

2nd Edition

Consultation

**A HANDBOOK
FOR INDIVIDUAL
AND ORGANIZATION
DEVELOPMENT**

**ROBERT R. BLAKE
JANE SRYGLEY MOUTON**

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A Handbook for Individual
and Organization Development

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Preface

Education and consultation are probably two of the most important factors behind the forward movement of society. Consultation may be more meaningful than education in focusing on actual "here and now" problems. When these problems are resolved, people can make real progress in the way they live and work.

This book provides a comprehensive exploration of the nature and scope of the consulting field. A systematic approach is employed to ensure broad and in-depth coverage of the subject. Only highly specialized kinds of consultation that are not of general interest have been excluded.

The field of consultation is in many respects unlimited, ranging as wide as there are knowledge to be used and problems to be solved. The varieties and sub-varieties of consultation are so great that the person wishing to become competent faces a bewildering array of possibilities. Within each particular intervention, however, there are underlying uniformities. Once the uniformities are identified, it becomes possible to recognize that the field of consultation is premised on relatively few basic assumptions as to how a client can best be helped to solve a problem.

The barrier to seeing these basic assumptions has been our inability to get above the field and look down on it in its entirety. The analogy is that of a satellite picture showing the various patterns of weather and their interrelationships when viewed from a continent-wide perspective. This second edition also discusses the Consulcube, a tool that makes it possible for the student of consultation to look upon any particular intervention in such a way as to identify its underlying assumptions and to see it in relation to others. Thus, this book

provides a basis for comparing, contrasting, and evaluating all major approaches applied in the field. Patterns of similarities and differences become visible, and the reader is enabled to examine choices for intervention most likely to be successful or unsuccessful.

This book examines five major approaches to consultation from the standpoint of their underlying assumptions in such a way as to demonstrate their relative richness or shallowness. Observations are made as to what conditions are favorable to each approach and likely to produce desired results as well as when and where the approach would be inappropriate. Emphasis throughout is on the dynamics of the interaction between consultant and client. Numerous concrete examples are cited to illuminate representative client-consultant interactions. Each example describes techniques employed by the consultant to the degree necessary for learning about the approach and its "how to do it" aspects.

In Chapter 1 a cube of 100 cells is introduced which serves as the orienting framework for the book. Thereafter the text illustrates the application of various consultation strategies for dealing with a variety of problems and describes the client who receives the intervention. Illustrative case studies were selected primarily for their utility in demonstrating an approach, not for the content of the intervention. The examples within any cell of the cube are intended to be representative of innumerable illustrations, all of which have common characteristics. An individual consultant's interventions with the same client may be represented in one or more cells of the cube, depending on the number of strategies used.

The Consulcube has proven to be an effective way to integrate the field of consultation, and two changes have been introduced in this edition. The order in which the intervention modes are presented is reversed. In response to several requests, theory/principle interventions are presented first. This strategy provides a basis for interweaving consultation and education in many modern applications. The development and change which occur offer an important and powerful way of breaking through barriers to effectiveness that previously resisted penetration. Prescriptive, confrontation, catalytic, and the acceptant modes follow. The other change in this edition is that the system for designating cells in the cube has been modified slightly.

Some see consultation as a *performing art* that can neither be described in the specific instance nor characterized in systematic terms. A performing art is difficult to learn except as one is tutored in it by a master. Others see consultation as a behavioral science discipline; that is, as an activity which can be described and characterized in systematic terms and applied in a deliberate way in specific instances.

Granted that effective consultation is based on a complex of factors, the goal of learning about consultation skills and theory is to increase the utilization of systematic insights, thereby creating a discipline to replace a performing art. Though an intervention entails a delicate and subtle relationship characterized by a performing-art quality, there is little question but that systematic insights

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can do much to strengthen the effectiveness of help-giving beyond that possible when consultation is regarded only as a performing art.*

This book will be of interest to a number of audiences. Consultants, whether internal organization development (OD) persons or external consultants retained by clients for specific purposes, will find it a useful basis for evaluating their own approaches and for seeing possible benefits of alternative approaches and of new opportunities for application. Corporate executives and industrial managers will find the presentation helpful in assessing what kinds of consultative assistance are likely to be useful in solving their particular problems. Undergraduate and graduate behavioral sciences or MBA students who wish to explore a career in consultation will find this book a useful orientation to the full range of possibilities.

