

a sideways look

News from Elevation Learning

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“King’s new clothes” syndrome

In Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy story, two swindling weavers promise a vain king a new suit of clothes that are invisible to those unfit for their positions or incompetent. When the king parades before his subjects in his new clothes, a child cries out, *“But he isn’t wearing anything at all!”*

A casual observer is unlikely to comment that consultants are plagued by self-doubt. Yet newly-minted consultants often worry that their legitimacy as a consultant will be challenged and they will be found wanting when clients or others claim that they are only pretending to wear clothes.

So where do clothes of substance come from? Consultants, like other professionals, can show legitimacy by demonstrating that they have met some accredited standard. You will see in this edition a report on a European standard being developed for consultancy; an ISO standard may follow. At a personal level acquiring relevant qualifications can grow the confidence of both consultants and clients. In the UK, the Institute of Business Consulting has introduced qualifications at both Certificate and Diploma standards; hundreds of consultants have now studied for the Certificate (many on courses that we have run) and there is increasing interest in the Diploma. This latter can be offered only by CMI approved Centres - a status I am proud that we achieved earlier this year.

And those interested in an international recognition of their competence should consider assessment as a Certified Management Consultant - an award now recognised in more than 50 countries around the world.

In these days of “brand me”, qualifications are likely to become of increasing relevance and so all consultants, whether in large or small practices, should consider them seriously.

Calvert Markham

Elevation Learning recognised by CMI

One of this year’s achievements was that we were granted recognition by the Chartered Management Institute as an Approved Centre for their training programmes. As well as satisfying the rigorous requirements of the assessors, this award recognises our advocacy in raising professional standards in management consulting around the world.

We already offer the Certificate in Management Consulting Essentials; now we are able also to offer the Diploma in Management Consultancy, a nationally recognised qualification for the industry. A brochure detailing the Diploma courses is available now on our website.

Spring Forum report

As usual, we invited a mixed group of clients, academics and peers to join our own team at our annual Forum, this year held in Greenwich. It offers the opportunity to debate and discuss topics of interest in a convivial and comfortable environment. This year we had four speakers who introduced quite different topics, each of which we then debated.

Standards in management consulting

Jeremy Webster, Silver Pebble Consulting, is part of a European working group looking at whether formal Standards are required in the profession of Management Consulting, and whether regulation would increase trade in the European Market. He explained that the European Services Directive was issued in 2006. CEN (the European Standards body) is currently developing a range of standards in response to the Directive. Management Consultancy is one of the first professions to participate in this initiative. (Note: a consultation document has recently been issued).

Developing Generation Z

The next session was led by Clive Webb, who is part of the Learning and Development team at KPMG. His challenge is to identify what makes an effective consultant at KPMG, to identify what their progression path might be, and design the development programmes to enable consultants to do their job effectively and to a high quality.

Clive gave a description of the graduate intake and highlighted that the new generation have different requirements in terms of style, approach and delivery formats. Essentially this Generation Z group (in their twenties and early thirties) are used to learning on the go, using blogs, online seminars, use the internet as a source of most information and have an expectation of immediacy. But does delivering content through many different media test the individuals' understanding or context of learning effectively?

The fourth wave in consulting

Daniel Muzio from Leeds University Business School and his colleagues have identified four waves in the business of consulting: the first were the consulting engineers, who were concerned with the flow of work on factory floors; next the strategists such as McKinsey and Bain who engaged at board level and whose influence gave birth to professional managers, and then the third wave of systems integrators in the late 70's, 80's and 90's.

Daniel and his colleagues suggest that the fourth wave of management consultants may fall into the following categories:

- New forms of specialist/niche services such as environmental or CSR consultancy
- Amalgamation within broad professional services firms to include law, accountancy etc and offer one stop shop services.
- Development of virtual forms of organisation and delivery (project based organisations)

Behavioural finance

Gulnur Muradoglu, Professor of Finance at Cass Business School presented a session on Behavioural Finance. Many people continue to believe that the finance markets are governed by an invisible hand providing relevant information, forecasts and controlling buying and selling activities so that it is an objective and clinical environment. However, Gulnur's research shows that nothing could be further from the truth and that markets are inefficient despite institutional regulations, processes and structures. Therefore something must be having an effect to create inefficiency and that thing is people's behaviour.

In summary, understanding your frames of reference and broadening them should enable you to make better financial decisions.

Once again our Forum proved an interesting and enjoyable event and we are very grateful to our team of guest speakers. If you are interested in participating or contributing to future Forums, do let us know.



