

a sideways LOOK

News from Elevation Learning

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Post millennial thoughts

Entering the second decade of this millennium I took a look at what I wrote in this column 10 years ago. I see that I hedged my predictions with “the reality is that there is always more continuity than discontinuity”. But what has turned out differently from predicted?

In 2000 I worried about the demographic effect of the post war baby boom (“a python eating a poodle”). But the recession has diminished the rush to retirement as pensions have become less attractive to many. And greater longevity and health have meant that older people are going to be working longer.

Then I wondered about the concept of the “consulting studio”. The idea is that there are organisations that act like film producers in respect of a consulting project and commission the best independents around to work on it. This has been slow to take off. Although there are some virtual groups, clients still seem keen to engage with real firms.

And what about the next 10 years? Increasing prosperity in developing countries will mean that wage cost advantage (for example, sourcing in China or India) will become less and businesses will look around the world to other countries to source work. This will not always be possible so we will also see a return to in-sourcing and on-shoring. And consulting firms? The trend to subcontracting rather than being a repository of knowhow will continue.

Let’s check this in 2020.

Calvert Markham

Street league



Like a lot of businesses we support charity and each year we choose a single one to be the focus of our attention. Over the last few years we have supported WaterAid but starting in 2010 we have adopted Street League. Quoting from their web site (www.streetleague.co.uk):

Our vision is to transform the lives of disadvantaged young people and adults in the UK using the power of sport. We achieve this through a structured football and education programme that helps build confidence, improve health, extend social networks, and develop skills towards long-term education, employment and independence.

Our players come from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds including homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, displacement, unemployment, crime, learning difficulties and mental health. Most players are put in contact with Street League through referral agents such as homeless hostels, job centres, drug rehabilitation projects and refugee teams.

Street League is also supported by the Impetus Trust (www.impetus.org.uk) which uses a venture philanthropy model to accelerate the growth of carefully selected charities and social enterprises so they can help many more people living in poverty.

Selling the wheel

We don't often review or recommend books in this newsletter (unless one of us has written them!) but one that caught our interest recently is "Selling the Wheel". The reason we like it is because it recognises that there is not just one type of selling or marketing approach that is best; it has to be suited to the maturity of the product-market in which you are trading.

The book (which was first published back in 2000) is an easy read, using a parable telling the story of the man who invents the wheel, which over time gradually becomes commoditised, and how marketing, selling and distribution has to change along the way.

The authors identify four different types of salesman needed at each stage:

1. The Closer, who needs to get adoption of the new product.
2. The Wizard who develops a variety of applications for it.
3. The Relationship Builder when there are a large number of suppliers
4. The Captain and Crew when ease of purchase becomes most important.

The classic method of selling professional services is in stage 3. But there are instances where a different style (types 1 or 2) is called for by consulting firms, for example when entering new markets or launching a new product.

An instance of this was recently with a client where we are working to develop their account management capability. Their offering is in IT where they are deep experts but where there is also a lot of competition. They told us, "One of our clients has suggested that they make arrangements for us to work on site". This client was one of their largest. Using the model above, what the client was asking for was for the IT consultants to move from stage 3 engagement to stage 4; ease of purchase was of significant importance to them. Moving to having a presence on site should therefore result in more business.

We're taking the messages to heart. We're applying them to our own business, where we can see a clear difference in different geographical markets and indeed in some cases between how we sell in-house work compared with our public courses. And don't be surprised if the concepts crop up in our training in selling skills too.

Selling the wheel - Jeff Cox and Howard Stevens: Simon & Schuster: ISBN 0 684 85600 X

Reasons to be cheerful



Sarah Jones accepts the award from IBC Director, Lynda Purser

In December 2009, Elevation Learning won the Institute of Business Consulting "most outstanding training centre" award. We were very surprised by how pleased we were. Why?

We had, after all, entered a submission for the IBC to consider, and effectively this meant opening ourselves up to the scrutiny of outsiders.

Elevation Learning has had 6 of its programmes endorsed by the IBC including the Core Consultancy Skills Course which is our foundation course for participants wishing to take the IBC's Certificate in Management Consulting Essentials qualification. We have taken over 100 candidates through to pass the CMCE, offering mentoring and support throughout; the most candidates from a training centre outside Further Education colleges or universities.

In addition, as many of our clients know, we design and deliver bespoke programmes to address specific needs of particular consulting teams. In fact, we believe this is where we excel because we have first rate tutors and over 20 years' experience in ever changing and diverse markets in the UK and around the world. That wealth of experience and credibility is hard to find anywhere else and we know our clients find it extremely valuable.

