

Consult Yourself

The NLP Guide to
Being a Management
Consultant



Carol Harris

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*The NLP Guide to
Being a Management Consultant*

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Preface

Over the years, many people have asked me how they could become independent consultants. Most of these people were experienced professionals in particular fields and now wished (or had no choice but) to change direction, although a few were starting out on their careers and had little work experience under their belts.

My immediate response to the 'new starters' was usually to tell them that one doesn't take up consultancy in the way one does other jobs – that is, feel attracted to it, do some training and launch into a career. I felt that consultancy was something to be done only when one had sufficient experience of a particular function, sector or process to be able to pass on one's own knowledge and skill to others. And, to a large extent, I still believe this.

However, management consultancy is now such a rapid growth area that it is commonplace for young graduates, or specialists with only a few years' work experience, to be taken on by the large consultancy practices, which then mould them to their own image. There sometimes seems to be a sharp contrast between this route to consultancy success and that of the seasoned professional who turns to consultancy after many years in line management, a functional specialism or business development.

There are many different routes to consultancy success, but they have in common the requirement for excellent skills in order to help others grow, develop, innovate, solve problems, manage, lead and achieve business results. Although the focus of this book is the independent consultant, the chapters that follow will take you through a range of consultancy issues and ideas. I hope they will give you food for thought, whatever your route into consultancy.

I have used various concepts in this book, many of them – as the title indicates – from NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming). Although I have kept the book as jargon-free as I can, I have indicated at the end of chapters the terminology for the NLP techniques used so that those who are unfamiliar can track them back

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and, if motivated to pursue them, learn more about their origins, applications and practice. The application of all the techniques mentioned is, of course, far broader than their usage here.

So use the book in whichever way suits you best; either read it from start to finish, or dip in at those points that attract your interest the most. And if you have any interesting consultancy anecdotes to recount, do get in touch – I like collecting tales of endeavour and result.

Author's note: Throughout this book I have used the term 'consultancy', as it is the word used in the UK to describe both the industry and the function. In the USA the term 'consulting' is used instead and readers may prefer to substitute this if it is more familiar to them.

Chapter 1

What Is Consultancy?

This chapter introduces a range of topics including the origins of consultancy, its purposes, the kind of people who can be consultants, the issues faced by consultants, what clients want from consultants (and vice versa), and consultancy elements and processes.

How Can Consultancy Be Defined?

There are two ways of considering the field of consultancy. There is the 'technical' definition – consultancy as a formal business activity. There is also the more commonplace definition – consultancy as an activity that takes place on a daily basis between people in all contexts.

The first definition encompasses many discrete processes, for example: ♦Management consultancy, ♦Medical consultancy, ♦Design consultancy, ♦Financial consultancy, and so forth.

The second definition covers activities such as an employee asking a colleague for ideas on how to tackle a task, a teenager asking an older friend for advice on relationships and a new house purchaser asking a neighbour for the addresses of local garden centres.

In this book I concentrate on the first definition of consultancy, that is, the formal processes in which people engage in business. I will be focusing especially on management consultancy, with brief glimpses at consultancy in other fields. The Management Consultancies Association (MCA) in the UK defines management consultancy as '...the supply of independent advice and assistance to clients about management issues'.

How Did Consultancy Originate and Develop?

Probably consultancy in its informal sense has existed for as long as people have been together in social groups. However, the origins of consultancy as a business practice are quite recent. The impact of the Industrial Revolution gave rise to 'industrial engineering', aimed at improving efficiency and productivity and, in the UK and the USA, some early consultancy activities were in evidence in the late 1880s; their origins being in management costing and accountancy. The 1920s were probably the starting point for modern consultancy as we know it and, in the decades that followed, many firms came into existence, with the 1950s being the real growth times for the consultancy industry, linked to postwar business expansion/reconstruction, technological advancement and growth in developing countries.

The early period of consultancy featured many consultancy products and processes, many of them trademarked 'off-the-shelf' solutions to problems. Some of these products, and their associated 'Here's the solution, now what's the problem?' approach have still survived, although nowadays consultancy tends to be much more client-focused and flexible, offering approaches and processes rather than guaranteed solutions.

Although there were some periods when consultancy services fell in popularity – the early 1970s in Britain being one of those times – consultancy survived and grew. Today it is one of the most popular work sectors for both employed and self-employed people.

