

Manager = Internal Consultant?

Life at the top may always have been hard, but at least in former days the role of the manager was relatively easy to define. Management was "command and control": telling people what to do and making sure that they did it.

Nowadays the manager's role has exploded. "Empowered" staff work in multidisciplinary or even virtual teams. Goals and strategies constantly change while timescales collapse. Not only is the modern manager expected to cope with this discontinuity, he or she is expected to thrive on it.

Defining the skillset demanded by the new role of the manager seems a tall order at first. But if we take a step back, a number of themes emerge. The manager's role is now more interventionist and supportive, with a much greater project element. Results must be achieved through influence, particularly as much of the work will be with individuals or units outside the manager's direct control. In fact the skills demanded are remarkably similar to those of the management consultant.

Linked to these developments are changes in organisational structures which have affected the ways managers are able to achieve these goals. The old hierarchical pyramid structures of organisations created clear lines of command that flowed from the strategy makers at the top through layers of middle management. Now organisations are much flatter, with reporting lines that can be multiple and even extend outside the organisation. Managers can no longer simply issue orders, but like consultants must achieve results by using influencing skills to win support and implement changes.

We are told that change is now a permanent feature of organisations, and management consultancy is nothing if not the discipline of change. A successful consultant must be able to: Assess the nature of a predicament and design a way of addressing it; Manage and implement a project to identify and implement a suitable solution; Work with the people in the organisation to ensure that they accept the solution and are committed to the changes required. Success as a manager now requires exactly the same abilities: in essence the manager must learn how to become an "internal" consultant.

Consultancy Skills Training was originally set up to equip people with the skills they needed to enter or succeed in the consultancy profession. However, as time goes on the demand for those skills has also come from organisations far removed from consultancy which are either setting up professional services operations, or increasingly, looking for ways to work in more "consultative" manner internally.

Philip Taylor comments: "We used to joke that one day everybody would be a management consultant, and in a sense that's coming true, in that more and more people in business are finding they need part or all of the consultancy skillset. Not only that, but we are finding that those skills are precisely those which are left out of standard management training programmes. Training managers are looking to consultancy skills as the glue that holds together other elements of their manager development



"programmes." Typical elements of such a programme could include both the hard and soft consulting skills that will help build credibility while avoiding the politics of becoming a performance consultant.



- Build collaborative relationships in the organization.
- Manage interactions with others.
- Identify job performance needs.
- Apply active listening techniques.
- Ask performance-based questions.
- Identify required and actual job performance.
- Handle resistance and challenges from clients.
- Establish terms of reference with clients.
- Collect job performance data.
- Analyze job performance data.
- Determine the causes of performance gaps.
- Apply a range of analysis tools and techniques.
- Guide clients through a decision-making process.
- Recommend training and non-training solutions to performance needs.
- Write a report of findings and recommendations.
- Adopt the most effective role during implementation.
- Measure the results of performance solutions.

