THE ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL CONSULTANT IN FACILITATING ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Today's organisations are faced with increasingly difficult choices about appropriate development strategies and structures. At the same time they are supported by a growing literature on management and organisational performance. Judging by the recent average growth in the revenues of the major international consulting firms (which was 34% in the period between 1998 and 1999 according to Kennedy Information, 1999), it appears that it is increasingly likely for organisations to call in external consultants to assist the organisation's managers to select appropriate development strategies from the range of available choices.

It may be argued that this situation means that consultants are caught in the grip of two opposing forces: There is the possibility of providing clients with a better outcome than ever before, based on the advances of management thinking that have occurred over the course of this century. At the same time, clients' beliefs that continual advancements in organisational success are possible are putting pressure on the consulting industry to achieve "quick fixes". Whilst striving to perform effectively, consultants are being driven towards providing formulaic responses to complex organisational problems. One of the possible consequences is that they may not be making full use of the available knowledge about organisations, management and the practice of consulting. A further difficulty is that although the literature on the practice of consulting is rich, the theoretical knowledge base for consultants is still regarded as being incomplete.

This situation provided the context for the study, in which the researcher sought to describe the roles that can be taken by a consultant during an assignment, and to explore the relationship between roles and subsequent organisational outcomes. Against this background the researcher identified an initial point of interest: the organisation that is engaged upon a search for organisational improvement. The term used to describe this was enterprise development (ED), which was defined as a situation in which an organisation's managers employ a consultant to undertake a set of activities with the objective of achieving a positive organisational outcome of some kind. The implicit research question was whether external consultants have a role to play in ED, and if so, whether there are ways to maximise the positive outcomes of their involvement.

The researcher selected action research as the most appropriate methodology for working on client assignments, which also provided an opportunity for those participating in the study to gain from the process. As a starting point the researcher and the consultant "research partners" developed an initial proposition; "that it is possible to identify the factors that influence consultancy outcomes by engaging in participatory research with individual consultants". This proposition was developed over the course of three research cycles, and a diagrammatic presentation of these cycles in relationship to the research question can be found in Chapter 1 (page 31).

In the first research cycle, the researcher worked alongside each of the three research partners on a single client assignment. They developed the "intervention profile" (IP) as a way of assessing the assignment's potential for an effective outcome. At the end of the research cycle the researcher and the research partners concluded "that assessing a particular client assignment with the help of the IP will assist a consultant to make choices about appropriate intervention strategies".

In the second research cycle the researcher and the research partners developed the IP further, formulating a list of intervention "conditions" that may exist for each of the intervention profiles, and applying this extended framework to a client assignment. They concluded that applying the framework effectively is limited by the consultant's capability. At this point they developed the second proposition; "that a tool for assessing consultants' strengths and weaknesses will assist them to plan a programme of professional development that will improve their practice of organisational consulting".

In the third research cycle the researcher and the research partners focused on the consultant's capability. Working through the "consulting approaches assessment" (CAA), a tool designed specifically for this study, the research partners identified their own approach to the practice of consulting. They concluded with a final proposition: "given that the way consultants approach the consulting process is one of the critical success factors, a consulting development programme that assists consultants to develop an intervention profile, assess intervention conditions and develop intervention strategies in the context of their own consulting approach will improve their practice of organisational consulting".

The evidence of the six cases undertaken in this study suggests that there is more than one role that consultants can take with a client organisation that can contribute to ED. It is also clear that there are ways of maximising the positive outcomes of consultancy interventions. Here the study makes two specific contributions to the knowledge on organisational consulting that currently exists.

Firstly, the IP and the CAA are additions to the literature, which allow practising consultants to apply the extensive literature on management and organisation to client assignments. Secondly, the researcher presents a model for organisational consulting which explicitly identifies the three different levels that consultants need to consider when undertaking client interventions (conceptualisation, strategy and practice), and categorises the existing body of knowledge on consultancy in terms of these levels.

These contributions have fundamental implications for the training and development of organisational consultants, and their application has the potential to improve their value to the organisations that employ them.

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"It is not at all clear that the current state of management theory, created in part by the changes of the past twenty-five years, is any more satisfactory than the theoretical confusion which existed in the mid-1950s. What is clear is that at present management continues to need better theories, and that managers and others continue to search for scientific models and scholarly guidance" (McGuire, 1982, p 31).

Despite the fact that almost two decades have passed since McGuire commented upon the search for "better theories of management", little has changed. The definitive theory of organisations has not been developed, and the already vast literature on management and organisations continues to grow, added to every day by the latest offerings from the academic journals, the business periodicals and the publishing houses. Well-known authors such as Peter Drucker and Charles Handy keep providing new reflections upon different aspects of management, long after their first widely-read books were published (1954 and 1976 respectively).

One of the results of this extensive and growing literature on organisations seems to be a tacit agreement amongst the writers on management; that "better theories" can be found. Related to this is an implicit message for managers: that organisational success is possible, if only one can identify the "right" answers to problems facing the organisation. In their influential 1982 book Peters and Waterman make this promise explicit; if readers follow the "lessons from America's best-run companies", they too will achieve "excellence". The messages for managers are that the pursuit of growth is commendable and its achievement is possible. That the Holy Grail of the manager of the 1990s is the "formula for excellence" does not seem to be too wild a claim to make.

This chapter introduces the reader to the study, which in general terms is concerned with managers as they seek this elusive state of excellence, and at a more specific level focuses on one of the strategies that managers use; the employment of an external consultant. In the chapter's first section, *In search of excellence*, the focus is on identifying the factors that appear to have influenced today's managers in their use of external consultants, and which have contributed to a situation in which the consulting industry is showing prodigious growth internationally. The researcher then looks at the development of management thinking and the emergence of consultants as a recognisable

feature within today's organisations. In this discussion the researcher identifies a number of challenges for consultants and their client managers as they work together within organisations. These issues provide the background for the study, and this section closes with a listing of the study's research questions.

The second section of the chapter, *Planning the research*, describes the way in which the researcher approached studying the issues raised. The researcher outlines the process of planning the research and describes the research strategy and the initial research methods.

The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the main points covered, and an explanation of the thesis structure.

IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE

The popular book 1982 by Peters and Waterman is best remembered for the message implied in its title - that organisational excellence is possible. The authors argue that the pre-eminent objective of achieving excellence is the result of the dominance of the rational model of management. They suggest that modern managers are working within a commercial environment where there are a number of shared core tenets about organisational success, including "big is better", and "it's all over if we stop growing" (Peters & Waterman, 1982, pp 43-44).

Given the number of management books that appear to accept that continuously improving performance is possible (for example, Champy & Hammer, 1993; Hale, 1995), it is easy to see how the dominance of this model (of excellence) may have been one of the factors in the development of whole fields of organisational improvement, some better known than others. Organisational development, (as explicated by Bennis, 1969), strategic management (Ansoff, 1965), organisational learning (Senge, 1990), human performance technology (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1992) and business process reengineering (Champy & Hammer, 1993) all offer managers the promise of organisational improvement or "revitalization" (Kilmann, Covin & Associates, 1988). One result of these contributions is that the manager's "toolkit" is larger than ever before.

However, the search for new methods shows no sign of dissipating. Already exposed to management concepts of efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability, today's managers continue to seek out the latest thinking in the hope that this will give their enterprise a competitive edge. As a result of this conscious focus on identifying the latest management approach, or its fads and fashions, if one follows the argument presented by Abrahamson (1991), managers are increasingly aware of alternative methods and models (Joiner, 1994). These include strategic thinking based on envisioning and double-loop learning (Argyris, 1992; Bunning, 1991; Fulmer, 1995), reflective processes (Bunning, 1991), concerns with "new age" practices (Berry, 1993), and the value of change as a strategy for improvement (Hale, 1995).

For some the interest in "the new" is driven by the "tremendous transformations in contemporary society and economics and in the phenomenon we call the organization" (von Krogh, Roos, & Slocum, 1996, p 157). This transformation is often described by the term used by Alvin Toffler in his widely read book, *The third wave* (Toffler, 1980), in which he argues that the "second-wave", characterised by certainty and stability, is giving way to a "third wave", where change is characteristic. The challenges of the "third wave" are in part addressed by Peter Senge in his 1990 book on the "fifth discipline" of management. Here Senge argues that there is a fundamental "movement towards learning organizations, [that is] part of the evolution of industrial society" (Senge, 1990, p 5). Those who agree with this position suggest that as organisations are increasingly regarded as social institutions for those who work within them, there is an increasing need for them to provide their employees with ways of expressing the human need for "self-actualisation" (Dixon, 1994).

Others interested in "the new" have been driven by their dissatisfaction with the "old" methods of improving organisational performance. Peters and Waterman comment that "much as the conventional business rationality seems to drive the engine of business today, it simply does not explain most of what make the excellent companies work" (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p 44). They critique the conventional approaches to organisational effectiveness that emphasise the value of analysis, which they say leads managers into taking a narrow and negative view of organisations. Their criticisms, which are aimed chiefly at management theorists, are echoed by Cameron, who

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comments, "effectiveness is both an apex and an abyss in organization behavior research" (Cameron, 1984, p 236).

More recently, Eccles, Nohria and Berkley (1992) clearly announce their dissatisfaction with the current writing on management in the title of their book, *Beyond the hype: Rediscovering the essence of management* (Eccles, Nohria & Berkley, 1992). Others implicitly reject some of the concepts that are regarded as fundamental to managers today. Ashkenas (1995) promotes the concept of the "boundaryless organisation", Carroll and Gillen (1987) question whether the classical management functions are useful in describing managerial work, and Fiol and Huff (1992) challenge managers with the questions "where are we, and where do we go from here?"

These separate strands of thinking indicate willingness on the part of managers to explore the notion that the "new" approaches may offer something that the traditional approaches do not. However, the willingness to explore new ideas may have in itself been a factor in the creation of a management literature that presents a huge range of concepts. The result is that despite the fact that the literature is more extensive than ever before, there is little agreement about where managers should focus their attention. For example, Senge (1990) describes the need for "a new type of management practitioner" (Senge, 1990, p 15). Similarly, through their publication of a collection of a set of important management writings, Smircich and Calás (1995) effectively emphasise the currency of Scott's (1974) contention, that "thoughtful people must explore alternatives for management that lie outside the boundaries of the [classical] paradigm" (Smircich & Calás, 1995, p 11). By contrast, Miles and Snow (1986) suggest that new organisational forms are needed to take advantage of increasingly competitive economies. Yet despite the different issues identified by these commentators and the implications for managers that exist, their discussions share at least one common theme; there are changes in store for managers.

Whether managers are aware of the range of ideas in the literature or the lack of agreement in these debates is irrelevant. The important issue is that these new concepts exist, and it is likely that many managers are aware of this, even if they are not aware of the subtlety of the debate. For the managers who are seeking to improve the performance of their organisations the future is filled with conceptual and operational challenges.

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The titles of the best-selling management books suggest that some managers appear to be ready to tackle the tasks involved in improving performance themselves. *Gung Ho! Turn on the people in any organization* (Blanchard & Bowles, 1997), and *Zapp - The lightning of empowerment: How to improve quality, Productivity and employee satisfaction* (Byham & Cox, 1998), are typical of those books listed by the internet provider Amazon Books in its section of most popular management titles. The target of these volumes is clearly the practising manager, and their implicit message is that managers can achieve organisational success through their own efforts.

Figure 1.1: The growth of consulting revenues

	Management consulting revenues ($ millions)		Growth %
	1997	**1998**	**1997-1998**
Arthur Andersen	739	1,020	38.0
Arthur Andersen Consulting	5,255	6,720	27.9
Deloitte & Touche	2,300	3,000	30.4
Ernst & Young	3,000	4,000	33.3
KPMG	2,300	3,000	30.4
Price Waterhouse Coopers	2,806	3,970	41.5
TOTAL	**$16,400**	**$21,710**	**34.2%**

(Source: Kennedy Information, 1999)

Although the researcher found no studies which allowed her to draw conclusions about the proportions of managers who use outside advisors, the growth in revenues for the international firms that offer management consulting (see Figure 1.1) indicates that there is an increasing trend for organisations to call in outsiders to help. These consultants can be contracted to undertake the task at hand, relieving managers of some of the burden of the managerial function (O'Shea & Madigan, 1997). While it is not possible to assess how many organisations employ outsiders, the growth in revenue generated by the international consulting industry suggests that the use of consultants is increasing. The growth in revenue demonstrated by this table is consistent with what is widely regarded as a fact of commercial life: that at some point an organisation's managers will need to employ an external advisor. There may be a one-off task that needs a specialist, such as a

lawyer to check a lease agreement, or a task that occurs regularly for a routine purpose, such as the preparation of year-end financial statements by an accountant. Both situations call for an individual with specific knowledge or skills, and if this knowledge is not available within the organisation, an external individual may be contracted to provide the organisation's managers with what is needed. This transaction-based scenario is consistent with a definition of consulting as "providing help on the content, process, or structure of a task or series of tasks, where the consultant is not actually responsible for doing the task itself, but is helping those who are" (Steele, 1975, p 3).

The broad definition provided by Steele is typical of a number of commentators who focus on the activities and processes inherent in consulting, irrespective of the particular type of task that is being undertaken. A similar approach is taken by Gordon and Ronald Lippitt (1986), who maintain that "consulting is aimed at aiding a person, group, organization, or larger system in mobilizing internal and external resources to deal with problem confrontations and change efforts" (Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986, p 1). A different perspective is again added by Steele in relation to the goals of consulting, when he says that consultancy is aimed at "some improvement in the future functioning of the client system, rather than simply at getting the immediate task completed satisfactorily" (Steele, 1975, p 3).

Alongside these general notions lie those which identify more specific types of organisational consulting such as "management consultancy". Management consulting has been defined as

> an advisory service contracted for and provided to organisations by specially trained and qualified persons who assist, in an objective and independent manner, the client organisation to identify management problems, analyse such problems, recommend solutions to these problems, and help, when requested, in the implementation of solutions (Greiner & Metzger, 1983, p 7).

This definition is used as the basis for the substantial contribution to the management consulting literature by Milan Kubr in his book *Management consulting: A guide to the profession*, first published in 1976, and now in its third edition (Kubr, 1996). Kubr concludes that the key features of management consultancy are that it provides a professional service, is advisory in nature, and is offered by an individual consultant who is independent of the client organisation (Kubr, 1996).

Today, the consulting industry is large, and, as noted earlier, still growing. A recent international industry survey noted prodigious growth in the industry, driven by the major international firms that employ many thousands of staff (Management consultancy, 1997; Stevens, 1991). In 1996 the largest firm in the world was Andersen Consulting, which employed over forty thousand staff and generated three billion US dollars in annual revenue. This compares to an estimated global market for the industry of forty billion US dollars and a worldwide workforce of more than one hundred thousand consultants (Caulkin, 1997).

All of these consultants are involved in the search for answers to managers' questions, and it has been argued that the industry is driven by client demand (Management consultancy, 1997). Some argue that consultants have become the new "management gurus" and that they are becoming a force within organisations through their influence on the organisation's managers (Huczynski, 1993; Jackson, 1996; Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 1996).

But it could also be argued that the growth in the industry is at least partly driven by the policies of governments around the world who are pursuing economic policies which depend on the "enterprise economy" and "business-like practices". In many countries these policies have reportedly had the effect of adding to the supply of consultants.

In New Zealand, for example, the restructuring that has occurred in organisations that were previously owned by the government has cost many thousands of individuals their jobs. Three thousand jobs were cut by the Electricity Corporation when it became a state owned enterprise (SOE), four thousand by the Coal Corporation, a further four thousand by the Forestry Corporation, and eight thousand by New Zealand Post (Russell, 1996). New Zealand Rail shed a massive fifteen thousand jobs. While many jobs were operational, a significant proportion were managerial, and it is commonly understood that a proportion of former managers have become consultants. While the researcher was able to find no published confirmation of this notion, the proposition seems to be upheld by the increased numbers of individuals who offer "business management services" in the annual business survey carried out by Statistics New Zealand (published as *Business activity statistics*). This shows that in 1997 there were 4,955 enterprises in this category,

employing 11,730 full time staff (as measured by "full time equivalents"), whilst by 1998 there were 7,215 enterprises and 14,840 full time staff (Statistics New Zealand, 1999).

Another aspect of government policy that may relate to the growth of the consulting industry is the way in which the use of consultants is encouraged through business development programmes. In some countries there are government subsidies for this purpose, and agencies in Italy, Norway, Denmark, Australia and Germany have devised programmes that use consultants to assist groups of enterprises to establish joint ventures and other forms of inter-organisational networks (Chaston, 1995). In recent years the New Zealand government launched two initiatives designed to increase the effective use of external consultants; the Trade New Zealand Hard Network Programme and the Ministry of Commerce Business Development Programme (since modified as the result of the 1998 Enterprise Assistance Review). While the long-term effectiveness of these programmes has not been assessed (Cragg & Vargo, 1995), it is clear that those government agencies that operate in laissez-faire economies such as New Zealand will continue to encourage organisations to use external consultants to develop their enterprises, based on the models that already exist within community agencies and professional associations (Cameron & Massey, 1999; Massey & Hurley, 1999; Massey, 1995).

The net result of these separate trends (government policy, economic restructuring and client demand) is that there are more consultants than ever before, and traditional "management consultants" have now been joined by colleagues who offer their services to organisations in a variety of ways, as industrial psychologists, human performance consultants, business process reengineers and consultants in total quality management (TQM). Many have training in one or more speciality, such as psychology or production technology. However, in addition to a specialty they all have an element of their work in common; working within organisations, assisting managers to deal with the issues that are specific to this context. As such, they are all influenced by the development of modern management - the field that has done more than any other to affect the way today's managers conceive of organisations.

The traditions and practices of the ancient civilisations of Babylon, China, Egypt, Greece and Rome provided the basis for the practice of management (Wren, 1994). The massive building projects undertaken by these societies created the need for principles such as delegation and span of control, and the ancient documents that detailed their use (chiefly religious writings) provided a foundation for later thinkers. Machiavelli and Hobbes built upon these concepts when they published their famous works *The Prince* and *Leviathan* in 1513 and 1651 respectively. Later still (1776) Adam Smith contributed *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, providing another key management concept: the specialisation of labour (Wren, 1994; Wren & Greenwood, 1998).

These foundations enabled the early American contributors to modern management, often described collectively as the classical theorists, to add to the knowledge on management practices (Chandler, 1990). At the same time, Fayol (published in French in 1916 and translated into English in 1949) and Weber (published in German in 1924 and widely known in the 1947 translation by Henderson & Parsons), were also making their contributions to management and organisation theory.

The focus on management that was a characteristic of organisations in the United States and Europe at the end of the nineteenth century was a direct response to the demands of increasingly industrialised economies. The practice of management became acknowledged as a distinct function within an organisational context (Fayol, 1916/1949), and the study of management was begun. As a result research "on" organisations started to gather momentum, and consulting "to" organisations was but a single step behind (Weisbord, 1987). While it was the development of management as an entire area of study that was the chief force behind the origin of consulting as a field, one figure was of critical importance: Frederick Taylor (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 1996).

Taylor's seminal work, (Taylor, 1911, widely available today in its 1947 republication) became the basis of "management science", a term coined to "contrast his approach with the unscientific approaches that characterized traditional management practices. By scientific, Taylor meant: based on proven fact rather than tradition, rule of thumb, guesswork, precedent, personal opinion or hearsay" (Locke, 1988, p 23). This work enabled Taylor to invent "a new profession, 'consulting engineer', linking cost accounting, time study, wage incentives and planning" (Weisbord, 1987, p 7). This

eventually developed into the consulting speciality of industrial engineering, a field which grew rapidly during World War I to satisfy the need for efficient production of manufactured goods (Washburn, 1996).

Although he was just one of a number of the classical theorists of the era, Taylor's contributions dominated management thinking at the time. He influenced the work of Carl Barth, Henry Gantt, and Frank and Lillian Gilbreth (Wren, 1994), all well known to today's management consultants for the practical tools that resulted from their work.

Despite the resistance to some of Taylor's principles (Kanigel, 1997), "scientific management" became synonymous with "good management". However, even with the wide acceptance of the principles of scientific management, the approach was soon to be challenged. The long-running research at the Hawthorne Works conducted by Elton Mayo and others, known to managers chiefly through Mayo's 1933 publication, developed into a body of work that epitomised an approach to organisations that soon came to be regarded as antithetical to Taylor.

Mayo's research provided the foundation for organisational consulting from a different perspective; one that focused on the relationship of people to the organisation's purpose. The label of "human relations" was given to this emerging field, which called for "social, human skills rather than technical skills" an "emphasis on rebuilding people's sense of belonging" and a "concern for equalizing power" (Wren, 1994, p 343).

THE EMERGENCE OF MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

Managers and consultants alike were influenced by the emergence of management science and human relations, as related, but separate schools of thought. Not only were practising managers quick to adopt the techniques and core tenets that were associated with each approach, but they were adopted by the increasing number of firms that were being established to provide advice to these managers. The consulting firm Business Research Services was established in the United States by Edwin Booz in 1914 (Kubr, 1986), and a professional body for management consultants was set up in 1929 (Washburn, 1996). Another of the most famous consulting firms of all time, McKinsey & Company was established in the 1930s by James McKinsey. He was motivated by the 1929 stock market crash to search for ways to avoid such drastic consequences in the future, through the development of better management practices within organisations

(Kubr, 1996). This objective was perceived as laudable and consulting to managers seemed to offer a valuable service.

The early consulting firms focused primarily on applying the principles of management science as they were then understood, and the dominance of this field for consultants continued for some decades. In addition to industrial engineering, the area that is most closely associated with Taylor, management science provided the basis for consulting areas such as strategic planning and quality management. Soon these fields were recognised as separate areas of specialisation, complete with their own proponents, such as Ansoff (1965) and Deming as explained by Walton (1989), his authoritative commentator. This rational approach to the pursuit and explication of facts, which was the essence of management science, continued during the 1950s, demonstrated in the advances that were made in areas such as operations management (Washburn, 1996).

This approach continued through the 1960s as managers turned their attention to comparing their organisation to that of competitors. In this area one of the first "model-based" firms was the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), established in 1963 by Bruce Henderson to focus on the provision of strategic advice (Kubr, 1996). Consistent with the popular BCG matrix, which allowed an organisation to assess its product line against that of its competitors was the growing use of structuralist analysis. This was based on uncovering the relationships between departments or other organisational units. Again, this approach was consistent with the principles of Taylor.

But by the 1970s the stranglehold that management science had on organisational consulting began to weaken. By now the research conducted by Mayo and his colleagues was beginning to influence the consulting industry through the behaviourist approaches such as organisational development (OD). A number of different approaches that were based on the work of the human relations school were popular during this time, including the "T-Group" (an abbreviation for training group). This technique, of using small groups to facilitate OD, which was pioneered by Kurt Lewin, then of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), influenced a whole generation of researchers and consultants working within organisations (French & Bell, 1995). A parallel development in applying human relations principles to organisations was occurring in the United Kingdom at the Tavistock Institute, through Eric Trist and others.

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The Tavistock work was also based on the work of Lewin (1951), and alongside Taylor, Lewin's contribution to organisational consulting cannot be overestimated. He was a significant influence on the consultants of the human relations school, who rejected the model-based approach which appeared to be the basis for the "management consultants", in favour of a "process approach" to organisational consulting.

The process approach as it applies to consulting is most clearly explained by one of the most important writers on management consulting; Edgar Schein. In a major contribution to the field he identifies process consulting as one of the three dominant models of consulting (Schein, 1969, revised edition 1988). He defines it as "a set of activities on the part of the consultant that help the client to perceive, understand, and act upon the process events that occur in the client's environment in order to improve the situation as defined by the client" (Schein, 1988, p 11). In Schein's typology the process consultant contrasts with the traditional expert consultant and the consultant as "doctor" (Schein, 1988).

While there have been other contributors to the field of management in general and organisational consulting in particular since Schein's definitive two volume work on process consulting (1968 and 1969), it could be argued that more recent contributors have merely addressed in detail the issues that were raised by Taylor, Mayo, Lewin and Schein. If this is the case, then these individuals have provided much of the raw material for the development of organisational consulting, and are partly responsible for the particular forms that it takes today, through their influence on later writers.

An examination of these later writers, who have followed the lead of Taylor and the others already listed (as demonstrated by the number of references to their works) reveals a number of common themes and shared concepts. Collectively these may be described as the "body of knowledge" for consultants and managers. As Kuhn observes,

> close historical investigation of a given speciality at a given time discloses a set of recurrent, quasi-standard illustrations of various theories in their conceptual, observational and instrumental applications. These are the community's paradigms, revealed in its textbooks, lectures and laboratory exercises. By studying them and by practising with them, the members of the corresponding community learn their trade (Kuhn, 1962, p 43).

This examination of the "textbooks and lectures" of the management community, part of which is briefly outlined above and which is examined in more detail in Chapter 2, suggests that the specialty of management does have some established theories, and that this makes up the body of knowledge for consultants. Despite the fact that the quest for new theories continues, those that currently exist make up a precious legacy for consultants and managers.

THE CONSULTANT'S LEGACY – A MIXED BLESSING?

The legacy is an extensive body of knowledge for today's organisational consultants, which is based on the traditions and practices of managers throughout history. More particularly the legacy has been formed within the last century, with Frederick Taylor's notion of "science in management" (1911) and Fayol's management functions (1916/1949) acting as focal points for the work of their contemporaries.

In turn, the cumulative knowledge of all of these theorists provided the basis for the "human relations school", individuals such as Mayo (1933) who rejected Taylor's notions, and Follett, who acted as a bridge between the opposing schools (Wren, 1994). More recently, theoretical contributions to organisational theory have come from Abraham Maslow (1954), Douglas McGregor (1960) and Henri Mintzberg (1973).

The result of these developments is that both managers and consultants are operating in an environment that has three identifiable characteristics. The first is that there is agreement on some aspects of management. There is an identifiable body of knowledge, and consultants and managers alike are more aware of the complexity of organisational processes. Those interested in the practice of management have access to widely accepted principles on organisation structure (Handy, 1995; Thomas, 1993; Weber, 1924/1947). They can consult books on managing change (Pettigrew, 1987; Senge, 1990), search out advice on improving performance (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969; Stolovitch & Keeps, 1992), and identify frameworks for analysing issues such as structure (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Porras, 1987; Porter, 1990).

The second characteristic of the environment for managers and consultants today is that in addition to this shared knowledge base there is implicit agreement that organisational success is possible (discussed by Peters & Waterman, 1982).

The third characteristic is that despite the body of knowledge and the continuing search for organisational success, the ultimate formula has not been found. Instead, the vast quantity of material within the body of knowledge provides tantalising hints on the best way of approaching organisational success, offering advice from a number of different perspectives. Some elements of the body of knowledge deal with the practice of organisational consultancy at a technical level (Kubr, 1996; Porras, 1987). Other elements deal with strategic issues such as identifying the appropriate level of the organisation for the intervention (French & Bell, 1995). Still others address conceptual issues (Schein, 1988; Weisbord, 1987).

THE CONSULTANT'S DILEMMA

This situation (where there is a body of knowledge, there is continued pursuit of organisational success and where the ultimate formula for its achievement has not been found) presents a number of challenges for consultants and their clients in making full use of their legacy.

The first challenge is directly related to the extent of the literature. The increasing numbers of collected writings on management (Clegg, Hardy & Nord, 1996; Dubose, 1988; Pugh, 1997; Smircich & Calàs, 1995) means there is simply too much material for any one consultant to comprehend. As a consequence, there is a tendency amongst organisational consultants to choose a particular area of specialty, drawing upon the literature that is specific to a single area such as strategic planning or performance improvement (Kubr, 1996). The drawback of this approach is that consultants who specialise in this way will almost certainly be forced to ignore other areas of the literature on organisations. These consultants rely on their knowledge of a speciality area or a particular technique to provide them with client credibility, and often remain ignorant of the size of the literature on consultancy that exists.

The second challenge is in meeting clients' changing needs. As managers devoured Peters and Waterman's (1982) best seller, and were convinced of the ease of identifying the characteristics of excellent organisations, they demanded a response from organisational consultants, putting pressure on them to provide easy formulae. Although some consultants continued to maintain their position that organisational consulting is complex and not easily reduced to a single, "one size fits all" process, others took this as

their opportunity to develop formula-based products. The rise of consultancy products such as Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and Total Quality Management (TQM) owes much to this interaction between clients and the consulting industry (Management consultancy, 1997; Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 1996).

It may be argued that these factors have created a situation where consultants are caught in the grip of two opposing forces. On one hand there is the possibility of providing clients with a better outcome than ever before, based on the advances of management thinking that have occurred. On the other hand, clients' beliefs that continual advancements in organisational success are possible are putting pressure on the consulting industry to achieve "quick fixes".

The crux of the dilemma that is created is that consultants are not usually able to achieve quick fixes. In part this is related to the complex nature of the consulting process, in which individuals assist organisations to address specific organisational issues, whilst the organisation's staff are simultaneously carrying on with their normal operations. But it is also related to an apparent lack of effective models for evaluating the results of a consultancy intervention. As demonstrated in Chapter 2 (pp 76-80), there is a dearth of literature on how to evaluate the outcomes of consultancy, and the approaches that do exist tend to depend on measuring a particular aspect of the assignment, such as client "satisfaction". For example, Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990) focus solely on the client's point of view of the "service encounter" when a consultant is working within an organisation – a perspective that may make it difficult to assess the *value* of the encounter (in terms of the long term effect on the organisation).

THE RESEARCHER'S EXPERIENCE

This situation described in the previous section (where there is a body of knowledge, there is continued pursuit of organisational success and where the ultimate formula for its achievement and measurement has not been found) represented the personal experience of the researcher as a consultant. After graduating with a postgraduate qualification in business, the researcher was employed as a business adviser, a role that she initially felt qualified to undertake - on the basis of her business training. However, in her subsequent positions (as an internal consultant within a multi-national company and then as a

consultant for a small management consultancy firm) she became aware of the shortfalls in her knowledge.

At this point she was not aware in any formal sense of a "body of knowledge" for organisational consulting, just conscious that in her own work she was called upon to offer her clients advice, which also had to be delivered in an acceptable way. In addition she was aware that her clients usually expected her actions to be related to some sort of organisational improvement, although it was rare for any formal assessment to be built into projects, and "assessment" usually depended on crude notions of "success" or "satisfaction".

As a result of her growing awareness of her lack of knowledge, in an unstructured way she began to explore the characteristics of an effective consultant, searching the literature for practical advice as well as conceptual frameworks. Here she found the literature on "management consultancy", as well as that on the professions or occupations that use the consulting model such as engineering and medicine.

After reflecting upon this literature in the light of her own experience, her conclusion was that individuals need to have high levels of technical expertise (in a field such as strategic planning) as well as strong interpersonal skills. Furthermore, she concluded that developing these skills is important for practising consultants. Despite her recognition of the need for professional development, she was not exposed to any formal training during her time as a consultant, nor introduced to any framework for self-paced learning. In retrospect she felt that this had prevented her from planning client work as effectively as could have been the case, and she was also aware that this had made it difficult to assess the "success" of an assignment.

The researcher's own experience as a consultant provided the impetus for her to explore the situation described above, and provided the context for the study. Against this background the researcher identified an initial point of interest; the organisation that is engaged upon a search for organisational improvement of some form, with the help of an external consultant. For the purpose of the study the term used to describe this particular state was enterprise development (ED). While used in a non-specific sense by those who are interested in "developing enterprises" (for example, in educational institutions), this term does not appear formally in the literature, nor does it appear to have a consistent

definition. For this reason the researcher chose the term to avoid the implications that would follow the use of a more widely known term such as organisational development (OD). She was also interested in using a term that could be adapted to the broad expectations of "success" that she felt she would encounter with different clients and consultants.

ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Although not widely used, "enterprise development" (ED) is a term that appears in the literature (for example, Neck & Nelson, 1992), where it seems to be related to the study of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). In this context it is used primarily to describe the planned creation of a healthy SME sector. In addition to its use in relation to a sector, ED can also be applied to the study of individual enterprises.

It was in this individual sense that the term ED was used in the context of this study. Here, it was defined as a situation in which the organisation's managers undertake a set of activities with the objective of achieving a positive organisational outcome of some kind. The broad definition provided the researcher with a way of encompassing any organisation that was following an active strategy, undertaken by managers, with the assistance of a consultant. At the same time, the definition also provided her with a way of limiting the scope of the study – avoiding for example, organisations that were using external consultants in a "non-developmental" way, such as in the preparation of financial plans.

The term ED was used in contrast to organisational development (OD) to emphasise two issues. Firstly, the researcher was seeking to study organisational projects in which the client had taken the lead in the development strategy. This was by way of contrast with OD in which the consultant often takes responsibility for determining the project's scope (Porras, 1987). Secondly, the term OD is clearly defined within the literature, and OD consultants have a set of techniques and approaches that they use. For the purpose of this study the researcher wished to focus on consultants with no affiliation to a particular discipline of this type. This was to make it easier for the study to focus on the *consultants* (and their interaction with their client) rather than the techniques and approaches that they used. The use of the term ED helped ensure that those participating in the study were not influenced by their knowledge of OD.

A related issue was that the researcher wished to leave open the possibility that ED would be identifiably different from OD, as demonstrated by the fieldwork. By emphasising that the term ED had been selected solely for the purpose of this study, the researcher felt that she was making this possible.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Having established the context for the research, the researcher was able to identify the aim of the study, which was to examine the role of the consultant during an assignment where the client organisation is engaged upon a search for organisational improvement, (for the purpose of this study labelled "enterprise development"). The focus was the implied relationship between the consultant's actions, the client's reactions and the organisational outcomes. Three broad research questions emerged immediately from this concern: "what does the consultant do", "how does the client respond" and "what is the result for the organisation".

Another factor in the development of the research questions emerged from a review of the literature (described in Chapter 2). Here the researcher summarised the current thinking on organisational consultancy (and the omissions within this thinking) in terms of its dominant themes. Combining these two factors provided the researcher with an initial set of research objectives:

1. To evaluate the potential role of the consultant in ED, by identifying the effects of interventions carried out by consultants in the context of an assignment.

2. To identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers.

3. To identify the key aspects of an organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate ED, with particular reference to interventions that seek to influence organisational and individual learning.

