The consulting process 3

A model

Various models of the consulting process, ranging from three to ten phases, can be found in the literature (Kolb and Frohman, 1970). We have chosen here the simple five-phase model which includes the major phases:

- entry
- diagnosis
- action-planning
- implementation
- termination.

This model is shown in Figure 10.

We must point out that this is not a universal model and should not be applied blindly to all situations. There will be times when the phases overlap or when you have to go back to an earlier phase. The model does, however, provide a useful framework for structuring and planning particular assignments. You may note that this model is very similar to problem-solving models since consulting is a form of problem solving.

Entry

This is a critical stage since it lays the foundation for all that follows. The subsequent phases will be influenced by the quality of the early conceptual work and the kind of relationship established with the client.

Initial contacts

In most cases it will be the client who makes the first contact by publicly announcing his/her intention to carry out a consulting project and inviting consultants to manifest their interest. In the case of small states, where most major projects will be financed by an international agency, it is important that you know where to look for such announcements. Projects may be implemented in the Ministry of Education but early knowledge of which projects are going ahead may be obtained from the Ministry of Planning and/or Foreign Affairs, that is, the ministry that holds portfolio responsibility for international

Figure 10 The consulting process

1 Entry
- initial contacts
- preliminary diagnosis
- assignment planning
- assignment proposal to client
- the contract

2 Diagnosis
- fact finding
- fact analysis and synthesis
- feedback to the client

3 Action planning
- developing solutions
- evaluating alternatives
- proposals to client
- planning for implementation

4 Implementation
- assisting with implementation
- planning and monitoring implementation
- training

5 Termination
- evaluation
- final report
- plans for follow-up
- withdrawal

Source: This is a modified version of Figure 1.1 (p. 14) in M. Kubr *Management Consulting: A guide to the profession,* 2nd revised edn., International Labour Office, 1986

co-operation. Most tertiary institutions in small states tend to have their ears close to the ground for intelligence of this type.

Defining roles

It is at this early stage that roles have to be defined and clarified. Time has to be spent clarifying who your client really is. In most cases you will be dealing with three different 'clients': the division/department where the problem is; the Ministry of Education which is the executing agency; and the international funding agency. In most cases, the first meeting will be with a senior manager in the ministry while the person(s) who owns the problem and with whom you will be working is someone else in the division/department. It is important for the success of the assignment to find out from the outset with whom you will be working.

Preliminary diagnosis

The need for, and importance of, this preliminary diagnosis is all too often not emphasised. The purpose of the diagnosis is not to propose measures for solving the problem but is, in fact, to quickly gather the information needed to understand the problem. While you need to know exactly what your client expects from you, you also have to ensure that his/her perception and definition of the problem is correct. Before starting to plan the assignment, you should undertake your own independent problem diagnosis. This need not be a long, time-consuming exercise. In fact, an experienced consultant starts such a diagnosis right from the very first moment of contact with the client.

Assignment planning

The next stage is to plan the assignment. Your client expects to receive your initial findings on the problem and a proposal describing what you suggest doing and under what terms and conditions. There are five main elements of assignment planning.

1 **A summary of problem identification**
This is a summary of the conclusions from the preliminary problem diagnosis.

2 **The objectives to be achieved and action to be taken**
Whenever possible these should be quantified. Social and qualitative benefits should be clearly described and explained. It may be that certain objectives will not be met unless your client takes certain measures. If so, it is essential that these measures are specified as clearly as possible.

3 **The phases of the assignment and time-table**
Both parties need to know what the other party expects at each stage.

4 **Role definition**
The style and mode of consulting considered most appropriate to the nature of the problem should be suggested here.
- What activities will be carried out by your client and what activities will be carried out by you, the consultant.
- Who will prepare what data and documents.
- What meetings, project groups, and other forms of group work will be used and who will be involved.

5 **Resource planning**
Following the detailed role definition you should determine the resources required by the assignment in each phase. Your client will need to know what resources provided by you will have to be paid for.

Assignment proposal to client

Preparation of project proposal

The assignment proposed will be described in a document to be presented to your client. This document may be given different names: survey report, technical proposal, project document, contract proposal, etc.

