Tantalus Tactics

Get the most out of your management consultants

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THE TANTALUSGROUP

Get the Most Out of Your Management Consultants

The global management consulting services market is valued at approximately **US$374.67 billion in 2026**, and is projected to reach US$471.39 billion by 2031 — a compound annual growth rate of 4.70%. (Mordor Intelligence, Management Consulting Services Market Report, 2026)

> **Much of this money pays for impractical data and poorly implemented recommendations. To reduce this waste, clients need a better understanding of what consulting assignments can accomplish.**

Adapted from Arthur N. Turner, “Consulting Is More Than Giving Advice,” Harvard Business Review, September–October 1982.

Good management consulting has eight fundamental objectives. As a potential buyer of management consulting services, you should ask yourself the purpose of your work.

A Hierarchy of Consulting Purposes

Traditional purposes

1. Provide requested information
2. Provide solution to given problem
3. Conduct diagnosis that may redefine the problem
4. Provide recommendations
5. Assist implementation

Additional goals

6. Build consensus and commitment
7. Facilitate client learning
8. Improve organizational effectiveness

1

Providing information to a client

Do you need help getting information? For example, do you need to measure sentiment with a stakeholder (government, customer, employee, etc.)? Are you interested in a competitive structure of an industry or part of your business?

A good consultant should be interested in how you plan to use the information that they will provide. This means they are trying to understand your underlying needs.

2

Solving problems

Do you have a difficult problem to solve? For example, are you considering a new marketing strategy? Are you thinking about making an acquisition? Reorganizing your business or team? Are you struggling with low employee engagement? Do you need to develop a leadership succession plan?

A good consultant will ask what solutions have been tried in the past, with what results. What steps do you have in mind? If the problem is solved, what solution will be applied?

3

Effective diagnosis

Good consultants study the external environment, the technology and economics of the business and the behavior of non-managerial members of the organization. The consultant must also ask why executives made certain choices that now appear to be mistakes or ignored certain factors that now seem important.

You should make team members available to the consultant. In fact they are often the ones who do much of the detailed work. The consultant should meet the client lead frequently to provide an update, troubleshoot, test ideas and recalibrate as necessary. In some cases, this will be the function or business head. In others it will be the company CEO or chairman.

Good clients participate in the diagnostic process. This way they are more likely to acknowledge their role in problems. Top consulting firms try to establish joint consultant-client task forces to work on data analysis and other parts of the diagnostic process.

4

Recommending actions

The engagement usually concludes with a written report or oral presentation to show what the consultant has learned and to recommend what the client should do. We devote a lot of effort to designing our reports so the information and analysis are clearly presented, with a logical action plan of steps designed to improve the diagnosed problem. The client then decides whether and how to implement.

This sounds simple but is seldom the case. Many convincing reports, submitted at great expense, have no real impact because the consultant's recommended solution only appears to work in theory and not in practice.

For example, a public utility struggled for years to improve its safety record. Quite simply, employees and contractors were getting hurt on the job. The consultancy diagnosed behavioral and communications problems from senior management — for example, too many safety initiatives and overlapping communications programs that confused employees and contractors.

A list of recommendations – including senior management training and decreased and clearer communications – were tabled but never acted on. In cases like these, each side blames the other. Reasons are given like "my client lacks the ability or courage to take the necessary steps" or "this consultant did not help translate objectives into actions."

5

Implementing changes

A consultant will often ask for a second engagement to help put any recommendations into practice. Effective work on implementation problems requires a level of trust and cooperation that develops gradually throughout the engagement.

In any successful engagement, the consultant continually strives to understand which actions, if recommended, are likely to be implemented and where people are prepared to do things differently. A frequent dilemma for experienced consultants is whether they should recommend what they know is right or what they know will be accepted. If the assignment's goals include building commitment, encouraging learning, and developing organizational effectiveness, there is little point in recommending actions that will not be taken.

6

Building consensus and commitment

To provide sound and convincing recommendations, a consultant must be both analytical and persuasive. Even more important is the ability to forge the coalition necessary to roll out the change and to keep up the momentum to see it through.

Interviews designed to gather information can also build trust and make the case for change throughout the organization. The consultant's approach should demonstrate that the reason for the interviews is not to assign blame but to encourage improvement.

7

Facilitating client learning

Good management consultants leave behind something of lasting value. This means not only enhancing clients' ability to deal with immediate issues but also helping them to cope with future challenges. This does not imply that they will work themselves out of a job. Satisfied clients will recommend them to others and will invite them back the next time there is a need.

Consultants facilitate learning by including members of the organization in the assignment's processes. For example, demonstrating an appropriate technique or recommending a relevant book often accomplishes more than quietly performing a needed analysis. When the task requires a method outside the professional's area of expertise, he or she may recommend other consultants or educational programs.

Learning during projects is a two-way street. In every engagement, consultants should learn how to be more effective in designing and conducting projects.

8

Organizational effectiveness

Sometimes successful implementation requires not only new management concepts and techniques but also different attitudes regarding management functions or even changes in how the basic purpose of the organization is defined and carried out. The term organizational effectiveness is used to imply the ability to adapt future strategy to environmental change and to optimize the contribution of the organization's human resources accordingly.

Consultants who include this purpose in their practice contribute to top management's most important task — maintaining the organization's future viability in a changing world.

"Are you unsure which purpose is right for you? The Tantalus Group believes all progress begins with a conversation."

Please contact info@thetantalusgroup.com or the author for a free 30 minute consultation.

Wylie Rogers

President and Management Consultant · The Tantalus Group

Wylie Rogers has 20 years of experience in North America, Europe and Asia, having worked in politics, the media, business and management consulting.

Wylie was previously the head of public affairs for BASF in Asia Pacific, a US$10 billion business, overseeing 15 countries in the region while based in Hong Kong. He also headed ABB Group's corporate communications team in Beijing, China, a US$2 billion business, and had roles ranging from spokesman to speechwriter and head of copy for the ABB Group in Zurich, Switzerland, a US$30 billion business. Before moving abroad, Wylie worked as a reporter and speechwriter in Canada.

Wylie attended INSEAD in France and Singapore for executive development and has a BA in English Literature with Honours. He did his post-graduate studies in journalism and has volunteered with the International Journalism Federation in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. As President of The Tantalus Group, Wylie manages the global network of Tantalus management consultants.

Put the talented team of Tantalus management and communications consultants to work for you. Our unique networked structure provides our clients access to the latest strategies from around the world and the ability to leverage experience in wide-ranging industries and markets.

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