A further research objective was added when the researcher made the decision to use action research (AR), and to use this research methodology with a small number of consultants whilst they were working with specific client projects. This decision, which is detailed in the following section, was the basis for the fourth research objective:

4.   To assist consultants and their clients to maximise ED outcomes.

In this section the researcher described the emergence of consultants as a recognisable force in organisations today, which has created a situation full of challenges for consultants and their client managers as they work together within organisations. In the following section the researcher outlines the process of planning the research and describes the research strategy and the initial research methods.

PLANNING THE RESEARCH

In planning the study the researcher considered a number of factors before deciding upon an appropriate research strategy. This process, which is described in more detail in Chapter 3, was chiefly concerned with identifying an appropriate response to the particular research situation, in the light of the current thinking on organisational consulting, as explored in Chapter 2. In this context there were a number of important issues. The most important feature was the fact that the researcher would be dealing with a situation in which there are significant theoretical contributions (as evidenced by the wide acceptance of the principles of Taylor, Mayo and the like), yet where there is no complete theoretical foundation for the practice of consulting.

A second issue was that the researcher would be working with client managers and consultants who were engaged upon "real life" assignments. The outcomes of the assignment would have a tangible impact on the client organisation, and it was clear to the researcher that any research strategy would have to allow for the impact that the research could have, both upon the organisation and the parties involved in the assignment.

The importance of selecting a research strategy which would be appropriate in a situation where theory exists, and yet is incomplete, and where the researcher had the objective of not impacting negatively on those participating, led her to the literature on "new paradigm research" (Reason & Rowan, 1981). This phrase is used to describe an approach that has been developing over some decades, as researchers have become aware of the limitations of traditional research. New paradigm research, which is described in more detail in Chapter 3, draws upon contributors and perspectives from

throughout the behavioural sciences; from Maslow to Lewin and from Marxism to humanistic psychology (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991; Reason & Rowan, 1981). As such, proponents of new paradigm research argue that it is able to act as a focus for the various streams of "non-positivist" researchers, able to convey a sense of unity in a disparate field, while retaining the richness provided by the proponents of different methods. In addition they argue that it does "justice to the humanness of all those involved in the research endeavour" (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p xi).

This ability to "retain richness" that is described as characteristic of new paradigm research is also identified as a key characteristic of other new forms of research, including that which is often described as "relativist research" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 1991). They identify a particular strength of the relativist approach as its ability to enable the researcher to "look at change processes over time, to understand people's meanings, to adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge, and to contribute to the evolution of new theories" (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p 32). By contrast, they say, research conducted in the positivistic paradigm can "provide wide coverage of a range of situations ... can be fast and economical; and, particularly when statistics are aggregated from large samples ... may be of considerable relevance to policy decisions" (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p 32).

One of the issues raised both in the literature on new paradigm research and the relativist approach concerns what may be called the "philosophy of research" (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). In their widely read contribution to management research, Easterby-Smith and his colleagues emphasise the importance of the researcher understanding the traditions of research in general terms, before applying this understanding to a particular piece of research. Similar arguments are put forward by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Crotty (1998), who suggest that only after researchers understand their position in relation to known research traditions can they identify an appropriate response to the particular characteristics of the research situation.

These arguments provided the researcher with a rationale for examining the literature on research traditions and identifying her own position in this context, as one aspect of making decisions on the particular methods to be used in the present study. In approaching this task she made particular use of two contributions to the research literature.

The first was the framework developed by Crotty (1998), in which he identified four elements that inform one another in the research design; epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. As Figure 1.2 suggests, Crotty's framework implies that for the researcher there is a natural progression from considering epistemological issues to considering methods.

Figure 1.2: Four elements of the research design process
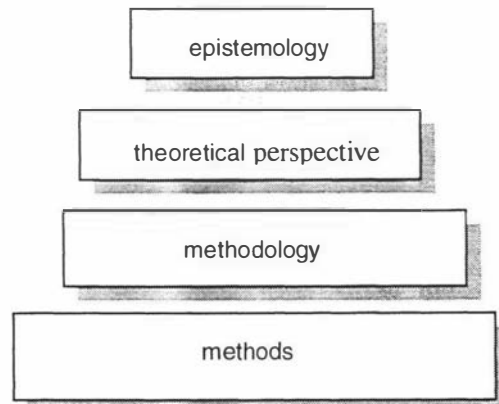
(Source: Crotty, 1998, p 4).

The second contribution from the research literature was the three-point framework presented by Morgan (1983), and reproduced in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Factors influencing the researcher's approach to research
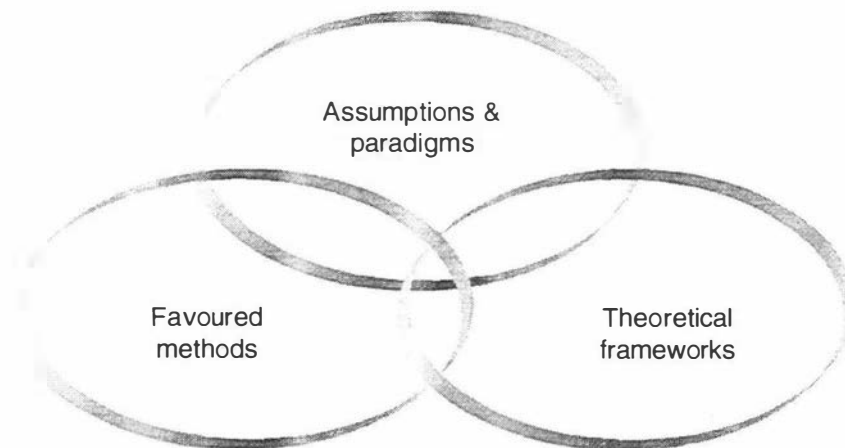
(Source: Adapted from Morgan, 1983).

Morgan suggests that the best way for researchers to approach research design is to first identify their personal "constitutive assumptions" or underpinning paradigms, and their "favoured methodologies", *before* comparing these to the "theoretical frameworks" provided by the literature. Morgan argues that this process will provide individual researchers with a way of designing a methodology that takes account of all the relevant factors, including the particular demands of the study (as encompassed in the research objectives), the personal approach of the researcher, and the traditions within a field of research (as evidenced by the literature).

Having already identified an initial set of research objectives, the researcher's next step was to consider the other factors suggested by Morgan (1983) and Crotty (1998) as having the potential to impact upon the research design. The points of commonality between the approaches provided the researcher with a way of conceptualising the factors that relate to the philosophy of research design such as epistemological and ontological issues. These factors are briefly discussed in the following section. Following this, the researcher describes the way in which she synthesised her conclusions about her own approach with the research objectives and the important theories that emerged from the literature.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RESEARCH DESIGN

Following Morgan's three-point framework (as depicted in Figure 1.3), and the four elements proposed by Crotty (Figure 1.2), the researcher's next step was to identify some of the possible epistemological positions that it is possible for researchers to take. In Crotty's terminology, these positions range from objectivism, which "holds that meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness", to constructionism, where "meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" and subjectivism, where "meaning does not come out of an interplay between subject and object but is imposed on the object by the subject" (Crotty, 1998, p 8).

In identifying an appropriate epistemological position (which has implications for the choice of suitable methods), the researcher drew upon the advice of Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991), who argue that it is not possible to design research in the absence of a philosophical awareness on the part of the researcher. They maintain that

understanding the main research traditions assists the researcher to contextualise the particular study and to ensure that the component parts of a research plan (the philosophical context, the strategy, the methods) combine to form a coherent whole. In the context of understanding the main research traditions the researcher made use of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) framework (as presented in Figure 1.4), and the additional comments on the framework from Morey and Luthans (1984).

Figure 1.4: Burrell and Morgan's subjective-objective dimension

The subjectivist approach
to social science

The objectivist approach
to social science

Nominalism	← Ontology →	Realism
Anti-positivism	← Epistemology →	Positivism
Voluntarism	← Human nature →	Determinism
Ideographic	← Methodology →	Nomothetic
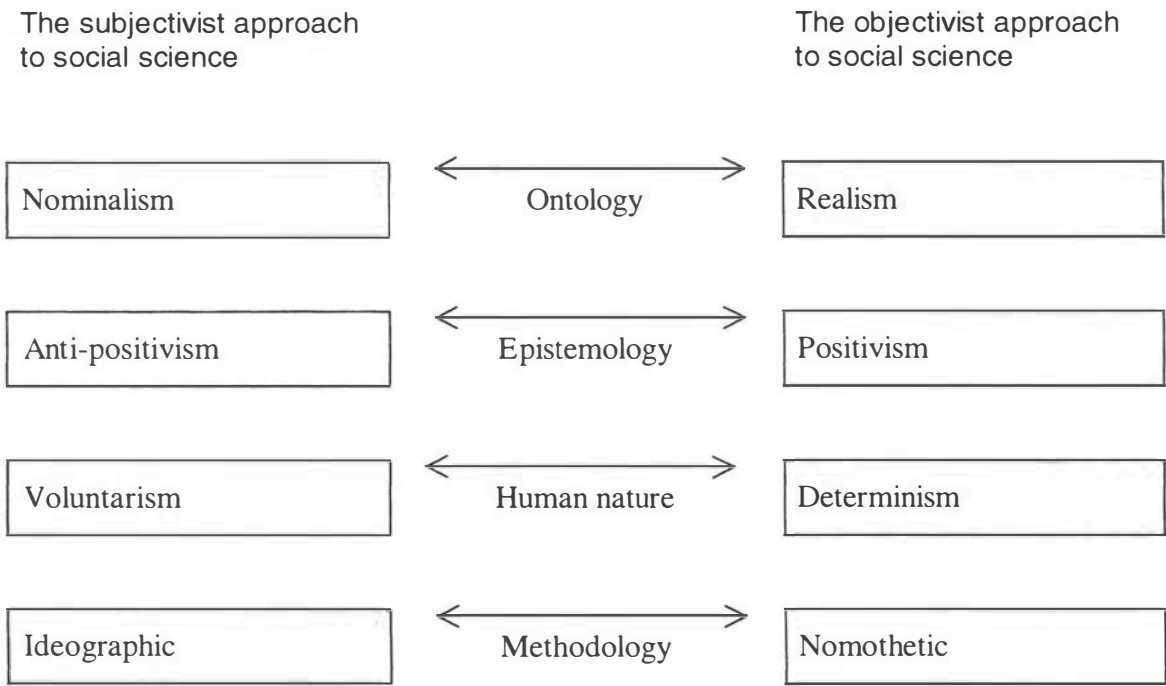
(Source: Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p 3).

This approach was chosen as it clearly identifies the terms emic cf. etic, subjective cf. objective and idiographic cf. nomothetic as similar concepts, compared to other approaches which deal with these concepts in isolation from one another, and solely in relation to their "opposites" (for example Morgan and Smircich, 1980 on qualitative and quantitative research, Evered and Louis, 1981 on insiders and outsiders, Morey and Luthans, 1984 on emic and etic, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991 on positivistic and phenomenological research, and Morey and Luthans, 1984 on ideography and nomotheism).

As already noted (see p 22), the researcher had already identified the essential similarity between the approaches of Crotty and that of Morgan: both emphasise the importance of researchers taking a structured framework to selecting their research strategies. Using

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these frameworks enabled the researcher to consider a number of issues, and identify the subjectivist approach as the most appropriate for the current study, based on the characteristics of the research participants. The choice of this epistemological position was the most important outcome of this consideration, as it implied that certain methodologies would be more appropriate than others would. A further influence on the research plan was the literature on the topic of organisational consulting. The way in which the researcher identified the most important elements of the literature is described in the following section.

DRAWING UPON THE LITERATURE

In addition to assisting researchers to identify their personal approach to research (as represented by their constitutive assumptions and favoured methodologies), Morgan's (1983) framework also provides researchers with a way of integrating this approach with the issues inherent in the discipline under study. This is achieved by identifying the theoretical frameworks that the researcher identifies as potentially relevant to the study.

In this case the researcher selected a number of potentially relevant frameworks after reviewing the literature. This review, which is presented in Chapter 2, drew upon a number of different topic areas from the extensive literature on management theory and organisational behaviour. Several frameworks were selected from this literature as a way of assisting the researcher to focus on the three issues already identified in the section *Research questions*; the client-consultant relationship, the consulting process and the behaviour of the individuals (consultants and clients) involved within the consultancy intervention.

The first framework identified in this review was selected for its ability to offer a perspective on understanding the client-consultant relationship. The literature provides a variety of perspectives, ranging from one which assumes the consulting process is linear (e.g. Kubr, 1996) to another where it is seen as being comprised of a series of overlapping processes (Cockman, Evans & Reynolds, 1992; Margerison, 1988; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). After introducing both frameworks to a number of practising consultants, in the early stages of preparing for the study, the latter model was selected by the researcher as the most appropriate framework for studying the way in which clients and their consultants perceived their relationship.

A further theoretical framework was identified to assist the researcher to understand the way in which the consultants selected the interventions that would be used within an assignment. Despite the fact that most clients and consultants would not have described their objective in this way, the task that they are engaged upon is related to that of organisational development (OD). The field of OD, which can be defined as "a planned, systematic process in which applied behavioral science principles and practices are introduced into ongoing organizations toward the goal of increasing individual and organization effectiveness" (French & Bell, 1995, p 1), provided the second theoretical framework.

The dynamic characteristics of OD and process consulting demanded a similarly dynamic framework as an aid to understanding the behaviour of the individuals (consultants and clients) involved within the consultancy intervention. This was provided by the third framework, experiential learning, which is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p38). This model has given rise to a number of similar frameworks, where individuals go through a continuous cycle of having a concrete experience, reflecting on the experience, forming abstract concepts based on the reflections and testing the ideas in new situations. In this study all of those involved were engaged in learning, and the model assisted the researcher to understand the behaviour of individuals.

SYNTHESISING THE FACTORS

As the previous section described, after completing the process of identifying an appropriate epistemological stance the researcher considered the relevant theoretical frameworks within the field of study and reviewed examples of research carried out within these areas. She then considered the research questions and objectives (as already introduced in the section *Research questions*). As a consequence of what she found, the researcher concluded that the subjectivistic perspective provided the most appropriate foundation for the study.

This decision was consistent with the advice from Morgan (1983), Crotty (1998) and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991), that understanding philosophical approaches to research is an important stage in the research design. This assists the researcher in systematically identifying the most appropriate research strategy and methods for the

study in question. In relation to this study the researcher considered the research objectives, the philosophical issues and the theoretical frameworks, before identifying three guiding principles that needed to be addressed in the research strategy (as shown in Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5: Synthesising the factors to provide guiding principles for the research engagement

A subjectivist epistemology

A process approach

Contributing to practice
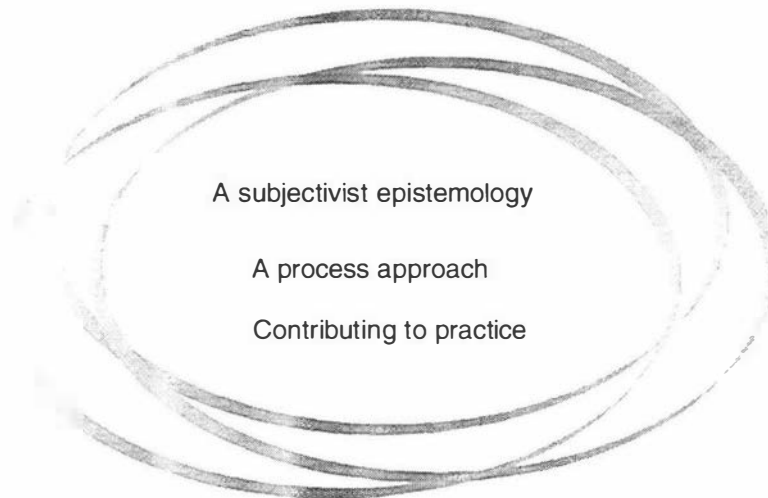
As already stated, the first principle was provided by the siting of the research at the subjectivist end of the spectrum, also described as the "interpretive" tradition (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Implicit in this positioning of the major research paradigm as interpretive was a commitment to the methodologies that are congruent with subjectivity, particularly phenomenology, which "stems from the view that the world and 'reality' are not objective and exterior, but that they are socially constructed and given meaning by people" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 1991, p 24).

The second principle was provided by considering the dominant frameworks within the literature as they relate to the events that occur within a consultancy intervention. These frameworks describe consulting as a process, which is itself occurring within the context of "organisational processes". In addition, the researcher was engaged upon a learning process. While the literature often represents processes as linear (see Kubr, 1996 on the consulting process, and Johnson and Scholes, 1993, on strategy), an alternative way of depicting them is in terms of "cycles" of events (see Kimberly and Miles, 1980 on the organisational life cycle). This non-linear or cyclical approach provided the researcher with the second guiding principle.

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The final principle that resulted from the synthesis of the three factors was provided by the applied nature of the research engagement. The issue here was that the research context should provide the opportunity for the researcher to contribute to practice whilst simultaneously developing theory.

The three guiding principles (as shown in Figure 1.5), provided a foundation for the researcher to examine the different research methodologies and methods (as differentiated by Crotty, 1998), and to assess their ability to contribute to the study in a way that addressed the principles effectively, while at the same time addressing the research objectives.

THE INITIAL RESEARCH STRATEGY

The factors discussed in the chapter up to this point (including the incomplete nature of the theoretical base relating to organisational consulting, and the breadth of the research questions) indicated that the researcher would have to be flexible in terms of the research plan. This suggested that the researcher needed to focus on selecting an appropriate research strategy, which would then guide the selection of specific methods.

In the search for a strategy that would unify the study (described by Crotty, 1998 as the research *methodology*, as distinct from the *methods*), the researcher considered a number of approaches, for example quasi-experimentation (as described by Cook, 1983) and organisational learning (Schön, 1983).

Given the context (as provided by the guiding principles of Figure 1.5), action research was chosen as the most appropriate strategy for the research question (for further explanation of this choice see Chapter 3). In this study it was clear that the research stakeholders would include clients and consultants, already engaged in a client-consultant relationship. In this situation both parties have an expectation that the client-consultant relationship will produce outcomes that will improve the client organisation. This expectation (of a positive outcome) suggested to the researcher that action research (which aims to contribute to the situation being researched) is an approach that the research stakeholders would see as compatible with their own objectives. Action research (AR) can be defined as a "cyclical process of inquiry that involves identifying a problem, planning action steps and implementing and evaluating the outcomes"

(Chisholm & Elden, 1993, p 122), and the researcher selected the approach as a way of addressing the needs of the research stakeholders.

In making this decision the researcher was aware of the criticisms of action research. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

ACTION RESEARCH

The basic premise of action research (AR) is that change and research are not mutually exclusive, and one definition of action research describes it as a "way of investigating professional experience which link(s) practice and the analysis of practice into a single productive and continuously developing sequence" (Bunning, 1994, p 1). The central issue is the provision of a context in which the *simultaneous focus* on "improving practice" and "developing theory" is possible. As Bartunek (1993) comments, whilst discussing the approach to action research taken by Argyris and Schön (1991),

> on a macro level AR can be understood as intervention experiments within particular practice contexts in which action researchers simultaneously test hypotheses pertaining to the resolution of particular problems and attempt to effect a (hopefully) desirable change in the setting based on their hypotheses (Bartunek, 1993, p 1233).

The way in which action research contributes to the organisational context is demonstrated in the action research cycle, presented in Figure 1.6.

Figure 1.6: The action research cycle
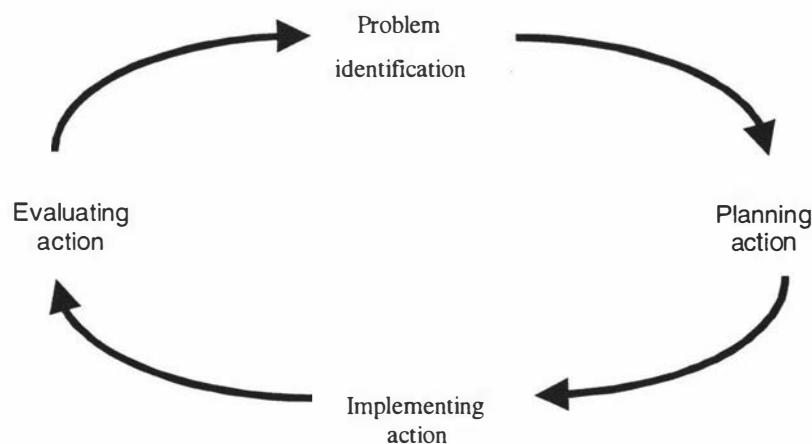
(Source: Adapted from Chisholm & Elden, 1993)

The dual focus of action research (on practice and theory) results in an approach that is considerably different to that of orthodox research in terms of planning and

implementation. Whereas orthodox research is based on the researcher observing the subject in order to test a hypothesis (generated by the researcher), in action research the research question is developed through an interaction between the researcher and subject, based on their joint interests. This question provides an "agenda" for the practice component of the research, which is subsequently used as the basis for the theoretical component (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996).

Another distinctive characteristic of action research is the involvement of the research stakeholders. While there are different forms of action research (Chisholm & Elden, 1993), which offer different models for the participation of research "subjects", they all depend on some involvement from these individuals. In more participatory versions of action research, the "subjects" may be involved in all stages of the research design; specifying the research issue, identifying a plan of action, monitoring the effectiveness of the action, and identifying what has been learned and how this should be communicated (Bunning, 1994). Using this model, the team can be described as consisting of those experiencing the issues identified (research sponsors), those attempting to solve the issue (research partners) and the expert researcher (Chisholm & Elden, 1993).

IMPLICATIONS OF ACTION RESEARCH

The choice of action research had implications for the way in which the researcher approached the planning of the study at an operational level. This is due to one of the key characteristics of action research; its cyclical nature, in which there may be several iterations, as the research partners address different aspects of their original research question.

The researcher planned for more than one research cycle to be undertaken, following the action research model in which iterations are inherent in the research process. The use of multiple research cycles also helped the researcher ensure that the study continued until such time as the consultants became fully involved as "research partners". As Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy (1993) caution, "no one may mandate in advance that a particular research process will become a fully developed participatory action research project .... to view participation as something that can be imposed is both naïve and morally suspect" (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993, p 176).

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The researcher felt that the existence of more than one research cycle would allow for "progressive focusing" to occur, where "gradually, particular items of interest begin to occur, or regularities appear that then come to act as a primary agency of selection in what to observe, and what to record of what one observes" (Woods, 1986, p 51). This approach implies that the research slowly evolves as the research team goes through successive cycles, which continue throughout the term of the study. This means that the research question is more accurately described as an *initial* research question, or a "latent hypothesis" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996, p 37).

In this context the research objectives that have already been listed (to evaluate the potential role of the consultant in ED; to identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers; to identify the key aspects of an organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate ED), reflected the researcher's latent hypothesis. This hypothesis was that external consultants do have a role to play in ED, and that there are ways to maximise the positive outcomes of their involvement.

In addition to the researcher's aim of testing this hypothesis, the researcher had identified her commitment to providing an opportunity for those participating in the research to gain from the theory building component of the research as it unfolds. This factor influenced the development of the fourth research objective, as already listed in the section *Research questions*.

Consistent with the principles of participation implicit in action research, the research objectives identified at this point were subject to discussion with the research partners. This process, as well as the subsequent discussions that took place as the research was undertaken, is described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, where the three research cycles are described in detail. The relationship of the three research cycles to the initial research question is depicted in Figure 1.7.

RESEARCH METHODS

While it is characteristic of action researchers to encourage the research partners to contribute to the methods used, it is common for the researcher to develop a methodological starting point (Reason, 1994). In this way the researcher can provide the

research partners with an initial set of questions, enabling them to focus on a specific task until such time as questions and appropriate methods emerge from the team itself.

Figure 1.7: The research plan
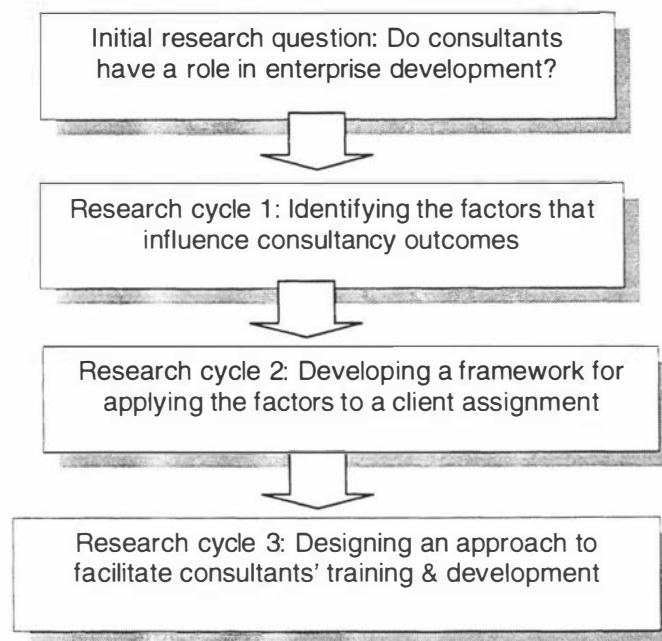
The researcher's initial plan was to identify a number of organisational consultants who would act as research partners. The researcher and the individual research partners would then establish a number of "research teams" to provide case studies. Once each research team was established the researcher planned to involve the clients in the selection of particular research methods, for use within the cases. However, the researcher also identified some methods in advance. Observation and interviews were the primary methods selected at this point, following the advice of Crotty (1998), Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe (1991), Morgan (1983), Patton (1982), Patton (1990).

SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced the study, which in general terms is concerned with managers as they seek enterprise development, and at a more specific level focuses on one of the strategies that managers use; the employment of an external consultant.

In the chapter's first section the focus was on identifying some of the issues for today's managers which have influenced their use of external consultants, and which have

contributed to a situation in which the consulting industry is showing prodigious growth internationally. The researcher first looked at the development of management thinking and the emergence of organisational consultants. She then identified a number of challenges for consultants and their client managers as they work together within organisations. These issues provided the background for the study, and this section closed with a listing of the study's research questions.

The second section of the chapter described the way in which the researcher approached studying the issues raised. The researcher outlined the process of planning the research and described the research strategy and initial research methods.

PRESENTING FINDINGS

The thesis does not distinguish between "data", "discussion" and "findings". Rather the data is presented, discussed and interpreted in the context of three iterative research cycles. In each of these cycles the research team collected data, discussed the implications for the direction of the study, and drew some preliminary conclusions, before moving into the next cycle. These cycles are presented in Chapters 5-7, and along with Chapter 4, which introduces the research partners (the consultants) and their clients in the form of six case narratives, comprises the body of the study. Chapter 2 summarises the literature, Chapter 3 describes the method, and Chapter 8 presents the researcher's conclusions.

"Research is never solitary. Even when you seem to work alone, you work in the footsteps of others, profiting from their work, their principles and their practices" (Booth, Colomb & Williams, 1995, p 61).

The previous chapter introduced the focus of the study, which is concerned with the role of the external consultant in enterprise development.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the literature that provided the context for this choice of topic, in a way that assists the reader to relate the main conceptual frameworks to the data which follows (in Chapters 4 – 7). As described in more detail below, the researcher divided the review into three sections, focusing on the *context* of organisational consulting, its *practice*s and the *outcomes* that result.

In undertaking this task the researcher's first step was to decide upon the scope of the literature to be considered. In some studies this is straightforward, with the literature from a single discipline providing the parameters for the research. However, it is more usual that more than one disciplinary base needs to be drawn upon. Where this situation occurs the researcher's task is to ensure that the reader has access to sufficient material without becoming overwhelmed by the complexities and apparent contradictions that are revealed when the writings of different disciplines are juxtaposed.

The primary difficulty is that even within a small number of disciplines there can be a number of competing paradigms, all providing theories, models or core principles. The resulting literature review can lack coherence, as the researcher attempts to explore the points at which the selected disciplines concur and diverge. However, if the researcher is successful, the relationships between the main principles are shown, and as they are merged, a unique "body of literature" is formed, created solely for the purpose of a single study.

In this study there was no single discipline to provide parameters for the research. As a result, the researcher's task was to seek out those that are most relevant, using the *practice* of organisational consulting as the focal point. As a means of ensuring that this focus remained explicit, the researcher selected the literature from the perspective of a

practising consultant, metaphorically placing an individual consultant at the centre of the overlapping fields in the literature, as depicted in Figure 2.1. This provided the researcher with a mechanism for selecting those subject areas that best relate to the topic. The resulting review is of an extensive body of literature, best described as the literature on "organisational consulting".

Figure 2.1: Using the practising consultant as a means of identifying the scope of the literature

In order to organise the literature the researcher selected a number of themes as key reference points. These themes were chosen by continuing with the structure introduced above, where the consultant was placed at the centre of the review process. This device helped to direct the researcher towards selecting literature that would address three of the fundamental concerns of any practising consultant, as implied by those offering advice on this topic (e.g. Harrison 1994; Kubr, 1996; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Porras, 1987). These concerns are: the broad principles that are used to guide the planning of a client project, the options that a consultant has once the project has started and assessing the consequences of the choices that are made.

The selection of these specific reference points relates to Pettigrew's (1985a) comment; that "theoretically sound and practically useful research on strategic change should involve the continuous interplay between ideas about the context of change, the process of change, and the content of change" (Pettigrew, 1985a, p 19). Given that the present study is concerned with change, in terms of its context, processes and content (or outcomes, as the researcher interpreted Pettigrew's notion of content), and that there is

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no single discipline that would provide an effective structure, this advice was heeded. For the purpose of the study Pettigrew's three concerns were translated into three themes; *context*, *practice* and *outcomes*. The result is a literature review that addresses themes rather than disciplines, appropriate for a field that is characterised by a concern with good practice as well as robust theory. The researcher's understanding of the relationship between the three themes, described as *The context for organisational consulting*, *The practice of organisational consulting* and *The outcomes of organisational consulting* is shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: A thematic structure for the literature

The Context for Organisational Consulting

All consultants base their work on a set of principles or a fundamental discipline. This section provides readers with as introduction to the principles involved.

The Process of Organisational Consulting

Based on their fundamental disciplines, consultants adopt particular consulting techniques. This section introduces readers to the material on the techniques & tools of organisational consulting.

Outcomes

Implicit in the consulting process is a concern with organisational outcomes. This section introduces readers to the different ways of evaluating

The chapter presents the literature relating to each of these three themes in a way that emphasises their equal importance, despite the differing lengths of the three sections. The chapter concludes by categorising the findings in terms of "what is known" about the field as a whole, and exploring the implications for the research topic. This discussion provides the backdrop against which the data is presented in the chapters that follow.

THEME 1: THE CONTEXT FOR ORGANISATIONAL CONSULTING

The literature that relates to the *context* of consulting is primarily concerned with the frameworks that underpin the practice of consulting within organisational systems. In general terms this literature introduces the reader to the very basis of organisational consulting - the concepts that are the foundation for practising consultants.

Although identifying the key frameworks appears to be a relatively straightforward task, it is more complex than it first appears. There are a number of reasons for this. The first is that organisational consultants are not a homogeneous group, and their differences, in terms of speciality area, background and experience have a major influence on the frameworks that they use. For example, during the 1990s Business Process Reengineering (BPR) has become a popular product for consultants to offer to their clients, and as a result, a number of consultants now describe themselves as "BPR consultants". Similarly, the quality movement has seen the emergence of a group of "quality consultants". These consultants describe themselves in terms of the approach that they take to a particular project.

In contrast are those consultants who define themselves in terms of a particular academic discipline. These include "management consultants" who base their work on the principles of management science, and "OD consultants" whose work is informed by the discipline of organisational behaviour.

A further group is that of consultants who approach their clients from the perspective of "how organisations work". These consultants tend to focus on specific organisational processes such as technology transfer or communication.

The difference between these three groups is that some regard their primary framework for organisational consulting as an academic "discipline", others use a particular "approach" or product, and others focus on an organisational process. While identifying the frameworks that relate to particular *disciplines* or to particular *organisational processes* is straightforward, identifying the frameworks that underpin some of the consulting *approaches* is often more difficult.

This section of the chapter deals with the first theme in the literature in three sub-sections. The first sub-section deals with the theoretical frameworks – the academic

disciplines identified above. The second sub-section deals with the different consulting approaches. The third sub-section deals with the substantial literature on organisational processes, including change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The development of management science and human relations as two separate but inter-related fields, both providing a grounding for the organisational consultant, means that there are two broad theoretical areas within the literature that need to be explored. The first is management science, the field that developed from the work of Taylor and the earlier contribution of Adam Smith in 1776 and others. The second is that of organisational behaviour, (OB), the term developed by Cyert and March (1963) to encompass the human relations school and related subject areas. The following sections present a selection of some of the relevant theory that exists within these broad areas.

The starting point for this discussion is the commonality that exists between the two approaches, which is based on the acknowledgement that both fields give to systems thinking. This fundamental perspective allows theorists to conceive of organisations as "a set of elements interrelated in a specific manner" (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993, p 54). More specifically, Narayanan and Nathu comment that this perspective provides the basis for working with the organisation, by identifying five subsystems; functional, social, informational, political and cultural. Another similarity between management science and OB lies in their use of the "contingency perspective", an approach which represents "a moderate position between two antagonistic stances" (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993, p 95). These two stances - which are sometimes described as nomotheism as opposed to ideography (Morey & Luthans, 1984) - are concerned respectively with a search for universal truths and those that are situation specific.

However, while both management science and the OB school depend on systems thinking and a contingency perspective, they apply these principles in different ways. For instance, while both management science and the OB school make use of a systems perspective, their focus is different. Management scientists focus primarily on the functional subsystem, while those of the OB school focus on the social and cultural subsystems (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993). This difference has implications for the way in which consultants approach organisations.

Management science will provide consultants with an appreciation of linear processes and causal relationships, and will establish an expectation that individuals within organisations will operate rationally. Their planned interventions will focus on organisational functions and control systems.

By contrast, organisational behaviour provides consultants with an understanding of non-linear processes, non-rational actions by organisational members, and co-operative systems. Some will take the perspective that individuals are autonomous beings who display potential for growth and that organisations stifle this growth (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993).

These different perspectives have provided the basis for an ongoing discussion in the management literature on the "essential" differences between their two sets of proponents. One example is the distinction made by Eastman and Bailey (1994), who argue that there are two major differences. The first issue is the "uniformity-diversity debate", which compares organisations that are concerned with uniform behaviour with those that tolerate and encourage diverse forms of expression. The second is the emphasis on economic rewards versus cultural values. Eastman and Bailey suggest that management science is concerned with uniformity and economic rewards, and OB tolerates diversity and cultural "rewards".