Most aid agencies have prepared a standard table of contents for, or guidelines for the preparation of, such documents. We present examples in Figures 11 and 12: Figure 11 provides a table of contents for a project document and is from UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning; Figure 12 gives guidelines for the format of a project document and is from UNDP's project aid

Figure 11 Table of contents for a project preparation document

Main items (Texts to be written)	*Annexes*	*(Responsibilities)*
1. *Justification*		
1.1. Current situation of the field considered		ED* (ECO)
1.2. Government policy		ED
1.3. Problems and needs		ED (ECO)
2. *Objectives*		
2.1. Statement of objectives		ED
2.2. Overall design of the project		ED
2.3. Results expected at the end of the project		ED
3. *Essential characteristics*		
3.1. Organisation		
3.2. Enrolment (or production)	3.21. Enrolment distribution	ED
3.3. Curriculum (or activities)	3.31. Weekly timetable by premises	ED
3.4. Methods		ED
3.5. Location		ED & ARC
3.6. Staff	3.61. Teaching staff	ED (ECO)
	3.62. Non-teaching staff	
3.7. Others		
4. *Items to be funded and costs*		
4.1. Construction	4.11. Teaching load and space required	ED (ARC)
	4.12. Schedule of accommodation, area and costs	ARC (ED)
	4.13. Characteristics of the premises and space standards	ARC
4.2. Furniture, equipment, materials	4.21. List of furniture	ARC (ED)
	4.22. List of equipment	ED (ARC)
4.3. Technical assistance	4.31. Technical assistance	ED
4.4. Staff training	4.41. Training	ED
4.5. Others		
4.6. Summary of costs to be financed	4.61. Summary table of capital costs	
5. *Administration of the project*		
5.1. Organisation and procedures		ARC
5.2. Monitoring and evaluation		
5.3. Implementation schedule	5.31. Implementation schedule	ARC (ED)
6. *Feasibility*		
6.1. Administrative feasibility		ED (ECO, ARC)
6.2. Financial feasibility	6.21. Annual operating costs to be paid by the government	ECO (ED)

*ED = Education specialist or planner. ECO = Economist. ARC = Architect. Brackets indicate partial responsibility.

Source: Education project identification, preparation and evaluation unit. IIEP educational materials prepared in conjunction with Unesco Division of Financing of Education 1986. Reproduced Magnen, Andre (1991) Education Projects: elaboration, financing and management, UNESCO, IIEP.

Figure 12 Guidelines for project formulation and the project document format

2.0 Project document

2.1. *Introduction*

1. Subsection 2.3, below, sets forth an annotated project document format. This format is in effect a modified version of the familiar descriptive format in use since 1975. It supersedes the provisional guidelines for the 'Utilization of New Project Document Format' issued under cover of a 'Dear Colleague' letter from the Administrator dated 26 October 1982, and the 'Supplemental Guidelines on Project Document Format' (UNDP/PROG/119, UNDP/PROG/FIELD/179) issued 20 December 1985.

2. The core structure of the project contained in these instructions consists of a hierarchy of basic project elements as follows:

Development objectives
Immediate objectives
Outputs
Activities
Inputs

3. A project formulated according to this structure is intended to develop in a certain sequence. Namely, the *inputs* or raw materials are to be transformed by the *activities* to produce specific *outputs*, which, when joined together, will lead to the accomplishment of the *immediate objectives*. The accomplishment of the immediate objectives will in turn contribute at least in part, to the achievement of the broader *development objective*. This is the basic theory or 'logic' of the UNDP project design, upon which the instructions which follow are based.

2.2 *Model table of contents*

Cover page

A. *Context*
  1. Description of subsector
  2. Host country strategy
  3. Prior or ongoing assistance
  4. Institutional framework for subsector

B. *Project justification*
  1. Problem to be addressed; the present situation
  2. Expected end of project situation
  3. Target beneficiaries
  4. Project strategy and implementation arrangements
  5. Reasons for assistance from UNDP/executing agency
  6. Special considerations
  7. Co-ordination arrangements
  8. Counterpart support capacity

C. *Development objective*

D. *Immediate objective(s), outputs, and activities*
  1. Immediate objective 1
  1.1 Output 1
    Activities
    1.1.1 activity 1
    1.1.2 activity 2
    1.1.3 activity 3
    1.1.4 activity 4

D. *Immediate objective(s), outputs, and activities (continued)*

1.2 Output 2

Activities

1.2.1 activity 1

1.2.2 activity 2

1.2.3 activity 3

1.3 Output 3

Activities

1.3.1 activity 1

1.3.2 activity 2

2. Objective 2

2.1 Output 1

Activities

2.1.1 activity 1

2.1.2 activity 2

2.2 Output 2

Activities

2.2.1 activity 1

2.2.2 activity 2

2.2.3 activity 3

E. *Inputs*

F. *Risks*

G. *Prior obligations and prerequisites*

H. *Project review, reporting and evaluation*

I. *Legal context*

J. *Budgets*

K. *Annexes*

I. Work plan

II. Schedule of project reviews, reporting and evaluation

III. Standard legal text for non-SBAA countries (if required)

IV. Training programme (if required)

V. Equipment requirements (if required)

VI. Job descriptions (if required)

VII. Framework for effective participation of national and international staff (if required)

Standard Content and Format – UNDP Project Document
Sample cover page
(Line-by-line instructions for the completion of the cover page may be found in section 30303 of the PPM.)
United Nations Development Programme
Project of the Government of