So internally we constantly evaluate our relevance and performance and change things when we feel they're not right for our clients or for us.

Of course the IBC award is not a medal of bravery, nor a national qualification; it's just a measure by someone else about how closely we share their values. So what was it about standing up to collect a trophy that made us so proud? It was receiving tangible recognition from peers for our long term commitment to consultant development and training; some kind of external validation from people we respect that the way we do things is the right way.

The experience has been good for team spirit too. The award says "we've seen what you have been doing; we think it's valuable, we think you do it best and we'd like to tell other people too".

So, if your organisation is thinking of entering for an industry-recognised award we recommend you do it. Even if you don't win, the process will make you evaluate your strengths and may highlight some opportunities and allow you to benchmark your performance against those organisations you consider the best in class. Of course you may also win which will make you surprisingly pleased too!

Compass develops its consulting talent with Elevation Learning

Compass has delivered fact based, independent advice since 1980. They are the premier brand in business and IT performance improvement. Compass Fact-based Consulting® gets to the root cause of cost efficiency, productivity and service quality gaps. Their clients are market leaders in the public and private sector worldwide and include Boehringer Ingelheim, EADS Airbus, Kraft, HSBC and Shell.

Compass operates globally with 21 offices in 16 countries and has five grades of consultant from Analyst to Consulting Director working in partnership with client organisations. The company recruits both practitioners with industry experience as well as graduates, usually with science or engineering degrees.

During 2008, in response to the recession, training and development investment was focussed on specialist or technical training. A year later, Compass recognised the need to refocus investment in development of talent and to re-energise the consulting team.

Nigel Hughes, Markets and Services Director said, “We needed to develop our consultants’ competencies in managing their client relationships, develop on-selling and other softer skills. “

Having identified which competency gaps existed, Compass then set about recruiting a training organisation to design and deliver a bespoke programme.

“Elevation Learning was shortlisted as we’d used them before and they were recommended by some of our new people who had worked with them in previous companies. They were ultimately chosen because they have good quality people, offered us flexibility, could work at our offices around the world, and the price was right. In short, it was a good fit.”

Compass created a 12 month Consultant Development Programme for new starters comprising three training events plus on-the-job mentoring from a senior consultant. These events are: an Induction Programme delivered by Compass, a bespoke Core Consultancy Skills course and a bespoke Selling-On course, both delivered by Elevation Learning.

Saskia Lawley, Group HR Manager said, “We wanted to improve the skills and confidence of our consultants. We know from the feedback we’ve received that Elevation Learning has pushed our teams hard. The trainers know it is important to get the best from the participants, and the participants appreciate that. The quality of the tutors and their ability to adapt each programme to the individuals in the room really sets them apart. They have real life experience to call on for demonstrations which makes them very credible and interesting. “

“There is no doubt that the Consultant Development Programme is already delivering results. One senior level consultant told me that a new graduate to his team identified on-selling opportunities at his first client meeting - a direct result of the Selling-On programme.”

In October 2009 Elevation Learning piloted an Advanced Consultancy Skills programme to address the needs of senior level consultants with responsibility for managing client relationships and managing a consultant team. Ten senior consultants attended the 3 day programme delivered by Elevation Learning’s Philip Taylor and Calvert Markham. The course was a resounding success and now has a waiting list of consultants demanding to attend.

Nigel concludes, “The analysts and graduate level consultants are coming up with new ideas and forcing everyone in the organisation to stretch out and broaden their thinking. This is terrific.”

The Consultant Development Programme is now being broadened to develop all grades of consultant for their next role in the organisation. Saskia says, “Advanced Consulting Skills will definitely be part of the Framework and we are talking to Elevation Learning about the benefits of getting external recognition for our courses or introducing formal qualifications such as Certificate in Management Consulting Essentials for our consultants. That our consultants feel valued is an essential part of our business.”

If you would like Elevation Learning to help develop or deliver your consultant training framework, please call us on 020 8642 9568. We would be happy to give independent and constructive advice.