Figure 2.3: Organisational consulting and its main theoretical bases
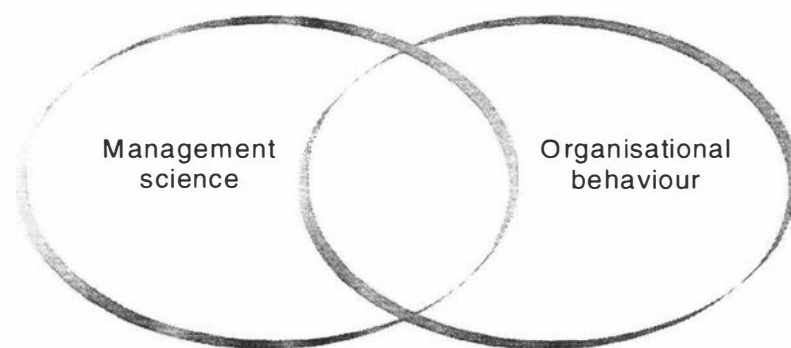
This discussion (of the differences between OB and management science) is too extensive to deal with in the context of this chapter, and is somewhat peripheral to the main topic of the study. In this context the most important concept has already been introduced; that management science and OB provide the main theoretical bases for most organisational consultants. Whether practising consultants are conscious of it or not,

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these two fields provide the underpinning paradigms for the way in which they select particular consulting approaches and tools.

Before leaving this discussion of theory it is necessary to point out that both of the fields already mentioned relate to the *organisation* as a point of focus, and yet there is a large group within the population of consultants who focus primarily on *individuals*. These consultants may operate from a number of theoretical perspectives, such as psychology or training and development. The technical literatures used by these consultants are not included in this review as the study is focused on "enterprise development" a topic which primarily focuses on organisational rather than individual issues.

The researcher has also excluded the vast literature that deals with consulting in one or more of its hybrid forms: the consultant engineer, the consulting physician, the landscape garden consultant. As the number of individuals describing themselves as consultants grows, so do the various practitioner literatures. While interesting in themselves, they add little to our understanding of the organisational consultant, as they focus on a specialist "body of knowledge", rather then *the practice of* consulting.

CONSULTING APPROACHES AND TOOLS

The previous section on theoretical frameworks introduced management science and organisational behaviour as the main disciplines that provide the framework for the theory and practice of organisational consulting. It was noted that some consultants use these broad theoretical areas to describe their area of expertise, overtly providing a pointer to clients and others that reveals their underlying assumptions about organisations, change, and the practice of consulting. It was also noted that given the lack of homogeneity of organisational consultants, the use of a discipline as a way of identifying one's approach is not universal.

A significant proportion of consultants choose instead to describe themselves by more specific labels, in relation to the particular approach that they use, such as TQM or BPR. The use of labels such as these can provide signals to clients about the way the consultant may intend approaching the change process (Werr, Stjernberg & Dochety, 1997). While some consultants who describe themselves as undertaking TQM and BPR do not make it explicit, there is a relationship between their consulting approach and the major theoretical developments. This distinction between the broad theoretical

approaches is noted by Narayanan and Nathu, who identify two groupings; those who use "rational open systems strategies" and those who favour "human system strategies" (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993, p 190). It can be argued that these groupings equate to the two disciplines already identified. Despite this, for the purpose of this review the terms management science and OB will continue to be used.

The following section presents the literature relating to some of the more common approaches used by consultants who choose to define themselves in terms of "what they do". These "approaches" and "tools" are related to the theoretical approaches already described, as suggested by Figure 2.3. This section (as represented by Figure 2.4) is by no means a complete picture, but it does serve to identify some of the divisions within the field, and to indicate the debates that are currently raging between the proponents of different products.

Figure 2.4: The link between theory and selected consulting approaches
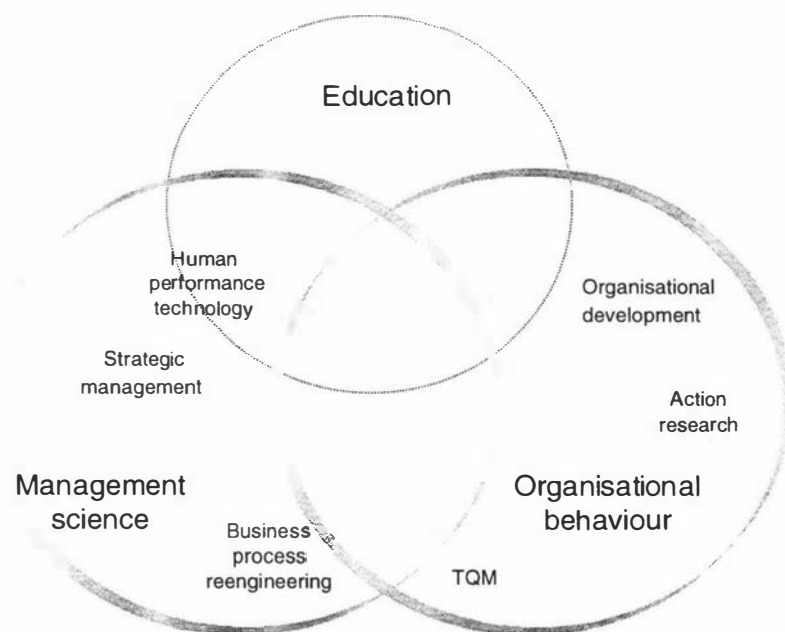
The researcher has also been able to indicate the topics within the literature on consulting approaches and tools that are well developed, and where there is a significant amount of written material. Generally this relates to the length of time that the approach has been in use, with strategic management one of the most significant in terms of the scope of its literature and the significance of the research that has been done on its use. By contrast, BPR is a field which is recent, and which in its own literature makes very little reference

to other organisational theorists, apart from Adam Smith (Champy & Hammer, 1993). As a result the section that deals with BPR is much shorter than the others are.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Organisational development (OD) is concerned with improving organisations, and is an important product of the broader discipline of OB. As a field of inquiry OD emerged in the 1950s partly as OB developed in reaction to the rational model of management that was dominant at that time (French & Bell, 1995). This rational model had provided the underpinning for techniques such as strategic management, which were described by some as overly mechanical, forcing managers to take a narrow view of organisational success. By contrast, as OD emerged, it was clear that while its purpose was in many ways similar to that of strategic management, that is, on "organizations and making them function better" (French & Bell, 1995, p 1, see also Argyris & Schön, 1978; Cummings & Huse, 1989; Hanson & Lubin, 1995), its fundamental approach was quite different.

Whereas strategic management focuses on the organisation and its external environment, OD tends to emphasise the organisation's internal dynamics, the social and cultural subsystems. There is also a difference in the roles for the organisation's managers. In the strategic management model managers have the ability to modify the organisation *in response* to its environment, however, OD implies a deterministic approach, i.e. where the organisation's future is in part "determined" by its environment. Here the role of the organisation's managers is to understand the "developing entity's ... underlying form, logic, program or code that regulates the process of change" and to move "the entity from a given point of departure towards a subsequent end that is prefigured in the present state" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p 515). Both approaches are consistent with Kurt Lewin's influential model of change (1951) which shows organisations moving from a current to a desired state through the vehicle of planned interventions. However, the difference is that the strategic management model implies that the organisation's managers can determine change, whereas OD acknowledges that the organisation's future is partly pre-determined. The consequence of the difference is that OD tends to focus on "total system change" (French & Bell, 1995, p 1).

The potential for total change has resulted in a body of literature that is both vast and diverse, compared to the narrower focus that is observable in the strategic management

literature. However, within this large body of material there are some identifiable strands. Many of these are concerned with the "practice" of OD, and so are dealt with in the second section of this chapter, *The practice of organisational consulting*. But there is also a body of literature that deals with different ways of approaching an organisation in terms of "change process theory" (Porras & Robertson, 1987). This term refers to an attempt "to understand the dynamics through which the organization changes as a response to any intervention activity", compared to "implementation theory", which focuses on the "intervention activity required to carry out effective planned change efforts in organizations" (Porras & Robertson, 1987, p 1). In their discussion the authors regretfully note that "implementation theory is more fully developed than change process theory" (Porras & Robertson, 1987, p 1). They also comment that change agents too rarely use an explicit model for understanding how an organisation functions.

Given the significance of change process theory to the consultant, the lack of a developed literature on change process theory is a noticeable and serious gap. However, this gap may be an understandable response to the multiplicity of concepts that are regarded as being related to OD. These include such diverse concepts and techniques as systems theory, participation and empowerment, teams, parallel learning structures, applied behavioural science, action research, laboratory training, survey research and feedback methodology, learning organizations, TQM and visioning (French & Bell, 1995). The volume of literature on topics such as those listed suggests that Porras and Robertson may be correct; while the OD practitioner has access to a variety of approaches for dealing with an actual client organisation, there is very little that is helpful in understanding the organisation's own change processes.

Despite an absence of a unifying theory of OD, there is a substantial amount of material that deals broadly with the different ways of approaching organisations. This includes discussion on the role of metaphors in the organisation (Morgan, 1997), as well as presenting different frameworks for change (Burke, 1994). In an overview of different diagnostic approaches Howard & Associates (1994) present a map of some of these frameworks, in a way that suggests the plethora of intervention approaches that focus on one aspect of organisational change, and a dearth of holistic approaches. Howard & Associates suggest that clients are at least partly to blame for this situation; their tendency to be problem-focused often guides the consultant towards a narrow approach

to the organisation's situation. However, there are also calls for frameworks that allow OD practitioners to prepare more effectively for client projects, by providing a way of simultaneously viewing the client organisation and planning the OD intervention.

These frameworks are generally based on some version of the open systems model, and one approach of this type is to identify different organisational "issues", such as strategy, structure, human resources and technology (Cummings & Worley, 1993; French & Bell, 1995; Harrison, 1994; Porras & Hoffer, 1986). Some of these approaches have been developed into distinct applications, such as Weisbord's "6 box" approach (Burke, 1994), and Kilmann's "eight tracks" (Kilmann, 1995). Another of these approaches is "stream analysis" (Porras, 1987).

A related and overlapping field is that of action learning and action research. Drawing upon the same traditions as that of OD, action research is usually taken to describe a specific form of OD, which its proponents argue has great potential for use in changing organisations. In this sense action research is being used to describe an approach to organisational change, in which a researcher becomes involved "with members of an organization over a matter which is of genuine concern to them and in which there is an intent by the organization members to take action based on the intervention" (Eden & Huxham, 1996, p 526).

This concern with change for the client organisation is the reason that action research is seen by some to be an approach that is suitable for organisational consultants. French and Bell (1995) describe "action research as a collaborative, client-consultant inquiry" (French & Bell, 1995, p 50) and as an "approach to problem solving" (French & Bell, 1995, p 139).

Similarly, Cherns identifies action research as one way in which social scientists can "help managers to change their organizations in ways that release the abilities of the people in them" (Cherns, 1973, p 66). Writing well before action research became widely discussed in the practitioner literature, (although it was known in the academic literature through the 1978 work of Susman and Evered, for example), Cherns describes action research as a powerful tool "for changing and redesigning organizations" (Cherns, 1973, p 66). The key to Cherns' argument is that action research has the potential to act as a bridge between practice and theory, and this theme is addressed by others who discuss

action research as an OD technique, including Gummesson (1991). He comments "action science always involves two goals: solve a problem for the client and contribute to science. That means that you must be both a management consultant and an academic researcher at the same time" (Gummesson, 1991, p 103).

Although the origin of action research is in sociology, and more recently has come to be associated with educational research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), its value is beginning to be acknowledged by those working within organisations. One description of action research makes this link explicit; action research is "a distinct form in OD"; a "process of diagnosing, taking action, rediagnosing and taking new action" (French & Bell, 1995, p 7). This definition is consistent with the argument that action research is useful in "planned change in social organisations" (Ledford & Mohrman, 1993, p 1355), and capacity building of individuals who are "engaging in a human process of building communities of inquiry" (Reason, 1993, p 1268). Both of these statements apply equally well to the organisations that are the focus of management researchers today.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

"Seen from the voluntaristic orientation, individuals and their created institutions are autonomous, proactive, self-directing agents" (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983, p 247).

One of the dominant themes of the management literature is that which presents strategic management as a means for the organisation's "self-directing agents" to deal with change, and organisational consultants have recognised its scope in their work with clients (Barcus & Wilkinson, 1995; Kubr, 1996). This is because strategic management is consistent with planned change and organisational adaptation. Chakravarthy and Lorange (1991), argue that it is the key activity for dealing with changes occurring in the environment and involves the continuous process of making strategic choices.

Strategic management is also seen as a key activity in enhancing an organisation's competitive advantage. Most recent research suggests that enterprises "obtain sustained competitive advantage by implementing strategies that exploit their internal strengths, ... while neutralizing external threats and avoiding internal weaknesses" (Barney, 1991, p 99). Another perspective presents strategic management as "concerned with managing the match between an organization and its environments" (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993, p 244).

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In historical terms strategic management owes a debt to its use in warfare. Recognising this link makes it possible to identify some of the key values that underlie the approach, which include the role of individuals (who are seen as rational decision makers) and the importance of competition. Another part of the heritage of strategic management is its base in financial planning and forecasting (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993).

The value of strategic management to the organisational consultant lies in its ability to assist a consultant to analyse organisational issues and to plan what should be done. This combination of strategic *analysis* and strategic *planning* (encompassed by the broader label of strategic management) has provided the basis for many of today's organisational consultants (Johnson & Scholes, 1993).

A particular aspect of strategic management is that which identifies inter-organisational linkages and networks not only as an inevitable aspect of operating in a commercial environment, but as a potential tool for the organisation to use in developing capability and enhancing performance. Recent findings indicate the effectiveness of networks as part of a deliberate strategy for business development, by supplying examples of effective inter-organisational networks in "strategic alliances" and "industrial clusters" (Larsson & Starr, 1993; Lewis, 1990; Miles & Snow, 1986; Porter, 1990). The implication is that the symbiosis which can result from the use of networks such as these may lead to improved performance, or the achievement of the organisation's strategy.

"In order to survive, an organisation must interact with its immediate task environment which comprises a constellation of competing, co-operative and regulatory institutions" (Wai-chung Yeung, 1994, p 472). Some interactions are based on choice, and these are the basis for the business or strategic network, defined as a "long-term, purposeful arrangement among distinct but related for profit organisations that allow these firms to gain or sustain competitive advantage" (Jarillo, 1988). Related to these "networks of choice" are inter-organisational relationships (IORs), described as "socially contrived mechanisms for collective action, which are continually shaped and restructured by actions and symbolic interpretations of the parties involved", through a "repetitive sequence of negotiation, commitment and execution" (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994, pp 96 & 97).

A further term is added by Gibb, who introduces the "learning circle", a network made up of the organisation and its advisers, which provides the organisation with all of the expertise necessary to fulfil both routine transactions and ED activities (Gibb, 1995). Gibb's focus is on small and medium sized enterprises, and the particular uses that they make of strategy is identified by Atkins and Lowe (1994). This term implies that a series of dyadic relationships between advisers and clients can be viewed as a type of network, one which adds to the potential outcome for the enterprise (Birley, 1985).

This principle implies a narrower approach to networks than that taken by some writers, who regard the economy as a whole in network terms. The implication of the narrower definition is a particular focus on inter-firm networks, which are typically characterised by close and long lasting relationships, and manifested in joint ventures, subcontracting arrangements and strategic alliances. This type of network is also described as a "business network", defined as "an integrated and co-ordinated set of ongoing economic and noneconomic relations embedded within, among and outside business firms" (Birley, 1985, p 476). Examples of these networks are industrial clusters, which exist primarily to provide the organisation with market information.

The existence of such specifically focused networks supports the notion that organisations use networks for a particular purpose. In this context Miles and Snow introduce the concept of dynamic networks, defined as "a unique combination of strategy, structure and management processes" (Miles & Snow, 1986, p 62). This concept of the network as simultaneously an organisational form and a set of internal processes, is the main contribution of network analysis to management theory, opening the way for more detailed research into the way different types of networks operate, and the value they provide to the organisation. Similarly, Borch and Arthur identify the strategic network (Borch & Arthur, 1995).

While the study of inter-organisational networks has been a significant part of the organisational development research agenda for the last three decades, it has also been an area of interest for a number of other academic disciplines, including geography, economics and political science. The legacy for the researcher of the 1990s is a number of studies which have considered different aspects of networks, leading to the identification of two areas of interest that are highly relevant to the study of inter-organisational relationships; the strategic use of networks as organisational *structures*

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and as organisational *processes*. These foci have evolved from the use of network analysis to research the purpose and function of industrial linkages and inter-firm relationships, an area of interest since the 1970s (Wai-chung Yeung, 1994). The result has been agreement on a number of key themes; different types of network were identified and defined, the relational nature of networks was recognised, and the strategic value of using networks for the individual enterprise was confirmed.

An associated idea is that of the need for "collaboration" - "the result of organisational change (breaking down hierarchies and organising around project teams) and external exchange (the development of networks of companies and the use of alliances for a wide variety of operational and strategic reasons)" (Shaugnessy, 1994, p 3). Shaugnessy notes that this has to be practised both inside the firm and in its external environment, and lists the skills of collaboration management: partner searching and appraisal; negotiating alliances; risk awareness, analysis and management; systematic project monitoring; time management; successful capacity management; dispute resolution; autonomous decision making); negotiating status; cultural empathy; contract acquisition (Shaugnessy, 1994, p 23). On a related topic, Mohr and Spekman (1994) note that strategic business partnerships that are effective are characterised by certain communication and conflict resolution behaviours as well as other attributes, such as commitment and trust. As will be seen later in this chapter, these lists bear a strong resemblance to those skills listed as being essential to the consultant.

BUSINESS PROCESS REENGINEERING

While most of today's organisational consultants operate within the broad disciplines of management science and strategic management or organisational behaviour and organisational development, there are some that use other approaches. One of the most popular in recent times is "business process reengineering" (BPR), an approach to organisations that "means starting all over, starting from scratch" (Champy & Hammer, 1993, p 2). The authors (who were instrumental in popularising the approach identified as BPR) go on to describe the BPR process, which means "identifying and abandoning the outdated rules and fundamental assumptions that underlie current business operations" (Champy & Hammer, 1993, p 3).

The fundamental assumptions Champy and Hammer are referring to (and an argument that is echoed by others, such as Peppard and Rowland, 1995) are the key principles of management science such as standardisation and mass production, and so BPR appears to be a rejection of this way of approaching organisations. However, this appears to be a false claim; despite rejecting the principles of management science (Grint & Case, 1998), BPR in fact builds upon it. Organisations are able to undertake BPR projects only because the managers and consultants involved have an understanding of organisational theory that did not exist less than a century previously.

HUMAN PERFORMANCE TECHNOLOGY

Another specific approach to organisational consulting is that which is described by its proponents as "human performance consulting" (HPT). Its practitioners describe it as "the product of a number of knowledge sources; cybernetics, behavioral psychology, communications theory, information theory, systems theory, management science, and more recently, the cognitive sciences" (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1992, p 5). However, while the researcher does not deny the importance of these ancestors, it is clear that HPT owes most to the fields of education and training and development, and to the specific techniques of instructional design. These fields all focus primarily on the individual, within an organisational setting, and this perspective is emphasised by HPT practitioners who see it as an "approach to attaining desired accomplishments from human performers" (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1992, p 7). As noted in the introduction, the fields that focus on organisations from the perspective of their individual members, rather than the organisation as an entity, have been excluded from this review. However, given the rise of "human performance consulting", brief mention is made of it here in the interests of completeness.

While the literature on HPT overtly identifies the link between HPT and the field of training and development, the description of HPT as "an engineering approach", and the field's practitioners as "technologists" suggest a relationship with management science (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1992, p 7). This implication is strengthened by a description of these technologists as individuals who adopt a "systems view of performance gaps, systematically analyze both gap and system, and design cost-effective and efficient interventions that are based on analysis data, scientific knowledge, and documented

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precedents, in order to close the gap in the most desirable manner" (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1992, p 7). However, a contrasting view is also provided, in which the reader is told that "performance technologists are evolving from training specialists to systems analysts specialising in human resource development" (Tovar, Gagnon & Schmid, 1997, p 67).

This suggestion that HPT is related to the field of human resource development as well as that of management science is important in the context of this discussion. In a similar way to that of BPR, HPT is a clear example of a new consulting approach that has created itself from the foundations of management science and OB.

ORGANISATIONAL PROCESSES

"Any theory of change should begin with a model of organizations" (Porras & Hoffer, 1986, p 478).

The previous sections presented a summary of the literature that deals with the main frameworks for organisational consultants. This material is of great value to the practising consultant. However, if the consultant is to be able to answer the first of the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter; "what are the broad principles that I can use to guide the planning of a client project", there is another area in the literature that needs to be explored. This is the literature that deals with the functions and processes of an organisation.

Presenting a summary of this literature is not a simple task, as there is no agreed "list" of organisational processes, and different authors make different selections, depending on their perspectives of the intervention process. For example French and Bell describe those processes that OD consultants work with as "visioning, empowerment, learning, and problem-solving" (French & Bell, 1995, p 28). Similarly, Narayanan and Nathu identify the process of environmental analysis, the strategy formulation and implementation process and decision-making, in the context of a discussion on rational strategies of management (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993). Weick (1969) emphasises the importance of information processing as the basis for the act of organising. Wolfe (1994), Damanpour (1991), Van de Ven and Rogers (1988) and Van de Ven and Poole (1990) identify the importance of innovation.

This section contains processes that are seen as important by consultants from both the management consulting and the process consulting schools, as well as those that are

common to both. The researcher's focus here has been on identifying some of the key processes, because although a full review of the literature surrounding each is beyond the scope of the review, these processes are of relevance to the organisational consultant.

THEORIES OF CHANGE

Organisational consultants are almost always concerned with change (Schuyt & Schuijt, 1998). While often the consultant's actual task is to deal with the mechanics of change (for example how to improve the efficiency of the client's reporting structure), this occurs within a conceptual context, whether the consultant is conscious of this or not. A consultant who is seeking to understand the different conceptual perspectives on change will probably refer to the literature. However, although the literature is rich in material concerning change, the consultant will probably be frustrated by the number of different change theories, and the difficulty of relating them to one another.

The challenge of identifying the different change theories and understanding their differences and similarities has been addressed by a number of authors who have attempted to provide a taxonomy of change theories. One approach describes change as incremental or radical, another discusses continuous and discontinuous change (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995), and yet another identifies first-order and second-order change (Bartunek & Moch, 1987). In a similar context, Kubr (1986) identifies five types of change; unplanned (evolutionary), planned (pro-active), imposed, participative, negotiated.

These approaches are useful in understanding the change process itself, but still do not provide the consultant with an overview of the different approaches. Nor is there a way of conceptualising the number of different theories. As a consequence, a situation has arisen which "encourages compartmentalization of perspectives that do not enrich each other" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p 510).

In response to this unsatisfactory situation Van de Ven and Poole present a categorisation of the different change theories produced by the different disciplines. They identify four basic types, described as "life-cycle, teleology, dialectics, and evolution" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p 513). They argue that these are the broad approaches that are used in the context of organisational change, either on their own or in combination.

According to this framework, the essence of the life cycle theory is that change is implied by the very existence of the unit of study, and that "the form that lies latent, premature or homogeneous in the embryo or primitive state becomes progressively more realized, mature and differentiated" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p 515). By contrast, teleology assumes that while an organisation does change as it moves towards a desired end state, this end state is not prefigured. Rather it is constructed by the organisation, which undertakes a "repetitive sequence of goal formulation, implementation, evaluation, and modification of goals based on what was learned" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p 516).

While both of these categories focus on the organisation as a discrete unit of change, the remaining categories deal with the organisation in relationship to others. "In a dialectical process theory, stability and change are explained by reference to the balance of power between opposing entities. Change occurs when these opposing values, forces, or events gain sufficient power to confront and engage the status quo" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p 517). In the fourth category, "evolution explains change as a recurrent, cumulative, and probalistic progression of variation, selection, and retention of organizational entities" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p 518).

The typology provides a basis for understanding the various organisational change strategies. For the practising consultant the two most important theoretical approaches are teleology and the life cycle, which are both concerned with the individual organisation, rather than its relationship to other organisations. In the context of this discussion however, it is not the case that both groups of theories deal with organisations, but that they present such different perspectives.

The essential difference lies in the way the proponents of the two approaches regard the organisation's ability (and by implication the ability of those who are guiding it, such as managers and consultants), to make choices that influence the future. Whereas adherents to the life cycle approach consider change as prefigured, those who favour a teleological approach assume a non-deterministic perspective, as discussed in earlier work from Astley and Van de Ven (1983). This in turn builds on writers such as March and Olsen who identify two fundamental processes for organisational change; "rational calculation and learning from experience" (March & Olsen, 1975, p 147).

Despite these different perspectives, in a rare demonstration of theoretical agreement, both approaches make use of Lewin's model of change which included the three stages of "unfreezing", "changing" and "refreezing" (Schein, 1987). However, consistent with the conceptual difference between the life cycle and the teleological approach, Lewin's model is used differently by the proponents of management consulting and OD. For example strategic management consultants, who use the rational model of change and a teleological approach, use an implicit adaptation of Lewin's model to assist them in planning the actions that an organisation will need to take to achieve its desired objectives. By contrast, OD consultants, who make use of the life cycle approach, use Lewin's model to achieve the organisational change that is "prefigured" or "latent". Given the division of thinking on the theory of organisations into two areas, this difference in their application of change theories is not surprising.

The fact that in the literature discussed so far Lewin's model dominates the literature on change raises a question about the way in which different cultures approach this issue. As Marshak (1994) points out, models are culturally derived. In his comparison of "western" and "eastern" models of change he makes a distinction between the two approaches, using Lewin's (1951) model to represent the typical western approach. In essence he summarises the difference between western and eastern approaches as respectively "destination versus journey oriented" (Marshak, 1994, p 404). Given that it is possible to see a relationship between the typical western approach (as identified by Marshak), and the teleological perspective described above, Marshak's comments emphasise the importance of the change model, in the work of the change agent.

DECISION MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

One of the most commonly discussed organisational processes is the decision making process (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Théorêt, 1976, see also French & Bell, 1995). Mintzberg and his colleagues built upon Newell and Simon's (1972) framework of decision making to produce a process with three phases; identification, development and selection. This linear representation implies a teleological approach to organisations and is consistent with the rational model of behaviour of strategic management.

This process is related to that of problem solving (Eden, Jones & Sims, 1983), and both imply that individual managers act as protagonists in the organisation's development.

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More specifically, in the problem solving process "problem solvers' attention shifts between a *task venue* (the real world operational milieu) and a *depictive venue* (a representational milieu)" (Whitiker, 1996, p 400). Whitiker argues that "bottlenecks" occur at both points at which the problem solvers attempt to move into a different milieu. Following Whitiker's argument that it is the existence of bottlenecks that organisational consultants work with, it is possible to see why decision making is of relevance to organisational consultants.

ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

Another organisational process that is identified by some consultants is learning. The term "learning organisation" is now common in the literature on management and organisational behaviour (Argyris, 1992; Jelinek, 1979), although the apparent contradictions inherent in the phrase have also been noted (Weick & Westley, 1996). It is widely used to refer to an organisation which "facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself" and is concerned with issues of "change, worker participation and development, adaptation, management systems and structures, processes of delegation, power and control, and how all of these are managed" (Jones & Hendry, 1992, p iii). However the term also suggests that organisations can "learn", and it is this implication that has drawn the attention of managers everywhere.

The literature on organisational learning is based on a fundamental assumption; that it is beneficial. This is based on the proposition that competitive advantage is "the rate at which an organisation can learn" (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994, p 18), and that organisational learning can improve performance. This claim is consistent with the focus on organisational learning that emerged through the 1980s, when it was described as "the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding" (Fiol & Lyles, 1985, p 803).

This concept (of organisational learning as a useful strategy for companies seeking to improve their operational functioning) was quickly adopted by organisational researchers, and the claim that "successful companies are those that consistently create new knowledge, disseminate it widely throughout the organisation, and quickly embody it in new technologies and products" (Nonaka, 1991, p 96) is indicative of current thinking. In a similarly positive vein Argyris (1992) comments "organisational learning is

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a competence that all organisations should develop .... the better organisations are at learning the more likely it is they will be able to detect and correct errors, and to see when they are unable to detect and correct errors" (Argyris, 1992, p 1).

While the key assumption in this section of the literature is that learning will improve future performance, whether this process works in practice is not yet clear. At the conclusion of a large-scale research project into organisational learning in companies in the United Kingdom, Jones and Hendry (1992) caution that more needs to be known about learning in an organisational context before it can be safely argued that organisations that do "learn how to learn" are more effective in transforming themselves as a result.

Related to the theme already described (that organisational learning has a useful outcome for the organisation) is that which describes organisational learning primarily as a process. While at first glance this may suggest that learning may have a value in its own right, it is clearly linked to the outcomes that may be achieved. Worth noting is the fact that different writers identify different outcomes, ranging from an increase in knowledge (Dixon, 1994) to an increasing capacity to take effective action (Kim, 1993) and a greater ability to be innovative (Gopalakrishnan & Damanpour, 1997). Clearly emphasising the concept of process as a way of transforming "inputs", Kolb describes learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p 38).

As already noted, a common theme in the literature on organisational learning is that it "does not define an end state, but rather is the process that allows the organisation to continually generate new states" (Dixon, 1994, p 3). This idea is based on the link between "learning" and "change", which is noted by some of the most recent writers. For example Hendry (1996) states "the theory of organizational change, of course, grew to a large extent out of learning theories, through the application of action research methodologies to organizational problems" (Hendry, 1996, p 622).

This claim provides the basis for a further link between learning and organisational theory, specifically between learning and the field of organisational development (OD). In this context, most of the accepted definitions of OD refer to organisational learning as a key element, for example; "second-generation OD includes an interest in organizational

transformation, organization culture, learning organizations, teams, TQM, visioning, working with the 'whole system'" (French & Bell, 1995, p 56).

It is the field of OD that provides organisational learning with its theoretical underpinnings, and within this literature we can seek the answers to the most obvious question; how is organisational learning achieved?

As the first step in answering this question some of those writing on the subject have identified different types of learning that are important in the context of an organisation. For example, Fiol and Lyles (1985) note the difference between lower-level and higher-level learning. Addressing the same topic McKee (1992) draws attention to the tendency in the business strategy literature to focus "primarily on production-oriented learning" (McKee, 1992, p 232). While McKee acknowledges the value of increasing efficiency, he makes the claim that different types of learning require different skills, and that until this is recognised it is impossible to develop an organisation's learning capacity.

The contribution that McKee makes is in listing the "three levels of organizational learning [that] are distinguished in the innovation literature: incremental, discontinuous and organizational", and his ability to link these to "different organizational processes" (McKee, 1992, p 235). Referring to the terminology commonly used to discuss the different types of learning already identified, McKee relates single-loop, double-loop and meta-learning to the three levels of organisational learning.

The identification of models for effective learning is a recurring theme, and just over a decade ago it was said that "although there exists widespread acceptance of the notion of organisational learning and its importance to strategic performance, no theory or model of organisation learning is widely accepted" (Fiol & Lyles, 1985, p 803). Since then, the contribution of a number of writers has reduced the validity of this claim. For example, Watkins and Marsick (1993) present "a framework for the learning organization" (Watkins & Marsick, 1993, p 3), and similar frameworks abound in the practitioner literature (Fulmer, 1994; McKenna, 1995; Pearn, Roderick & Mulrooney, 1995). Empirical studies of the effectiveness of frameworks for organisational learning are also starting to appear in academic journals (DiBella, Nevis & Gould, 1996; Lipshitz, Popper & Oz, 1996). One of the more important contributions has been that which distinguishes between "the acquisition of skill or *know-how*, which implies the physical ability to

produce some action, and the acquisition of *know-why*, which implies the ability to articulate a conceptual understanding of an experience" (Kim, 1993, p 38). This distinction between operational and conceptual learning is consistent with an understanding that is less about "finding someone else's answer" than of acknowledging that the situation within an organisation is complex, and as a consequence there are many right answers, and therefore many different ways to reach the same goal (Dixon, 1994).

However, in practice, the "many ways" are usually conceptualised in terms of the actions that are taken by individuals. Thus we are told that individuals learn by going through continuous cycles of having a concrete experience, reflecting on the experience, forming abstract concepts based on the reflections and testing the ideas in new situations (Kim, 1993; Kolb, 1984). Building on this foundation of experiential learning we are introduced to the concept of learning as the act of interpreting experience, and told that interpretation is unique to each individual (Dixon, 1994). There is also some discussion of why individuals learn (Dixon, 1994; Norland, 1992), and how they learn best (Iddings & Apps, 1992; Richardson, 1994). In a study that focuses on information use in organisations, Sligo cautions that some "measures to reduce knowledge gaps may have the opposite effect to what is wanted, tending to increase rather than diminish knowledge differentials" (Sligo, 1997, p 302).

However, while there is a definite focus on the role of individual learning in the context of organisational learning, there is a significant body of the literature that presents a dissenting view. Not only do we need to "address the role of individual learning and memory" (Kim, 1993, p 37), but we must "differentiate between levels of learning, take into account different organisational types, and specify the transfer mechanism between individual and organisational learning" (Kim, 1993, p 37). Similarly, we are told that while "each organisational member can learn" (Dixon, 1994, p 36) and "an organisation learns through the capability of its members" (Dixon, 1994, p 36), "organisational learning is not simply the sum of all that its organisational members know - rather it is the collective use of this capability of learning" (Dixon, 1994, p 36).

The relationship between individual and organisational learning is made even more explicit by McKee (1992) who maintains that "individual learning is necessary but insufficient to produce organizational learning .... For organizational learning to occur knowledge must be accessible to others beyond the knowledge discoverers, and it must

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be subject to application, change and adaptation by others in the organization" (McKee, 1992, p 233). This statement demonstrates the emerging understanding of the distinction between organisational and individual learning, an understanding that goes far beyond that mooted by earlier writers, who conceptualised an organisation as adaptively rational systems that learn from experience (Cyert & March, 1963).

Another perspective on the relationship between individual and organisational learning is provided by Sligo (1996) who argues that access to information is one of the key factors that allows employees to learn, and that this will result in their understanding of the company's situation being enhanced.