____

PROJECT DOCUMENT

Number and title:
Duration:
Project site:
ACC/UNDP sector & subsector: a/
Government sector and subsector:
Government implementing agency:
Executing agency:
[Co-operating or associated agency (if applicable)]:
Estimated starting date: __________
month, year
Government inputs: (local currency)
(in kind) ________________
(in cash) ________________

UNDP and cost sharing financing

UNDP IPF	$________
Other (specify)	$________
Govt. or third-party cost sharing (specify)	$________
UNDP & cost sharing	$________
Total:	$________

Brief description: (Provide a succinct statement of what the project is intended to achieve and its major features, including whether it is intended to provide institution building, direct support or some other type of assistance. Specify any 'special considerations'. (see heading B–6.)).

On behalf of:	Signature	Date	Name/title (please type)
The Government:	________	______	__________
Executing agency:	________	______	__________
UNDP:	________	______	__________

United Nations official exchange rate at date of last signature of project document:

$1.00 = ________

a/ Please study the ACC Programme Classification Extended for UNDP Purposes carefully in section 30304, subsection 4.0, and assure that the code and title used most accurately reflect the primary area of project activity.

Source: UN Development Programme and Projects Manual programme. Such tables and guidelines are useful in ensuring that nothing important is forgotten. They should be adapted to the type of project concerned.

Virtually all agencies have standard procedure manuals. It is necessary to understand agency procedures if your consultancy is part of an aid project or programme.

In general a proposal will have four sections:

1 **Technical section**
   Here you describe your preliminary findings, your assessment of the problem, the approach to be taken and the work programme proposed.
2 **Staffing**
   In this section you should give the names and profiles of your staff who will be executing the assignment.
3 **Consultant background**
   You can here refer to information on the consulting organisation's experience and competence that relates to your client's particular needs.
4 **Financial section**
   You should indicate the cost of the services, provisions for cost increases and contingency plans, and the schedule and other indications for payment of fees and reimbursable expenses. Aid agencies and public sector organisations tend to have their own standard terms of business. For example, some organisations pay a percentage of the total fee on signing the contract and the balance on completion of the assignment. Others will only pay when invoiced at completion of contract. It is important that you are aware of these standard terms of business before finalising the proposal.

Presentation of proposal

The proposal can be presented at a meeting or mailed to your client but in most cases a final decision may take some time, especially if there is a selection procedure to be applied. For most projects funded by an aid agency, this will be the case. You need to know by what criteria you are judged and the relative weight assigned to the various aspects of the proposal. For example, an aid agency may recommend a weight of 10–20 per cent to the section on the consulting firm's general experience, 25–40 per cent to the work plan and 40–60 per cent to the section dealing with key personnel proposed for the assignment.

The consulting contract

The entry phase of the consulting process is regarded as successful if it concludes with a contract between you and your client. The form of this contract depends very much on each country's legal system and customary ways of doing business. It may be in the form of a verbal agreement, letter of agreement or written contract.

What to cover

While there is no universal form of contract, there are certain aspects of the consulting assignment that are normally covered; these are outlined in Figure 13.

Figure 13 What to cover in contracting

1 Who the contracting parties are (consultant and the client)
2 The scope of the assignment (objectives, description of work, starting date, timetable, volume of work)
3 Work products and reports (documentation and reports to be handed over to the client)
4 Consultant and client inputs (expert and staff time and other inputs)
5 Fees and expenses (fees to be billed; expenses reimbursed to the consultant)
6 Billing and payment procedure
7 Professional responsibilities (handling confidential information; avoiding conflict of interest; other aspects as appropriate)
8 Copyright (covering the products of the consultant's work during the assignment)
9 Liability (the consultant's liability for damages caused to the client; limitation of liability)
10 Use of subcontractors (by the consultant)
11 Termination or revision (when and how to be suggested by either party)
12 Arbitration (jurisdiction procedure for handling disputes)
13 Signatures and dates

Source: M. Kubr *Management Consulting: A guide to the profession*, 2nd revised edn., International Labour Office, 1986

Diagnosis

Fact finding

Facts are the building blocks of any consulting work. A considerable number of facts are required to get a clear picture of the situation yet, as the consultant, you will have to continually apply the principle of selectivity. In most small states data may not be readily available and special schemes have to be established to obtain it.