This way of treating consultation provides a number of benefits for the student of consultation or the practitioner in the field.

1. A comprehensive orientation to the field permits all the interrelated aspects to be seen in the context of the whole.
2. The strengths and limitations of one intervention mode can be compared and evaluated against others.
3. The points of application are so numerous that the reader is able to see opportunities of consultation beyond what he or she has been able to learn from direct experience.
4. A systematic approach to the field provides a basis for aiding the student or practitioner to learn why one kind of consultation is more likely and another kind less likely to be helpful in solving the same problem.
5. Sometimes a needless mistake is made because inexperienced consultants are unaware of a valid way of dealing with the problem. Needless mistakes can be avoided through a deeper understanding of the field.

The book may be used in several ways, but learning the Consulcube framework in Chapter 1 is basic. Once this is understood the book can be studied, a segment at a time, beginning with theory/principles interventions in Chapter 2. Practicing consultants will not only find the book useful as a basis for evaluating their own interventions, but also for seeing the richness of the field and how they may extend their own practices. The best way for a practicing consultant to do this is to locate the cell most characteristic of his or her own work and then test options as to how interventions from other cells might be used. For the practicing consultant it can be a useful reference work.

Chapter 32 is of particular value and may be used in sequence after Chapter 1. It is a summary but it also provides the beginning of a more general theory of consultation.

* P. B. Vaill, "From the Bookshelf," a review of *Consultation* by Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, in *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 13, no. 1 (1977): 117-20.

Reginald C. Tillam has provided invaluable support in the preparation of the first edition of *Consultation*, and Delores Thomas the same for this second edition. Along with our experiences as consultants over a period of thirty years, these collaborations have led to this integrated presentation. Also, our close personal acquaintance with other consultants has aided us in interpreting the various writings about consultation that are reviewed here. Appreciation is expressed to the many authors included in the text who have sought to reveal their approaches.

Austin, Texas
January, 1983

R.R.B.
J.S.M.

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1

Consultation

Consultation is useful in seeking solutions to many of the complex issues and problems that people and organizations face today. Consultants offer assistance by *intervening*—that is, by taking some action to help a client solve his or her problem(s). These interventions may involve much more than simply telling a client what to do or applying “common sense” remedies to a situation.

The range of situations encountered by today’s consultant is as varied and distinctive as are the behavioral dilemmas people face in modern times. In addition to classical consulting areas, the field has expanded to include individual and group therapy, rehabilitative efforts and community action initiatives. In business and government, consultation is no longer limited to aspects involving managerial competence. Firms and agencies now recognize that alcoholism and drug addiction, for example, are as much organizational problems as they are personal problems. Thus numerous organizations are seeking assistance in understanding and coping with such varied dilemmas as helping an individual relieve pent-up tensions; consulting someone who has lost patience with subordinates; dealing with teamwide frustrations; or launching a major effort to increase productivity and enhance organizational effectiveness. In the latter sense, management development and organization development also are fields of intervention, as are vocational counseling, mid-career “retreading,” and retirement planning. Consultation now extends even to helping nations grapple with a range of issues from border disputes to ideological conflicts. Despite the seeming uniqueness of these situations, they are linked by a common framework of underlying principles—principles that will become clear as our discussion progresses.

REASONS FOR SEEKING CONSULTATION

An endless number of conditions may cause a client to seek consultant help. Some are genuine problems for which the consultant can help develop solutions. Other calls for consultant help are motivated by what the client may think are real needs, but in point of fact, they arise from goals other than increasing effectiveness. The consultant can satisfy these motivations if he or she wishes, but little improvement in problem solving will result from doing so and many ethical issues will crop up. Genuine motivations are of the following sort:

Bafflement. One of the conditions that causes clients to seek consultative help is a sense of bafflement. This means that things are not as they should be but the client is unable to figure out why. An expert’s perception of the situation will hopefully result in a reduction of bafflement and production of insight into what really is going on in the situation, and how it should be handled.

