



The Apertures of Consulting Across Disciplines

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Roundtable: Global Consulting

The objective of this proposal is to present to practitioners the apertures of consulting across disciplines during the “Empowering Consulting Practitioners, Leaders, and Educators” 2021 Leadership Roundtable. The global pandemic resulted in unprecedented changes and challenges for society. It mandated a re-imagining and restructuring within organizations. The effects are drastic and demand new organizational solutions that adjust to the changing times. Government leaders seek to identify the needs of entities and individuals because of this catastrophic event. Leaders across diverse organizations seek to identify ways to move from survival to organizational advancement. Consultants seek to determine how to meet the needs of both the government and business leaders with strategic consulting that offers long-term solutions. This paper identifies the commonalities and divergences that contribute to the apertures in consulting. The findings reveal the leadership of the government must create systems of communication that includes the leadership of organizations and consultants. The remaining findings exist under this overarching aperture. New theories are nonexistent but merely continuations of approaches and leadership theories seen in such unprecedented conditions. A brief overview and analysis of the current challenges and apertures, emerging theories, and best practices are provided to include recommendations on how to successfully consult in the 21st century and beyond. Additional insight for a proposed case study offers an avenue for further research on how to address the apertures of consulting across disciplines.

Keywords: consulting, leadership, apertures, COVID-19, disciplines

The economic and social disruption from the 21st century COVID-19 pandemic is devastating with detrimental effects on tens of millions of homes globally. Organizations experienced a vast measure of disheveling which resulted in tactics to save existing businesses of all sizes. Individuals across the globe quickly learned the pandemic is not simply a public health crisis, but a crisis that spans every sector (Branswell & Joseph, 2020). Before the pandemic, consultants played a major role in diverse organizations globally. Presently, the need for consultants continues to rise due

to changes in the dynamics of business competition, client business logic, and environmental discontinuity (Ciampi, 2007). The pandemic is now a major contributor because of the uncertainty faced by businesses regarding the future direction and structural evolution of the organization. Changes in the labor force, markets, and technology altered the infrastructure unapologetically. Ciampi posits a reconfiguration of the value chain occurred with both immaterial and material activities. Processes relative to customer service, research and development, strategic knowledge, and organizational competence are now internalized. Further, internal intellectual undertakings, such as business analysis, human resources development, strategic planning, and marketing influenced client evolution. The economy is considered globalized with the utilization of information and technology to compete in an arena without geographical boundaries or constraints. According to Porter (1987), how well organizations compete is dependent upon their ability to embark on new pathways that create diverse, strategic direction, expand boundaries, enhance organizational profiles, and provide avenues for diversification of service offerings to increase profit. How does a consultant fit into this new dilemma?

The Role of a Consultant

The role of a consultant has become increasingly important for organizations. If the economy is globalized, the role of the consultants within the organization must be from a globalized perspective. According to Jones and Pfeiffer (1973), a major concern in consulting is the relationship between science and practice. Consultants play a significant role in organizations that extend beyond merely providing solutions. Consultants facilitate the interaction between divided entities to create healthy work environments. Their roles must transition towards long-term relationships past the implementation of a solo project. A specific skill set to assist clients is a necessity, as well as the skill set of a consultant-generalist for a more robust experience that creates organizational transformation. According to Vosoughi (2014), process-consulting must become intertwined in the process to ensure clients accept full responsibility and ownership of organizational challenges throughout each phase of the process. Knowledge creation serves as the foundation of social, external, and internal processes. The creation of new knowledge is a dynamic meta-process that is continuous with iterations that run parallel. The consultant and client share responsibility in the application of their explicit knowledge. This aids in the evolution of systemic concerns, and best practices. This direct experiential knowledge share allows clients to assimilate knowledge to discover causes, identify client capabilities, and confirm methods to solve issues. New processes and new knowledge emerge to shift the trajectory of the organization to areas of solidarity and profitability. The result is a deeper appreciation of the work of the consultant beyond a solution providing entity to one of relationship and active participation. The client resources are increased, while new and unique knowledge is obtained to ensure competitive success in the global marketplace (Nonaka, 1994).