Fact analysis and synthesis

You will find that in consulting there are no clear-cut limits between analysis and synthesis. Synthesis (in the sense of building a whole from parts, drawing conclusions from fact analysis and developing action proposals) starts during fact analysis.

To an experienced consultant, analysis and synthesis are two sides of one coin. You should use your theoretical knowledge and practical experience to help you synthesise while you are analysing. You nevertheless have to avoid the traps that data and past experience may set, such as the temptation to draw hasty conclusions or allow your ideas to become fixed before examining the facts in depth.

Feedback to your client

Feedback can be oral or written, for example, as reports or memos. Feedback meetings are common, and are useful for providing valuable additional information especially in relation to attitudes to the problem and to your approach.

Action planning

There is continuity between diagnosis and action planning. The foundations of action planning are laid in good diagnostic work. Despite this continuity, there are significant differences in approach and methodology between the two phases. The emphasis in action planning is no longer on meticulous fact gathering and analytical work but on creativity and innovation. In many cases you do not have to come up with a totally new approach or solution, you may need to use a solution already used elsewhere. But even transfer and transplant require creativity and imagination.

It is to be stressed that *your client's involvement should be high in this phase.* There are several reasons for this, one of which is that participation in action planning generates commitment in implementation. Also there is no need to offer your client alternatives with which he/she is not familiar and cannot accept. Involving him/her in the process will ensure that he/she agrees with the approach taken and be able to implement it.

Some of these techniques can be used for working on action proposals in a team with your client and staff.

Let us now look briefly at the main steps in action planning.

Developing solutions

Searching for ideas

You are searching for ideas and information on possible solutions to the problem. The objective is to identify and evaluate all interesting and feasible ideas before deciding on one proposal. Your client must feel confident that he/she is not being forced into accepting one solution without the opportunity to look at other possibilities.

You and your client have to decide on how to orient the search for ideas. Should it be towards solutions that may be already available, or towards a new original solution? Also, you need to decide how far the search should reach. Should it be limited to the client organisation or could solutions be found in other organisations, other sectors or countries? Will it be necessary to screen technical literature?

Drawing on experience

You need to draw on experience, consider methods successfully used elsewhere, and use knowledge derived from various sources:

- your previous assignments
- files and documentation in your organisation
- colleagues who have worked on similar problems
- professional literature
- staff in other departments of your client's organisation who may have knowledge of the particular process
- organisations such as aid agencies which are prepared to communicate their experience.

All sources must be considered. It may not always be possible to transfer a method used elsewhere, you may have to think out your own solution. This calls for creative thinking. You may find it useful here to review the principles and methods of creative thinking (Rawlinson, 1981; de Bono, 1977).

Evaluating alternatives

In practice you have to adopt a pragmatic attitude and bear in mind the temporal, financial, human and other constraints that may exist. The ideal solution may be within the client's reach but the time and cost may be prohibitive.

There may be cases when evaluation will be relatively easy, for example, choice between a ministry printing its own books or buying ones off the shelf. The number of evaluation criteria is, in this case, limited and quantifiable. There are however some complex cases where some criteria are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

Various attempts have been made over the years to increase objectivity in 'subjective evaluations by associating numerical values with adjectival scales.' The values thus obtained are then used in decision analysis (Brown, 1982).

Proposals to the client

Consider the timing and the form of presentation of the action proposal to your client. If your client's staff have been involved all along, as is recommended for long complex assignments, then presentation of the final proposals should not bring up any surprises. The presentation merely summarises, confirms and puts up for decision, information that your client has already had.

There are cases, however, where there may have been limited contact with or reporting to your client owing to the scope or nature of the assignment. For example, in reorganisation assignments you may not wish to circulate too much information before the solutions have been defined and examined by a restricted working group. As far as possible, the presentation should be both oral and written. You could make an oral presentation and then leave the relevant documentation with your client. Alternatively, your client may prefer to receive your recommendations in writing first and arrange a meeting with you after reading them.

Do not flood your client with analytical details but mention the evaluation techniques used, give a clear picture of all the solutions envisaged, and justify the solution you propose.

Planning for implementation

The action proposal must include a realistic and feasible implementation plan. Many consultants omit this. An effective action proposal should outline *what* to implement, *how* to implement it, and *by whom* this should be done. The implementation plan is not only useful to your client; you may find that planning the stages and activities to put the new scheme into effect reveals problems requiring the proposal to be further improved and modified before submission to your client.

In some cases your involvement in an assignment ends here. Having accepted your proposals, your client may wish to undertake the implementation him/herself.

