



The inside track on
using consultants

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introduction

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Moorhouse Consulting is passionate about consulting with integrity. That's why this booklet provides some guidelines as to when to use us to best effect and – just as importantly – when it would be more appropriate to use a competitor.

Before bringing in consultants (from any firm) you should be clear how best value will be derived from the ensuing relationship. Indeed, in the first instance, you should be sure you actually need external support. If you do, then ensure you have done everything you can to enable your consulting partner to best support you.

This booklet provides a useful guide to how to choose, use and, if necessary, when to remove your consultant.

“Before bringing in consultants you should be clear how best value will be derived from the ensuing relationship.”

where is your organisation heading?

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If you don't know the answer to this question, perhaps it's not the best time to bring in consultants. Of course consultants can help facilitate this conversation but be wary of the type that tells you where to go without involving you in the preceding analysis.

Moorhouse Consulting specialises in translating strategy into meaningful programmes of work that take you to your destination. We can, and occasionally do, facilitate strategic analysis but it is not our specialisation. Specialist strategy houses abound – but, again, be wary of the strategist who offers to 'hang around' for implementation. Skilled strategists and effective deliverers are rare bedfellows indeed!

Make use of internal skills

Some organisations have so habitualised the use of consultants, they forget to challenge whether their own staff have the internal capability to undertake sustainable change. Don't mistake habit for logic.

Using consultants is often more convenient and expedient but home-grown change is inherently more sustainable than externally-driven transformation, regardless of how collaboratively the client-consultant team behaves. Large-scale transformation invariably requires some form of external expertise and support but ensure you always exhaust your own talent pool before you hire externally.

“Ensure you always exhaust your own talent pool before you hire externally.”

how well do your people accept external support?

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Most organisations are well versed in change; the ones that aren't tend not to be around for very long. However, most of us carry a few scars and can tell the odd tale of a corporate transformation experience that was "less than optimal". If these previous efforts involved consultants, how much were they actually to blame?

Don't get us wrong, business consultants can range from essential allies to unskilled detractors; but, ask yourself, are any of the root causes of problematic change closer to home? No consultant expects to be met by unanimous acceptance but it helps if:

- you have a clear 'champion'.
- there is a critical mass of support.

Good consultants can move mountains but they are only as good as your organisation allows them to be.

David or Goliath – Does size really matter?

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Bringing in the 'big guns'

There are a multitude of players in the UK consulting industry; indeed, it feels like just about everyone is calling themselves a consultant nowadays. The consulting industry continues to evolve and as to future trends, the 'Big Players' will not disappear (indeed we should expect some of them to get bigger through acquisition).

This 'Super League of Big Firms' will endure principally because there is still a need for transnational system and process implementation. These 'Goliaths' share a number of common characteristics – hoards of bright, young graduates working behind relatively small numbers of grey haired managers and Partners in highly-leveraged staffing models (i.e. many juniors working to each senior owner). There are clearly specialisations within such firms but the majority of the work is 'procedural consulting' (that bright, young graduates can quickly learn).

This model requires a certain style of approach to sustain it – let's call it the 'land and expand' approach. You may well have been there as a client? Your organisation brought in a 'Big Firm' expert to tackle an isolated issue and before you knew it there were seventeen fresh-faced graduates hot-desking in the neighbouring office.

But let's not get too carried away...if you are embarking on a transnational IT implementation, or require your UK consultant to have a colleague in the San Francisco and Hong Kong offices, then scale will dictate only a handful of options. But if you need 'Goliath', be prepared to pay the premium for him.

Let's also be realistic – the vast majority of consulting procurement is done at the national level and, as such, most consulting firms need regional cover at most. In the vast majority of UK consulting engagements, firms don't have to be global to optimally support the organisation.

Create your dream team

We believe, that for the vast majority of UK consulting, there is a valid alternative that is being increasingly recognised. The alternative is to hand-pick your 'dream team' from smaller, specialist companies to create the optimal, collaborative 'eco-system' of your people and experienced externals.

Moorhouse Consulting certainly endorses this type of collaboration; our expertise is Programme Management delivery, which often puts us at the centre of transformation initiatives. This doesn't mean, however, that we aim to populate all the other team vacancies i.e. the 'land and expand' model. If you need further specialist support, we will encourage you to use other specialist firms (without favour or prejudice). Once you've built your 'dream team', be assured we will facilitate collaborative high performing team behaviours – it's at the heart of our programme management specialisation.