The Role of Leaders

Global leaders face one of the biggest crises in history. The urgency to sustain life within the healthcare system is a priority. Business organizations face great uncertainty regarding the sustainability of the business for the future. Leaders have responded as quickly as possible to confront the unanticipated, unprecedented challenges of the pandemic (Lee, 2020). Global leaders seek to enact processes of influence in attitudes, behaviors, and thinking among the global community to create a synergistic effort toward the achievement of a common goal and vision (Adler, 2001; Festing, 2001). According to Reiche et al., (2017), the expectation for leaders is the assumption of integral responsibilities in leading both people and societies through safe navigation of storms to rebuild the future. According to Lee (2020), “the roles of global leadership in such crisis time, is centered around the concept of dynamic balancing, which refers to the ever-evolving and ongoing process of attending to competing demands and formulating one’s response to address multiple logics simultaneously” (p. 16). Lee (2020) posits the need for three specific dimensions to accomplish dynamic balancing relative to global leadership. The first dimension consists of local protection and global collaboration. This requires well-coordinated efforts which are collected for the development of sound treatments, mobilization of resources and materials, and designs sufficient as economic mechanisms to save jobs and businesses. Global leaders must embrace broader visions and refrain from self-protection and isolation. The second dimension is a dynamic balancing of short-term and long-term perspectives. Oftentimes, global leaders work tirelessly against the clock during crises. However, short-term goals must be at the forefront to ensure needs are met efficiently and quickly. In addition, long-term thinking is a necessity to foresee the consequence of present decisions on the future. For this dynamic balancing to occur leaders must incorporate this manner of thinking in daily decision-making. The third dimension entails negative and positive emotions. According to Lee, “People experience fear, anxiety, anger, and frustration when their health, family, job, and business are threatened or hit by crisis” (p. 17). Leaders bear a great responsibility to instill hope, love, positive emotions, and direction. In turn, individuals create solutions that broaden their perspectives toward solutions for current crises.

Current Challenges & Apertures

According to Quade and Brown (2002), the organizational development profession is at a crossroads. The field is defined with specific and nonspecific techniques. The values that define the field are not always clear. In addition, consulting has become a competitive practice with much secrecy which surrounds effective strategies. Previously, organizational issues were planned and predictable solutions. However, this is ineffective for today’s market (Burke, 2014; Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005). Organizations must prepare to handle complexities, chaos, and interwoven issues that result from unexpected outcomes due to organizational systems (Burke, 2014; Quade &

Brown, 2002; Senge, 2006). Kiechel (2012) posits, “What companies didn’t have before the strategy revolution was a way of systematically putting together all the elements that determined their corporate fate ... the pre-strategy worldview lacked a rigorous sense of the dynamics of competition” (p. 4).

According to Weick (1995), there must be a certain level of thinking, analysis, and conceptualization in consulting evaluations. Bateson (1972) posits that addressing organizational problems requires consideration at levels of higher logical thinking and analysis to identify solutions. Hence, appropriate determination of the logic type and class requires consideration and deep thought regarding organizational situations, work factors, internal situations, and contextual factors. The consideration of context is very important. Context influences the importance, meaning, and level of response required for each given situation. According to Motamedi (2014), “The impetus for consulting could be driven by external conditions, internal factors and dynamics, or strategic issues comprised of a mix of external opportunities and threats and internal strengths and weaknesses” (p. 11). How should 21st-century consultants approach consulting engagement considering the pandemic? The reality is that consultants must go deeper and consider the aftermath of the pandemic. For example, Massey and Rodgers (1986) established the Significant Emotional Event (SEE) concept that defines SEE as, “an experience that is so mentally arresting that it becomes a catalyst for you to consider, examine, and possibly change your initial values or value system.” After decades of peace and economic growth, we are now faced with a pandemic. How the organization is affected by a SEE must be considered in the consultants’ organizational needs assessment.