Implementation

Assisting with implementation

Implementation is ultimately the responsibility of your client but involving you has significant advantages for both you and your client. Your co-responsibility for the implementation can overcome some difficulties that may be encountered during implementation. You may also be more careful in proposing action plans that are realistic and feasible. However, a client's reluctance to involve the consultant in implementation is often motivated by financial reasons.

There are many ways for ensuring that your charges are kept low and these have to be discussed at the entry phase of the assignment so that the required resources are planned.

There may be times when you would not be required during implementation. For example:

- When the problem is relatively straightforward and no technical or other difficulties with implementation are envisaged.
- When the collaboration between you and your client during diagnosis and action-planning was good and your client demonstrated a good understanding of the problem and a capacity to deal with implementation without further assistance.

In cases where you are required, you may wish only to be available to intervene at your client's request or to make periodic visits at agreed points to check progress and advise.

Planning and monitoring implementation

A set of proposals for implementation usually forms part of the action plan presented to your client. Before implementation starts, a work programme should be prepared. This work programme should clearly state the *what, how* and *by whom*. The 'by whom' is often omitted. However, it is very important that responsibilities are defined. Implementation will create new tasks and relationships. Specifying people's contribution will be useful in drawing up training programmes and establishing controls for monitoring implementation.

Training

In most operating assignments, some staff development is foreseen as part of the work programme. Such development may take a variety of forms and differ in volume from case to case.

In some cases, formalised training programmes may be required, while in others it will be sufficient to develop staff through their direct co-operation at the different phases of the consulting process, for example, problem-solving.

Termination

This is the final phase of the consulting process when you actually withdraw.

Evaluation

This is the most important part of the termination phase. Without evaluation, it is not possible to assess whether or not the results obtained justify the resources used. Both you and your client can draw useful lessons from evaluation. Too often, no evaluation is carried out or, if it is undertaken, it is superficial and marginal. This may be because of the difficulties inherent in the evaluation of change in organisations. There is a considerable body of literature highlighting this. For a recent examination of the issues see Mick Howes (1992).

Ideally, evaluation should be carried out by you and your client at the end of the diagnostic and action-planning phase. It enables you to review progress and interim results and, if necessary, to adjust the assignment plan and work methods.

Evaluation should be a joint exercise. It should focus on two basic aspects of the assignment:

- The benefits
  New capabilities – new skills acquired by the client
  New systems and behaviour
  New performance
- The consulting process

The dimensions of the process to be evaluated are:

1 **The design of the assignment**
Was the contract clear, realistic and appropriate to your client's needs?
Did the original definition of objectives provide a good framework and guidance for the assignment plan?
Was the consulting style used sufficiently defined, discussed and understood?
Were people briefed about their roles and responsibilities?

2 **The quantity and quality of inputs**
Did your consulting organisation provide a team of the required size, structure and competence?
Did your client provide the resources needed for the assignment?

3 **The consulting mode used**
What was the nature of the consultant–client relationship?
Was the right consulting mode used?
Was the consulting mode adapted to your client's capabilities and was it adjusted to the task at hand?

4 **The management of the assignment by you and your client**
Was there flexibility in the original design?
How did your consultancy organisation manage and support the assignment?
How did your client control and monitor the assignment?

Final report

Whatever the pattern of interim reporting, you should submit a final assignment report at the time of withdrawal. This final report should be short, yet provide a comprehensive review of work performed, pointing out the real benefits obtained from implementation and suggesting to your client what he/she should undertake or avoid in the future. A good consulting report should be capable of commanding the respect of your client who will see it as a source of further guidance.

Plans for follow-up

Final evaluation may not be completed at the end of an assignment if measurable results cannot be identified immediately. In this case, follow-up evaluation should be agreed by you and your client. For you, follow-up evaluation may lead to future assignments as it provides invaluable information on the real impact of operating assignments and on new problems which may have arisen in your client's organisation. Your client may also welcome the opportunity to discover new problems before they become critical.

Both interim and follow-up evaluations use classical techniques like interviews, observations, questionnaires and meetings.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal can have three meanings:

- The assignment is completed.
- The assignment will be discontinued.
- The assignment will be pursued without further assistance from you.

In deciding to terminate the assignment you and your client should be clear which of these three applies so there is no ambiguity.

Your withdrawal also terminates the consultant–client relationship. The way this is done will influence your client's motivation to pursue the project. It will also influence both your client's and your own attitude towards future assignments.

Care should be taken in planning the right time to withdraw. Withdrawing too early or too late can spoil a good relationship and jeopardise the success of a project.