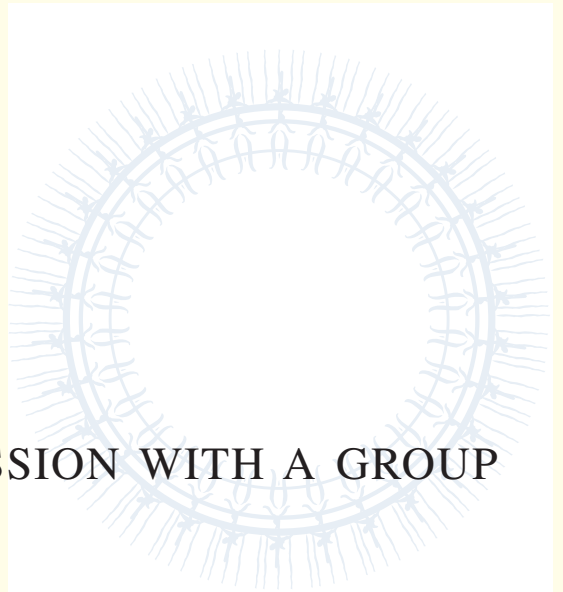




COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY CONSULTING
BUILDING INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS THAT WORK



IN A RECENT DISCUSSION WITH A GROUP OF INDUSTRY EXPERTS, ONE DIRECTOR

IGNITE TALENT

COMPARED WORKING IN THE COMMUN-

ICATIONS INDUSTRY TODAY WITH ATTEMPTING TO TEACH

ADVANCED CALCULUS WITH ONLY A PARTIAL UNDERSTANDING

of the subject. She said that today's "experts" often fall short in terms of technical know-how. A service engineer in the group, however, described a totally different challenge. He felt confident in his knowledge of next-generation technology because he had taken numerous technical courses with titles like, "Dense Wavelength Division Multiplexing." But what today's technical experts really lack, he explained, are consulting skills, tools, and processes.

In an industry that is reinventing itself continually, consulting enables you to meet the needs of the current market by providing solutions, rather than merely a product. In a time of increased competition, conver-

gence, globalization, and new technology, consulting allows technical experts to separate the white noise from what's truly meaningful to their current project and see the big picture at the same time. This benefit, in turn, allows them to put their technical expertise to optimal use. At a team level, consulting skills provide a common language for conducting business with internal and external clients. For example, Wilson Learning worked with and monitored the progress of a group of people who introduced their organization to a common consulting process, and the benefits spread exponentially as workers used the knowledge. The communications industry,

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therefore, requires a new job profile for today's technical expert, in which consulting is equal in importance to technical expertise.

How do you explain this shift in importance? The service engineer made what he called his "brain analogy," in which technical knowledge represents gray matter, or intellect, and consulting skills represent the synapses that ignite the intellect. In other words, the right consulting process allows an individual to translate any business challenge—whether it concerns a client, a strategic partner, the distribution channel, or a coworker—into a workable assignment. Such an assignment draws upon his or her technical expertise to meet and exceed the client's expectations.

Consider the evidence showing that consulting leads to repeat business. According to research conducted by the Purdue University Center for Customer Driven Quality, a relationship that gives an effective consultant the opportunity to make contact with the customer is advantageous, even when the situation involves a customer complaint. The study reports, predictably, that 79 percent of customers who purchased a "good product or service," and experienced no problems, made repeat purchases from the company. Here is the surprising figure: 85 percent of customers who had problems with purchases, and received effective consulting to resolve those problems, made subsequent purchases. In today's service economy, your consultants can serve as a competitive advantage, even when all you had in mind was damage control.

WHO BUILDS THE CLIENT RELATIONSHIP?

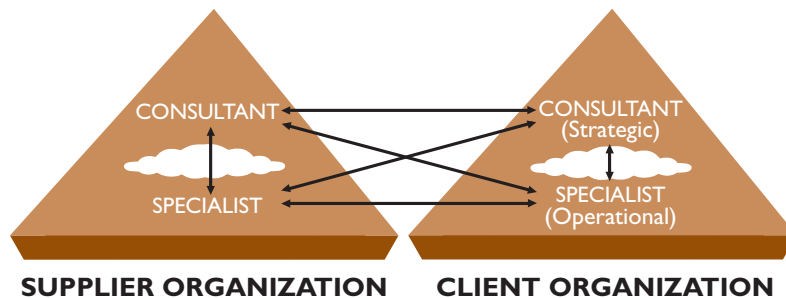
Perhaps in years gone by it was the account executive who initiated, clinched, and then cultivated the customer relationship. The technician was just responsible for implementation. Now network and telecom technologies are evolving too quickly for any single individual to master everything, while at the same time the business needs of the client are more complex and changing rapidly. Today, more than ever, it is a solutions team that provides service to the customer, drawing members from every function of the organization.