It appears that there is an emerging consensus about organisational learning on a number of levels. Firstly, there is agreement that learning should be established as an essential aspect of organisational life (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994; Solomon, 1994). Secondly, there is agreement that there is a relationship between individual and organisational learning, based on an understanding of "organisational learning as the intentional use of learning processes at the individual, group and system level to continuously transform the organisation in a direction that is increasingly satisfying to its stakeholders" (Dixon, 1994, p 5). Thirdly, there is an implication that it is possible for an individual's knowledge to be "transformed into organisational knowledge valuable to the company as a whole" (Nonaka, 1991, p 97). Finally, there is some agreement that while there is a relationship between organisational and individual learning, there are differences in the processes of each: the organisational learning cycle is fundamentally different from the individual learning cycle (Kim, 1993, p 40). However, as Sligo (1996) argues; the move from operant conditioning models of learning to social learning implies that the acquisition of knowledge by staff is valuable in its own right – not simply in the context of how it contributes to organisational learning.

THE CONTEXT OF ORGANISATIONAL CONSULTING: A SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE

The history of management provides a framework for understanding the emergence of the organisational consultant and the two different approaches that dominate organisational consulting today. Thus management consultants and OD consultants operate side by side in an industry that is increasing in size at a "prodigious rate" (Management consultancy, 1997, p 3). These consultants, as well as those that come to

organisational consulting from specialist disciplines such as industrial psychology, have access to a number of broad disciplines that include management science and organisational behaviour, as well as speciality areas such as psychology and education. These disciplines provide a body of theory for the practice of consulting that allows for the development of specific consulting approaches and tools, such as organisational development, action learning, business process reengineering, strategic management and human performance technology.

In addition, the body of knowledge provides a framework for the identification of different organisational processes. While there is general agreement that organisations consist of a number of inter-related processes, there is little agreement about what they are. While consultants who associate themselves with OD focus on processes of "visioning", "communication" and "organisational learning", management scientists are more likely to identify "decision-making" and "planning". Given that all consultants work with organisational processes this difference in perspective is important in practice.

In relation to our understanding of organisational processes, a number of commentators have discussed the relevance of metaphors. Their work is based on the important contributions by earlier writers (see for example Pepper, 1942) on the nature of knowledge. While this is an area which is beyond the scope of this review, it has provided the basis for more recent writers such as Tsoukas (1994), who presents a typology for understanding management knowledge, McKenna and Wright (1992), who discuss the existence of organisational tunnel vision, and Weick (1995), who suggests that what "we see" determines what "we don't see". This last notion has been popularised in the well-known work by Gareth Morgan on "images of organisations" (Morgan, 1997). Here Morgan identifies some of the ways in which we view organisations, such as machines, natural organisms, political systems and cultures. For the organisational consultant, who is dealing with organisations daily, this contention has potential ramifications: if consultants have particular favoured metaphors for viewing organisations, then this may affect the way they choose interventions.

In summary, the body of knowledge provides the context for individual consultants - a unique combination of factors that forms the background against which their practical experience is developed.

THEME 2: THE PRACTICE OF ORGANISATIONAL CONSULTING

The literature that is concerned with the *practice* of organisational consulting is essentially a commentary on "what a consultant does" in the context of an organisational intervention. The section follows the structure used previously, where the researcher selected relevant material from the various bodies of literature that are available, in terms of what may be of value to a consultant within an organisational setting. In this section in particular the device of the "typical consultant" is more than an abstraction; the consultant's hypothetical presence has been used to guide the researcher in determining the scope of the literature that is considered. For guidance the researcher has used the second of the three questions posed at the beginning of the chapter, as being fundamental to the practising consultant; 'what options do I have once the project has started"?

Figure 2.5: The consulting literature
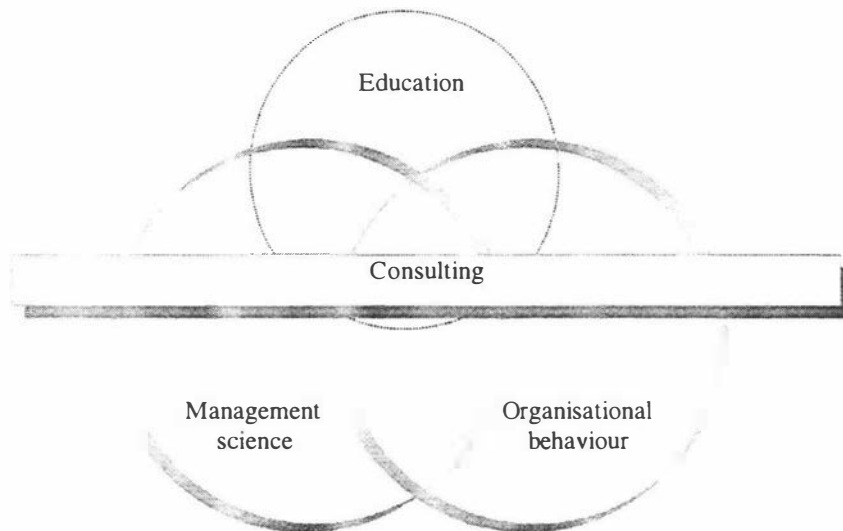
As already noted, there is a vast literature that deals with consultants in a general sense. In response to this volume of material the researcher narrowed the focus of this section of the review to the material that deals with the theory and practice of organisational interventions. This excludes the consultants who, although they work *in* or *with* organisations, have an additional area of expertise, such as information technology or engineering. The result is a collection that draws upon the academic and practitioner

literatures of management consulting, organisational development and other related areas such as counselling. The way this material relates to the previous section is depicted in Figure 2.5.

As this diagram suggests, the literature on consultancy is chiefly drawn from the broad disciplines discussed in the previous section, and one way of organising this section could have been to use management science, human relations and education as headings. However, the researcher concluded that a more effective way of organising this section was to draw out the key concepts around the theme of the practice of consulting. This also made it possible to include material from other relevant disciplines such as counselling.

Within this body of literature there are several main clusters of material, and these are dealt with in a number of subsections. The first subsection deals with the models of the consulting process; the choices that the consultant has in approaching a particular assignment. The second subsection deals with the tasks and functions that a consultant takes. The third subsection addresses roles and the fourth the skills that a consultant needs. The final subsection deals with the client and the client system.

MODELS OF THE CONSULTING PROCESS

The literature on the context for organisational consulting identified a number of ways in which a consultant can approach an organisation, such as whether the consultant should be internal or external to the organisation (Kelley, 1979). The implication is that different consultants will approach their work differently, depending on their background discipline. This will affect the way they understand organisations and the process of change. Extending this argument it may be imagined that the literature on consulting would make an overt link between a particular discipline and the tools that have developed in relation to its dominant models.

However, much of the literature on consulting is written without a contextual link of this sort. The result is a collection of "consulting principles" and "guidelines" that appears to be drawn from a single literature base, a literature of "consulting". This is not the case, and the researcher has already argued that the literature on the practice of consulting is drawn from many different fields. The difficulty with this eclecticism is that there are few

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pointers to those who use the "consulting literature" to suggest that it is an incomplete theoretical base from which to approach an organisation.

The best example of this theoretical confusion is in one of the most popular topics in the consulting literature, that which attempts to explain the "consulting process".

Much of the early literature on consulting attempted to identify the "stages" of the consulting process, and used these as the basis for designing a "multi-stage model" of consulting. While the different models produced varied in their emphasis and had a different number of phases, there was a degree of commonality. The basis for this was their tacit use of Lewin's model of change, which provided a linear foundation. The most common multi-stage model that emerged included at least the four stages of diagnosis, planning action, implementing action, and evaluation (French & Bell, 1995; Kolb & Frohman, 1970; Kubr, 1993; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958). The implication that this model (and its variations, which included those with up to twelve stages) is the norm for any consultancy intervention is best summarised by Kolb and Frohman (1970) who argue that "consulting relationships can be improved and organizational changes better implemented if consultant and client attend to the issues and problems raised in each of the seven developmental stages" (Kolb & Frohman, 1970, p 64).

This multi-stage model is one of the main frameworks in the organisational consulting literature, and it is clear from the writers who refer to it that it is regarded as important both by management consultants and OD consultants. However, the field of OD provides alternatives to the linear approach, which characteristically describe the process as cyclical. These alternatives modify the linear model (and yet in part agree with the central concept by combining linear and cyclical models), typically through the presence of feedback loops (French & Bell, 1995). A similar approach is taken by Evans, Reynolds and Cockman (1992) and others who synthesise the linear approach with Kolb's cycle of experiential learning (Cockman, Evans & Reynolds, 1992; Evans, Reynolds & Cockman, 1992).

In a departure from the multi-stage model Margerison uses three overlapping circles to indicate the overlapping nature of the "three main areas of activity" in an assignment; action planning, action research and action implementation (Margerison, 1988, p 25). A

similar approach is introduced by Ring and Van de Ven (1994) who in the context of "co-operative inter-organisational relationships" provide a model which includes four main elements; negotiation, commitment, execution and assessment (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). Despite the fact that this last model was developed to describe the activities that occur between organisations that are seeking to co-operate, in the context, for example of a joint venture, it appears to be equally useful in addressing the challenges facing organisational consultants.

The two approaches (the linear and the cyclical) yet again indicate the differing perspectives taken by the different types of organisational consultant as well as the presence of a considerable amount of shared thinking. The two perspectives also provide the foundation for an important debate within the field that was prefigured in the previous section: Is there an identifiable process of consulting, and if so, how does it relate to other organisational processes such as planning, learning and decision-making?

Schein, who focuses on the stages of problem solving, presents one side of the argument. His emphasis suggests that consulting is not a process in its own right but an element *within* organisational processes such as problem solving (Schein, 1988). This is in contrast to the multi-stage models already described which imply that there is a *process of consulting*. In his work on the different consulting models, Schein brought together what he believed to be the three different types of consulting; the "purchase of expertise model", the "doctor-patient model" and the "process consultant model" (Schein, 1988, pp 5-10). A similar approach was taken by Greiner and Metzger (1983) who identified three broad types of "intervention style"; emotional interventions, direction interventions and knowledge-focused interventions (Greiner & Metzger, 1983).

Both of these contributions imply that different styles are appropriate at different times, and that there are occasions when use of a "doctor" is indicated, to "diagnose" and "cure" an organisational problem. They also take a similar approach to the stages of consulting, implying that this process is subservient to the organisational processes of decision-making or planning.

Another aspect of both of these contributors is their implication that all organisational consultancy is concerned with organisational "problems". This is made explicit in the problem-centred approach provided by Barcus and Wilkinson (1995). However, there

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are alternatives. These come mainly from OD consultants who take a "developmental" diagnostic orientation, focusing on issues, rather than problems (Burke, 1994; Cummings & Worley, 1993; French & Bell, 1995; Harrison, 1994; Kilmann, 1995; Porras, 1987; Weisbord, 1978). While some writers seem to be suggesting that their approach can be modified to suit any situation, others warn against this simplistic approach. Shirom and Harrison (1995) suggest "starting with a broad open-systems frame and then developing more problem-focused models to guide analysis" (Shirom & Harrison, 1995, p 89).

However, irrespective of whether they are considering problem-centred or developmental approaches, there is a question that in the researcher's opinion none of these writers was able to answer satisfactorily. In Schein's words, the key challenge for consultants is to "learn when and how to be in the role of expert advice giver and when to be in the role of facilitator and catalyst. We need to develop diagnostic criteria to aid in making a valid choice among the possible modes of helping" (Schein, 1987). This challenge remains valid today.

INTERVENTION TASKS AND FUNCTIONS

The second main cluster of material on the practice of organisational consulting deals with the specific ways in which a consultant undertakes his or her task. Some contributors deal with the fundamental choices facing a consultant, reflecting an awareness of the issues discussed in the material on context. For instance, Porras and Robertson (1987) comment that interventions can be classified into two general approaches. "Either consultants focus on the gap between actual and desired organisational states, or they attempt to ensure congruency among relevant organisational characteristics" (Porras & Robertson, 1987, p 24). Other writers imply a concern with congruency within an intervention, urging consultants to plan their interventions carefully, by choosing an appropriate diagnostic model and then selecting methods that are consistent with this model (Cummings & Worley, 1993; Greiner & Metzger, 1983; Levinson, 1994).

Despite this valuable advice, which hints at an awareness of the complex challenges facing the consultant who has to be aware of his or her "general approach" (according to Porras & Robertson, 1987, 1992), as well as particular methods, much of the material that falls within the scope of this section deals with more detailed concerns. In general

this specific material complements the broad concepts on consulting models described in the previous section, and in some cases the link between the multi-stage models and the consultant's task is made explicit.

For example, Kubr (1996) lists a particular "stage", such as entry, and then details the tasks that are associated with this stage. A similar approach is taken by a number of other contributors who provide lists of tasks for the consultant engaged in a particular assignment, with one of the most detailed coming from the early work of Lippitt, Watson and Westley (1958). They identify the following tasks:

> diagnosing the nature of the client system's problem, assessing the client system's motivations and capacities to change, appraising the agent's own motivations and resources, selecting appropriate change objectives, choosing an appropriate type of helping role, establishing and maintaining the helping relationship, recognising and guiding the phases of the change process, choosing the specific techniques and modes of behaviour which will be appropriate to each progressive encounter in the change relationship, and contributing to the development of the basic skills and theories of the profession (Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958, p 126).

A slightly different perspective is provided by Schein (1987) who complements his work on dominant models with the suggestion that there are ten key activities that a consultant may perform. These range from the straightforward; "to provide information, or to diagnose complex organisational and business problems" to those activities which are usually implicit or unstated - to reward and punish certain kinds of behaviour, or to absorb anxiety and provide emotional strength (Schein, 1987). Building on this foundation Kubr identifies twelve possible ways in which a consultant can function within an organisation, from "finding and providing management and business information" to "providing moral support and counsel" (Kubr, 1993, p 27). While Kubr and Schein echo Lippitt et al. there is a difference. The former present their activities as *alternatives* for the consultant, whereas the latter imply that the tasks identified should all be accomplished within the context of an assignment.

All of these contributions provide a natural basis for more recent work which focuses on identifying common aspects of grouping the tasks into what may be described as "consultancy functions". By implication this work recognises the importance of Schein's three dominant models and Lewin's important recognition of the consultant as a change agent (Schein, 1987).

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In the third cluster of the literature on the practice of organisational consulting, Wooten and White (1989) provide one of these groupings of the consultancy function, commenting, that "although articulated differently, commonality can be found throughout the approaches taken to conceptualise the various roles of the change agent. Specifically, the consultant functions of education, research, and advice provider are noticeable" (Wooten & White, 1989, p 655). A similar summary is provided by Williams and Woodward (1994), who identify "expert, executive, researcher, tutor, educator, conciliator, power broker, synergist", linking each of these to a more detailed list of tasks (Williams & Woodward, 1994, p 45). In both instances the focus on identifying commonalities is more than simply a summary of the material on the consultancy *task*; it provides a basis for the work on consultancy *roles*. While consultancy roles has long been a focus of some of the writers already mentioned, the topic has become more prominent in the last decade. Within the substantial amount written on the topic there are two main perspectives.

The first perspective seeks to identify roles that can be broadly applied to most consulting interventions. In an important early contribution Steele (1975) suggests role metaphors; teacher, student, detective, barbarian, clock, monitor, talisman, advocate and ritual pig. Using less evocative language Wooten and White (1989) come to a similar conclusion as that implied by Steele; that consultants have a choice in approaching an intervention. They offer consultants five basic change roles, consistent with their work on the consultancy function. "Based on the work of Lippitt, Watson and Westley (1958), the roles of educator/trainer, model, researcher/theoretician, technical expert, and resource linker are suggested" (Wooten & White, 1989, p 655). Both contributors imply that the roles are complementary, and that within an intervention more than one role will be used.

The second perspective discusses role possibilities in terms of a single "dimension" or a particular aspect of an organisational intervention, implying that a single role choice will need to be made for each intervention. Lippitt and Lippitt (1986) provide what is probably the best well-known example of this type, presenting a consultant's role on a continuum from directive to non-directive. This continuum lists the roles of objective observer, process counsellor, fact finder, identifier of alternatives and linker to resources,

joint problem solver, trainer educator, information specialist, advocate (Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986, p 61). In the same vein, Weisbord claims that "the best role a consultant can hope for is stage manager" (Weisbord, 1987, p 15).

While in some ways the mono-dimensional nature of the second perspective on effective consulting appears restricting, it does offer a very real benefit, by providing the consultant with a means of selecting an appropriate role. The complexity of working within an organisation means that there are a number of aspects to consider when choosing a role, and it may be simpler to choose between obvious extremes such as "objective observer" and "advocate" than between the roles of "technical expert" or "educator/trainer".

It is this question of choosing appropriate roles that is the focus of the most recent work on the topic. The first element of this is general advice, which emphasises the need to relate the group's expectations (in term of their desired outcomes) to the consultant's choice of role (Bentley, 1994). Similarly, it has been noted that there is a "situational specificity of change roles [and] factors such as organizational climate and change technology have a profound effect on change roles" (Wooten & White, 1989, p 661).

More specific advice comes from the practitioner literature, where Champion, Kiel and McLendon (1990) state that choosing a role depends on "the organizational situation, characteristics of the client, characteristics of the consultant, [and] the client/consultant relationship" (Champion, Kiel & McLendon, 1990, p 68). They offer their "consulting role grid" which organises the nine roles of consultant, counsellor, coach, partner, facilitator, teacher, modeller, reflective observer, technical advisor and hands-on expert in relation to two dimensions; consultant responsibility for client growth, and consultant responsibility for project results. In a similar vein Barcus and Wilkinson (1995) put forward an "influence grid" which suggests that a role is chosen according to the level of trust between the client and consultant and the credibility invested in the consultant by the client (Barcus & Wilkinson, 1995).

A slightly different perspective is provided by Williams and Woodward (1994) who emphasise that the selection of an appropriate role for a consultant should be viewed as an outcome of assessing client needs. They are building on the work of Lippitt and Lippitt (1986) who discuss criteria for consultant role selection. They argue that the task

of role selection depends on "the nature of the contract, goals, norms and standards of the client system, personal limitations and inclinations of the consultant, what worked before, whether the consultant is internal or external [and] events external to the consultancy process" (Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986, pp 71-74). While these factors are undoubtedly important, they provide no advice to the consultant on how to assess their relative importance.

While Champion et al. (1990) and Barcus and Wilkinson (1995) provide valuable insights into the way in which a consultancy role may be selected, their work implies that role selection occurs once only in each intervention. By contrast, Wooten and White (1989) assert that

> due to the dynamic nature of organizational change, great flexibility must be assumed by change agents and client systems as they progress through an intervention. Change agents may assume exclusively singular roles, e.g., researcher or counsellor, throughout the change effort (Wooten & White, 1989, p 653).

The clear implication is that although a single role *may* be taken, it is equally likely that multiple roles will be necessary, to effectively address the different tasks at each stage of an intervention. This concept is developed by Lindon (1995) who describes a consultancy intervention in terms of a number of stages, and then links these to the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (Lindon, 1995). A similar approach is taken by Menzel, (1975) who uses force field theory as a starting point to identify the phases of a client-consultant relationship and then suggests the implications for the change agent.

While the material already discussed tends to focus on choosing a role that will be most effective in terms of the project's outcomes, other approaches recognise the need for consultants to focus on a broader range of outcomes. For example, Schaffer (1995) comments on the need for consultants to undertake a "multiplicative strategy [which] requires the consultant to take responsibility for helping to develop client skill and capability" (Schaffer, 1995, p 48). By multiplicative Schaffer refers to the potential for the consultant's presence to create a "multiplier" effect, with the pay back for the organisation being greater that if the consultant had worked on his or her own. Schaffer's main theme is that of increasing effectiveness within a consultancy intervention, by paying attention to the client as well as the consultant. The concern with this objective is the basis for the work on role reciprocity.

This concept refers to the argument that is touched upon by Schön (1983) and developed by Wooten and White (1989); that "both the change agent and client system assume specific roles in OD" (Wooten & White, 1989, p 654). As they go on to explain, in an effective intervention the client and consultant take roles that are appropriate *in relation to each other*. They maintain that "role efficacy can be defined as the extent to which all change parties can fulfil their mutual and specific roles most effectively at each stage of the OD process" (Wooten & White, 1989, p 661). The implication is that while consultants may well change roles within an intervention, this will cause clients to modify their roles accordingly. However, the literature is silent on the details of "how" and "when" these role modifications should be made. Wooten and White comment that "ideally, a mechanism or model is needed that can guide change parties to appropriate change roles, irrespective of organizational climate and the change technology used" (Wooten & White, 1989, p 661). Despite this claim, not only does the literature offer no "mechanism or model" of this type, there is little discussion of the dynamics of role choice. Whether it is the client or the consultant who is responsible for selecting the initial role is not clear.

Another area in which little work seems to have been done is on assessing the effectiveness of different role choices, and the research that has been done has shown surprising results. In research on a large-scale change intervention it was found that the most effective influence modes were "enforcement" and "manipulation" (Poole, Gioia & Gray, 1989). A similar study by Porras found that it was not always the most intense consultancy interventions that provided the best results (Porras, 1979).

CONSULTANCY SKILLS

The fourth theme in the literature on the practice of consulting deals with the skills that an effective consultant needs. Amongst those authors who discuss the topic there are some who deal with broad skill sets. Margerison (1988) identifies two sets of skills; technical skills and interpersonal abilities. Porras and Robertson (1987) list four skill clusters; interpersonal competence, problem-solving ability, the ability to create learning experiences and the skill of personal insight. Schein (1972) identifies three components of the consultant's professional knowledge. These are an underlying discipline or basic science upon which the consultant's practice rests, an applied science or "engineering" component from which many of the day-to-day diagnostic procedures and problem-

solutions are derived, and a skills and attitudinal component that concerns the actual performance of services to the client, using the underlying basic and applied knowledge (Schein, 1972).

That a consultant needs an underlying discipline is one of the key themes in the literature, although not all writers agree with its pre-eminent status. There is an equally strong argument that "consultants will need to have a basic speciality - but be generalists. They should be able to tie all the threads together and see the whole picture while not losing mastery over their speciality" (Vieira, 1995, p 2). This awareness of the complex skills needed is shown by a recent contributor who comments that consultants need to "develop flexible specialization in a chosen field, relevant to one or more classes of human systems and develop a capacity to interact with multiple subject experts and evolve creative solutions by unifying their knowledge using a relevant systems model" (Dash, 1994, p 65). A similar reluctance to compartmentalise a consultant's skills is shown by Bloomfield and Danieli, who argue that "the technical and socio-political skills deployed by management consultants cannot be separated out, that they are inextricably intertwined" (Bloomfield & Danieli, 1995, p 23). As these and others argue (Baxter, 1996; Beavin, 1995; Bessant & Rush, 1995; Bushko, Lee & Raynor, 1996), the emphasis on "flexible specialisation" and skill in synthesis and interaction is without doubt a demonstration of an emerging understanding of the consultant of the 1990s; as "expert" *and* "process consultant".

A similar recognition of the changing nature of consultancy is shown by Lee and Skarke (1996), who ask

> what happens to the ideas, concepts, tools, and techniques of the fads when they are no longer fads? They do not just go away. The good ones become part of the mainstream body of knowledge. They become accepted practices - the 'eternal truths' of management (Lee & Skarke, 1996, p 10).

They suggest that the essential competencies of a consultant are constantly being added to, and that tomorrow's consultant will need to be skilled in areas that were not even considered by the earliest contributors. "The management consultant of tomorrow will generally follow the rules, yet also break the mould. He or she will know the system and yet constantly search for new paths and directions" (Vieira, 1995, p 69).

The increasing emphasis on the consultant's interpersonal skills is shown by Kubr, whose "qualities of a consultant" include intellectual ability, ability to understand people and work with them, ability to communicate, persuade and motivate, intellectual and emotional maturity, personal drive and initiative, ethics and integrity, physical and mental health (Kubr, 1986). Other qualities are implied by his list of factors that a client needs to consider when selecting a consultant. These include professional integrity, professional competence, rapport with the consultant, assignment design, capability to deliver, ability to mobilise resources, costs of services, and image of consultant (Kubr, 1993).

Kubr's list focuses on the interpersonal skills, and many other commentators discuss the importance of the consultant being able to build a strong relationship with the client (Greiner & Metzger, 1983; Heron, 1990; Long, 1992; Margerison, 1988; Schön, 1983). The term "psychological contract" is frequently used (or implied) in this context, to describe "unwritten and largely nonverbalised sets of congruent expectations and assumptions held by transacting parties about each other's prerogatives and obligations" (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994, p 100).

Relating to the writing on consultancy skills is a significant and well-established literature on the training and development of consultants (Barcus & Wilkinson, 1995; Berry, 1993; Donaghue, 1992; Institute of Management Consultants, no date; Kubr, 1996; Menzel, 1975; Roffé, 1995; Steele, 1975; Stocker, 1996). These sources identify a number of forces that impact upon consultants' learning, and discuss a variety of devices for enriching it (Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Steele, 1975). The literature on this topic even provides a list of essential topics in a consultancy training programme. As early as the 1950s it was thought that general preparation for consultants would need to include conceptual-diagnostic training, orientation to theories and methods of change, orientation to the ethical and evaluative functions of the change agent, knowledge of the sources of help, and operational and relational skills (Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958). These same writers went on to suggest that consultants would need to specialise, either by type of client system, diagnostic orientation and method, areas of change objectives, "level" of problem, or type of change method (Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958).

Almost three decades later a similarly comprehensive approach is offered by Kubr, who suggests a framework for preparing consultants that provides them with; an orientation to management consulting, an overview of the consulting process, a multi-levelled

approach to consulting skills, and an introduction to managing and developing a consulting organisation (Kubr, 1986). However, there are still clearly issues in the delivery of appropriate training programmes; recently Stocker (1996) commented on the lack of university courses.

The practical focus of these writers is particularly evident in the practitioner literature. Professional associations such as the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC) have their own prescription for consultants, described by them as the *IMC Body of Knowledge* (Institute of Management Consultants, no date). Publications such as the *Journal of Management Consulting* and the various journals for the training and development industry also offer various approaches to consultant training.

Despite the fact that curricula of this type have been developed in the context of western economies, there is a marked similarity in the accessible literature on developing consultants in other countries. Thus Roffé (1995) identifies different elements of a training programme for consultants in Lithuania, and in a discussion on consulting across east-west boundaries, Smith (1995), argues that "all the things needed to be a good consultant on the local scene are required at the international level" (Smith, 1995, p 3).

By contrast with the broad descriptions of "consulting skills" some more recent writers are conscious of the skill requirements of the specific roles that a consultant may choose. "Set adviser" competencies are identified (Donoghue, 1992) as are those of the facilitative role; understanding the context, technical competence, rational skills, interpersonal skills, task process skills, human process skills, personal characteristics (Berry, 1993). However, given the researcher's focus on organisational consulting in general terms, this level of detail was not considered relevant to the literature review.

CLIENTS AND THE CLIENT SYSTEM

The final cluster of material that can be drawn from the literature that deals with the process of organisational consultancy is that which addresses the client. So far our discussion on a consultancy intervention implies the presence of a client, a consultant, a client system (the client organisation) and the project itself. These are the "elements of change", and are similar to the components described by Bunning (1991) as being implicit in action learning. He identified "the action taker (the learner), the focus of

action (the project) (and) the action context (the organisational culture)" (Bunning, 1991, p 6).

Despite the client's critical role in the intervention implied by Bunning's framework, the literature is strangely silent in terms of the client and the client system. However, one topic of discussion is the need for the consultant to identify the "correct" client. Schein (1987 and expanded in 1997a) gives the most explicit advice, listing a number of different client types. He comments

> *contact* clients approach the consultant or manager initially, *intermediate* clients get involved in early meetings, *primary* clients own a problem for which they want help, and *ultimate* clients may or may not be directly involved, but their welfare and interest must be considered in planning (Schein, 1987, p 118).

On the same theme Kubr comments on the importance of making a distinction between the individual client and the client enterprise (Kubr, 1986).

The identification of different client types is related to the discussion on role reciprocity, by providing the consultant with a way of understanding the needs and expectations of different clients. While this is an important contribution to the literature, the emphasis is on the implication for the *consultant,* rather then the client. This emphasis on the consultant as the central figure in a consulting intervention is described by Bloomfield and Best (1992), who suggest that clients are limited in their ability to negotiate with the consultant, sometimes because of an unequal relationship in terms of power. They comment that the "power" in an intervention is often wielded by consultants who are perceived by the clients to have a greater level of expertise. A different perspective is offered by Sturdy (1997), who argues that the emphasis by some commentators on the insecurity of managers (who are persuaded to use consultants through a perception of their own inadequacy) means that "their active role in the consultancy process and its interactive nature tends to be neglected" (Sturdy, 1997).

One issue that is discussed from the client's perspective is "how to choose a consultant". Much of this is in terms of lists of ideal characteristics of an effective consultant and implies that the client needs to be competent in assessing a prospective consultant against this ideal standard (Goulter, 1996; Holtz, 1989; Kubr, 1993; Patterson, 1995; Scarbrough, 1996; Shenson, 1990). Another perspective is provided by the studies that attempt to identify the characteristics that are important to the client. One recent study

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reported that the reputation of the consultancy firm, their experience in the client's industry and cost were the most important factors (Patterson, 1995).

While the literature implies that the client's competency may impact on the intervention, it also suggests that the client system will also have an impact on the effectiveness of the intervention. In terms of the client system, Schein identifies three possible organisational cultures; the "operator culture", the "engineering culture" and the "executive culture" (Schein, 1997b). He comments that a lack of alignment between members of an organisation results in learning problems and barriers to effective reinventing, and goes on to suggest that "both the executive and engineering culture operate on the implicit assumption that people are the problem" (Schein, 1997b, p 10).

For the practising consultant this statement is particularly important as it provides a way of *recognising* a competent client system, which in other contributions to the literature is described in very general terms. For example, Steele (1975) advises that a client system needs to be open to learning. This is related to a classic contribution from Argyris (1970) who also suggests that the degree to which the organisation is open to learning is important. He advises that the interventionist needs to assess "the probability that the client system is open to learning. The more closed a client system is, the lower is the probability that an interventionist can help the client system" (Argyris, 1970, p 136).

Another contribution to this topic discusses the barriers that some organisations have to successful interventions. These are organisations that are old, large and entrenched; that have experienced autocratic leadership in the past; that were highly successful before the turbulence of the 1980s, and that have implemented numerous cycles of singular intervention approaches (Kilmann, 1995). The point is made that the characteristics of the client system are related to the characteristics of the organisation's management, which needs to be consultative (Kilmann, 1995) and collaborative (Tovar, Gagnon & Schmid, 1997).

THE PRACTICE OF ORGANISATIONAL CONSULTING: A SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE

While the first section of this chapter provided a foundation for understanding the development of the field of organisational consulting, this section dealt with its practice. This was achieved by searching the literature of the various fields that have consultants

of one sort or another. The researcher considered those fields in which the discussion was not solely concerned with an area of specialisation, instead looking for research and comments that related to the practice of consulting.

This focus meant that the differing perspectives on organisational consulting were revealed as the approaches of the "management consultants" (those with an affinity for the discipline of management science) were juxtaposed with the "OD consultants". A number of distinct differences in the two approaches were found, although this separation is not always clear cut, and a number of overlaps do occur.

The first difference was in relation to the "consulting process". While the management consulting literature presents various linear models of the process, OD consultants attempt to relate the tasks that a consultant undertakes with the organisation's own processes. This difference is crucial, since it appears likely that the way the consultant conceptualises the process or processes that he or she is part of will have an effect on some aspects of the intervention. A further complication is that Schein's model implies that consultants should be able to act as "expert" *or* "process consultant". This implies that it is not sufficient for "OD consultants" and "management consultants" to develop separate and distinct approaches; appreciating the differences is a responsibility of all consultants. Unfortunately, the literature lacks a framework for helping them to identify situations in which it is important to focus on the "consulting process" rather than organisational processes.

The second difference is implied by the different ways of approaching organisations identified by Porras and Robertson (1987). In the light of one of the previous sections within the chapter, *Models of the consultancy process*, it appears that the consultants who focus on gap analysis are working within an implicit teleological framework, while those who choose to focus on congruent processes are working within an implicit life cycle approach. Again, a question for all consultants is how to select an appropriate approach.

A third difference is in the discussion on the tasks undertaken by a consultant. Those writers who present consulting as a process in its own right suggest that particular tasks can be linked to particular stages. By contrast, OD consultants provide lists of tasks that may be undertaken at any point during the intervention; consistent with their view of

consulting as a cyclical process, undertaken within the context of the organisation's own processes.

Where the two approaches converge is through writers who provide frameworks for viewing both types of consultant, building on Schein's typology of expert, doctor and process consultant. Thus there are frameworks for viewing the alternative ways in which a consultant may work within an organisation; as educator, researcher or advice provider, according to Wooten and White (1989).

These ways of viewing the potential ways in which the consultant can work within an organisation are related to the well-developed literature on roles, which lays out the consultant's range of options, and acknowledges the need for consultants to consider when roles need to be modified. However, this literature too has its gaps: it is lacking in advice on how to "manage" role reciprocity - the details of whether it is the consultant or the client who makes the first step in the "dance" of role selection. It also offers little advice on "how to select" an appropriate role, despite the obvious need for some sort of framework to be developed (as evidenced by the framework models that exist – which have been developed by practitioners themselves). An even more serious gap in the literature is a way of assessing the effectiveness of different roles.

Another theme in the literature in which the OD consultants and management consultants agree is in the skills that are needed, although there is a difference in emphasis. Whereas both groups list broad areas such as interpersonal skills and understanding consulting, those working within the context of management consulting are more inclined to emphasise the importance of a speciality area. However, this is a subtle distinction, with a significant number of commentators suggesting that there is in fact a new style of consultant emerging in the 1990s; one who recognises the complexity of intervening in a client system and who has the ability to make intelligent choices about an appropriate intervention design (Bellman, 1990; Berry, 1993; Dash, 1994; Poole, Gioia, & Gray, 1989; Porras & Robertson, 1987; Schaffer, 1995, Weisbord, 1987; Wooten & White, 1989). Unfortunately, until the literature can provide the typical consultant with a reliable method for making such a complex choice, this new style of consultant may be a rare find.

THEME 3: THE OUTCOMES OF ORGANISATIONAL CONSULTING

"OD has been primarily process-oriented, assuming that by focusing on organisational processes, the outcomes will take care of themselves" (Porras & Robertson, 1987, p 21).

A natural consequence of the continued interest in organisations is for practitioners and theoreticians alike to focus on how organisations perform. Their objective is to identify the factors that make an organisation successful, as a basis for developing techniques for increasing the rate at which this occurs. However, as has been noted by several commentators over the course of the last decade or so, there is a lack of a unified theory of organisations (McGuire, 1982; Watson, 1986). Watson (1986) in fact goes on to argue that there will never be a full and generally acceptable body of organizational or managerial theory (Watson, 1986). Given the absence of a unified theory of *organisations*, the search for a single theory of *organisational performance* has been largely unsuccessful.