The Management Consultancies Association survey of consultancy trends showed that, in the UK, between 1960 and 1998 there was a steady rise in the number of consultants employed by MCA firms, from around 1,500 in 1960 to almost 15,000 at the end of 1999. Bruce Petter, Executive Director of MCA, has said that management consultancy is one of the fastest-growing industries in the United Kingdom.

Revenues in the UK now exceed £6 billion, with exports well over £1 billion, and consultancy services offered include IT consultancy, IT systems development, strategy, financial services, project

Chapter 7

Consultancy Techniques

This chapter considers some of the techniques and approaches used in consultancy. There are three elements to this chapter:

- ♦Generic consultancy techniques;
- ♦Underlying concepts;
- ♦Specific techniques.

Many of the topics contained in this chapter are used generally within the business world as well as in consultancy. Some of the concepts and techniques have readily definable origins and attributions, and some are trademarked processes. There are numerous books written on these topics, and I have referred to some of these in the Bibliography.

Generic Consultancy Techniques

Information Collection

Information collection is the foundation for much of a consultant's work. It is important to ensure that information is actually valuable. A distinction may be made between data and information; generally data is considered to be the raw material, whereas information is material that has been manipulated to be useful. For example, a list of all the stationery suppliers in the country is data, but the details of those suppliers within your own area and carrying products that are useful to you, is information. You can utilise the second list of suppliers, but need to work on the first before it can be useful.

Elements of information

To be useful, information needs to have certain attributes; it needs to be:

- Relevant – appropriate for your needs.
- Up to date – as timely as possible.
- Comprehensive – sufficiently wide in scope for the purpose.

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- Reliable – ‘correct’ and stable.
- Available – readily usable.
- Accessible – easy to find.
- Comprehensible – understandable.

Use of information

Information is required in many situations in consultancy. Some that spring to mind are

- Setting up your business.
- Marketing and selling.
- Financial management.
- Client relationships.
- Project management.

Information-gathering processes

There are numerous ways of gathering information; some you may find useful are:

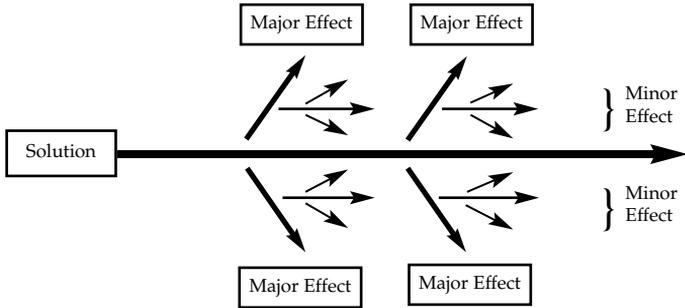
- Discussion.
- Questionnaires and surveys.
- Library and information bureau searches.
- Company searches.
- Internet and intranet searches.

Analysis

Having accessed your information, you will need to work out how to use it to best advantage. Analysis of information can be conducted in different ways, depending on your purpose and your time and resources. The word ‘analysis’ can seem to imply a mechanical process, but there is more than one way to assess the information you hold. A useful distinction can be between ‘finger-in-the-air’ techniques and ‘number-crunching’ techniques. I like to think of the first as ‘intuitive’ analysis and the second as ‘numerical’ analysis. They can both have their place in consultancy processes, as I will go on to explain.

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Solution-effect diagram

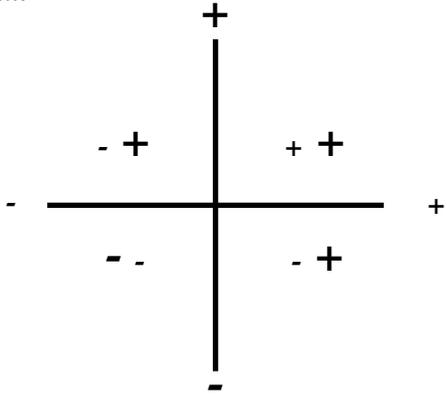


Matrix diagrams

Matrix diagrams are a very common way of representing issues. A matrix has two axes, vertical and horizontal; their intersection produces four quadrants. A matrix can be used to show the different results achieved from different combinations of the elements.