Uneasy feelings. Uneasy feelings are not of the same quality as bafflement, yet they fall in the same area. A person may have an uneasy feeling that things are not as they appear, but may be unable to penetrate the situation in order to test

the true state of affairs. Uneasy feelings are usually more specific than the sense of bafflement, and discrepancy is more likely to be perceived between what the client thinks the situation ought to be and what he or she infers it to be.

Check-up. Many clients find interest in employing consultants on the basis of conducting a check-up. Check-ups are useful because they compare the analysis of a situation by an outsider to that of the insider(s). An outsider can often identify adverse factors that insiders have come to take for granted. This, in itself, is a useful contribution.

Standards of performance excellence. Clients seek the help of consultants because of constantly changing standards for judging the quality of performance. What constituted a standard of performance excellence ten years ago, for example, no longer provides a measure of what is theoretically possible in today's environment. Realizing that standards of excellence change and perhaps having a perception of what would be excellent, a client may seek consultation assistance in order to shift the level of performance to a higher degree of excellence.

Change motivations. A client may feel that change is in order and be interested in exploring the possibilities of change. The conclusion may be that changes are unnecessary or even undesirable or it may be that an effort to change could be highly rewarding and satisfying. The point is that the client is motivated to explore the possibilities without necessarily having a sense of any dire need for change or even a basic sense of direction.

Conflicts. Organizations and individuals experience many and sometimes very deep, severe, and destructive conflicts. These conflicts may be interpersonal, intergroup, or interdivisional, but the end result is that they reduce cooperation and interfere with performance. Sometimes an uncooperative individual or group duplicates the personnel and services that the other could have provided if cooperation was available. Consultants can do much to bring conflict resolution about and great benefits can then be realized by individuals, groups, intergroups, and organizations.

Behavioral science knowledge. The behavioral sciences have been creating a revolution in management by aiding organizations gain to insight into principles of behavior. Through these insights, the general structure of management is strengthened and awareness of the possible need for consultation may be increased.

Morale and cohesion. A client may be aware that morale and cohesion within his or her group or organization is at a lower than optimal level. He or she may request the services of a consultant to diagnose the situation, and, if findings are adverse, to recommend steps by which morale and cohesion might be improved.

Human resources management. Clients may find themselves in need of assistance or support in personnel decisions.

Competence deficiency. Organizations find themselves needing help when the skills necessary to solve problems are simply unavailable within the organization. A consultant may contribute temporary problem-solving skills under such circumstances.

All of the above reasons for employing a consultant are real in the sense of being genuine, even though they may be symptomatic of deeper problems.

There are other reasons for employing consultants that have a somewhat questionable and even cynical character, either because there is no real problem to be solved or the real problem does not lend itself to resolution by the help of a consultant. These pseudo needs must be reviewed and understood in order to be recognized. Consultants who respond to requests for services based on these kinds of motivations are taking a great risk.

Saving face. The client may employ a consultant to get answers that the client then "confirms" as being consistent with his or her own judgment. The consultant is really covering up the client's lack of knowledge by giving answers which are then taken by the client and projected as his or her own.

Snubbing inside competitors. Insiders may have a point of view on how to deal with a situation, but clients may perceive themselves as displaying weakness by permitting other insiders to take the lead. The client is reluctant to show internal and external competitors that he or she does not know how to deal with the situation. The solution is to employ a consultant who may develop the same solution as an insider, but allows the client to avoid "bowing" to the inside competitor.

Keeping up with the Joneses. Another reason for employing a consultant is that other persons with whom one is in comparison also are employing consultants. If the client were not to employ consultants while competitors do, this might reflect negatively on his or her openness to new ideas or to self-examination. It becomes important for one not to fall behind, so managers may develop a stable of consultants, primarily to compete or impress rather than to gain the consultant's experiences or resources for resolving problems.

Rigid organization lines of reporting. In many bureaucracies, expert resources may be available, but not immediately accessible. When internal sources of assistance are not responsible to the person needing help, they may be perceived as unavailable. A client may contact outside consultants who can provide the services that others within the organization could contribute, but because they are in other reporting lines it is impossible to make contact with them.