The result has been the creation of a set of tools that each address particular aspects of organisational life, and the unified approach continues to be elusive. This is the situation that exits for today's organisational consultants, who are forced to work without a framework for assessing the effectiveness of their contributions. Despite this lack, there is an implicit message for them in the literature; that successful organisational intervention should result in improved organisational performance (McLachlin, 1999; Porras & Hoffer, 1986).

This final section of the review is concerned with the way in which consultants contribute to organisational outcomes. Just as the material on the practice of organisational consulting (detailed in the section *The practice of organisational consulting*) was best organised by imagining the interests of a consultant, this section is also organised by using this same device. This provides a number of questions; what are the factors that impact on the outcomes, and how is success measured? These questions provide the headings for the sections that follow.

SUCCESS FACTORS

There are a number of claims in the literature on organisational consulting about the different factors that impact upon the "success" of a consultancy assignment (Bloomfield

& Best, 1992; McLachlin, 1999; Marshall, Alderman, Wong & Thwaites, 1995; Patterson, 1995; Porras 1987; Redman & Allen, 1993; Rynning, 1993; Schaffer, 1995; Smith, 1995; Williams & Woodward, 1994). One way of defining success is "adding value", in terms defined by the client (Kay, 1993). However the ability of a client to define "value" seems by implication to be questioned, with much more literature focusing on apparently objective measures, particularly those that are financial (Kent, 1994). Thus the "quality" of the client-consultant relationship is often identified as a way of assessing success (Lipton, 1995; McGivern, 1983). In specific terms other writers list factors such as a clear definition of expectations, top management involvement, client commitment, and collaboration (Tovar, Gagnon, France & Schmid, 1997). However, while these factors can be helpful in making a crude assessment of the success of a particular intervention, "there are increasing demands from clients to demonstrate the favorable impact of OD efforts and interventions on organisational outcomes that impact economic performance" (Levin & Gottlieb, 1993, p 297).

These increasing demands have been the consequence of an increasingly educated set of clients; the managers who avidly read the latest "management guru" for advice and explanations of "how organisations work effectively". Writers such as Peters and Waterman, (1982) Handy, (1976, 1978, 1991 & 1995) Drucker, (1954) and Covey, (1989) are immensely popular with practising managers, and it is this readership that is responsible for "the mounting pressure on OD practitioners to adopt more instrumental and outcome-focused approaches" (Levin & Gottlieb, 1993, p 297). However, none of these authors offer an immediately attractive framework for assessing the effectiveness of a consultant, a situation which is clearly related to another gap in the literature; the absence of a single approach to assessing organisational effectiveness (Kay, 1993).

Many authors comment on the number of different approaches to this issue (Cameron, 1980; Huber & Glick, 1993; Ostroff & Schmitt, 1993; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The fourfold framework proposed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) identifies the rational goal, open systems, internal process and human resource models. Cameron (1980) also identifies four main approaches to evaluating organisational effectiveness. These include assessing an organisation in terms of; how well it achieves its goals; the extent to which it acquires resources; its internal processes and operations; and the degree to which the organisation's strategic constituencies are satisfied (Cameron, 1980). He argues that

none of the approaches is suitable for all organisations or in all circumstances, and for some organisations none of the approaches is suitable. He suggests a strategy for coping with this situation, which depends on restricting "the concept of organisational effectiveness to a very specific referent" and analysing limited aspects of an organisation only (Cameron, 1980, p 73).

One example of this approach is to focus on the relationship between consultants and their clients (Cameron & Massey, 1997; McGivern, 1983). Another common use of the "specific referent" principle is to focus on the client's point of view of the "service encounter" when a consultant is working within an organisation (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990). Drawing on the contributions to the field of service management, they make the point that for many clients "interaction [with the service provider] *is* the service" (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990, p 71). Their approach is founded on empirical research that demonstrates "the importance of the quality of customer/employee interactions in the assessment of overall quality and/or satisfaction with services" (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990, p 72). This relates to the important contribution of Zeithmal, Parasuraman and Berry, (1990), who developed the tool known as SERVQUAL for identifying "gaps" in service encounters.

This tool has been widely used, including some applications to the service encounter between a client organisation and a professional adviser (Chaston, 1994; Page, 1998). In this context it has presumably been valuable in identifying discrepancies between the assumptions of service providers (banks, management consultants) and their clients. However, there are also examples of the principle (of the link between client satisfaction and a quality intervention) to be applied so generally as to be unhelpful. An evaluation of internal change agents, for example, concludes, "the owner/managers who participated are mostly pleased with the results" (Rosa, Scott & Gilbert, 1994, p 21).

So, while the emphasis on identifying gaps in the "service encounter" may be useful, there are limits to its application. The most important of these is the implicit emphasis on "improving service delivery" rather than "providing more effective service". In other words, by focusing on the perspectives of the client and the service provider, it is easy to become side-tracked by the extensive literature on successful consulting firms (Holtz, 1993; Karlson, 1992; Maister, 1993; Weinberg, 1985). This is tangential to the real issue;

what is the "best" way of approaching a particular organisational intervention, both in terms of context and process.

To answer this question it is necessary to go back to the base disciplines from which all organisational consultants operate. Irrespective of whether the consultants are conscious of this basis or not, the management science and the organisational behaviour literatures provide different perspectives on the processes of organisational consulting and the way in which "successful consulting" is measured.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESS

The management science perspective is to focus on the consulting process as described by Kubr's five-stage model, of "entry, diagnosis, action planning, implementation, termination" (Kubr, 1993, p 21). This is consistent with the tendency of management consultants to view the consulting process as a discrete process in its own right, which begins when the consultant "enters" the organisation, and ends when he or she "terminates" the relationship with the client. By contrast, the organisational behaviourists view the consulting process as interrelated to other organisational processes. As a consequence, their approach to measuring the effectiveness of their intervention is quite different.

One example of the former approach is Rynning (1993), who identifies a number of "important consultant characteristics" which the literature suggests will have an impact on the ultimate effectiveness of an assignment. These characteristics include "continuity, good quality, relevance for the client, good knowledge of the local conditions, well-developed professional network, broad knowledge, quick response, good follow-up and near location" (Rynning, 1993, p 50). While it could be argued that this emphasis on the discrete stages of the "consulting process" is too narrow an approach to organisational consulting, the conclusions that Rynning reaches are valuable. After studying the responses of the users of consulting services and the providers, "both consultants and clients agreed that the client being too busy was the biggest problem, followed by the consultant's poor knowledge of the client organisation and physical distance" (Rynning, 1993, p 54).

Another example of the management science perspective is provided by those consultants who conceptualise organisations as entities that construct their own future

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(i.e. operate in a teleological way). For them, a logical approach to measuring effectiveness may be that which is based on how well the intervention assisted the organisation to achieve its objectives.

By contrast, an organisational behavioural perspective views organisations as entities that are undertaking a "journey" through a "life cycle". The implication of this "global" approach to organisational development is that the consulting process is viewed as interrelated to other organisational processes. The difference implied by this perspective is that a successful intervention may be one in which behavioural change occurs (Porras & Hoffer, 1986). This broad perspective is echoed by French and Bell, who comment that OD is a "planned, systematic process in which applied behavioral science principles and practices are introduced into ongoing organizations toward the goal of increasing individual and organization effectiveness" (French & Bell, 1995, p 1). The way that OD consultants focus on social sub-systems, also means that their interest in effectiveness is focused here (Narayanan & Nathu, 1993, p 158).

The difference between management science and OD is clearly seen again, and in a rare comment on precisely this distinction, Cameron observes, "different conceptualizations of organizations produce different models of organizational effectiveness" (Cameron, 1984, p 279).

There are some examples of approaches that try to integrate these different perspectives. Veney and Kaluzny (1984) propose an approach that employs "various methodological strategies to determine the *relevance*, *progress*, *efficiency*, *effectiveness*, and *impact* of program activities" (Veney & Kaluzny, 1984, p 2). Similarly, Swartz and Lippitt identify three areas that may be evaluated; the consultant-client relationship, the event, and the system's progress toward its goal (Swartz & Lippitt, 1975). In their terms an event refers to an individual intervention, e.g. a training programme, which may be regarded as highly satisfactory by participants, but fails to assist the client to achieve whatever objectives were articulated in respect of the assignment as a whole.

While this model is useful in identifying the main elements that can be evaluated for the purpose of this study it is not sufficiently explicit in the way it links the relationship, the event and the outcome.

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It is clear that for organisational consultants and their clients there is no single way of assessing success. Various commentators offer alternative perspectives on the area, but there seems to be little common ground. Rather, there seem to be two camps; those who define success from the consultant's perspective and those who define it from the organisation's perspective. Those in the first group are likely to use focused measurement techniques, with the aim of assessing their own performance. By contrast, those in the second group are more likely to try to assess the effect of the intervention on the client organisation. The model developed by Swartz and Lippitt (1975) is still one of the few approaches to evaluating a consultancy intervention that integrates these two perspectives.

CATEGORISING "WHAT IS KNOWN"

As this chapter has demonstrated, consultancy as a field of practice developed from the work of practising managers, such as Frederick Taylor (1911) and Elton Mayo (1933). These important figures were the basis for the main schools of thought about management, and it is possible to discover through their writings a clear theoretical underpinning for the practice of consulting. There are two perspectives on this; one provided by management science and the other derived from organisational behaviour. These two differing perspectives provide practising consultants with different ways of approaching their work within organisations. However, despite the differences that are apparent by comparing the two main theoretical perspectives, overall the literature presents what may be regarded as the "majority view".

In addition to describing the main themes of the literature, this review has touched upon some of the less common themes; those that have been raised more recently, or those that while not in the mainstream, provide an interesting perspective on consulting.

One of these is an idea that has been raised by a number of commentators concerning the "new consultant" emerging in the 1990s. This is a consultant who recognises the complexity of intervening in a client system and who has the ability to make intelligent choices about the dimensions of consultancy (Berry, 1996). This claim is based on earlier

work, such as the contention that the types of strategies that produce the best results differ in different environmental circumstances (Hofer & Schendel, 1978). This implies a need for those interested in change to access different *models*, as well as different *strategies*, and to draw on the perspectives from management *and* OD. This multi-disciplinary way of operating is consistent with a view of change management as a process that is based on analysis, education, learning, and politics (Pettigrew, 1985b; Pettigrew & Whipp, 1991).

It appears that this concept of the new consultant is the basis for the models that have been developed to synthesise previously distinct approaches (Hedlund, 1994; Lundberg, 1997). One example is the use of action learning as a "holographic metaphor" which "simultaneously attempts to combine within itself a number of dimensions that are often regarded as separate" (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983, p 9). Another is the "balanced scorecard", which the authors propose as a way of moving "towards a new strategic management system" (Kaplan & Norton, 1996, p 85). This framework proposes the division of all organisational activity into four management processes; translating the vision, feedback and learning, business planning and communication and linking (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). It is clear that both of these approaches are seeking to transcend a single disciplinary base and in the process create a "multiplicative" approach to organisations (Schaffer, 1995). The implications for consultants are considerable, with the onus on them to develop their skills in order to approach organisations from whatever perspective is appropriate.

However, there is also a note of warning, such as the concern that "by focusing on the content of quality management and assuming the role of 'quality management expert', OD practitioners are exposing themselves to four major risks" (Levin & Gottlieb, 1993, p 301). Amongst these risks are "violating a fundamental tenet of effective OD practice by not basing an organization change approach on a diagnosis of client system needs and readiness" and "neglecting established theories of individual and group behavior change by prescribing a specific direction and pathway for organization change" (Levin & Gottlieb, 1993, p 301).

It is this last comment that is particularly significant for the thousands of practising consultants and their clients who are encountering organisational consulting at a crossroads. While the field now comprises a substantial body of literature that addresses

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the main issues for the organisational consultant, the questions that remain unanswered are of equal importance. The final section of this chapter examines the implications of this unsatisfactory situation.

CONCLUSIONS FROM CATEGORISING LITERATURE

In this chapter the researcher has presented a review of the literature that appeared to be most relevant to the subject under study. As explained in the chapter's introduction, the researcher approached the task of selecting the most relevant contributions from the extensive fields of management, organisational behaviour and consulting by identifying three of the main concerns of any practising consultant. These were; the broad principles that are used to guide the planning of a client project, the options that a consultant has once the project has started and assessing the consequences of the choices that are made. These concerns provided a framework for the review that was based on three themes: *context*, *practice* and *outcomes*. These themes provided the section headings for the three sections of the chapter.

In undertaking the review the researcher had two objectives. The first was to identify the areas within the literature where there is agreement between the different contributors. As this chapter has demonstrated, there is considerable agreement in the literature about some of the core principles affecting organisational consulting: There is a definable literature concerning organisational consulting. In a theoretical sense, the main contexts for this literature are management science and organisational behaviour, and to a lesser extent, education. However, the researcher's experience suggests that theory is not the dominant context for most of the hundreds of thousands of consultants who operate around the world; for these consultants it is the tools of "practice" that provide their underpinning frameworks, models and guiding principles. The practitioner literature is dominated by the extensive literature on consultancy tools and techniques.

The researcher's second objective was to identify those areas of the literature in which there is less commonality, or where there is an absence of clarity that would enable the readers of the literature to make the most of its valuable insights. In this context the most striking feature of the organisational consulting literature is that it encompasses both theory and practice. The strength of the resulting "body of knowledge" is that its scope deals with everything a practising consultant needs to know; appropriate theoretical

paradigms, effective approaches and useful tools. However, while it is the scope of the literature that is its primary strength, it is also its chief weakness. Lundberg (1997) comments that "the literature appears fragmented and discursive as best – most likely because consultancy is at present underconceptualized" (Lundberg, 1997, p 193). The result is that readers of the literature are provided with little guidance on how to assess the different themes within the material. This would not be important if organisational consultants viewed themselves as members of an identifiable profession. But individuals come to organisational consultancy by a number of different paths, and they are not always aware of the main theoretical frameworks that are accessible.

This was not a problem in the early days of organisational consulting. As the first consultants followed the thinking of Taylor (1911) and Mayo (1933), their advice to their clients was guided by rigorous conceptual paradigms. While some commentators (see for example Huczynski, 1993 and Locke, 1988), have emphasised the practical nature of these "theorists", in the absence of any integrative theory of management and organisational behaviour they provided the most robust foundation possible at the time.

However, as the number of consultants grew, the link between a consultant's actions and his or her "theoretical base" was weakened, and consulting tools began to be developed which were not linked to a conceptual base. The result was the emergence of consultants who had no sense of how their techniques were related to theories of change or organisational development. Collins (1996) makes this point with some force, when he agues that the

> admittedly rather loose, grouping of consultants and gurus, charged with reshaping management and reshaping our thinking about management, has turned its back on the most fundamental aspect of social analysis – that theoretical reflection and analysis are indispensable - and has, instead, attempted to walk a "practical path", a path which eschews theoretical reflection and which encourages the management reader and the student of management to do likewise (Collins, 1996, p 66).

Given the large numbers of consultants operating, and the variation in the way in which they are educated today, it may be supposed that this group dominates the population of organisational consultants.

In practice this means that one consultant may review a client's long-term plan and recommend a strategy that makes use of an inter-organisational network. In a similar

situation another consultant may focus on the client's process, and recommend that the organisation's members be asked to contribute - which may or may not result in an inter-organisational network being created. While there may be a relationship of the actions of these two consultants to their "base disciplines" of management science or organisational behaviour, it is unlikely. For most consultants the link between theory and practice is not explicit.

The difficulty that this situation creates is that there is no rigorous internal debate about the practice of consulting that includes the perspectives of both management science and organisational behaviour. Nor is there sufficient research that uses these perspectives to address the practice of consulting both at a conceptual and a practical level. In the absence of this debate practising consultants make their way as best they can, picking up techniques and management formulae from their reading and their experience, both of which are likely to be influenced by the writings of the latest management guru (Huczynski, 1993; Massey, in press; Massey & Walker, 1999a).

The difficulty is that as time goes by more is written about the topic that makes no link between practice and theory, the practitioner-focused writing that was referred to in the previous section, *The practice of organisational consulting,* begins to gain currency. While Schaffer's (1995) "multiplicative approaches" are not necessarily a bad thing, the suggestion that the consultant of the 1990s should operate in a "new" way may lead some to reject their theoretical paradigms of management science and OD. Clearly there is most risk of this occurring for those consultants who are unaware of their conceptual framework. These consultants will do more than reject the limitations of a single model; they will take this advice as the opportunity to work "outside theory".

In this study, it was this possibility (that consultants may be unaware of their theoretical underpinnings) that provided the researcher with one of the points of focus for examining the role of the consultant during an assignment where the client is engaged in enterprise development. This issue is examined in detail in *Chapter 7: The third research cycle – A focus on professional development.*

However, in more general terms the literature review provided the underpinning for the whole study. In particular the review provided the researcher with a body of knowledge on organisational consulting. This was useful to the researcher in two ways. Firstly the

researcher was able to assess the consultants' understanding and application of this knowledge. Secondly, the researcher was able to disseminate important elements of the body of knowledge to the consultants. These dual uses of the literature in the context of the study are described in the chapters that deal with the research cycles (Chapters 5 - 7).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND EXECUTION

"Organisational inquiry is currently characterised by two broad approaches. One is methodologically precise, but often irrelevant to the reality of organisations; the other is crucially relevant, but often too vague to be communicated or believed by others. We need to find ways to improve the relevancy of the one, and to improve the precision of the other" (Evered & Louis, 1981, p 392).

In Chapter 1 the researcher described the factors that had resulted in her interest in exploring the role of the external consultant in enterprise development. These included her own personal consulting experience, the growing revenues generated by the consulting industry internationally and the continuing search for excellence exhibited by today's managers. An additional factor was the state of the literature on organisational consulting. Despite the extensive nature of this literature, the researcher's assessment (as detailed in the concluding section of Chapter 2) was that the literature is too large for individual consultants to become familiar with. As a result, they tend to focus on learning about specific approaches to the practice of consulting (such as TQM and BPR), rather than its theoretical foundations.

On the basis of these factors the researcher identified the central aim of the study, which was to examine the role of the consultant during an assignment where the client organisation is engaged upon a search for organisational improvement, (for the purpose of this study labelled "enterprise development"). At this point the researcher also identified an initial set of research objectives:

1. To evaluate the potential role of the consultant in ED, by identifying the effects of interventions carried out by consultants in the context of an assignment.

2. To identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers.

3. To identify the key aspects of an organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate ED, with particular reference to interventions that seek to influence organisational and individual learning.

4. To assist consultants and their clients to maximise ED outcomes.

The content of the literature (as well as its omissions) was the focus of Chapter 2, which was divided into four sections. Under the headings the *Context for organisational consulting*, the *Practice of organisational consulting* and the *Outcomes of organisational consulting*, the researcher summarised the important themes. At the conclusion of the chapter, in the section *Categorising what is known*, the researcher noted the scope of the literature, and the difficulties that its extensive nature presents for practising consultants. As noted above, one of these difficulties is that there is simply too much material for any one consultant to comprehend. As a consequence, there is a tendency amongst organisational consultants to choose a particular area of specialty, drawing upon the literature that is specific to a single area. The likely result is that many consultants are not familiar with the main theoretical frameworks that exist.

The five sections of this chapter describe the research plan that was developed in response to the research objectives and the context that was revealed by reviewing the literature. In the section *Engaging in research*, the researcher provides an account of her experience of preparing for the research encounter. She then describes the process of planning in the section *Preparing to research*. This involved identifying the factors that influenced the research design, and using these factors to guide the initial research strategy. In *Designing action research* she outlines some of the strengths and limitations of the methodology that was chosen, and introduces the methods that she initially identified as appropriate. This is followed by a description of an early research cycle in the section of the same name. In conclusion the researcher describes the changes that were made under the heading *Modifying the research plan*.

ENGAGING IN RESEARCH

"A view of research as engagement stresses that research is not just a question of methodology, for method is but part of a wider process that constitutes and renders a subject amenable to study in a distinctive way. The selection of method implies some view of the situation being studied, for any decision on how to study a phenomenon carries with it certain assumptions, or explicit answers to the question 'What is being studied?'" (Morgan, 1983, p 19).

Preparing to undertake research with human subjects challenges the researcher intellectually, physically and emotionally. The research process not only requires a

focused mind and a strong constitution, but an ability to articulate one's own values and the way in which they relate to the "research engagement" as noted by Morgan (1983). In effect, the researcher is being challenged to apply all of his or her self to the research process, a potentially powerful experience that can result in personal growth as well as professional contribution (Torbert, 1991). The underlying notion is of "the total person as a research method" (Moustakas, 1981, p 210). This situation has parallels with the consultancy process (Harrison, 1995) and action research, and in the literature on the latter area there are comments on the significant demands of study for the action researcher (Chisholm & Elden, 1993; Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993; McNiff Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). In particular the high level of collaboration and the eclecticism and diversity of the process that evolves are identified as factors that create challenges for the action researcher (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993).

However, references to how the individual can deal with the demands of engaging in research are rare in the literature. While the researcher as objective outsider is now acknowledged as one way only of looking at research, and there is a growing body of literature on different "non-positivist" approaches to research, these references (such as (Berg, 1989; Lawler, Mohrman, Mohrman, Ledford, & Cummings, 1985), are primarily philosophical in content. For researchers willing to explore the boundaries of "research" in *practice*, and wanting to engage more than their brains in the research process, there are far fewer sources of pragmatic advice.

Much of what can be found comes from researchers describing their own research experiences, with some of the most striking coming from those dealing with situations in which their emotions are affected by the very topic of study. In an account that is arresting because it is written by an individual taking the role of *researcher*, rather than *therapist*, Moustakas (1981) talks about his study of loneliness in a deliberately personal way:

> My way of studying loneliness, in its essential form, was to put myself into an open, ready state, into the lonely experiences of hospitalized children, and to let these experiences become the focus of my world. I listened. I watched. I stood by. In dialogue with the child, I tried to put into words the deep regions of his experience. Sometimes my words touched the child in the interior of his feelings, and he began to weep; sometimes the child formed words in response to my presence, and thus he began to break through his numbness and the dehumanizing impact of the hospital

atmosphere and practice. At this point, loneliness became my existence. It entered into every facet of my world - into my teaching, my interviews in therapy, my conversations with friends, my home life. Without reference to time or place or structure, somehow (more intentionally than accidentally) the theme came up. I was clearly aware that exhaustively and fully, and in a careful manner, I was searching for, studying, and inquiring into the nature and impact of loneliness. I was totally involved and immersed in this search for a pattern and meaning which would reveal the various dimensions of loneliness in modern life (Moustakas, 1981, p 211).

A similar description of research as an all encompassing experience comes from Collin, who comments "from the start there was a parallel between the subject of research and the way that I studied it, for I was engaged in a *learning process* as I struggled to find an appropriate methodology" (Collin, 1981, p 385).

These experiences are more than interesting anecdotes of "life in the field"; they are concerned with appropriate responses to particular research situations. In the context of loneliness, Moustakas' choice of response was a "strategic choice"; entering into the situation with his emotions allowed him to gather more data. Described in this way, Moustakas' research method seems to have an inherent logic - as the most appropriate method for the situation. His own self-awareness allowed him to identify an emotional response, not just as "acceptable", but as having value in the process of gathering and making sense of data. But this interpretation (of the engagement of the whole person as a pragmatic choice) is unfairly narrow, failing to recognise that Moustakas is one of a growing number of researchers who are consciously engaged in "new paradigm research", an approach which offers alternatives which "do justice to the humanness of all those involved in the research endeavour" (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p xi).

NEW PARADIGM RESEARCH

In their major work on new paradigm research Reason and Rowan describe it as the outcome of a search for an approach which moves beyond "naïve enquiry" and at the same time is in contrast to the "dead knowledge" they see as produced by orthodox objective methods (Reason & Rowan, 1981). Their aim is to produce "a synthesis of naïve enquiry and orthodox research, a synthesis which is very much opposed to the antithesis it supersedes" (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p xiii). The result of this commitment to synthesising the strengths of new forms of enquiry as well as orthodox research is an approach that draws upon individuals and groups spread throughout the behavioural

sciences. As such, its proponents argue that new paradigm research is able to act as a focus for the various streams of "non-positivist" or relativist researchers, able to convey a sense of unity in a disparate field, while retaining the richness provided by the proponents of different methods, including action research (Reason & Rowan, 1981; Reason, 1988).

For researchers attempting to render "a subject amenable to study", (Morgan, 1983, p 19), and committed to "doing justice to all those involved", these concepts, and the examples of new paradigm research in practice such as those provided by Moustakas and Collin (both 1981), provide a set of principles that help the individual researcher to remain true to the issues of importance once a study is begun.

The most important of these principles, as identified by new paradigm researchers as well as others interested in exploring the philosophy of research as well as its practice (for example, Bartunek, Bobko, & Venkatraman, 1993; Berg, 1989), is the need to "site ourselves" within the research, to recognise that "research involves an interaction between the scientist [1] and the object of investigation" (Morgan, 1983, p 12). As Morgan goes on to explain, this need is based on a practical principle, that

> scientists engage a subject of study by interacting with it through means of a particular frame of reference, and what is observed and discovered in the object ... is as much a product of this interaction and the protocol and technique through which it is operationalized as it is of the object itself (Morgan, 1983, p 13).

Morgan concludes "this view emphasizes the importance of understanding the frameworks through which scientists engage their object of investigation" (Morgan, 1983, p 13). Popper's perspective is similar; "we all have our philosophies, whether or not we are aware of this fact, and our philosophies are not worth very much. But the impact of our philosophies upon our action and our lives is often devastating" (Popper, 1979, p 33).

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[1] Despite the explicit use of the term "scientist" in this discussion, it is the researcher's view that Morgan could have used "researcher" as an alternative, and notwithstanding the discussion of "science" and "not-science" that exists in the literature, this was not a debate that Morgan was entering at this point.

While the importance of the researcher's frames of reference is not recognised by all those who undertake research, it has a particular relevance to new paradigm researchers: while their positivist colleagues enjoy their position as part of the historically dominant intellectual tradition, non-positivists can feel simultaneously isolated and excited by their different experience of research. The level of engagement that can potentially occur for new paradigm researchers can truly lead them to agree with Morgan's insight; "in research, as in conversation, we meet ourselves" (Morgan, 1983, p 405).

In the following section the researcher describes her approach to the research engagement, in the light of her exploration of some of the literature on new paradigm research. This approach was based on her commitment to designing a plan that took account of the particular characteristics of the research context, and which also acknowledged the current debates on research.

PREPARING TO RESEARCH

Any planning exercise, whether related to research or not, invariably involves an element of tension between foreseeable and unforeseeable events, formal structures and dynamic processes; the "act" of planning and the "plan" as an outcome. The plan itself is usually based on careful and rational thought, but to be successful needs enough flexibility to accommodate the moments of serendipity and insight that cannot be predicted. A research plan is no different; it has a rational basis (the aim of the study) and carefully structured components (the research objectives) but also needs to be flexible in order for unplanned elements to be integrated into the research in a way that enriches the original purpose.

The outcome of this approach can be a dynamic process, where planned elements interact with unplanned elements, creating a piece of research that is grounded in theory as well as field work. However there is a need to ensure that the resulting plan remains consistent with the original conception and this is where identifying the research parameters becomes essential. These parameters act as loose boundaries for the research, providing the researcher with a set of guidelines that can be used at any time as a "check" on the emerging research design.

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In the present study the researcher had a clear sense of the aim of the study and the objectives that she wished to achieve at its completion. These became the primary parameters for the research. However, before she became involved in the research design as described by a number of commentators on the topic (for example, Cooper & Emory, 1991; Sekaran, 1992), she was determined to first identify any other factors that would have the potential to influence its development.

In approaching this task she primarily used the two contributions to the literature already described in Chapter 1, and depicted in Figures 1.2 and 1.3. The first offering was Crotty's (1998) framework, in which he identified four elements that inform one another in the research design; epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods.

The second was the three-point framework presented by Morgan (1983). In this framework Morgan suggests that the best way for researchers to approach research design is to first identify their personal "constitutive assumptions" or underpinning paradigms, and their "favoured methodologies", *before* comparing these to the "theoretical frameworks" provided by the literature. He argues that this process will provide individual researchers with a way of approaching a particular topic of study, which is based on their personal needs as well as the traditions within a field of research. In collaboration with Smircich (1980), Morgan emphasises the importance of considering these issues. They state

> the case for any research method ... cannot be considered or presented in the abstract, because the choice and adequacy of a method embodies a variety of assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and the methods through which that knowledge can be obtained, as well as a set of root assumptions about the nature of the phenomena to be investigated (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p 491).

As she prepared for the research encounter the researcher reflected upon the frameworks provided by Morgan (1983) and Crotty (1998). Despite the contrast between their approaches, with Morgan emphasising the researcher's "personal constitutive assumptions", and Crotty focusing on the need to understand the implicit relationship between the four levels of his model, the researcher could also see their commonality. In particular, it was clear to the researcher that both authors recommended a structured approach to research design, based on a number of inter-related factors, rather than a

single determinant. This multi-factor approach was the most important consideration in the researcher's preparation for the study, as described in the following sections.

In *The philosophy of research design*, the researcher examines the epistemological choices that were open to her as she embarked upon the research. Following this, in the section *Drawing upon the literature*, the theoretical contributions revealed as a result of the literature review are identified. In the section titled *Synthesising the factors*, the researcher describes how the parameters for the study were provided by the research objectives, the theoretical frameworks from the literature and the factors that related to the philosophy of research design. The researcher then describes how she examined the interrelationship of the parameters. The final result of this process is that the researcher is able to identify three principles that were used to guide the development of the research strategy.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RESEARCH DESIGN

Following Morgan's three-point framework and the four elements proposed by Crotty, as well as her own interpretation of these two models (as emphasising the importance of taking a structured approach to research design), the researcher's first step was to identify some of the possible epistemological positions that it is possible for researchers to take. In Crotty's terminology, these positions range from objectivism, which "holds that meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness", to constructionism, where "meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world", and subjectivism, where "meaning does not come out of an interplay between subject and object but is imposed on the object by the subject" (Crotty, 1998, p 8). This perspective is identical to that of Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe (1991), who identify a number of possible epistemological positions that exist. Building upon the work of Morgan and Smircich (1980), they present a continuum that suggests there are six different positions that researchers may take, from "subjectivist to objectivist" (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p 25).

In the context of this continuum, the researcher identified her position in relation to the present study at the subjectivist end of the scale. This position was derived partly from the researcher's own view of reality as "socially constructed rather than objectively

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determined" (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p 24). However, a more important factor was her understanding of the study's participants: Her prior experience as a consultant (as described in Chapter 1), suggested that they would be more comfortable with commenting upon the "social construction" of the situation of a client assignment rather than on its "objective truths". This notion is explored further on page 103.

This identification of the subjectivist position as appropriate for the study provided the researcher with a basis for examining the implications of this position in relation to choosing suitable methods. Here she drew upon the advice of Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991), who argue that it is not possible to design research in the absence of a philosophical awareness on the part of the researcher. They maintain that understanding the main research traditions assists the researcher to contextualise the particular study and to ensure that the component parts of a research plan (the philosophical context, the strategy, the methods) combine to form a coherent whole. In the context of understanding the main research traditions the researcher made use of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) framework.

This framework (presented in this chapter as Figure 3.1, and introduced initially as Figure 1.3) is helpful in understanding the research literature and its various strands, particularly the contributions that identify the different ways of approaching research. In this literature it is common for continua to be identified with pairs of concepts that are seen to be in opposition to one another. As a result the new researcher becomes familiar with the vocabulary of the profession: able to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative (Morgan & Smircich, 1980), insiders and outsiders (Evered & Louis, 1981), emic and etic (Morey & Luthans, 1984), positivistic and phenomenological (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991), and ideographic and nomothetic (Morey & Luthans, 1984). But the ability to distinguish between the terms is not the same as being able to apply their concepts to a particular study. For this to be possible the researcher needs an understanding of the relationship of the different continua *to one another*.

This is the value of Figure 3.1, in which Burrell and Morgan (1979) present a way of approaching the research process in terms of four different perspectives. This presentation is similar to Crotty's (1998) framework, with its four levels, but the advantage of Burrell and Morgan's approach is that they apply labels to the extremes of each dimension. The result is that it is possible to group the terms emic, subjective and

idiographic together, as a cluster of similar concepts. As their diagrammatic representation demonstrates, for Burrell and Morgan there is a natural "grouping" of concepts, as essentially "subjective" or "objective" in character.

Figure 3.1: Burrell and Morgan's subjective-objective dimension

The subjectivist approach to
social science

The objectivist approach to
social science

Nominalism	Ontology	Realism
Anti-positivism	Epistemology	Positivism
Voluntarism	Human nature	Determinism
Ideographic	Methodology	Nomothetic
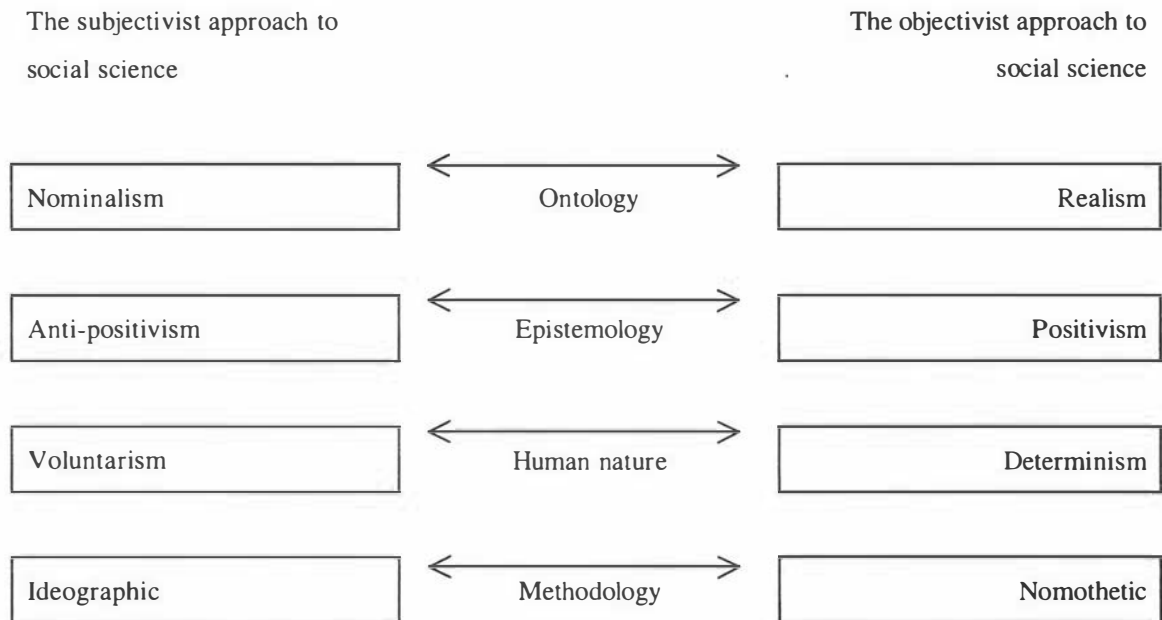
(Source: Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p 3).