I find it helpful to have people design their own matrices, or to work with them in designing ones which relate well to their situations. To do this, simply take two different issues that are relevant in the situation being reviewed and put each on one axis; this gives the four quadrants, which can then be analysed in relation to the real-life situation that exists.

Matrix diagram



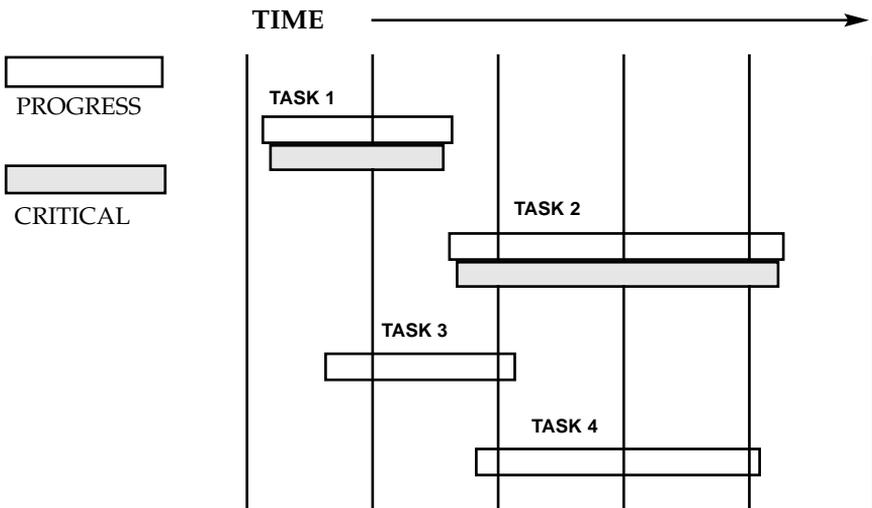
Gantt charts

Another technique that is especially useful in project management is the Gantt chart, designed by an American, Henry Gantt, at the time of the First World War. A GANTT chart has vertical columns and horizontal lines. The first column lists the activities and the other columns represent time periods.

As each activity is listed, a horizontal bar is drawn across all the time columns that relate to it – so if the columns were months of the year and an activity was due to begin in March and continue until June, the bar against that activity would run across the March, April, May and June columns. Other activities are similarly indicated, so it can easily be seen where there are many parallel activities, where there are quiet periods and so on. A normal office day planner is a kind of Gantt chart.

Underneath each bar, you can also put a second (parallel) bar; this is to show the actual progress of the activity. So if the March activity did not actually start until April, and continued until July, the bar for progress would begin later and extend further than its estimated time. If you put the actual times taken in a different colour, this also gives you a very clear way of showing comparisons between estimated and actual activity times and indicates the overall progress of a project very simply and effectively.

Gantt chart



Consult Yourself will revolutionise your approach to becoming a management consultant. Using strategies developed from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), this book will help you to assess the benefits and risks of a career in consulting, and provides techniques that will enable you to:

- **manage your time**
- **evaluate**
- **present information**
- **collaborate**
- **interview**
- **coach**

Pioneering a thoroughly-structured process of becoming a consultant, **Consult Yourself** is essential reading for independent consultants/partnerships and associates, new entrants to large consultancy practices, internal consultants, and everyone interested in consultancy. Effectively applying the insights of NLP to the sphere of business, this is a guide that will give you the edge as a consultant.

Carol Harris lives in Welshpool in Mid Wales. Since 1986 she has run her own consultancy practice – Management Magic, specialising in the development of people and organisations. Prior to that she was, for seven years, Director of Personnel and Administration for the Arts Council of Great Britain.

“The only guide to consultancy that anyone could need ...”

**Graham Willcocks, MCMI, FCIIPD, Chairman, Development Processes plc;
Director, Wesley House Consultancy**

“...an essential book not only for every consultant and consultant-to-be but for trainers, facilitators and other change professionals alike.”

Wiebke Koch, Lecturer in Strategic Business Management, International Business School Berlin; Consultant, Entrepreneurship in the Knowledge Society, Freie University Berlin; Director, SynerGenius Consulting

“Readers will be challenged by new and thought-provoking ways of thinking.”

Ian Barratt, Chief Executive, Institute of Management Consultancy

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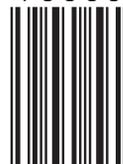
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