-oriented model, cost effective and systematic at the same time. Brinkerhoff and Gill (1994) state that “HPT is dedicated to linking training, environmental redesign, feedback systems, or incentive systems to measurable performance in order for the organization to achieve its business goals and objectives.” This focus makes the difference between the eight phase consultant model and HPT.

The difference between HPI and HPT is that the HPI model uses steps to conduct the performance analysis, followed by cause determination, creating the appropriate intervention plan, implementation of intervention and followed by evaluation. Thus HPI focuses on “diagnosis or troubleshooting alone: Instead, it emphasizes a systematic process that includes follow-through on the intervention selected to narrow or close the performance gap.” (p.208)

6. WHAT MODEL IS MOST APPEALING AND WHY?

In my opinion the eight phase consulting model is the most appealing model designed by Scott and Barnes. The model is very clear and easy to be applied, although it is recommended for an internal consultant. The sequences in which the steps are developed depends on the type of project and the scope of intervention, therefore it can be applied to a multitude of projects. Communication is an essential key factor that helps building the trust between the client and consultant. One of the main reasons for which I consider this model to be more useful than the others is the feedback phase; after all the data has been collected and all findings analyzed the consultant can create the intervention framework. The eight phase model explores the layers of the problem, perceptions of how others contribute and how the clients contribute to it. The advantage of using this model is the fact that the alternatives used to address the problem are discussed with the client,

describing clearly what will be changed after the intervention, providing training for new skills that are required. The last step of the model, evaluation and learning, is very useful for discussing the consequences of the intervention on the client morale to see what they have gained from the intervention.

7. THE BENEFITS OF INTEGRATING MODELS

Communication, as the only way of interaction between people, transmission of information, ideas, emotions, coordination of activities, play an essential role in the organization. Using the HPT model could bring benefits to the eight phase model by adding up the future planning of human performance improvement, as Rothwell (1996b,15) says “planning for future improvements in human performance problems or realizing improvement opportunities as well as examining past and present performance problems or breakdowns.” (p.180)

As earlier mentioned, consulting is not a linear process and intervention plans differ on the type of project and the scope. To determine the right solution of the root problem requires the exact determination of it. Integrating the other two models presented HPI and HPT can be beneficial for the eight phase model from the point of view of human performance improvement. Although the Scott and Barnes model describes the consulting process from the beginning until the end, Rothwell considers that each part of the organization is a subsystem that contributes to the success of the overall organization; thus “changes in one part of the organization will affect others.” This means that the choice of the intervention model is very important, as the intervention does not only affect a particular part of the organization but also areas can be impacted. Some interventions can be costly, some more suitable for other type of jobs, therefore the eight model phase could benefit more of the Gilbert’s Behaviour Engineering Model (BEM); to overview the variables that influence the work environment and individual performance. Benchmarking is another method that can be used to establish the goals and objectives, but also flow charting can be helpful in the organization of the data that is collected during the identification of the root cause.

It has been observed by many authors that the major cause for poor performance is due to leadership and unclear management standards. The problem of leadership in human resources management analyzes the individuals involved in this activity; the person who leads and those who interact in this context. In *The Role of Analyst*, Gilbert “assumes that most people want to do a good job and are generally capable.” The BEM focuses exclusively on identifying traits ideal of the person entrusted with the leading role, having in mind that behaviors and styles most effective could be identified and practiced by those persons with special status in the organization.

8. CONCLUSION

Being an analyst means that you must penetrate the ins and outs of the business, understand the requirements, to research the requirements and work with business to identify real demands and to put your application skills of problem solving to design a solution that meets requirements.

Each of all the three models discussed has its advantages and can be complemented by the others. A smooth transition towards the desired performance can be reached by selecting the approach which is most compatible with the client’s needs. The communication between the client and consultant, where there is an internal consultant or an analyst, leads to the determination of the best combination that can bring the success of the intervention plan.

Discovering the root problem based on an accurate diagnosis is the most important phase in any of the three models. Based on the type of project and scope of the intervention, one of the models can be used to ensure the desired performance goal is met.

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