While it could be argued that the simplification of complex concepts into a single dimension (subjective cf. objective) has its limitations, there are two advantages to the approach. Firstly, the notion that "subjective" is related to nominalism, anti-positivism, voluntarism and an idiographic approach to choosing methods conveys a "richer" sense of subjectivity than is normally the case. For the researcher seeking to understand a single concept such as "positivism", this is helpful, and leads to a greater clarification of a particular piece of research. Secondly, Burrell and Morgan are able to use the single dimension that they have created as the basis for identifying "four paradigms for the analysis of social theory" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p 22).

The resulting framework has a number of uses, allowing researchers to "map" the major theories that relate to organisations, to locate their own study within this map, to identify the major pieces of research within their discipline, and to gain an understanding of the way their disciplines relate to others.

In the context of this study the framework allowed the researcher to consider some of the paradigms that have influenced the study of organisations. This consideration was a further factor in the choice of an initial research strategy, as detailed in the section *The initial research strategy*.

Figure 3.2: Paradigms for the analysis of social theory

THE SOCIOLOGY OF RADICAL
CHANGE

	Radical humanist	Radical structuralist	
SUBJECTIVE			OBJECTIVE
	Interpretive	Functionalist	

THE SOCIOLOGY OF REGULATION
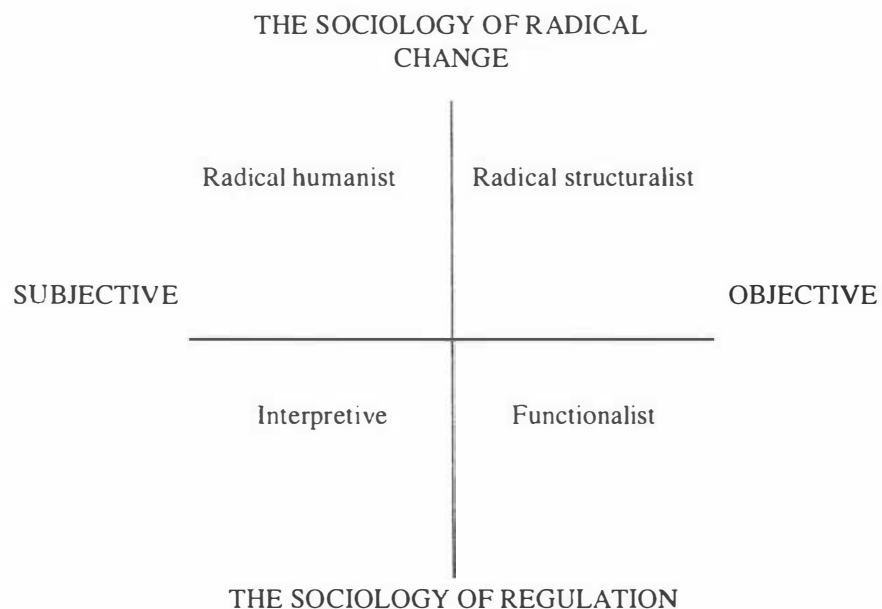
(Source: Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p 22).

As already noted (see p 93), the researcher had already identified the essential similarity between the approaches of Crotty and that of Morgan: both emphasise the importance of researchers taking a structured framework to selecting their research strategies. At this point the researcher had considered a number of issues, and had identified the subjectivist approach as the most appropriate for the current study, based on the characteristics of the research participants. The choice of this epistemological position was the most important outcome of this consideration, as it implied that certain methodologies would be more appropriate than others would. A further influence on the research plan was the literature on the topic of organisational consulting. The way in which the researcher identified the most important elements of the literature is described in the following section.

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Drawing upon the literature

"Sound research leads to systematic theory; yet systematic theory is needed to guide sound research" (Argyris, 1970, p 14).

The third factor that was considered prior to the development of a research strategy (in addition to the research objectives and the factors relating to the philosophy of research design), was the set of theoretical frameworks that the researcher identified as potentially relevant to the study after reviewing the literature. As the review in Chapter 2 demonstrated, the literature that can be drawn together in the context of a study into organisational consulting is extensive. In addition, there is no single accepted disciplinary base that dominates. Rather, there are a number of key disciplines, such as management science and organisational behaviour that provide the basis for the bulk of the contributions, as well as others that are significant to organisational consultants, (for example, psychology), but which are less important in the present study. As the literature review demonstrated, these disciplines provide the practising consultant with a number of key frameworks.

To ensure that the research design was fully informed by the literature on organisational consulting, the researcher sought to identify those frameworks that had appeared to be most significant, (as demonstrated in the literature review), and that appeared to be most relevant to the research questions.

The frameworks that were selected at this point (in advance of the start of the fieldwork) contributed to the study by giving the researcher a way of understanding some of the key concerns that were inherent in the research question. These included the way in which the client and consultant understood their relationship, and the way in which the consultancy interventions affected the client system.

In terms of the client-consultant relationship, the researcher first focused on identifying the various approaches that have been developed to describe client-consultant relationships and the process through which they are formed. This process is described in the literature (as noted in Chapter 2 in the section *The consulting process*) by a variety of models, ranging from the linear "step by step" model (e.g. Kubr, 1996) to one which presents the process as one of overlapping stages (for example, Cockman, Evans & Reynolds, 1992; Margerison, 1988; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). This last model (Ring &

Van de Ven, 1994) provided the most helpful foundation for the researcher in understanding the way in which clients and their consultants perceived their relationship.

A further theoretical framework was identified to assist the researcher to understand the way in which the interventions that were selected related to the client system. At this point the researcher had not identified any consultants who may have been interested in taking part in the study, nor had any fieldwork started. However, she had made the preliminary assessment that enterprise development (ED), as defined in Chapter 1, would have some differences from organisational development (OD) that would emerge through the course of the study. Despite this assessment, the researcher also envisaged substantial similarities between the two approaches. As a result of this assessment that ED and OD would be shown to be related to one another, the researcher identified the model of OD as a key framework, where OD is

> a planned, systematic process in which applied behavioral science principles and practices are introduced into ongoing organizations toward the goal of increasing individual and organization effectiveness. The focus is on organizations and making them function better, that is, on total system change. The orientation is on action-achieving desired results as a consequence of planned activities. The target is human and social processes, the human side of organizations. The setting is real organizations in the real world (French & Bell, 1995, p 1).

The dynamic characteristics of OD and process consulting demanded a similarly dynamic framework as an aid to understanding the behaviour of the individuals (consultants and clients) involved within the consultancy intervention. This was provided by the third framework: experiential learning, which is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p38). This model represents learning as a process, with individuals going through a continuous cycle of having a concrete experience, reflecting on the experience, forming abstract concepts based on their reflections and testing the ideas in new situations. In this study all of those involved were engaged in learning, and the model appeared to offer the researcher a way of understanding the behaviour of individuals.

After completing the task of identifying an initial set of frameworks for the study, the researcher had access to three frameworks, which she had selected to provide her with a starting point for understanding the study's different aspects. Firstly, there was the Ring and Van de Ven approach (1994) to considering the way in which clients and their

consultants perceived their relationship. Secondly, there was the OD model (as represented by French and Bell, 1995) as a way of approaching the consultancy interventions in relation to the client system. Thirdly, there was Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning, which the researcher envisaged would help her to consider the behaviour of individuals within the consulting relationship.

Although the researcher recognised that other, potentially more appropriate frameworks could emerge during the course of the research, at this point she was satisfied with her identification of the important theoretical perspectives in the literature. She also concluded that the choice of the theoretical frameworks was consistent with the situation facing today's managers as described in Chapter 1. The key characteristics of this situation include the argument that the researcher presented in Chapter 1: that there is a "body of knowledge' for managers and organisational consultants. Unlike the body of knowledge that exists for some professions which is codified in a single source, the situation for consultants and managers is that their knowledge is not drawn from a single discipline. Rather, it is drawn from a number of disciplines. With the continued pursuit of organisational success by both these parties, and the fact that the ultimate formula for its achievement has not been found, the researcher had little choice but to select a set of frameworks that represented the different themes in the literature.

SYNTHESISING THE FACTORS

Morgan's approach to research makes it clear that the logic of a research strategy is embedded in the links *among* paradigms, metaphors and favoured approaches to "puzzle solving" (Morgan, 1983), as well as in relation to the research objectives. His use of "logic" is indicative of his belief that the researcher's "world-view" must be complemented by an appropriate methodological view, which is firmly related to the characteristics of the situation under study. The researcher drew upon this thinking as she reviewed the factors that she had considered in preparing for the research. She was particularly aware that as researchers approach a topic of study they consider a range of factors, both consciously and unconsciously. In this study the researcher attempted to *consciously* identify all of the factors that influenced her selection of appropriate research methods. As noted in the introduction to the section, her starting point was the research objectives, as listed in the introduction to this chapter.

The second point to be considered was the factors that related to the philosophy of research design. In the section titled *The philosophy of research design,* the researcher identified the epistemological position that seemed most relevant to the present study. This position was at the subjective end of Burrell and Morgan's (1983) subjective-objective dimension, also describedas subjectivism (Crotty, 1998).

The researcher then reviewed the literature; reflecting on the relevant theoretical frameworks within the field of study and considering examples of research carried out within these areas. This exercise produced the three frameworks introduced in the previous section: the consulting process, organisational development and experiential learning.

In the context of the study these three factors (the research objectives, the factors relating to the philosophy of research design and the frameworks that emerged from the literature) acted as the research parameters (as depicted in Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Parameters for the research
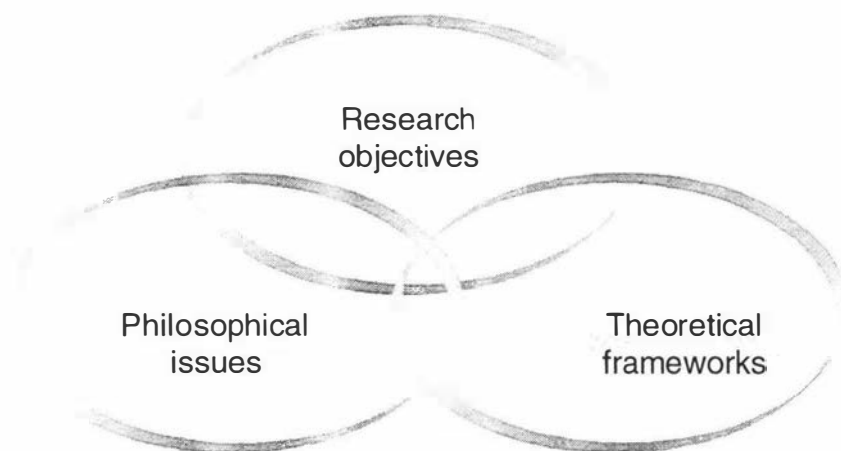
After considering the way in which these parameters overlapped, the researcher was able to identify a set of guiding principles for the research, which would in turn inform the development of an appropriate research strategy. Figure 3.4 (initially introduced as Figure 1.5) demonstrates how the researcher visualised the parameters interrelating, and lists the guiding principles that emerged.

The first principle was provided by the siting of the research at the subjective end of the epistemological continuum. Implicit in this positioning was a commitment to a phenomenological perspective, which "stems from the view that the world and "reality"

are not objective and exterior, but that they are socially constructed and given meaning by people" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 1991, p 24). They comment that this approach is useful if the researcher is seeking "to understand and explain *why* people have different experiences" (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p 24, italics added). By implication they conclude that an objectivist epistemology would not be appropriate in this same situation.

Figure 3.4: Synthesising the parameters to provide guiding principles for the research engagement
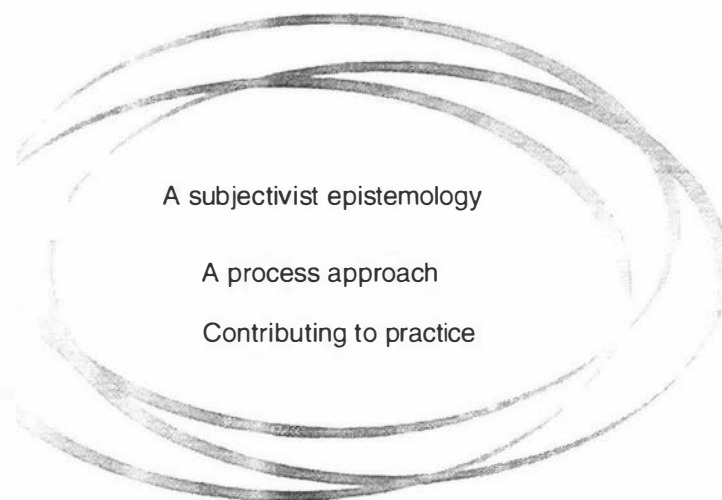
A subjectivist epistemology

A process approach

Contributing to practice

The second principle was provided by considering the dominant frameworks within the literature as they relate to the events that occur within a consultancy intervention. These frameworks describe consulting as a process, which is itself occurring within the context of "organisational processes". In addition, the researcher was engaged upon a "learning process". While the literature often represents processes as linear (see Kubr, 1996 on the consulting process, and Johnson and Scholes, 1993, on the process of strategy), an alternative way of depicting them is in terms of "cycles" of events (for example, see Kimberly and Miles, 1980 on the organisational life cycle). Given the researcher's experience of consulting, where the client's original "problem" was often redefined in the light of examination by the consultant, she considered that this would be the pattern most likely to be followed by the consultants in the study. As a consequence she adopted the non-linear or cyclical approach, and this provided the researcher with the second research principle.

The final principle that resulted from the synthesis of the three factors was provided by the applied nature of the research engagement. The issue here was that the research context should provide the opportunity for the researcher to contribute to practice whilst simultaneously developing theory. The challenge for the researcher was establishing a research engagement that allowed the researcher to become "close enough" to the individuals involved, and a "part of" the client-consultant relationship, while retaining the role of "researcher" (rather than additional consultant). In addressing this challenge the researcher found the distinction that Evered and Louis (1981) make between "inquiry from the inside" and "inquiry from the outside" provided her with a way of understanding different aspects of the research task, particularly the way in which the analytical categories within the research are "interactively emergent" (Evered & Louis, 1981, p 385). In this study the researcher adopted the approach of inquiry from the inside.

The three guiding principles provided a foundation for the researcher to examine the different research methodologies and methods (as differentiated by Crotty, 1998), and to assess their ability to contribute to the study in a way that addressed the principles effectively, while at the same maintaining the integrity of the data gathered. This led to an examination of the methods of "new paradigm research" described by Reason and Rowan (1981). Particular consideration was given to "action research", a methodology that is consistent with the principles of new paradigm research.

ACTION RESEARCH

Action research (AR) was considered as a research approach for this study primarily because of its ability to enable change and research to be simultaneous (e.g. Bunning, 1994; Chisholm & Elden, 1993), an important principle of the study, as noted earlier in the chapter. AR also appeared to have the potential to provide the most effective means of researching a situation where the participants were highly motivated to gain as much as possible from their participation in the study, and where the researcher was likely to be regarded as having the potential to actively contribute to the cases at the centre of the study.

To understand the potential of AR to contribute in the way described it is necessary to know something of its early proponents, and the situations surrounding its emergence as

a research form. The term itself is usually attributed to Kurt Lewin who used it to describe a way of "generating knowledge about a social system while at the same time attempting to change it" (Chisholm & Elden, 1993, p 121). Lewin and others working on separate continents during the 1940s were committed to two parallel actions; effecting social change while at the same time contributing to an improved public understanding of the importance of the issues being considered. Through the following decades these ideas (and their application) were further developed by researchers and consultants working within a wide variety of organisations. During this time their approaches (which in practice differed widely from one other) were described by a number of labels, including that of action learning, a term coined by one of the field's most enthusiastic proponents, Reg Revans (1982), and explored by any others, including Argyris, Putnam and McLain-Smith (1985).

The basic premise of AR (and its various forms, as noted below) is that change and research are not mutually exclusive. AR is therefore seen as a "way of investigating professional experience which link[s] practice and the analysis of practice into a single productive and continuously developing sequence" (Bunning, 1994, p 1), where knowledge development is the outcome (Gustavsen, 1993). This definition has implications for all of those involved. The central issue for the researcher is the provision of a context in which the *simultaneous focus* on "improving practice" and "developing theory" is possible, and yet where both do occur, without there being too much "action", and too little "research". As Bartunek (1993) comments, whilst discussing the approach to action research taken by Argyris and Schön (1991),

> on a macro level action research can be understood as intervention experiments within particular practice contexts in which action researchers simultaneously test hypotheses pertaining to the resolution of particular problems and attempt to effect a (hopefully) desirable change in the setting based on their hypotheses (Bartunek, 1993, p 1223).

In this definition the key difference between AR and traditional research is the dynamic relationship between the researcher and his or her socio-cultural environment. This concept is the focus of Bawden's (1991) work on the researcher as part of the research setting, where he or she works with co-enquirers to learn about the issues that are important *within* a particular system – rather than standing outside it as an objective systems analyst. Bawden (1991) describes this as a "structurally coupled action

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researching system" (Bawden, 1991, p 26). This critical relationship between the researcher and a particular environment is also emphasised by Zuber-Skerritt (1992) and Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992), who claim that AR is characterised by three things. These are "a group of people working together; involved in the cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on their work more deliberately and systematically than usual; and a public report of that experience" (Perry & Zuber-Skerritt, 1992, p 197).

The effect of this definition is to emphasise the similarities between action research and other tasks that may be undertaken by a manager in the context of organisational improvement. This concept (that AR, or its related field of action learning, is not dramatically different to the normal tasks of organisational life) is one of the many strands in the AR literature. For example, Morgan and Ramirez (1983) argue that action learning is valuable as a way of encouraging "the use of intelligence and initiative amongst its members" (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983, p 6). Other examples of AR also stress its value to organisational members (see various examples in Whyte, 1991) and in other practice-based contexts such as journalism (McGregor, 1995).

However, it is precisely this similarity between the work of the action researcher and the manager that is the basis for those who criticise it as an approach. Despite the careful phrases of Bartunek's definition (noted above), which emphasises the scientific aspect of AR, some (including those who promote it as an approach, such as Bennett and Oliver, 1988) have doubts about its rigour. Some action researchers are clearly aware of this possible criticism, and are careful to describe their understanding of AR in the language of orthodox research. For example, Chisholm and Elden (1993), argue that action researchers "follow the normal rules of scientific enquiry and must have data collected systematically over time" (Chisholm & Elden 1993, p 128). On the other hand, others refute this position, commenting that rigour is a perspective that is based on an epistemological standpoint that is inappropriate to AR (Susman & Evered, 1978). The two sides of this debate are demonstrated in the divisions within the literature. While there is a significant area of the literature which attempts to address this issue directly, there are also those who ignore the question altogether, instead focusing on the way in which AR is practised (McNiff, 1988; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996).

At the centre of the practitioner literature are the various representations of the way AR is undertaken. A typical representation is the cyclical model of Figure 3.5, first introduced as Figure 1.6.

As this figure demonstrates, the action research process is different to the orthodox research process (as explicated for example by Emory & Cooper, 1991). By contrast with orthodox research, in AR each stage of the process deals with "action". In addition each stage is linked explicitly to a prior stage, in a cyclical, rather than a linear, fashion. Another difference between AR and traditional research lies in the way in which AR has a dual focus on practice and theory. This results in an approach which at a conceptual level is considerably different to that of orthodox research in terms of planning and implementation: whereas orthodox research is based on the researcher observing the subject in order to test an hypothesis (generated by the researcher), in AR the research question is developed through an interaction between the researcher and subject. This question provides an "agenda" for the practice component of the research, which is subsequently used as the basis for the theoretical component, which in turn is used to inform practice (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). As Susman (1983) makes clear, "action research is a general mode of inquiry that starts and ends in a concrete setting" (Susman, 1983, p 112).

Figure 3.5: The action research cycle
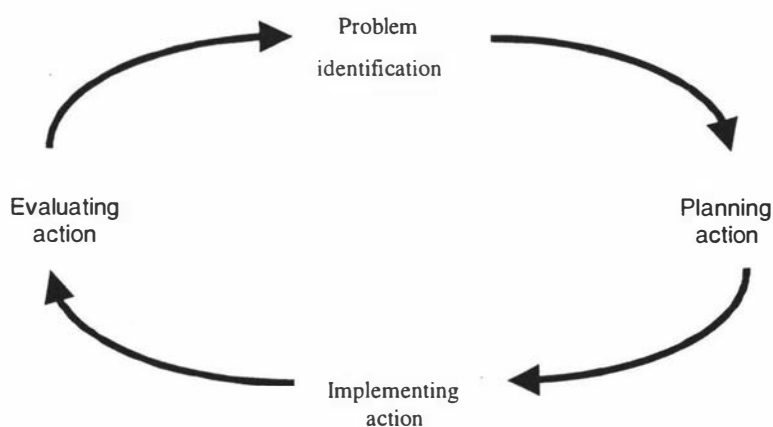
(Source: Adapted from Chisholm & Elden, 1993)

In other words, a further distinctive characteristic of AR is the involvement of the research subjects, or stakeholders. While acknowledging that there are different forms of

AR, (such as the "technical", "practical" and "emancipatory" types proposed by Carr and Kemmis, 1986, and those defined as "classical" or "emergent" by Chisholm and Elden, 1993), all involve the research stakeholders to a greater degree than is the case in traditional research. They may be involved in all stages of the research design; specifying the research issue, identifying a plan of action, monitoring the effectiveness of the action, and identifying what has been learned and how this should be communicated (Bunning, 1994). The "research team" can therefore consist of those experiencing the issues identified, (research sponsors), those attempting to solve the issue (research partners) and the expert researcher (Chisholm & Elden, 1993).

The form of AR in which stakeholder involvement is most evident is usually described as "participatory action research", (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993; Whyte, 1991), and has been described by these writers as both "a process and a goal" (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993, p 175). This sort of comment produces further challenges from those who oppose AR: the fact that some of its proponents argue that it is a research method that is "worthwhile" in its own right, implies that it is sometimes selected as a method irrespective of the characteristics of the research situation. This possibility is firmly rejected by Aguinis (1993), who argues that "AR and SM [scientific method] are two forms of inquiry that may be less distant philosophically than some recent comparisons have recognized" (Aguinis, 1993, p 417). He advises the researcher to heed Lewin's comments on the purpose of AR - not to "confront normal science but to expand it" (Aguinis, 1993, p 421).

This opinion, which emphasises the value of AR, so long as it is purposely selected as a method on the basis of the characteristics of the research environment, and undertaken in a thoughtful and systematic way, was followed by the researcher in the present study. Here the researcher's prior experience as a consultant ensured an orientation towards seeking to improve the state of the research participants, and·AR appeared to provide a way of balancing the tension between "change implementation" and "knowledge generation" as identified by Aguinis (1993). It was clear to the researcher that in the present study, where she was researching an area in which she had some professional expertise, this tension would exist, unless she selected a strategy that would minimise its possible effects.

In the present study it was clear that the research partners could include clients and consultants, and their expectation of the client-consultant relationship was a further factor in considering action research as an appropriate approach. Both groups have an understanding of the client-consultant relationship as a process where the consultant will *affect* the client and the client's organisation. In the same way as a consultant seeks to improve the state of the client organisation through selecting appropriate interventions, the tradition of action research aims to contribute to the situation being researched. This perspective derives from their "vision of how society or organisations could be improved" and action researchers "use the research process to help bring this desired future state into existence" (Chisholm & Elden, 1993, p 127).

In summary, the researcher's choice of AR was based on her consideration of a number of factors. Firstly, there was the researcher's commitment to benefiting the research participants (as embodied in the fourth research objective). Secondly, the researcher could foresee that the circumstances inherent in the study of client-consultant relationships (particularly her prior experience as an organisational consultant) would make it difficult for her to remain as an "outsider" while undertaking the research. Here she made use of Bawden's (1991) concept of the research setting as a system which the researcher becomes part of. Evered and Louis provide a similar idea in their 1981 discussion of the differences between "enquiry from the inside" and "inquiry from the outside". Thirdly, the literature suggests that AR has particular relevance to an organisational setting. While its application in organisational research is fairly recent, it is growing (Eden & Huxham, 1996), and the researcher was interested in exploring the potential of the methodology.

Lastly, the researcher considered the debates within the literature on AR that focused on the difference between AR and orthodox research. Given that the researcher had already identified a subjectivist approach as suitable for the particular demands of the research situation, it appeared that AR was consistent with this position.

However, although the factors listed above persuaded the researcher that AR was the most appropriate methodology for the study, she was aware of the potential challenges of its use, as identified by those who criticise it as a research method. To minimise the possible negative effects, the researcher decided to follow those action researchers who focus on the need to be rigorous in planning and undertaking AR.

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THE INITIAL RESEARCH STRATEGY

In action research *"we put our trust ... in the human process of critical curiosity"* (Reason, 1993, p 1268).

The factors discussed in the chapter up to this point indicated the need for a multi-faceted research strategy as a way of maintaining faith with the guiding principles, of a subjectivist epistemology, a process approach and contributing to practice (as depicted in Figure 3.4). This was a different approach to that taken by orthodox research, which generally focuses on identifying research objectives as the first (and sometimes only) step that is undertaken before the method is chosen. However, the approach taken in the present study was consistent with the principles on new paradigm research which the researcher has already acknowledged as the main methodological "reference point" for the study.

Consistent with this need for a multi-faceted approach, case studies were chosen as an appropriate research method, with action research adopted as the underpinning methodology (using the terminology of Crotty, 1998). This choice was based on the particular demands of the situation, namely the research objectives, which included the objective to provide the research partners with a learning experience while the study was underway; the issues relating to the philosophy of research design; the types of research emerging from the disciplines of management and organisational studies; and the researcher's commitment to retaining the "holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 1989, p 14). Case studies are described at length in the literature (Chetty, 1996; Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Larsson, 1993), and proponents of the method note that the case study is particularly appropriate for research that deals with questions of "how" and "why". "This is because such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequency or incidence" (Yin, 1989, p 18).

Given that the researcher had made a decision to use case studies in the context of AR (with its particular focus on the development of theory), she searched the literature for an approach to case studies that discussed the issues inherent in this use of the method. This she found in Eisenhardt (1989), who provides a roadmap of undertaking case studies that are theory generating. The process is described "step-by step", suggesting a

linear progression which is not always characteristic of case study research, but this is balanced by an acknowledgement of the iterative nature of the process. Movement between theory and data is described as "enfolding" the data within the literature, a description that effectively captures the experience of qualitative research.

In the section *Preparing to research*, the researcher has described her approach to the research engagement. In the following section she describes the specific tasks that were related to designing the research plan for the topic under study.

DESIGNING ACTION RESEARCH

"I tell what is for me a true story about the methodology of a research project. I shall describe firstly what it is that I was trying to learn about in the research; secondly, how I set about trying to learn about it (that is, the methodology as I intended it); thirdly, how I in fact went about learning about it (that is, the methodology as it turned out); and fourthly, what kind of learning this produced" (Sims, 1981, p 373).

The development of a research plan is essentially a response to the question "what is the best way to approach the research topic" within the context of the study. The "context" for the present study was provided by the guiding principles that were described in the previous section, after the researcher (following Morgan, 1983 and Crotty, 1998) examined the context issues; the research objectives, the literature and the factors relating to the philosophy of research design.

A further element of the context was provided by the researcher's decision to adopt action research as the research strategy. This decision had a major impact on the process of designing the research, with the action research model (as depicted in Figure 3.5) having distinct differences from that of the orthodox research process, for example, that presented by Emory and Cooper (1991). In addition to the differences already noted in the section *Action research*, is that whereas traditional research is usually conceived of as a single process, the adoption of the action research cycle usually leads to successive cycles, as shown in Figure 3.6.

Presenting the action research cycle in this way offers a deceptively simple view of an action research project, which in practice may be complicated by the participation of the research partners *at all points* of the cycle. Depending on the way the project has been

conceived, they can contribute to identifying the research objectives, planning the research methods, applying these methods to their own practice, and sharing in a final evaluation of the methods in relation to the objectives. The orthodox "research plan" does not have the same importance in an action research project, which instead focuses on the *act* of planning (and subsequent cycles of "acting", "observing" and "reflecting").

The guiding principle for these action cycles is similar to that described by Woods (1986) as "progressive focusing", where "gradually, particular items of interest begin to occur, or regularities appear that then come to act as a primary agency of selection in what to observe, and what to record of what one observes" (Woods, 1986, p 51). This implies that the research slowly evolves as the research team goes through successive cycles of professional reflection (Schön, 1991), which continue throughout the term of the study.

Figure 3.6: Consecutive cycles of action research
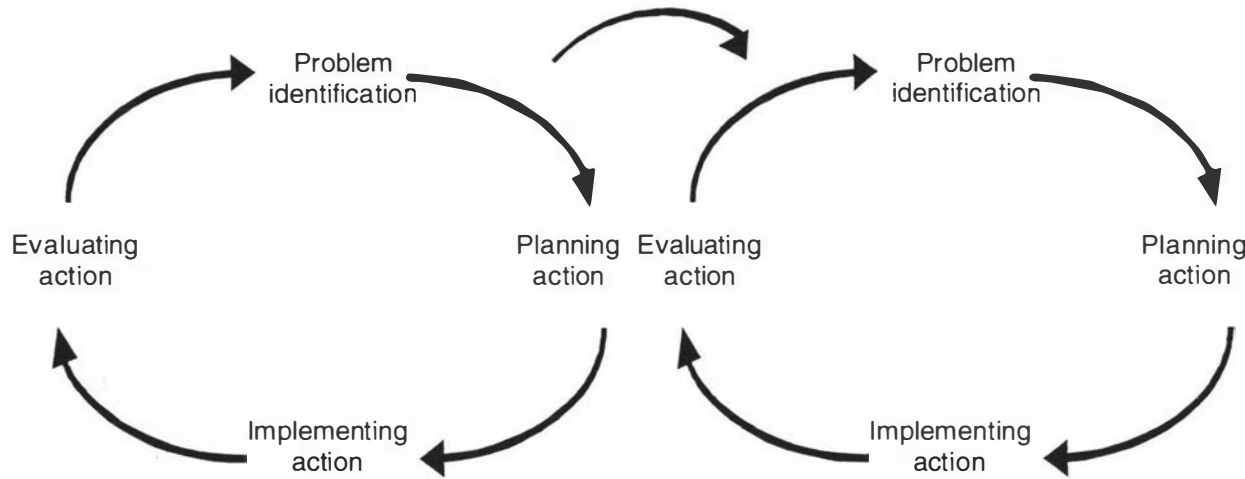
However, while depicting action research in this way clearly demonstrates the iterative nature of action research *cycles*, it overly simplifies the overall process of the research project within which the action research cycle is occurring. For the researcher needing a conceptual understanding of the way the research *project* and the research *cycles* fit together, Reinharz's (1981) representation offers a useful starting point.