New courses for Elevation Learning

Last year we launched our Advanced Consulting Skills course which is aimed at consultants who have a managerial role in a practice - responsibility for other consultants, projects, clients, sales or product development. Consultants at this level have a disproportionate impact on the practice performance and this course develops skills in all the major areas that they are likely to encounter:

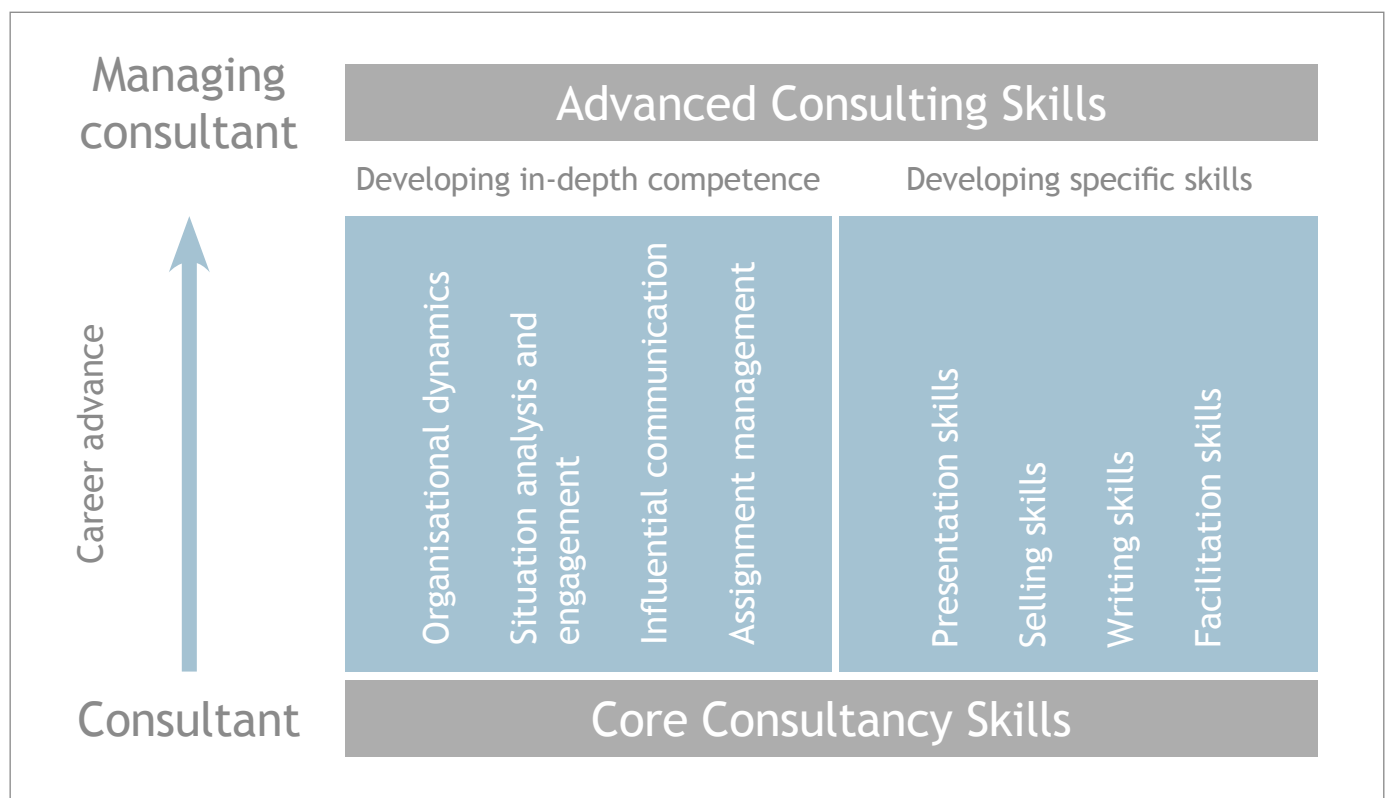
- self-development and the development of other consultants
- supporting practice management and development
- offering superior diagnostic skills to understand clients and the challenges that confront them
- business development
- client handling
- project delivery

So far as we know, this is the only course offered for consultants at this level and it has been acclaimed by all those who have attended it.

We also are developing a new suite of programmes to address the skills needed by consultants in the course of their work. Four courses are to be launched later this year, which should also meet the requirements of the IBC Diploma in Management Consultancy:

- **Organisational dynamics** and how to use them: this covers features of internal and external operating environments; handling organisational change; working with clients and their organisation; understanding group dynamics; developing high impact teams and working effectively with groups
- **Situation analysis and engagement** is all about understanding clients and their predicaments. It covers the “hard” analytical skills needed to sell and deliver consulting projects and so deals with the research, analysis and tools and techniques needed to create effective working relationships, establish client needs, develop proposal content and contractual terms of engagement, and create deliverables
- **Influential communication** covers productive working relationships, personal impact, communication methods and presenting with impact
- **Assignment management** reviews different consulting models, identifying effective intervention management strategies, project strategy and lifecycle and project methodologies, and effective project delivery

These, together with our current suite of courses, enable you to map our courses on to the development of consultants as shown in the figure below.



This is a comprehensive programme of training in consulting skills; please contact us on 020 8642 9568 if you would like further information.