Roles within supplier organizations are shifting from predictable internal support to dynamic, value-added solutions—for both one's own company and the customer's company. To remain competitive and valuable, communications professionals need to move from being just technically savvy to also solving business problems. Highly evolved solutions call for employees who bring more to the table than just individual functional expertise. In technology companies worldwide, the common mission is to go beyond providing excellent products and services to integrated solutions.

Integrated solutions require teams that include a variety of roles, from account manager to technical support expert to customer engineer. With so many people now involved in each client relationship, communication with the customer and within the team is vitally important. Each participant in the client interaction has a different perspective, or hilltop, from which to view happenings. Maintaining consistent communication to and from the client is a critical success factor for keeping their business. To work well together, team members also need a common approach to pre-sale preparation and project implementation

so that the very best solution can be delivered to the customer. This is the foundation of a consulting culture.

The Cloudline Model describes a common web of relationships between organizations that supply professional goods or services to their clients. The cloudline represents the different perspectives from above and below, and the barriers to communication that this can create. More specifically, the model describes the problems that supplier and client organizations have internally in coordinating activity between inside departments, such as sales and installation.



A client organization can be represented by the triangle on the right. About halfway up the triangle is a cloudline. Above the cloudline are executives who have a vantage point from which they can see a long way out and around their own altitude, but they can see little detail on the ground level. They may see the business as blue sky, where the sun shines, and believe things are going to be great. The strategic planners, executives, and other process owners live here.

Below the cloudline things are viewed quite differently. Here it may be stormy, with dark skies and a great deal of agitation and wind. Thunderbolts and hailstones may pierce the cloud cover above. Visibility is often reduced to a dim view of the piece of ground in front of you. Here is where the operational people live.

85 percent of customers who had problems with purchases and received effective consulting to resolve those problems, made subsequent purchases.

The triangle on the left represents the consulting or supplier organization. In the supplier world it is the job of a partner or account manager to develop and maintain effective relationships with their strategic executive counterpart—those clients who live in the top level of the client organization. These relationships create the “opportunity” to sell into the client organization. From this relationship—an above-the-cloudline relationship—opportunities are discussed and possible projects are framed.

Similarly, in the supplier organization there will be a number of professionals who work below the cloudline, delivering solutions to their operational client counterparts. These functions may include data consultants, service engineers, maintenance specialists, and content experts such as contract personnel, pricing analysts, marketers, product developers, finance, HR, and network specialists.

Across and within these organizational structures, there are a number of relationships to be managed: account manager and strategic client, technical professional and operational client, account manager and technical professional, and strategic client and operational client.

Organizations that manage these relationships effectively get the best out of their business opportunity. The challenge of successfully maintaining these connections may be even greater if the solutions team is a virtual team, working across space, time, and organizational boundaries through webs of communication. Whether they are collocated or distributed, team members need to get the project work done on time and within budget. Complex solution development projects require complex organizational design and intentional communication design for sharing information, coordinating tasks, meeting timelines, and producing deliverables.

In both supplier and client organizations, business is often handled either above or below the cloudline without enough communication through the cloud. The challenge is to have communication and understanding at both the strategic and the implementation levels. A good consulting organization maintains those paths of communication and can assist the client organization with addressing business issues caused by their own cloudline. Highly effective teams in potent organizations maximize the value of every participant's knowledge to innovate, reduce costs, and change people's thinking. So how do you get everyone on the solutions team aligned and "reading from the same page?"

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A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR EXCHANGE

In the communications and high-tech industries around the world, a successful company needs solutions teams with a common approach to strategy, pre-sales planning, account management, and project delivery to leverage initial successes and deliver the very best results to the client. With so many people now involved in each client relationship, communication with the customer and within the team is vitally important. This requires a shared language for understanding roles and activities and for building consensus above and below organizational cloudlines. Learning a common language for conducting client business bridges the gap and leads to solutions teams that work better together. Professionals and managers can use mutually understood terms and concepts to talk with others in the organization about customers and customer organizations.

The professional transition is from being a proficient technician to becoming a business technical consultant, with a well-rounded understanding of how technology impacts business. Each member of a solutions team needs the skills and professionalism to act in a consultative manner with clients, regardless of his or her specific role. Consulting skills training is designed for technical professionals who need to act more as fee-earning consultants when delivering their expertise to clients, as well as for sales professionals who need to develop a wider capacity to understand the client's business in order to sell solutions. Most organizations need to get these two groups working together effectively to sell and deliver quality solutions that can contain a mixture of hardware and software, consulting and services.

Wilson Learning and Quarto offer an approach to consulting skills and consultative selling that is applicable to all roles involved in developing solutions. At a personal level, this approach offers skills and tools for managing client engagements. At a team or group level, it provides a common framework that can be used within a team to yield effective

communication and decision making. It introduces a five-step process for strategizing and implementing a consultative solution, and a number of “effective tools for busy people” that build understanding of the complexities and issues within any specific situation or organization.

