

Working With Consultants (1)

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One of the great developments of evolution and of civilization was specialization or the division of labor: allowing individuals to become really good at specific tasks without having to worry about all the other kinds of activity required to support life. Multicellular organisms show specialization of cell types in evolution as early as the sponges of the Cambrian period of 600 million years ago.<

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/560783/sponge/32647/Evolution-and-paleontology>

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All human societies that have been studied seem to show some division of labor, even if it sometimes consists solely of different roles assigned to children, women and men, and elders. Archaeologists have long debated “whether the specialized activities that women undertake are those that lend themselves to being structured as ‘multi-task’ work, conducted intermittently to accommodate child care.”[1] Another author proposes that the agricultural revolution of c. 10,000 BCE may have led to increased fertility, relegation to reproduction, and consequent widespread historical oppression of women in early post-Paleolithic cultures.[2]

Sometimes it makes sense to get help from experts outside one’s own organization. The specialized knowledge and skills of experts may make their services too expensive to keep on hand permanently by employing them full time – and often consultants’ skills serve to initiate self-sustaining processes that don’t require constant input from outsiders.

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines “management, scientific, and technical consulting services” as firms which “offer technical expertise, information, contacts, and tools that clients cannot provide themselves. They then work with their clients to provide a service or solve a problem.”< <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs037.htm#nature> > In general, the BLS describes the industry as “the fastest growing and one of the highest paying.”< <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs037.htm> > In 2006 (the last reported year), the BLS found about 921,000 consultants in all occupations, with about 83,000 consultants supplying information-technology-related services (computed from data in Table 3< <http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs037.htm#related> >).

Some people are hostile to consultants, seeing them as threats to their own position or perceiving their use as an implicit devaluing of the employees’ competence. There are many jokes at consultants’ expense; for example, one I remember right away is “A consultant is a person who borrows your watch to tell you the time and then charges you for it.” Another favorite is this response I collected years ago by an “HyperExpensive” Consultant to the question of why the chicken crossed the road:

Deregulation of the chicken's side of the road was threatening its dominant market position. The chicken was faced with significant challenges to create and develop the competencies required for the newly competitive market. HyperExpensive Consulting, in a partnering relationship with the client, helped the chicken by rethinking its physical distribution strategy and implementation processes. Using the Poultry Integration Model (PIM), HyperExpensive helped the chicken use its skills, methodologies, knowledge

capital and experiences to align the chicken's people, processes and technology in support of its overall strategy within a Program Management framework. HyperExpensive Consulting convened a diverse cross-spectrum of road analysts and best chickens along with HyperExpensive consultants with deep skills in the transportation industry to engage in a two-day itinerary of meetings in order to leverage their personal knowledge capital, both tacit and explicit, and to enable them to synergize with each other in order to achieve the implicit goals of delivering and successfully architecting and implementing an enterprise-wide value framework across the continuum of poultry cross-median processes. The meeting was held in a park like setting enabling and creating an impactful environment which was strategically based, industry-focused, and built upon a consistent, clear, and unified market message and aligned with the chicken's mission, vision, and core values. This was conducive towards the creation of a total business integration solution. HyperExpensive Consulting helped the chicken crossing to become more successful.

Sometimes the hostility shades over into abuse. I was once told by a staff member at a large corporation that he and his buddies used to string consultants along for weeks to encourage them to believe that they had a chance of winning a contract based on a Request for Proposal (RFP) even though the creeps had already chosen the winner. Apparently these people had the same attitude towards consultants that sociopaths < <http://www.behavenet.com/capsules/disorders/antisocialpd.htm> > have towards insects and other small animals they torture. < <http://www.behavenet.com/capsules/disorders/cndctd.htm> >

More on working with consultants in the next column.

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NOTES

[1] The quotation is from a book review by Prof Joan Gero of *Gender And Material Culture In Archaeological Perspective*, edited by Moira Donald and Linda Hurcombe (2000). St. Martin's Press (ISBN 978-0312223984). AMAZON < <http://tinyurl.com/naek8n> >. Review published in *American Journal of Archaeology*, 106(1):118-120 (Jan 2002) and located using restricted access to the online JSTOR database subscription of the Kreitzberg Library of Norwich University.

[2] Smail, D. S. (2008). *On Deep History and the Brain*. University of California Press (ISBN 978-0520258129). AMAZON < <http://preview.tinyurl.com/kulkta> >. Pp 190 ff. Extract available from Google Books < <http://books.google.com/books?id=zpOXA2VSPWwC&pg=PA190> >

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