Moorhouse Consulting is a 'David' but small equals focus and focus equals real value. So, if you believe you need a consultant, and now know whether you need David or Goliath, then read on...

“Moorhouse Consulting is a 'David' but small equals focus and focus equals real value.”

how to choose your consultant

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So, you are sure you need a consultant and you have decided whether you will get best value from a 'Big Firm' or 'Little Firm'. Sit the applicants down, in turn, and ask them the following questions:

“How will you deliver sustainable change?”

Look into their eyes. It will be immediately obvious which ones have been there, rolled their sleeves up and worked collaboratively with clients to deliver meaningful change and which ones are reciting the business textbook.

“When is it appropriate to 'be cruel to be kind'?”

At the heart of true business consulting lies a paradox. On the one hand you want your consultant to be collaborative, almost intimate; on the other, you want them to be objective and distant. It's an intricate balancing act – ask them how they manage it.

“What don't you do well?”

Consultants can be an arrogant lot. The rare exceptions take their profession seriously but not themselves. Probe for a bit of integrity and humility. Listen carefully for those who are candid enough to concede their limitations; those who claim to be 'all things to all people' are always too good to be true. Focus equals real value; and focus requires a concession as to limitations.

“ Listen carefully for those who are candid enough to concede their limitations.”

“What competitor would you recommend?”

Your applicant will either answer directly or obfuscate. Professional consultants will have no issue in recommending fellow professionals.

“What client references would you want us to see – and which ones would you not?”

Take references and be sure to actually research these (and some they don't provide) yourself. Previous clients will eulogise about good consultants; defer selection until you hear a eulogy. Good consultants will also come with experience and experience always means the odd mistake. The integrity required to admit errors and the intelligence displayed in learning from them are key traits you will require from your consultant.

“What do you do to have fun?”

This is a radical question. Most will stare back in incredulity. What has fun got to do with something as serious as business transformation? True, you are not seeking entertainment but successful, collaborative endeavour will require your people to work in close cahoots with the consultants. Make sure you will enjoy their company and have some fun en route.

“How do you plan to exit?”

Look at the consultant's marketing materials; they will no doubt abound with the 'focus on skills transfer to client' rhetoric. Everyone knows the sound bite. Genuine consultants passionately believe it to be a true indicator of their success. They will want to work themselves out of a role by developing people within the client firm. Myopic consultants see this as truncating their revenues; the more prescient see the value of long-term client relationships as a result of this approach.

how to use your consultant

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**So, you have selected your consultant.
Before the work gets underway, make
some ground rules clear...**

- 1** We will always be absolutely candid with each other. There is no problem we should not share.
- 2** We are in this together; our trust in you, however, has to be earned.
- 3** Solve my problem, not every problem you come across.
- 4** Get the job done, no matter what it takes but make sure you understand your welcome.
- 5** Do it with us, not to us; share our success, but know ultimately that it is us, as the client, who will really deserve it.

“In the main, you will receive real, credible benefit from your client-consultant partnership.”

when to remove your consultant

In the main, you will receive real, credible benefit from your client-consultant partnership. On occasion, however, you will know (or at least sense) that you are not receiving all that was promised. It is important you recognise these danger signals and, additionally, know what to do when you experience them.

The Danger Signals

- All your consultant does is argue with you.
- All your consultant does is agree with everything you say.
- Your consultant does all the presentations.
- You spend more time arguing about the project commercials than you do about project delivery.
- Your consultant spends more time 'knocking down the shed' than actually building a new one.
- Your consultant has 'gone native'.

When you start to see the signals, immediately book a meeting with your consultant. Sit them down and look carefully into their eyes. Ask them: "Are you proud of your work?" They will answer: "Yes". You will know if they believe it.

when to use Moorhouse Consulting

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Use us if:

- you are running a national, or regional, programme.
- you need specialist Programme/Project Management expertise or support.
- you need a strategy to be implemented with pragmatism and passion.
- you have a programme-related anxiety.

Don't use us if:

- you are running a large, transnational IT or process implementation.
- you need your consultant to have colleagues around the globe.
- you need a piece of deep (esoteric) industry or system analysis.
- you need a new strategy – we can help – but there are dedicated strategy houses out there.

Contact us

www.moorhouseconsulting.com

E: paulaallerton@moorhouseconsulting.com

T: 01225 446 313

F: 0870 460 1917



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