Our approach focuses on three key consulting competencies:

Making sense of complexity requires a structure for sorting information and understanding what motivates clients to take action, how to get them to buy in, and how to get them to actively participate in recommended solutions. With a simple but coherent set of tools and techniques, solutions teams can better delineate a client situation, the opportunities and issues it presents, and what the business drivers and predominant culture are. The 7P™ Model provides individuals and teams with the capacity to thoroughly diagnose an organizational issue in seven vital areas of business activity. This analysis produces a broader understanding of the circumstances in the customer setting and yields solutions that fit better with the client’s business needs. It allows consultants to collect the right information and help themselves and their clients to accurately diagnose the situation.

Developing effective relationships means solutions team members must continuously develop relationships with different individuals in the client organization. Working within a solutions team also demands the capacity to develop relationships, this time with other team members and the extended enterprise. The five-step EDACT™ Model is a process for developing relationships and includes an understanding of personal motivation and style. It also offers ways to modify behavior to increase effectiveness in all types of interactions.

Facilitating meaningful change means taking the output from understanding the situation and the people involved and crafting both an appropriate solution and a strategy for getting the solution adopted by the client. The ultimate goal of the consulting relationship is to make something happen that positively impacts the client organization. When the transition point comes and the consultant exits or hands off the project, meaningful change has been realized and there is potential for a repeat engagement. Clear contracting and the importance of supporting the client during and after implementation are also elements of a successful consultation.

The changes in the communications business environment demand a new set of competencies and capabilities from individuals inside provider organizations. Consulting requires both expert and process consultation skills, and it is possible to be highly competent in both practices. Consulting capability will differentiate you from your competition, and provide your talent with the multidimensional proficiencies they need to help you prosper.

TALENT: YOUR BEST SOURCE OF ADVANTAGE

Service providers—whether legacy leaders, their deregulated offspring, or start-ups seeking a niche—must address the impact of industry trends to remain competitive or even viable.

From Product to Integrated Solution

Communication providers are moving away from transactional product and service sales to integrated offerings in an attempt to meet customers' increasingly complex requirements. With a solution-selling focus, the vendor brings together all the components (hardware, software, and services) for the customer. This increases the knowledge burden for the supplier, who must know products intimately and how to bundle them appropriately. They must also add value in the context of each client's unique legacy system, while looking at the future to ensure the system can handle the projected growth.

From Technical Focus to Business Focus

While providers are still expected to be the experts in all things technical, they also need to understand basic business contexts and processes. Whether it involves talking with CFOs or negotiating with a supply chain partner's IT department, this expertise is a new occupational requirement for technical specialists of all levels.

From Just Meeting the Need to Providing Value

With many providers from which to choose, today's communications firms cannot afford to just connect the cable and walk away. The additional usefulness they offer their customers can win or lose the business when the marketplace pool is crowded with competitors.

From Commodities to Strategic Relationships

In line with the previous shifts, clients look at providers in terms of a package deal rather than isolated products or services. Given the amount of money invested in most communications solutions, buyers prefer to have an ongoing, long-term association with the organizations that provide their integral services and systems. As their dependence on the Internet and other communication channels grows, customers will engage in a close, personal relationship with the organization that provides their links to the global marketplace.

People who are selling, developing, and implementing solutions for customers need to get closer to them to understand their business and business issues more than ever before. It requires a different mindset—a consulting mindset.

The impact this business shift has produced is that the people who are selling, developing, and implementing solutions for customers need to get closer to them to understand their business and business issues now more than ever before. It requires a different mindset—a consulting mindset. Salespeople, technical professionals, customer service, and the managers of all these groups need the skills and frameworks to work effectively in a more consultative relationship with their customers.

The irreversible movement toward product convergence is paralleled by an equally revolutionary organizational convergence. Technology, deregulation, and marketplace competition fuel the former; partnerships, mergers, and cross-functional solutions teams characterize the latter.

To increase their reach domestically and internationally, create capacity, capture market

share, and manage converging technology, communications companies are engaged in a flurry of partnerships, alliances, and joint ventures. Mergers and consolidations grab the headlines almost daily, changing the names of the players and the rules of the game.

It is clear that partnering and alliance-building is a major pre-determinant skill set in the emerging economy for successful companies. Again, the implications are that people become more adept at working in a consultative manner in these relationships.

People are the best source of competitive advantage, or to phrase it another way, your talent is the best advantage you have over your competitors. How your offering is presented, delivered, maintained, and leveraged by your talented personnel is critical in a shifted environment focused on business, value, and relationships. How effectively your people consult with your customers and your partners, discover their real needs, and understand their business is what makes the difference.

To manage and grow the business more effectively, a solutions company needs genuine consulting skills at the front end and effective internal communication within their value chain, supporting every step of delivery from pre-sale to maintenance. The crucial shift is from a delivery mindset to a solutions mindset that results in a consulting relationship with the customer. Organizations that address this shift successfully offer their clients integrated solutions that work.



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WLC 42507 7/01 Version 10.0

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