Figure 3.7: The cognitive/action or work/being cycle of new paradigm researchers


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                        Acting &
                        evaluating

    Communication      ┌─────────────────────┐      Reflecting
    & planning         │ Evaluating the entire cycle │
                       │ in terms of its development │
                       │ of the person, the problem  │
                       │ & the method                │
                       └─────────────────────┘

                        Integrating
```
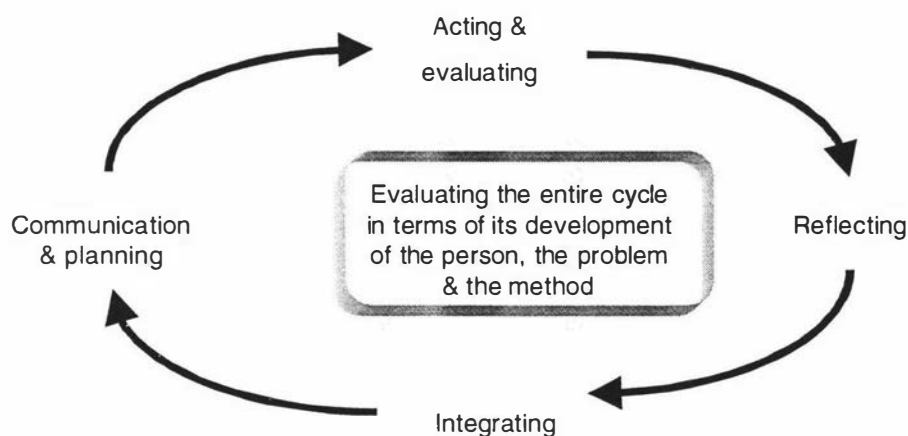
(Source: Reinharz, 1981, p 430).

This model effectively captures the cyclical nature of action research, while providing a framework for viewing the research that allows the researcher to stand at a slight distance from the "action". The use of a model such as this to give the researcher a sense of perspective is important, as "progressive focusing" has a way of "drawing the researcher in". As the action researcher soon discovers, both "standing back" and "becoming part of the action" are important if the research is to be successful.

WRITING ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH

"We must tell our stories complete with their frames" (Reason, 1993, p 1254).

As already noted, one of the consequences of using action research is that the research plan is not "complete" until the research process is concluded. This presents a challenge for the researcher in terms of documenting the process within the framework of a thesis. This framework provides an orthodox researcher with a forum for presenting the completed research plan without the need to display the uncertainties and doubts inherent in the journey towards that point. By contrast, the action researcher is forced to present the whole picture; the uncertainties and doubts as well as the emerging answers. The end result can appear to be unnecessarily lengthy, and the reader may begin to doubt the capacity of the researcher to cope, but it is essential if the reader is to understand the action research process in which it is impossible to separate research "methods" from "results". The considerable overlap between the two requires the researcher to document

the developing research process with as much attention to detail as is usually reserved for presenting data.

The structure of the final sections of this chapter attempts to address this difficulty, and follows Sims (1981) by dividing the material into three sections; what "I was trying to learn about in the research ... the methodology as I intended it [and] the methodology as it turned out" (Sims, 1981, p 373). These areas are covered in the sections *Research questions*, *Research methods* and *An early research cycle*.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study the researcher's aim was to contribute to understanding aspects of the role of the consultant during an assignment and the relationship between roles and subsequent organisational outcomes. The focus was the implied relationship between the consultant's actions, the client's reactions and the organisational outcome. Three broad research questions emerged immediately from this concern; "what does the consultant do", "how does the client respond" and "what is the result for the organisation".

Another factor in the development of the research questions was the findings of the literature review described in Chapter 2. This summarised the current thinking on organisational consultancy in terms of three themes; *The context for organisational consulting*, *The practice of organisational consulting* and *The Outcomes of organisational consulting*.

Combining these two factors (the researcher's aim and the literature) provided the researcher with the initial set of research objectives that were stated in the introduction to this chapter, namely, to evaluate the potential role of the consultant in ED, by identifying the effects of interventions carried out by consultants in the context of an assignment; to identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers; to identify the key aspects of an organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate ED, with particular reference to interventions that seek to influence organisational and individual learning, and to assist consultants and their clients to maximise ED outcomes.

Consistent with the principles of participation implicit in action research, the researcher was aware that the objectives identified at this point would be subject to discussion with

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the research partners (at this stage not identified), who in an ideal situation would commit to working on the research objectives side by side with the researcher. However, this could only occur once they had become sufficiently interested in the study to actively participate, and as Greenwood and his colleagues caution; "no one may mandate in advance that a particular research process will become a fully developed participatory action research project .... to view participation as something that can be imposed is both naïve and morally suspect" (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993, p 176). Participation is clearly a state that develops during the course of a study, and can be demonstrated only by the increased involvement of the research partners in decisions that affect them.

RESEARCH METHODS

While it is characteristic of action research to encourage the research partners to contribute to the data collection methods used, it is common for the researcher to develop a methodological starting point. This parallels the way in which the researcher can provide the team with an initial set of research questions, enabling them to focus on a specific task until such time as questions and appropriate methods emerge from the team itself.

In the present study the researcher considered a number of issues before developing an initial set of data collection methods. The first issue related to effectiveness. The literature on research methods (for example Gummesson, 1991; Patton, 1990) suggests that the researcher's task can often be described in terms of tension between the researcher and the individuals providing data; the researcher wishes to obtain data that is focused on the topic in question, without alienating the data sources by requesting too much of them. An implicit aim of any research design is therefore to minimise this tension, by choosing methods that provide as much relevant material as possible (without collecting such a narrow set of data that it fails to provide any insight into new areas) without needless waste. In this study the choice of action research already reduced this risk, with the research partners themselves having the opportunity to comment on the appropriateness of the data collection methods.

A second issue was the relationship between a consultant and a client. In this situation both parties have an immense amount at stake, and the relationship can be extremely

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precarious. This reinforced the need for extreme caution in the selection of research methods. It was clear that the research methods should aim to have as little impact as possible on the relationship between the client and the consultant, and be consistent with the intervention techniques used by the consultants themselves.

In terms of selecting research methods the case studies provided an obvious starting point. The researcher's initial plan was to establish a number of "research teams" to provide the case studies, and to become an integral part of each research team for the duration of the client assignment. It was envisaged that these research teams would have multiple functions, with each member gaining a different benefit. For the client the team could act as an extension of the consultant, providing an extra source of advice at no cost. For the consultant, the team had the potential to provide an informal "quality audit". For the researcher, the teams had a dual purpose: as the primary source of data and of additional ideas for new research methods. This duality of function is characteristic of both case studies and action research, where specific methodologies emerge from the research itself, resulting in a method which "draws in" an increasing number of "research strands".

LEVELS OF DATA COLLECTION

As part of the process of identifying appropriate methods for data collection, the researcher considered the type of data that the project was likely to produce. This exercise presented the researcher with a choice; of waiting until the collection was under way and letting an organising framework emerge from the data itself, or considering the different types in advance and preparing an initial analytical framework. While both approaches have their proponents, the researcher decided upon the prior development of a conceptual framework. Describing conceptual frameworks in terms of its levels of analysis, Klein, Dansereau and Hall (1994) claim "levels issues set the stage for data collection and data analysis" (Klein, Dansereau & Hall 1994, p 224). They go on to argue that without a preliminary picture of the components of the end product (the new theory) the researcher will not be able to identify the correct data levels effectively. This can hamper the progress of the research given the inter-relationship between data, data collection and data analysis: "levels issues create particular problems when the level of theory, the level of measurement, and/or the level of statistical analysis are incongruent"

(Klein et al., 1994, p 198). The inter-relationship among all three aspects is critical to ensure that from the earliest stage possible the researcher considers data in terms of its eventual contribution to theory. Inherent in this need to consider the relationship of data to theory is the need to consider the levels from which data is sought.

At this point of the study the researcher decided to focus on the *relationship between* the consultant and the client, and as a way of sharpening the focus of the data collection, the researcher attempted to identify the key elements of focus for the research. Following Van de Van and Poole's (1990) approach, three core constructs were identified that seemed to have the potential to be useful in studying the client-consultant relationship: effectiveness, impact, and satisfaction. The identification of these constructs followed Lippitt and Lippitt (1986), who suggest that clients and consultants find it simplest to focus on evaluating a consultancy intervention in terms of their "satisfaction" with the process – often assessed in very crude terms. As noted in Chapter 2, there is very little literature on the evaluation of consultancy interventions, and the model developed by the Lippitts was one of the few that offered a way of assessing an intervention on a number of different levels.

These three constructs (of effectiveness, impact and satisfaction) were then related to three data levels; the assignment (the project that the consultant was engaged to undertake), the intervention (an identifiable element within the context of the assignment, such as a meeting), and the event (an occurrence or non-occurrence within the context of an intervention). This identification of the event follows Van de Ven and Poole (1990) and Ring and Van de Ven (1994) who describe a process in which *events* are the unit of observation; "the use of an event as the unit of observation permits researchers to focus simultaneously on both organizational and individual units of analysis"(Ring & Van de Ven, 1994, p 112).

As a way of assessing how the core constructs could relate to the data levels once the field work had started, the researcher developed a matrix of the core constructs and the data levels (Massey, 1997). She used this matrix (represented as Figure 3.8) as an aid to developing her thinking on the research methods that would be needed, once it was clear what data would need to be collected. For example, her conjecture was that the clients would be able to comment upon their "satisfaction", both in relation to the assignment overall and in terms of a specific intervention. However, she felt it was unlikely that they

would be able to assess their satisfaction with an "event". In terms of the matrix, this meant that satisfaction was indicated as a construct that needed to be addressed both in terms of the assignment and the intervention.

Figure 3.8: The research matrix - constructs and levels

Core construct / Data level	Satisfaction	Effectiveness	Impact
Assignment	✔		✔
Intervention	✔	✔	
Event			✔

Similarly, at this stage in the study (before the fieldwork had begun), the researcher envisaged that effectiveness could be said to relate more closely to the intervention, compared to the assignment or event. Again, in terms of the matrix, this meant that effectiveness was indicated as a construct that needed to be addressed solely in terms of the intervention.

Although untested with the participants in the study at this point, this matrix did provide the researcher with a basis for selecting a preliminary set of data collection methods. Following Patton (1982, 1990) and others (Spradley, 1980; Tolich & Davidson, 1999; Walford, 1991), the researcher planned to use participant observation as the main approach to gathering data on the role of the consultant. Interviews were also identified as a key method that would provide both confirmation of the researcher's perception of what was occurring and complementary data on aspects of the study that could not be observed. Thus it was planned to use interviews both as a way of "checking" the data collection and collecting data when the researcher was not present.

To ensure that the preliminary selection of the research methods covered the core constructs, the research methods identified were added to the matrix presented in the previous section. As shown in Figure 3.9, this provided a way of matching the methods with the core constructs already discussed, and ensuring that each pair of concepts had at least one data collection method.

Figure 3.9: The multi-method matrix

Core construct Data level	Satisfaction	Effectiveness	Impact
Assignment	Interviews		Interviews Document review
Intervention	Observation Diaries	Observation Diaries	
Event			Observation Diaries

At this point the researcher did not attempt to formally select   a method for data analysis, following the comment by Easterby-Smith and his colleagues (1991); "if the researcher is undertaking her research from a social constructionist perspective, then she will attempt as far as is possible not to draw a distinction between the collection of data and its analysis and interpretation" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991, p 104). The researcher was also influenced by Wolcott's (1994) description of qualitative data being constructed from experience, through "description, analysis and interpretation" (Wolcott, 1994, p 9), and other accounts of dealing with qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss, 1987). This included the notion of progressive focusing already referred to at the beginning of the section *Designing action research*.

AN EARLY RESEARCH CYCLE

The fieldwork phase of the study began early in 1996, when a letter was sent to all consultants registered with the Manawatu and Wellington Business Development Boards. At the time there was a network of twenty-one Business Development Boards (BDBs). Since disestablished, at this time these crown entities administered the business development programmes of the New Zealand Ministry of Commerce. The letter, which was sent on behalf of the researcher by the Executive Directors of the two Boards, briefly outlined the research and invited the recipients to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study.

Around a dozen consultants contacted the researcher by telephone after receiving the letter, with a variety of responses. Some sought further information about the project, while others expressed their general support for the research while indicating that they were not prepared to take part themselves. Several of the respondents appeared to be interested in taking part if the researcher would commit to taking a certain role in a particular project. For example, one consultant was engaged upon a project that seemed to fit into the researcher's definition of enterprise development. However, he had contacted the researcher with the proposal that she should act solely in an auditing capacity, on behalf of the client, which was a sizeable crown entity. In this case the potential research partner's objective seemed to differ significantly from that of the researcher, and she made the decision not to enter into arrangements of this type.

The outcome of this stage of the process (which stretched over twelve months) was that five consultants agreed to further discussions about their participation, and the researcher wrote to each of them with further information. After receiving the information all five signalled that they were still interested in participating, and the researcher arranged to visit them to discuss the implications of their involvement further. At these meetings she explained the purpose of the research, and worked through the points in the consultant information pack (Appendix A).

The first consultant agreed to participate in the study in April 1996, after responding to the letter from the Manawatu Business Development Board, and receiving information about the project in the way described above. Dave Gaynor was the Managing Director of a Palmerston North consulting firm, FR Development. He and the researcher had met previously, and he was aware of her general interests and background.

The second consultant also agreed to participate in the study in April 1996. Lisë Stewart, the Client Services Director of The Training Company became involved in the study through her personal friendship with the researcher, and her strong interest in developing her own skills and the capacity of the business.

In July 1996 Carol-Rankin White expressed her interest in the study. Carol, an adviser with the Capital Development Agency (the economic development arm of the Wellington City Council) responded to the letter from the Wellington Business Development Board.

It was through the network of business advisers that Carol belonged to that Glen Horrex heard of the study. Glen, an adviser with the Palmerston North Enterprise Board contacted the researcher in April 1997.

The last consultant agreed to participate in the study in May 1997. Jo Innes, the principal of Partners in Performance, became involved in the study after the researcher's request had reached Virtual Consulting, a network of consultants based in Wellington and the Manawatu. The contact person for Virtual circulated the researcher's request to the network's members, and Jo responded.

Once they had agreed to take part, the consultants were asked to sign a research consent form (Appendix B). At this point they were invited to identify client assignments that could be suitable for the research, according to the criteria discussed with the researcher. Once a potential project has been identified the client was sent an information pack (Appendix C). If the client was interested in participating after reading the information a meeting was arranged between the client, the consultant and the researcher (this process is described in more detail in Chapter 4). Once agreement was reached their involvement was confirmed with a formal indication of consent (Appendix B).

PREPARING FOR FIELDWORK

In order to develop a complete picture of the relationship between the consultant's actions and the organisational outcomes, the researcher's aim was to become part of each research team for the duration of the client project, attending and participating in as many of the project meetings as possible. During this time data would be collected in the manner described in the previous section, through direct observation, interviews, diaries and document review.

Once the first client project was identified the researcher designed a set of data collection sheets for use when observing client-consultant interactions (Appendix D). In addition, the researcher planned to use project diaries, partly as a further way of checking on the researcher's observations, and partly to address the developmental focus of the study. These would be provided to the consultants at the beginning of each client project, and they would be asked to record their observations and send these to the researcher (Appendix E). In an extension of this idea, a data collection pack was also designed for clients (Appendix F).

In the context of the research a number of projects functioned as an "early research cycle". Defining the projects in this way was not always possible until after they had begun, and in fact the researcher only established one project team as an intentional "trial". However, the reality was that three projects were undertaken that were able to provide the researcher with a way of refining the design. In the following section these projects are briefly described, without revealing the identities of the consultants or the clients. This style has been adopted to focus the reader's attention on the way in which the project contributed to the refining of the research design, rather than the data it contributed.

The first project was a strategic planning exercise. The researcher was present at all the meetings, and the consultant appeared willing to "learn" from the experience. However, the consultant's focus tended to be on getting the researcher to "tell me where I went wrong", which had the effect of acting as a brake on the developing relationship between the client and the consultant. In the interest of the client, the researcher did not attempt to pursue the establishment of a research team with this particular client, although the consultant remained committed to staying involved.

The second project was a business capability assessment. The researcher was again present at all the meetings, and in this case the consultant had a clearer understanding of the way in which the action research process could work. The consultant sought feedback, discussed this with the researcher, was willing to try out new approaches in response to these discussions, and was interested in assessing the impact of any changed technique. However, in this case the client failed to become involved, seeing the consultant as an added barrier to the process that he had embarked upon. His lack of willingness to participate in the research team that the researcher and the consultant had begun to form demonstrated the consequences of an uninvolved client. Again, the researcher did not attempt to pursue the establishment of a research team with this client, although the consultant remained committed to staying involved.

The third project was a preliminary business assessment undertaken at a "business clinic". The clinic situation meant that it was not possible to forewarn the clients that there would be another person present at their initial meeting, and the meeting was begun with the researcher being introduced, and the client having the option of inviting her to

stay. The client did so, and it was the intention of the researcher and the consultant that when the client returned to the consultant then their permission would be sought to establish a research team to work on their project. However, despite the client's apparent composure, and her assurance that she would return to the consultant for further assistance, this did not occur. It seemed likely that the researcher's presence had had a negative impact on her ability to form a relationship with the consultant. After discussion with the consultant, the decision was made that the environment was not conducive to the research project, and that further projects would not be sought with the consultant.

The group of four remaining consultants was further reduced when the consultancy function of the Palmerston North Enterprise Board was disestablished, resulting in the redundancy of the business adviser, and his withdrawal from the study. The remaining three consultants remained part of the study until its conclusion in 1999. Over this time each worked on a number of different client assignments, and where suitable (and willing), successive clients were participants in new research teams.

REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The experience of these three initial projects enabled the researcher to draw a number of conclusions. Firstly, the broad research design appeared to offer the blend of stability with flexibility that was thought desirable: the consultants would stay the same, but the nature of each research team would be different according to the nature of the assignment and the characteristics of the client. This situation seemed to provide an effective way of meeting the dual needs inherent in action research: each research team provided the opportunity for the "improvement of consulting practice" (chiefly of benefit to the research partners), while the cumulative experience provided a way of "developing theory" (primarily of benefit to the researcher).

However, it was clear that some of the research methods worked better than others, and that the researcher would have to maintain a high level of flexibility in order to capture comparable data in different projects. For example, one consultant found the discipline of using the project diary difficult, and the researcher found that the only way of collecting his thinking on a particular project was to interview him. The researcher also found that the project diaries were unsuccessful in terms of the clients, who although willing to be interviewed, appeared unwilling to contribute their thinking in such a direct way through

diary entries. After the initial three projects the use of the project diaries was discontinued.

Thirdly, it appeared that the success of the research team depended on the attitude of the consultants and their clients to the study. For the consultants it was necessary for them to develop a sense of engagement in the process, while for the clients this degree of involvement seemed unnecessary. It was clear that the sense of involvement by the research partners would not happen immediately, and that the researcher would have to spend time working on the relationship, creating a climate of trust and credibility.

A related issue was the choice of action research, and the way in which the research partners understood this choice. At first, taking the advice of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, the researcher focused on the practical implications of being involved in an action research project, rather than discussing the philosophy of action research per se. While there were some merits in this advice, particularly in the initial stages, as time went on it became clear that the consultants needed to have a greater understanding of the approach, if they were to be able to fulfil their role as research partners.

Finally, there was a large amount of data emerging from the process which had not been predicted by the researcher. For example, the researcher's initial plan had been to use observation as the primary method for collecting data within the various interventions of an assignment. However, she had not predicted the number of meetings that would take place within a project, nor their demands upon her as an observer, both in terms of the number of people present and the length of the session. These issues meant that there were more field notes than the researcher had originally envisaged. As discussed in the next section, this situation influenced the researcher in her modification of the research plan.

MODIFYING THE RESEARCH PLAN

Reflecting on these issues, (that the overall research design appeared to be effective; that some data collection methods were more successful than others; the importance of the research partners and their clients having a positive attitude to the project; the large

amount of data), the researcher realised that some modifications to the research design were needed. In general terms, the purpose of these changes was to ensure that the research would meet the needs of the research partners as well as those of the researcher. The most important task for the researcher was to identify a model that would assist her to conceptualise the three elements of the study: the individual projects, the research cycles, and the overall research project.

A MODEL FOR LEARNING

The model that was selected was the model of "cognitive/action" developed by Reinharz (1981). The model (depicted in Figure 3.7) is built on the experiential learning cycle, and in the context of this study provided the researcher with a way of understanding her own "learning cycle". While this model was personally useful, the researcher also needed a way of viewing the learning cycles of the three research partners, and of relating these to one other. The challenge was to find a way of conceptualising the learning cycles of three individuals, who had different starting points for their involvement in the study, (according to their experience and interest), different styles of learning, and who moved from their starting points in different directions and at different speeds.

One way of approaching this challenge would have been to acknowledge the distinctive nature of each of the three learning processes and to conceptualise the overall learning in terms of *four* cycles; that of the researcher and of the three consultants. However, as the study progressed it became clear that this approach was not necessary. Over the course of the study the consultants began to converge in their thinking and use similar language to describe their involvement in the study. This was no doubt due in part to their frequent contact with the researcher, who consistently described the study in similar terms to each of the three consultants. But an additional factor was probably due to the consultants themselves, who as the study progressed became more aware of their abilities as consultants as well as their "developmental needs". While these *needs* remained specific to the individual, the *process* of identifying them was common to all. As a result, it was possible to describe a single learning cycle for all three, with each consultant using the act of learning as a framework to explore issues of particular interest.

One way of representing this "consultant learning cycle" was provided by the model of co-operative inquiry (Reason, 1994) as shown in Figure 3.10. This model helped the

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researcher to visualise the various components of the study; (the consultants and the client projects), and the process of questioning and answering that the research partners were engaged upon. But on its own the model implied that the researcher and the consultants were engaged in *exactly the same* process, and this was not the case. Not only was the researcher engaged upon a separate process (in terms of the research as a required element of enrolment in a university degree), but each research partner had contact with the researcher only and no formal contact with the other consultants. This meant that the researcher was the only party who was in a position to take an overview of the study.

By merging the two models already discussed in this section, the researcher developed a single model for the study, as shown in Figure 3.11. This representation emphasised that the researcher's learning and the consultants' learning cycles were related, yet had distinct differences.

Figure 3.10: Model of co-operative inquiry

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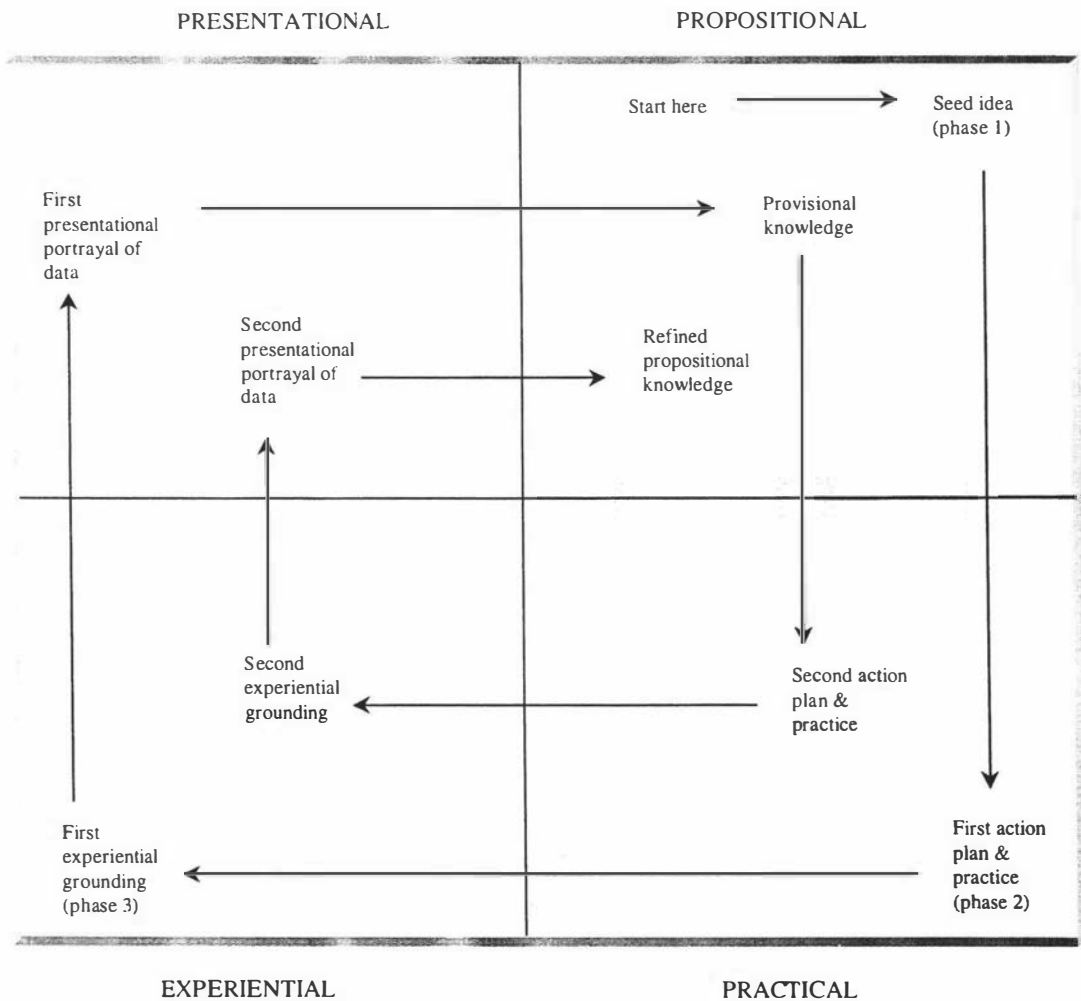
There were two advantages of using this model in the context of this study. Firstly, it allowed the consecutive research cycles to be compared, demonstrating that while a researcher may move through similar phases in subsequent cycles (in this model described as proposition, practice, experience and presentation) there is a difference in terms of "level". In this sense level indicates the concept of "depth", as the parties involved in the study move from a superficial exploration of the issues to a "critical and risk-taking exploration of their experience" (Reason, 1994, p 45). Given that there was more than one cycle in this study it was important to have a basis for comparing the cycles and their outcomes.

Secondly, the use of the model provided a way of integrating the researcher's learning cycle with those of the consultants, ensuring that the different learning cycles were maintained, while the links between them were explored. This was a useful device for the researcher, helping her to remain focused on the needs of the study overall, while remaining true to the intent of co-operative inquiry.

Figure 3.11: The study's multiple learning cycles
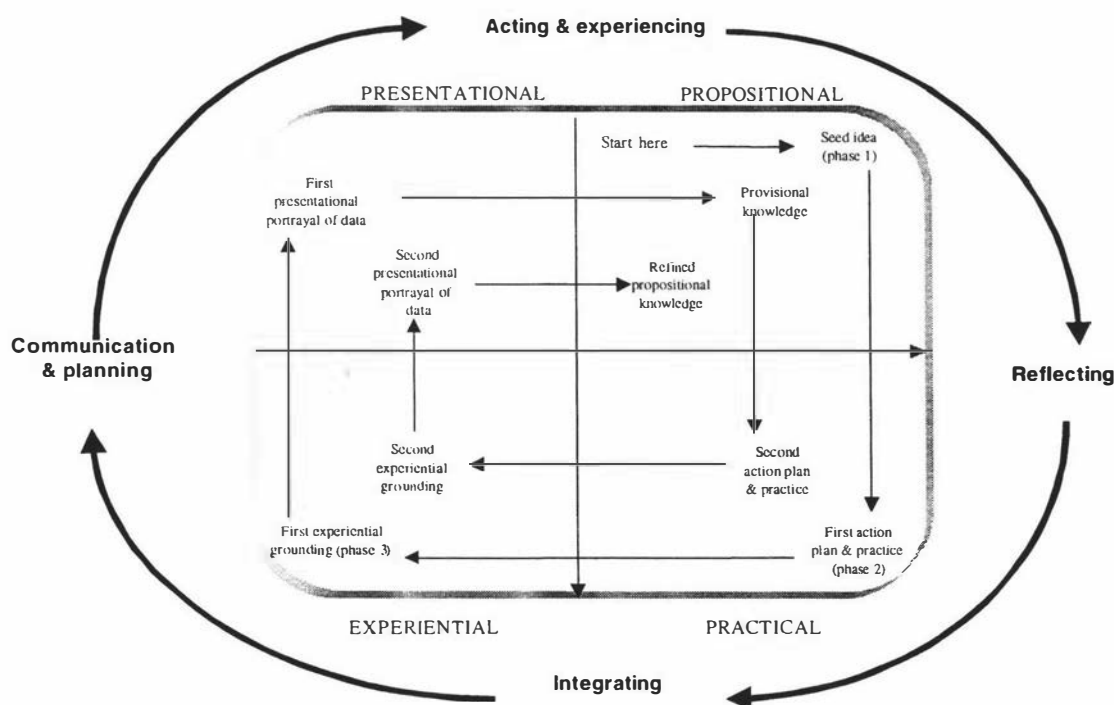
THE INITIAL PROPOSITION

One of the implications of formally representing the study as a series of learning cycles meant that the researcher had to identify a starting proposition. This was the statement: "that it is possible to identify the factors that influence consultancy outcomes by engaging in participatory research with individual consultants". This general statement was a way of presenting the researcher's latent hypothesis as identified in Chapter 1: that external consultants do have a role to play in ED, and that there may be ways to maximise the positive outcomes of their involvement.

This thinking marked the end of the researcher's formal preparation for undertaking the research. While some further modifications were made to the research design, this occurred during the three research cycles, which took place during the period April 1996 to July 1998, and that are described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. During these research cycles the researcher became part of six client projects. In the following chapter, these six cases are introduced in two parts. In *The research partners* the researcher describes how her planned methodology worked in practice. In *The client assignments* the six cases are presented in the order in which they were undertaken. The chapter concludes with a restating of the first proposition.

CHAPTER 4: CASES IN ORGANISATIONAL CONSULTING

"All models of action research suggest that inquiry engages in a cyclical process; problems are identified and questions asked, some form of action is designed and carried out, empirical and/or experiential data are gathered, and then in a reflective mode the experience is compared with the starting idea and questions" (Reason, 1993, p 1268).

In the previous chapter client assignments were identified as the chief means of focusing the researcher's fieldwork. The rationale for this decision was partly pragmatic: given that consultants operate primarily in the context of particular client assignments, "cases" were clearly an appropriate design construct – they already existed independent of the study. An additional reason for the use of client assignments was the researcher's objective of enabling change and research to be simultaneous, with the assignments providing an appropriate forum for the consultants to improve their practice in a way that was consistent with their usual schedules.

However, the more important reason for the use of client assignments was the way in which they functioned within the context of action research, in which both the consultants and the researcher had their own objectives. This acknowledgment of objectives both for the researcher and the consultants created two "levels" of "learning cycle", with the researcher focusing on the study as a whole and the consultants focusing on the insights that could be derived from one assignment and applied to another. The client assignments provided the link between the two levels of research, acting as a point of focus for both the consultants and the researcher.

Chapter 3 provided a framework for visualising the relationship between these two sets of learning cycle, in Figure 3.11: *The study's multiple learning cycles*. This model gave the researcher a way of viewing each consultant as the partner in a separate (but related) research project, within which a number of research cycles were occurring, based on the client assignments. These research cycles, during which the researcher became part of six client project teams, are described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. This chapter introduces these six cases in two parts. In *The research partners* the researcher describes how her planned methodology worked in practice. In *The client assignments* the six cases are presented in

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the order in which they were undertaken. The chapter concludes with a restating of the first proposition.

THE RESEARCH PARTNERS

The individuals who worked with the researcher, particularly the three who were a part of the study for a substantial period of time, were central to the study (see Appendix G for details of the scope of their own businesses). Not only did they provide the researcher with access to the client projects that are presented in this chapter as client assignments, but over time they became involved in the central question of the research, and in the process became full "research partners".

As already noted in Chapter 3, the first consultant agreed to participate in the study in April 1996. Dave Gaynor, the Managing Director of FR Development became involved in the study after he responded to the letter sent to consultants by the Manawatu Business Development Board.

Since 1993 Dave has been the principal in FR Development, a business development company jointly owned by Dave and Palmerston North law firm Fitzherbert Rowe. The focus of the company is to help its clients to identify business opportunities, such as new products or markets and then to capitalise upon these opportunities through developing strategies and action plans. This focus is consistent with Dave's sixteen years' work experience in scientific institutions in a number of different positions. While gradually he moved into commercial roles within his employing organisations, his scientific training remains a strong legacy. "I was trained in experimental procedures - putting forward a hypothesis, testing, getting results. It has a logic". It is this sense of logic that appears fundamental to Dave in his work as a consultant; "everything I do can be seen as a project or a sub-project".

The second consultant also agreed to participate in the study in April 1996. As described in Chapter 3, Lisë Stewart, the Client Services Director of The Training Company became involved in the study through her personal friendship with the researcher, and her strong interest in developing her own skills and the capacity of the business.

As its name suggests The Training Company's core business is the development of skills within organisations. However, Lisë views her approach to training and development as unusual, in that she focuses firmly on the provision of training that is both useful for the organisation and enjoyable for the participants. This focus means that clients who request a training programme are taken through a process of assessment first, before The Training Company will agree to proceed. The purpose of this assessment is to ensure that training is in fact the most effective intervention for the particular situation. This particular approach to the delivery of training was the reason for the researcher's interest in The Training Company; which is probably best described as an organisational development consultancy.

In July 1996 Carol-Rankin White expressed her interest in the study. Carol, an adviser with the Capital Development Agency (the economic development arm of the Wellington City Council) responded to the letter from the Wellington Business Development Board. An initial project was undertaken with Carol, but as described in Chapter 3, the environment of the business clinic (which was where Carol did her client work) was not conducive to the research project. After discussing the issue with Carol, the researcher decided that further projects would not be sought.

It was through the network of business advisers that Carol belonged to that Glen Horrex heard of the study. Glen, an adviser with the Palmerston North Enterprise Board, contacted the researcher in April 1997. However, as described in Chapter 3, in mid 1997 the consultancy function of the Palmerston North Enterprise Board was disestablished, resulting in Glen's job being made redundant.

The last consultant agreed to participate in the study in May 1997. Jo Innes is the principal of Partners in Performance, and became involved in the study through her links with Virtual Consulting, a network of consultants based in Wellington and the Manawatu. Chapter 3 describes how the researcher contacted a member of Virtual who circulated her request to the network's members. Jo responded, eager to participate in a project that had the potential to add to her professional development.

Jo's focus is "performance improvement consulting", a field which has grown from the needs of the training and development profession to offer structured ways of selecting and evaluating organisational interventions. The company offers a number of services,

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chiefly assisting organisations to develop ways of ensuring that individuals and groups are working towards organisational goals.

The remaining three consultants (Dave, Lisë and Jo), remained part of the study until its conclusion in 1999. Over this time each worked on a number of different client assignments, and where suitable (and willing), successive clients were participants in new research teams.

THE RESEARCHER

The researcher, Claire Massey, had a similar background to the three research partners, in that her interest in consultancy emerged as the result of a career in which periods of study alternated with periods of paid employment. After establishing and running her own business, she returned to academic study. Qualified with a Masters of Business Administration she then worked for the Palmerston North Enterprise Board (PNEB), an organisation funded by the local authority to develop businesses in the city.

A large proportion of the work of the PNEB was advising individuals who were already in business or who were thinking about establishing businesses, and as the CEO of the Board, the researcher dealt with many of these clients personally. The regular reports from the Board to the Palmerston North City Council (the Board's principal funding source) indicate that during the researcher's tenure the Board was visited by more than 300 clients (see for example, PNEB, 1992).

Following three years at the PNEB the researcher spent three years working overseas as a management consultant, employed by an independent firm that focused on the needs of small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs). In this position the researcher was responsible for her own client list, delivering the majority of the work they required herself, although occasionally other consultants from the company would assist. Projects completed during this time included those that focused on strategic planning, product development, training needs analysis and delivery, and performance improvement.

This job gave the researcher an appreciation of the variety of functions undertaken by an external consultant, and the particular challenges facing a consultant working within a small, independent firm. From the researcher's perspective the principal difficulty was balancing the commercial imperatives of employment in a small firm (where financial

pressures are often more visible than in a large firm) with the need to remain current with the most recent thinking on the practice of consultancy.