Emerging Theories

Organizations are extremely complex which requires a different way of leading and thinking. A recent leadership theory considers the complexity of science and social systems known as the complexity leadership theory (CLT). This theory identifies leadership from a systems perspective attributed to the human interaction dynamics in complex systems (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). “With complexity theory, the importance of exploring the nature of interactions and adaptations in systems and their influence on behaviors, patterns, innovations, and interactions are emphasized” (p. 301). Leaders are advised to create organizational capacity that accommodates change through exploration and identification of behaviors and strategies that facilitates adaptability, creativity, and learning. Katz and Kahn (1978) first applied the theory and provided the foundation necessary to understand organizational dynamics for change. Perhaps this theory is useful for leaders because of the catastrophic nature of the pandemic.

Best Practices

Consulting is a \$250 billion global market. According to Kaplan (2020), the consulting industry is plagued with business models considered stagnant and ill-suited for a

digital world driven by technology. Consulting is considered labor-intensive and based on billable hours. Therefore, three significant trends are a necessity for current, emerging, and future consultants:

1. **Consulting Services Stratification:** Consultants are identified as basic or strategic. The unpredictability of future, catastrophic, unannounced events reinforces the need for strategic thinking consultants who understand strategic, contingency, and scenario planning. Implementation services are considered and will decrease in value. Strategic thinkers create sustainability which adds value to the organization.
2. **Digital Delivery:** The adoption of remote work and work-related technologies will remain a part of organizations. Clients will require consultants to shift their method of delivery to a method that accommodates the digital world. It is noted that remote work will highlight any gaps in the organization's work processes, which is advantageous for the consultant. The objective is not to ignore gaps, but to develop methodologies and work processes with remote, digital delivery. This delivery extends far beyond collaboration and video conferencing tools to service offerings “based on emerging technologies like no-code software and artificial intelligence to creating new digital methodologies that transform clients’ fundamental work processes” (p. 1).
3. **Scalable Business Models:** Traditional organizations utilize a business model consistent with leverage. The billable model was lucrative as the more one billed, the more monies the organization received, which increased salaries and bonuses. However, consultants must create scalable, repeatable best practices to deliver values that extend beyond billable hours and adds value to the organization. Consultants will be required to build digital solutions that are branded and recreates the entire consulting model.
4. **Prepare for future change by building capacity for change.** Collaborative learning and leadership are integral for the facilitation of capacity building in today’s complex, digital global market (Burke, 2014; Senge, 2006).
5. **Consultants must understand organizational processes with an in-depth knowledge of the organizational dynamics.**

Conclusion

The pandemic requires consultants to reconsider and make modifications to existing structures to advance and experience success as a consultant in the 21st century. Organizations are now uncharted territory where all options must be considered as part of the consultative process (Kaplan, 2020). The choices made will impact the organization and determine whether stagnation or progress is evident. Next-level consultants must embrace the challenges presented by the pandemic and rise to the occasion with the creation of systems that foster longevity for organizations.

About the Author

Chenille White is a second-year Ph.D. student at Regent University, where she is studying organizational leadership. She is the CEO and a Business & Organizational Consultant for Elite Business & Consulting Services, LLC. Chenille travels extensively providing advisory, business management, consulting, and training on startup, financial, organizational, and technical assistance services for small to mid-sized businesses, ministries, nonprofits, and government-funded programs. She serves as the Executive Pastor within her local ministry and trains leaders. Chenille founded I-WIN Women's Empowerment Network designed to identify and eradicate barriers in the life of women which hinder them from reaching their full potential. I-WIN provides solutions to foster growth in every area of their life. Her research interests include consulting and organizational development, organizational leadership, millennials in leadership, millennials as consultants, women, and entrepreneurship, and consultants as servant leaders.

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