Training challenges in medium-sized practices

Elevation Learning has a very large number of consulting practices among its clients, many of whom have challenges in common in managing their training, and who have an interest in how other firms address them. So it was in August that a group drawn from a number of medium-sized consulting practices came together to discuss an agenda that included:

- how to ensure that training is available when needed, both for performance development and career progression.
- how to break down the syllabus; for example, narrow and in-depth on specific topics, or broad across a range of topics.
- how to deliver face to face training cost-effectively to geographically dispersed teams and what alternatives can be used effectively.
- in what ways can training be used to develop practice as well as individual competence?
- how can best value be got from training through transfer into practice back at work?

These are perennial issues and in the space of a morning, we made only a small dent in them. However, there were some interesting conclusions:

1. Consultancies are learning organisations and so it makes sense to recruit against not only a competence profile but also the individual's capacity to develop. This involves having self awareness and emotional intelligence. It also requires them to see personal development as a priority.
2. Good training then motivates and empowers staff.
3. It is difficult to get more experienced consultants to see personal development as important. This seems to be a fairly common experience. Self development questionnaires and similar approaches can, however, provide a wake-up call.
4. Yet senior consultants have much to offer their less experienced colleagues, particularly in one-to-one coaching. They can also become "centres of excellence" within the firm.
5. Developing coaching skills throughout the organisation is therefore of value, particularly if off-job training is spread between several sessions and there is practice between times to apply the learning, perhaps with coaching.
6. It is important that individuals take responsibility for their self-development; HR/learning and development should therefore take the role of suppliers rather than drivers of development. To that end, therefore, development budgets should be with the business unit/individual rather than with the centre.

There was much else that was taken away and we all concluded that this was time well spent.

If there is a theme that you would like to discuss at a seminar with your colleagues in other firms, do let us know and we will see if there is sufficient interest so that we can convene another event.



Account management development drives sales up for Capacitas



Capacitas is a technology consulting and business process outsourcing company focused on ICT performance, capacity and cost efficiency. Since it was founded in January 2002 Capacitas has attracted many prestigious clients including easyJet, Nokia, National Australia Bank, Orange, Yell and Hewlett Packard.

Capacitas has grown its client base significantly in recent years and expects similar growth in the future. They put their success down to the industry experience and quality of their staff and their commitment to deliver outstanding service to their clients. “We have a can-do attitude and our clients appreciate that” says Danny Quilton, Chief Operations Officer at Capacitas.

By 2009 Capacitas had grown an impressive client list but recognised that they needed to formalise their account management function in order to foster ongoing profitable relationships.

Danny Quilton says “We had developed some good business relationships with our clients and one or two were particularly interesting with a great deal of repeat business. We wanted to attract more of that type of business but needed some outside support to help us identify how to go about it in the best way.”

They called on Elevation Learning for advice. Elevation Learning was first introduced to Capacitas when Chief Executive Officer, Andy Bolton, decided that his newly recruited consultants would benefit from developing their selling and consultancy skills to complement their IT knowledge. Over the years Elevation Learning and Capacitas have developed a collaborative relationship from which both parties have benefited.

After some discussion, Capacitas decided that it wanted to develop the account management skills of its key people, so asked Calvert Markham of Elevation Learning to design and run a workshop to help them do this. Capacitas agreed to allow Calvert to interview a number of clients with whom they had a close relationship about their impressions of and dealings with Capacitas. The findings formed a foundation on which to devise a programme to help the Capacitas team develop their account management style and approach.

Calvert says “The Capacitas team already had good selling skills so that wasn’t an issue. The areas that needed formalising were around the appreciation of their clients’ situations, how to appraise a client’s needs effectively and how to use this knowledge to inform their account management plans.”

The resulting one day seminar ran in September 2009 and was followed up with half day workshops in the following November, March and June. The workshops allowed the team to review specific account management plans against client needs and determine objectives for the forthcoming sales period.

Danny concludes “Capacitas’s staff found the workshop proceedings to be enormously useful in formalising an approach to handling multiple interfaces into a client. In addition, Elevation Learning provided guidance to ensure that Capacitas’s resources were targeted efficiently to ensure the best return on investment.”

A key measure of success was the increase in repeat business. After adopting the recommendations from the workshop Capacitas observed an 18% increase in revenue from its accounts.

Innovation in Management Consultancies

Dr. Joe O'Mahoney of Cardiff Business School is leading the Consulting Innovation Project at the Advanced Institute of Management. This is a two year project funded by the UK government to understand the processes that enable innovation in consultant - client interactions. Here he comments on some of his findings.

The ability of management consultancies to generate and disseminate new management ideas is central, not simply to the health of the industry, but also to the efficiency of clients and the wider global economy. Yet in recent years innovation in the industry has come under pressure from a number of sources:

- **Procurement:** procurers have had a commoditising effect on consultancy offerings by standardising services.
- **Service:** strategy consulting, where innovative activity is more easily achieved, has declined significantly in recent years.
- **Time:** Utilisation levels have increased significantly in recent years, leaving less time for training and R&D activities.
- **Project size:** As projects have increased in size, clients have become more risk adverse, seeking tried and tested solutions.

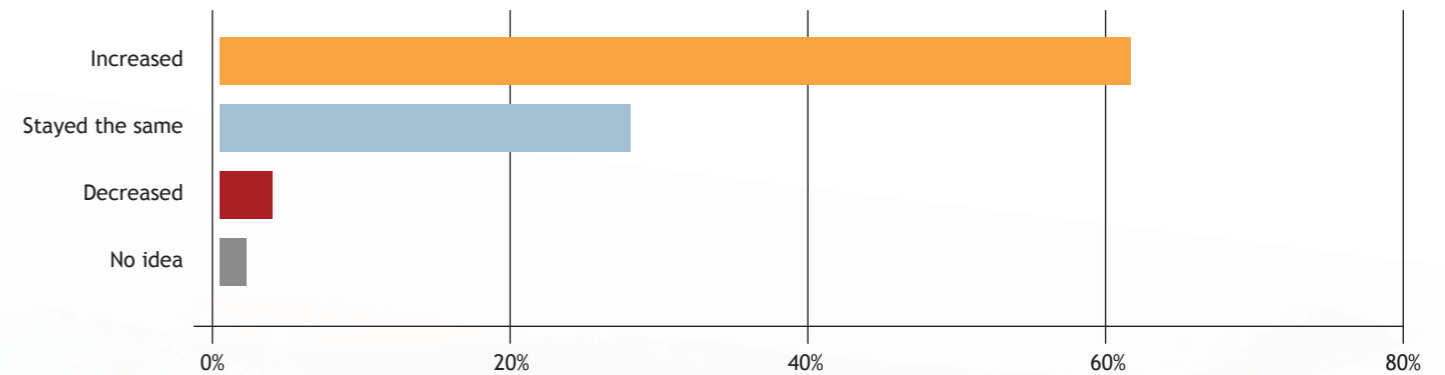
The result, it has been argued, has been 'trouble at t'mill' when it comes to consulting innovation. A recent survey by the MCA showed only 52% of clients were happy with the levels of creativity from their consultants, whilst a large study by Andrew Sturdy argued that consultants generally performed standard client roles rather than anything particularly innovative. It seemed, as The Economist argued last year, 'the industry badly needs a big idea'.

Yet, all is not as it seems. Two recent surveys show that innovation in consultancies is at least perceived to have increased. The first, from the UK Innovation Survey recently published its latest findings. These compared to previous surveys, report a 36% increase in consulting firms reporting the introduction of new services. These findings appear in line with a survey conducted by this author, which found that over 60% of consultants believed that levels of innovation in their firm has increased over the last five years, and that 72% believed it would continue to increase in the future.

So what is to account for this discrepancy? Initial findings from the surveys indicate that the nature of innovation has shifted as the environment for consultancies has shifted. Consultancies appear to be innovating with clients and third parties more than ever before, in the face of recession they are turning to innovation as a differentiator and globalisation appears to be having an effect as well.

The analysis for this project is not yet complete, but it seems fair to argue rumours of the death of innovation in consultancy have been greatly exaggerated. It appears that innovation has shifted rather than disappeared.

Over the past five years do you believe innovation in your consultancy has :



Our course compendium

Since we were founded in 1989 we have provided training on most topics in consulting skills. Most of our training is provided in-house for our clients and designed on a bespoke basis. But there are a number of recurrent topics that we address and these are shown in the table below.

Area of training	Courses
Consultant qualifications	
Certificate in management consulting essentials	Core Consultancy Skills*
Diploma in management consultancy	Developing consulting insight* Compelling communication* Organisational dynamics* Engagement management*
Other courses	
Selling skills	A progressive series of courses: Selling on - for those in a primarily delivery role; Selling skills for consultants - for those with a sales target; Account management - a workshop approach for relationship managers
Communication skills	Writing skills; Presentation skills; Influencing skills; Business story telling
Working with clients	Client engagement skills; Leading consultancy projects; Facilitation skills
Managing in a consulting practice	Advanced consulting skills
Problem solving	Analytical tools and techniques; Systematic problem solving

These courses are 1 - 3 days duration; some can be tailored to suit the time you have available.

** Note: all these courses can be taken standalone, without the need to take the associated qualification.*