The researcher's recognition of the challenges inherent in consultancy was an influential factor in her decision to return to New Zealand to accept a job offer from Massey University. She planned to undertake further study into the general field of consultancy, in the hope of providing some insights into the process for those involved in its practice.

By the time the research partners became involved in the study the researcher had been working at Massey University for two years. During that time she had met all of the five consultants who expressed their interest in the study, and had discussed her own consulting experiences with them. This personal contact between the researcher and the research partners was clearly a major factor in their agreeing to take part in the study. Not only were the research partners open to the further development of an existing relationship, they had had the opportunity to discuss their joint interests. The researcher's understanding of the issues that the research partners were facing, and her work with clients on a wide variety of projects meant that she was able to provide practical support to each consultant during the course of the assignments.

WORKING WITH THE CONSULTANTS

Once committed to their involvement in the study, the consultants spent a considerable amount of time with the researcher, particularly when she was working with one of them on a client assignment. While each project was different in terms of its process, typically there would be a period of high activity once the project terms of reference had been agreed upon. During these periods, it was common for three or four client meetings to be held within the course of a fortnight, and the researcher attended as many of these as possible. Usually these meetings would be preceded be a short meeting between the consultant and the researcher, and followed by a "de-brief" at the conclusion of the session. In addition to the meetings themselves, during the course of the client project the consultant and the researcher were frequently in touch by telephone or electronic mail. The purpose of these messages was often to confirm meeting details, but they frequently developed into important data sources. For example, the consultants often handed on important information about the way in which the project was progressing – in the context of organising the next session.

In addition to these client-oriented sessions, the researcher and the consultants met outside the context of a client assignment. The researcher identified the possibility of meetings such as these in the original research plan, although they were initially described in general terms only. This lack of detail was based on the researcher's assumption that although meetings of this kind would eventually become an integral part of the study, their purpose could not be predicted at the outset; this would evolve during the course of the study as the parties became comfortable with each other.

Based on this assumption, the researcher at first took the lead in arranging meetings and devising an agenda. However, the need for the researcher to take this responsibility diminished as the study progressed and as the consultants were able to identify the benefits of their involvement. Their increasingly clear expectations meant that the meetings developed a purpose of their own, becoming more regular and structured, with a common theme underpinning each discussion. This common theme was "professional development". While professional development of the consultants had been an explicit goal for the researcher from the beginning of the study, as demonstrated in the research objectives, this had not been emphasised in the preliminary discussions between the researcher and the consultants. This was deliberate, as in the researcher's assessment an initial objective of "improving professional practice" may have alienated the potential research partners, by seeming to imply their need for improvement.

Despite the fact that a formal discussion about the potential of the study to improve the consultants' professional practice did not occur at the beginning of the research, as the study progressed the consultants clearly saw this as a potential benefit of their involvement. This was particularly obvious as the consultants became comfortable with the researcher and were able to articulate their interest in improving their practice of consulting more clearly. Dave explained why he was prepared to find time in a busy schedule to spend with the researcher by saying "I always learn something from these sessions". In a similar vein, Jo commented "once the research is completed, I'd like to talk to you about ways of continuing this *mentoring* relationship" (emphasis added).

In these comments both Jo and Dave indicated their growing awareness of the value of the research to them as consultants, and as the study progressed all three consultants translated their changing expectations into specific requests of the researcher. At different points each consultant asked the researcher to spend time with him or her,

discussing a variety of topics. These ranged from strategic development of their own businesses to identifying training needs and appropriate training courses. From the perspective of the consultants, this signalled a clear recognition of the researcher as a "mentor", and of the research process as multi-levelled, with their "developmental needs" complementing and overlapping the researcher's needs.

By making specific requests of this type the consultants became the protagonists at this level of the research, with the researcher *responding to* their requests. However, by responding to the needs of the individuals the researcher was able to gain from the process as well. Firstly, the personal meetings were an invaluable source of data, particularly in the later stages of the study when sufficient trust had built up between the researcher and the consultant for them to reveal more of their thinking about the consulting process. Secondly, they allowed the researcher to continue to gather data about the projects that she and the consultants had worked upon; frequently, the consultants would explain their thinking about a particular concept with reference to a project. Thirdly, the different ways in which the consultants approached the sessions allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the consultancy process overall, through comparing their approaches.

IDENTIFYING A POINT OF COMMON INTEREST

In making this comparison of the consultants and their involvement in the study, the researcher drew upon the model that was introduced in Figure 3.11. Given the fact that in this study there was no single group exploring a set of questions, but a set of three pairings (the three consultants and the researcher), comparing the pairs was useful. At first there seemed to be differences in the way they each related to the study, which seemed to be related to the depth of their involvement. However, as time continued any differences became less noticeable, with all three consultants becoming deeply involved and focusing on very similar issues. By the time the researcher formally asked the research partners to list their objectives for their involvement (which occurred during the third research cycle) there were a number of common themes.

Firstly, there was the issue of professional development identified in the previous section. Each consultant expressed an interest in learning more about consulting techniques and processes within the course of their involvement in the study. Secondly, there was a

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desire to monitor their own effectiveness through feedback from the researcher. Finally, all three mentioned that their involvement had potential benefits for their clients. One consultant was interested in gaining an insight into the process of post-graduate research before committing to a study on a similar scale herself.

The commonality between the consultants' interests and the initial objectives listed in Chapter 3 made it possible for the researcher to reduce the different perspectives to the single proposition that was introduced at the end of Chapter 3: "that it is possible to identify the factors that influence consultancy outcomes by engaging in participatory research with individual consultants". This proposition became the "starting point" identified in the model already introduced.

Once identified, this starting point became the rationale for the meetings between the researcher and the consultants, which as time went on became more and more focused on following the study through its successive cycles and phases of proposition, practice, experience and presentation, while retaining the consultant's focus on mentoring. However, although the initial proposition provided the underlying logic for the meetings, the model of co-operative inquiry was not made explicit at the beginning of the study. At this point the meetings focused on a range of topics, and their format was dependent on the needs of both the researcher and the consultant at the particular time they were undertaken. For example, it was common for there to be an informal element at the beginning, while both parties commented on any developments in their thinking about the practice of consulting, either by reference to a particular client project or to material they had been reading. This was then followed by a discussion on a specific topic that may have been generated by the consultant or the researcher.

In addition to the meetings, data was gathered from communications via electronic mail and telephone conversations. Often several data-collecting methods were used for the same topic. For example, the information about the consultants' educational background was primarily gathered informally, with the researcher taking notes of references to their qualifications, and the way in which this had provided them with useful tools or approaches for their consultancy practice. At a later stage the researcher asked each consultant for a curriculum vitae and a list of any specific short courses or university papers that they felt had been of particular value in their development as consultants.

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SELECTING THE ASSIGNMENTS

Once the consultants had agreed to be involved in the study, the researcher asked each of them to select an appropriate client assignment. When this selection occurred the researcher asked the consultant to discuss the involvement of the client organisation with the appropriate contact person, as planned and described in Chapter 3. This selection of a potential client project generally happened quite soon after the researcher had made contact with the consultant, and as a result, the client assignments provided the primary focus for the consultants and the researcher, at least initially. The act of focusing on a project then provided sufficient shared experience for the relationship of the consultant and the researcher to gather momentum, and the meetings described in the previous section to be scheduled in the periods between projects.

Each assignment fitted within the parameters provided by the broad topic of the study, in which the client and the consultant were engaged on a particular project with the overall objective of "enterprise development" (ED). As explained in Chapter 1, in the context of the study ED was defined as a process in which an organisation works towards fulfilling its full potential through a partnership with an external consultant. The nature of enterprise development means that "full potential" is different in each case, depending on the characteristics of the enterprise and the goals and objectives of its managers. These differences are explored in detail in the description and analysis of the individual assignments.

Throughout the study it was emphasised that once engaged upon an assignment, *project objectives* were the primary focus, with the *researcher's objectives* having a secondary position. However, it was also clear that the addition of the researcher had the potential to significantly impact on the client-consultant pairing, producing benefits for the parties involved, in addition to those provided to the consultant between assignments. For the client the researcher was often viewed as an extension of the consultant, providing an extra source of advice at no cost. However, whether the additional "potential" was realised depended on a number of factors. These are described in more detail in the assignment narratives.

THE CLIENT ASSIGNMENTS

The researcher spent over two years engaged in the fieldwork for the study, working with the three consultants on six assignments. While some of the assignments were completed quickly (for example the second assignment took place over the course of approximately six weeks), others took much longer, with the project for Ormond Stock Associates taking the consultant some eight months to complete. This meant that the researcher was also involved with the project for this length of time, and in addition there were post-assignment interviews with each client.

Over this period a large amount of data was gathered. There were notes from the various meetings, documentation associated with the assignments, and material generated by the consultants (and in some cases by the clients). This data was organised in various ways, and is presented in the thesis in a number of forms, and from different perspectives. In this chapter the assignments are presented from the consultants' perspectives as case narratives, following Yin (1989). This perspective was chosen as a way of introducing the reader to the participants in each assignment, the central processes that were chosen and the outcomes that were achieved.

Figure 4.1: Assignment timeline

February 1996   July 1998
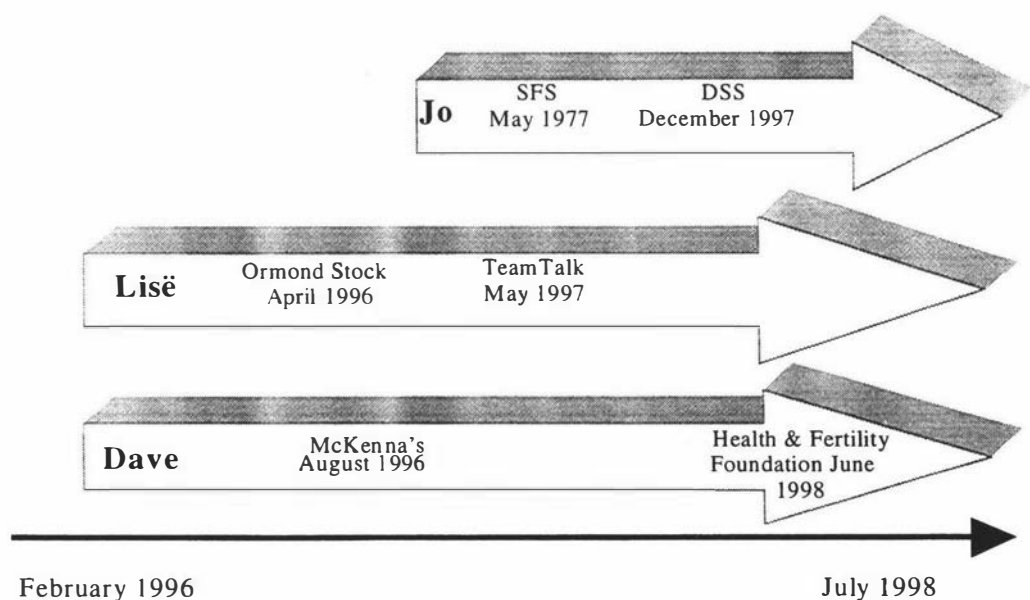
The assignments are presented in the order in which they appeared in the study. This choice was made in order to emphasise the relationship between the assignments and the

research partners' learning. This learning is made more explicit in later chapters where Figure 3.11 provides a framework for identifying the insights gained.

ASSIGNMENT 1: ORMOND STOCK ASSOCIATES

The consultant in this assignment was Lisë Stewart, who approached the researcher in April 1996 to discuss a client project that appeared to be suitable. An initial meeting with the client confirmed his willingness to participate, and the researcher became involved in the assignment soon after.

The case narrative that follows is based on data collected through a variety of methods and from a number of sources. The researcher had full access to the consultant's client file, which included formal and informal documents relating to the project. She attended several client meetings at the Palmerston North offices of Ormond Stock Associates (OSA), taking notes and checking her identification of the issues with the client and the consultant afterwards. To evaluate the project outcomes interviews were arranged with the client and the consultant.

ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

Ormond Stock Associates is a consulting engineering firm, which was established in 1979 by Ormond Stock. Since then the enterprise has gone through a number of distinct stages. In stage one (1979-1985), the business operated as a family concern, focusing on establishment and growth issues. In the consolidation stage (1985-1994), the enterprise was formally incorporated, and the focus moved to developing the product line, improving internal systems, and increasing the client base. During the current stage, which began in 1994, the company has been able to realise the investment of the first two stages, operating on all levels as a fully functional corporate body. Ormond Stock Associates is now a national consulting firm with international clients and the operational capability and systems to service them.

OSA owns the building it occupies, a converted two-storey villa. The style of the exterior is reflected in the interior which is furnished with wooden furniture and divided into offices for Directors and shared work spaces for junior staff. This traditional layout is consistent with the company's organisational structure and operating procedures which both communicate a reasonable level of structure and formality. Despite these

indicators, the company also displays its individuality; a major piece of New Zealand art dominates the meeting room, a fact that tempers the potentially uninteresting interior surroundings and mitigates against the development of a colourless organisational culture.

At the time the research was undertaken, the business was employing eighteen people and Ormond Stock was the Chief Executive and Managing Director of a Board of three.

Figure 4.2: Organisational structure of OSA
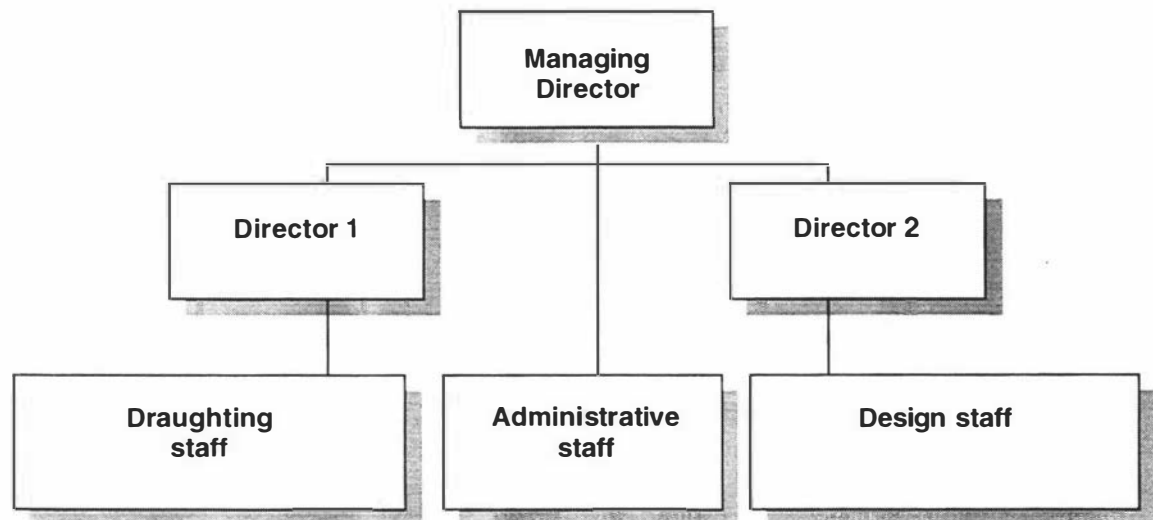
THE PROJECT

The presenting problem in the case was a lack of staff compliance with operational procedures. The company had recently completed the documentation of operational procedures and the preparation of manuals. Staff members were ignoring these and the CEO felt that the solution to this problem was to have staff introduced to the content and purpose of the manuals within a training programme. The selection of a training firm (The Training Company), was indicative of the CEO's preliminary assessment (as stated to the consultant); that the company was facing a particular problem that could be solved with the assistance of an "expert" - a trainer who could change his employees' behaviour.

Despite the client's assessment of a particular problem, there was no formal brief, and the consultant was not asked to provide a proposal for the actions she planned to take. Instead she was asked to make some suggestions for further action, based on information provided at a preliminary discussion between the two parties. While the information she was given did indicate that there might need to be a training component within the

project, it was clear to the consultant that there were other organisational issues. As a result the consultant's response was to propose a broadly based development process that encompassed the initial brief and stressed the value of working simultaneously on different aspects of the company (culture, systems, planning, personal development) instead of a single objective.

The CEO quickly accepted the revised brief as it corresponded with his unstated feelings about the complexity of the challenge facing the company. From his perspective the company could already be described as "successful" and yet there were also changes that he wanted to make. While he had focused on the "non-conformance" aspect of his employees' behaviour in identifying the source of a "problem", he was equally aware of the company's current achievements and future potential. In retrospect he described his feelings in the following way: "We knew there were a lot of things we needed to know, but didn't know what they were. So we started with training, which exposed us to new ideas and we were then able to see the project more holistically".

The consultant's approach was to start with a task that would be useful for the company, and which would also give her the opportunity to get to know the staff and identify any other issues that were contributing to their lack of compliance. This task was for the company to develop a strategic plan.

This task was undertaken with the whole OSA team, including support staff and Directors. There were two evening sessions, with the first focusing on the company's history, and the second looking to the future. These sessions provided the consultant with a clear idea of what needed to occur at OSA and she documented her assessment in a progress report. While this report was primarily designed to identify the actions that the company would need to take in the future in terms of completing the project, the consultant took the opportunity to provide a rationale for the work that had already been done. In a sense, she was writing a retrospective proposal, commenting that "the broad objective of the consultancy would be to assist OSA with current issues (chiefly concerned with growth), and to develop ways of anticipating, and dealing with, future issues". In summary, she commented that "the initial phase was designed to provide a foundation for a long term organisational development programme".

The report concluded with a plan for future work and a set of options for how OSA could proceed; with or without The Training Company's help. A meeting was held to discuss the report, and Ormond was enthusiastic about proceeding. However, the company was in the middle of hiring new staff, and he wanted to wait until the new appointments had been made so that the new staff could also benefit from the project. The consultant kept in frequent contact with him during this time, and when the project was finally revitalised some months later, a relationship of trust had developed between Lisë and Ormond.

During the meeting that was held to refocus the project, the client revisited the initial issue (the non-compliance of staff with the operational manual), while commenting on his desire to have the staff understand *why* their compliance was so important (in the context of the company's organisational goals). At this point he gave The Training Company the go-ahead to undertake further work. This phase of the project had two objectives; to complete the strategic plan as proposed in the Progress Report and to develop a Training and Development Programme for OSA.

This second phase of the project started with a Directors' meeting, and was followed by a company meeting that focused on identifying a number of key operational values that the staff saw as important in OSA's future. These were "responsiveness", "technology", "innovation" and "quality". These four values provided a basis for an ongoing developmental agenda that incorporated a whole series of tasks. For example, some interventions focused on individuals, such as the one-to-one meetings the consultant had with each staff member to identify any personal learning needs. Other interventions focused on the group, such as the development of a Service Blueprint, a technique for identifying system and process blockages as the first step in making improvements.

As time went on, these interventions gradually became more sophisticated, with the consultant making use of tools such as the Team Climate Inventory and the Organisational Success Profile, both of which were developed for use by independent consultants such as The Training Company.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

The ongoing nature of the project meant that there were a number of specific outputs. However, what was more difficult was assessing the value of the outcomes. In this

context, the client's experience with other consulting assignments assisted him in assessing the value of the service provided by the consultant. He had a set of questions that provided clear criteria for measuring her contribution; "could we have done it ourselves", "did it add value", "were we equipped with new tools", and "did the project contain 'epiphanic' moments that we were able to use". The questions indicated an awareness of the importance of tangible outcomes as well as his openness to unplanned outcomes ("epiphanies"), although his actual statements suggested a reliance on the latter; "we know things are working because there are 'moments of truth' that tell me that I am now achieving."

When asked to comment on more formal methods for monitoring consultants in general terms, the client commented "if your adviser is competent you don't need an auditing system, but if your adviser is incompetent, you need a system to make sure you're not getting 'done'". This emphasised his strong belief in the value of forming a relationship of trust, as a necessary foundation for a successful intervention.

By contrast with the client, the consultant took a different view of measuring success, placing greater emphasis on the formal relationship between the assignment objective and the organisation's goals. However, she also assessed the "feel" of the assignment, informally monitoring the tone of all communications with the client and his staff.

While these comments suggest a strong emphasis by both the consultant and the client on assessing "satisfaction" (as opposed to effectiveness or impact, as noted in Chapter 3), the client was equally forthcoming when asked to assess the effectiveness of the consultant's work. He was clearly more than satisfied with the consultant's choice of activities and her skill in implementing the intervention plan. However, as the interview continued, he increasingly focused on factors that related to satisfaction, strengthening his previous comments. In this context he commented on the consultant's willingness to be flexible in arranging meeting times, her ability to accept negative responses, her commitment to identifying issues of importance to the client, and the consultant's personal appeal and skill. But by far the most important factor in the client's mind was the establishment of a close personal relationship between the consultant and the client; in his mind a precondition to a successful outcome. His opinion was that "a partnership is essential for the client-consultant relationship to be successful; unless it is that way you won't achieve the degree of honesty needed". It was in this context that he identified a

barrier to the project's success: a lack of access to the consultant due to her high workload.

The consultant was also able to identify the factors that had influenced the process. Whereas the client focused primarily on consultant characteristics, her response was the reverse, dealing with *client* characteristics. She stressed the importance of client commitment to the change process, gaining access to the client and dealing with the appropriate decision-maker, as well as identifying personal factors such as honesty and integrity.

ASSIGNMENT 2: MCKENNA & ASSOCIATES

The consultant in this assignment was Dave Gaynor, who approached the researcher in August 1996 to discuss a client project that appeared to be suitable for inclusion in the study. An initial meeting with the client confirmed his willingness to participate, and the assignment was started soon after.

In this narrative the researcher was able to make use of data from a number of sources. The consultant provided the researcher with copies of key documents, including reports that he felt were relevant to the project. The researcher also attended client meetings at McKenna's Palmerston North offices as well as those at the consultant's office. At meetings she took notes, checking her identification of the issues afterwards with the participants. To evaluate the project outcomes interviews were arranged with the client and the consultant.

ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

McKenna's has been operating since 1989, when Kevin McKenna began a business offering services to job seekers in Palmerston North. In addition to career counselling and the production of curriculum vitae, the company offers psychological testing based on the Myers-Brigg Type Indicators (MBTI). The administration of the MBTI provides McKenna's with an opportunity to explore a link between an individual's MBTI profile and their employment preference. While this link has already been recognised and documented in the literature, there appeared to be no easily accessible methods for assisting the individual to understand the implications of their personality category. Kevin McKenna made the commitment to developing a software package that would enable an

employment adviser to identify the types of employment that would be suitable for each of the sixteen MBTI profiles.

With work on the software well under way, Kevin could see the opportunity for the "McKenna's approach" to be developed beyond the scope of its initial base in Palmerston North. He incorporated a new company, McKenna & Associates (International) Ltd, and approached a number of individuals, some of who had been his clients, with a proposal to become part of the new parent company. Three partners were found, and together with Kevin's son Terry, they became the Board of Directors of the new company.

The Board was solely concerned with McKenna & Associates (International) Ltd, rather than the single agency that continued to operate as McKenna's (Palmerston North). At this point their sole option for making a return on their investment was to increase the number of businesses offering the "McKenna's System". They decided to licence the system (including the software that was due to be completed at any time) to others through franchise agreements, and at this point they sought the advice of an external consultant.

Figure 4.3: Organisational structure of McKenna & Associates

Director	Director	Director	Director	Director
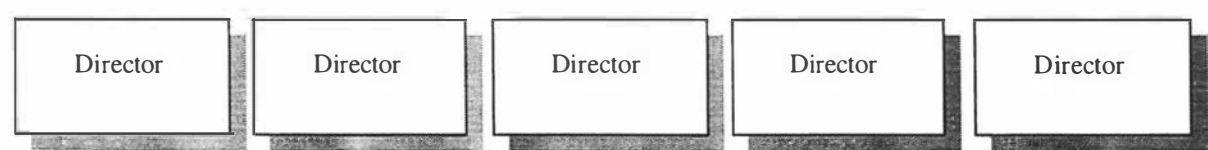
THE PROJECT

Once the McKenna's Board had made the decision to expand through franchising, the Managing Director (MD) contacted a local business development consultant. The consultant and the MD were already known to each other, and the MD was aware of the services that the consultant could offer. The specific request of the McKenna's Board at this time was for a consultant who could help them write a strategic plan. The MD provided the consultant with a marketing plan that he had already written for the company, and this was discussed at their preliminary meeting, which was held to decide on the appropriate next steps.

One of the issues that was raised at this meeting was cost; and in order to minimise the consultancy fee the consultant suggested that McKenna's apply for a subsidy through the Business Development Programme (BDP), a government funded business assistance scheme, administered locally by the Manawatu Business Development Board. This would provide McKenna's with a subsidy towards the cost of the consultancy, and from the consultant's perspective, would provide a suitable framework for future planning.

The McKenna's Board responded to this suggestion with another request that the consultant help them develop a strategic plan, and the consultant repeated his suggestion that the "capability assessment" required by the BDP would provide a suitable foundation for the strategic planning process to follow. He put this proposal in writing, and at this point the Board agreed with the suggestion. They then made a formal application to the Business Development Board for financial assistance for the completion of the capability assessment.

The capability assessment was completed in two sessions, with the consultant seeking information from the MD about a number of topics, following the format provided by the Business Development Board. The consultant drafted a detailed assessment, and a meeting was held with the MD to discuss the draft and make any amendments necessary. At this meeting arrangements were made for the first strategic planning session, and for copies of the final version of the assessment to be circulated to all Directors.

The first planning session focused on introducing the process of the planning exercise, and getting the Directors to start thinking about their overall vision for the company.

The second session began with the consultant outlining the notes from the previous session, encouraging discussion between the Directors. The outcome of this discussion was that some changes were made to their initial draft. This revised version provided the basis for the session, which was designed to assist the Directors to identify the objectives and actions that would be necessary for the goals to be achieved. The group spent much of the session working in pairs, and they were asked to continue this "homework" and give a written summary of their progress to the consultant before the next session.

Following this meeting the consultant circulated a draft of the plan, which provided each pair with a framework for completing the section they were responsible for. On the basis of the material provided by the pairs who had completed their task, the draft was

amended, and the revised version was circulated prior to the third group session. At this session it was clear that a lot of work on the plan still needed to be done, and there was considerable discussion about the best ways of tackling the task. Eventually the group decided to spend some time on the plan without the consultant's assistance, and they agreed to work towards another meeting a month later. This meeting was cancelled, as from the consultant's perspective the Board had not made sufficient progress for it to be useful.

At a rescheduled meeting the Board presented the consultant with their input. He provided comments to them, and undertook to incorporate their work into a final version of the plan. In effect this meeting concluded the project, as after this session the Board took responsibility for continuing to plan for the launch of McKenna's onto the franchise market. The consultant made a number of followup calls, but with the strategic planning phase complete, the Board felt there was no further requirement for his involvement. They did continue to use an external adviser however - a consultant experienced in the launch of new franchises.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

When the Directors approached the consultant they were very clear about their needs: They wanted assistance with the development of a strategic plan. This document was developed, and in terms of the company's progression, the plan marked the completion of an important stage of growth. It provided McKenna's with a foundation for selling the franchises, and gave the Directors a tangible record of their future plans. The planning process also provided them with an activity that allowed them to work together as a group, identifying their own strengths and weaknesses, and gaining confidence in their relationships with each other as fellow Directors. Although this outcome had not been foreseen at the beginning of the process, it appeared to be a real benefit.

However, despite these achievements, both the consultant and the contact client for the company (the MD), indicated a slight sense of dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the process. From the consultant's perspective this was due to the client's lack of response to his attempts to contact them after the plan was finalised, and his awareness that they had employed another consultant to assist them with a further stage of the company's development. A different perspective was provided by the client, who although

describing himself as extremely satisfied with the work carried out in connection with the strategic plan, was also aware of the amount of work that still had to be done after its completion, to ensure McKenna's success.

ASSIGNMENT 3: STUDENT FINANCE SECTION

The consultant in this assignment was Jo Innes, who approached the researcher in May 1997 to discuss a client project that appeared to be consistent with the objectives of the study. An initial meeting with the client confirmed her willingness to participate, and the researcher became involved in the assignment soon after.

In writing the case narrative the researcher made use of a variety of data. She was provided with copies of key documents relating to the project, and was put on the circulation list for all new documents that were written while the project was being completed. The researcher met with the consultant and the project sponsor in preparation for the project, and then was asked to participate in the project team meetings. Once the project was completed the researcher met with the project sponsor and the consultant to discuss their evaluation of the project outcomes.

ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Student Finances Section is one of a number of sections within Corporate Services, the administrative division of Manawatu Polytechnic. The main function of the section is to administer student loans, under the system introduced by the New Zealand government in the early 1990s. A key task is ensuring that student loan applications are progressed through the approval process without unnecessary delay.

At the time the research was undertaken the organisation was going through a period of re-adjustment, as the result of changes in the tertiary education sector. Staff at all levels of the polytechnic were attempting to deal with the impact of increased student numbers, a rising level of expectations of financial accountability from the government funding agencies and the community at large, and increased competition within the education market. An important factor in the changing environment was the introduction of a new governmental scheme for funding students, which allowed them to borrow money to pay tuition fees and living expenses. This scheme increased the demands on the Student

Finances Section, which became responsible for administering the component of the loan that was related to tuition fees.

Figure 4.4: Organisational structure of Student Finance Section
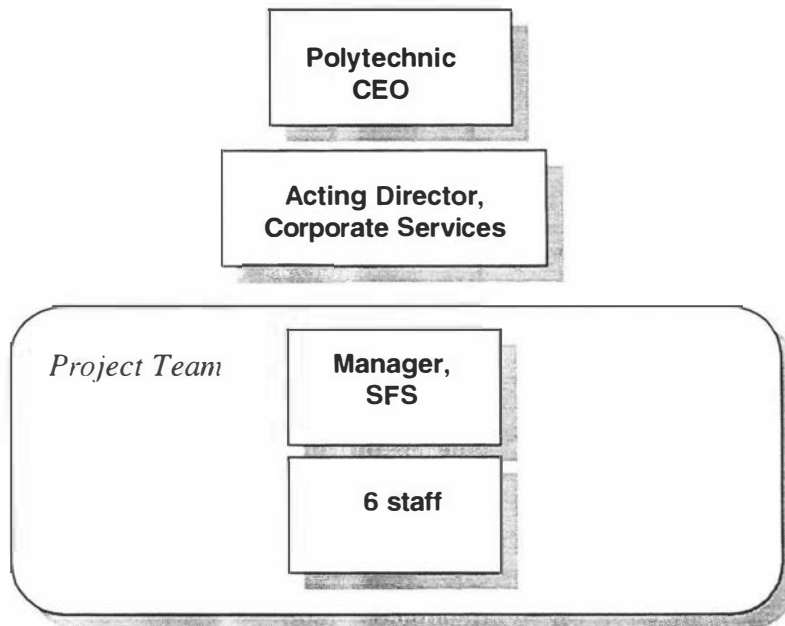
THE PROJECT

The project was initiated by the Acting Director, Corporate Services. She had become aware of delays in processing student loan applications, and was concerned about the broad implications of the situation. Not only were students dissatisfied, but this dissatisfaction had communicated itself to staff who had direct contact with students. This group of staff felt stressed and unhappy with their inability to deal with the students' demands, and in turn, brought pressure to bear on the seven staff within the Student Finances Section. Staff members were unable to make immediate improvements to their systems in a way that would alleviate the delays, and were exhibiting signs of low morale and stress.

The Acting Director requested help from an external consultant with the aim of improving the service provision of the Student Finance Section, and of relieving the stress on the staff directly responsible for the loan processing. In addition to the specified outcome (improving service provision), the Acting Director had clear expectations about the process that should be followed. She was specifically interested in the consultant "facilitating a change process that would effect positive system changes while

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simultaneously involving the team responsible for implementing the changes". She explained that her reason for this was to ensure that the consultant's suggestions were developed *in conjunction* with the staff within the section, which would increase the likelihood that they would be effectively implemented.

The consultant responded with a proposal "to assist Student Finances to plan for service improvement". This proposal described the project results that she envisaged, outlined the processes that would be undertaken in order to achieve the results, and listed the five stages of the project, with appropriate objectives for each stage. The Acting Director approved the outline, and the project was formally begun with a meeting of the project team at the end of May 1997. This meeting was designed so that the parties involved in the project had an opportunity to explore their roles, needs and expectations, and identify project constraints and critical dates.

After this meeting a project schedule was produced, and the internal and external situation analyses were begun. Both of these analyses were undertaken by the project team, which first met to plan the way in which they would carry out their task. By the end of this meeting the tasks had been identified and they had been allocated to each team member.

Subsequent meetings of the team had a dual focus. With the consultant's help the team collated and assessed any new data (which was mainly concerned with an analysis of the external environment), and also worked on specific tasks that helped them with their analysis of internal systems. The chief tool used for this analysis was the "service blueprint" a type of flow chart that is designed to improve service delivery through describing the elements of the service, identifying any barriers to successful delivery and then providing a basis for a redesigned process. In total there were six of these "analytical sessions", and at the end of the process the team came together in a performance planning session. This was designed to integrate all of the analysis that had occurred, and the consultant used the discussion as a basis for the Service Improvement Plan. This document laid out the project team's findings and their recommendations for service improvement. The plan was delivered to the project sponsor by post, and discussed at a meeting in August.

From the consultant's perspective the project was completed when the project sponsor accepted the Service Improvement Plan. However, for the organisation this point marked the beginning of the key stage of the "service improvement process", as the recommendations began to be implemented, without the consultant's guidance. In this context the sponsor had very clear ideas about the outcomes that needed to be achieved, as explained in an initial meeting with the researcher. At this point she had emphasised her interest in improving service delivery in a way that wholly involved the staff. This emphasis on improvements in service as well as in morale was reflected in her discussion about how she would measure success. In this discussion she identified two distinct tools; an internal cultural assessment and a customer satisfaction survey. Both of these had already been carried out, and she spoke of plans to repeat them at the end of the project. She also identified other less formal indicators that she would be watching for: a decline in sick leave and "the absence of deputations!"

By contrast, the team itself described its desired outcomes in terms of "preferred ways of working". They spoke of the need to "have fun" and "take responsibility for project progress". The way they felt about their progress against these criteria was checked regularly by the consultant, usually at the start and finish of each session.

ASSIGNMENT 4: TEAMTALK

The consultant in this assignment was Lisë Stewart, who approached the researcher in May 1997 to discuss the suitability of a client project. An initial meeting with the client confirmed his willingness to participate, and the researcher became involved in the assignment soon after.

The case narrative that follows is based on data collected through a variety of methods and from a number of sources. The researcher had complete access to the consultant's client file, which included formal and informal documents relating to the project. She attended several client meetings at TeamTalk's Wellington offices, taking notes and checking her identification of the issues with the client and the consultant afterwards. To evaluate the project outcomes interviews were arranged with the client and the consultant.

TeamTalk operates a trunk radio network throughout New Zealand, servicing customers who need to communicate with off-site staff and who find radios a cost-effective alternative to mobile phones. The company was established in 1994 by Broadcast Communications Limited (BCL) the engineering division of Television New Zealand, and soon after the establishment half of the shares were sold to International Wireless Corporation (IWC), a multi-national company based in the United States. This shareholding was increased to 100% and by the time the researcher was introduced to TeamTalk representatives from IWC had a majority representation on the Board of Directors. IWC also has interests in a number of other companies in New Zealand, some of which supply TeamTalk with hardware or specialist services.

Figure 4.5: Organisational structure of TeamTalk
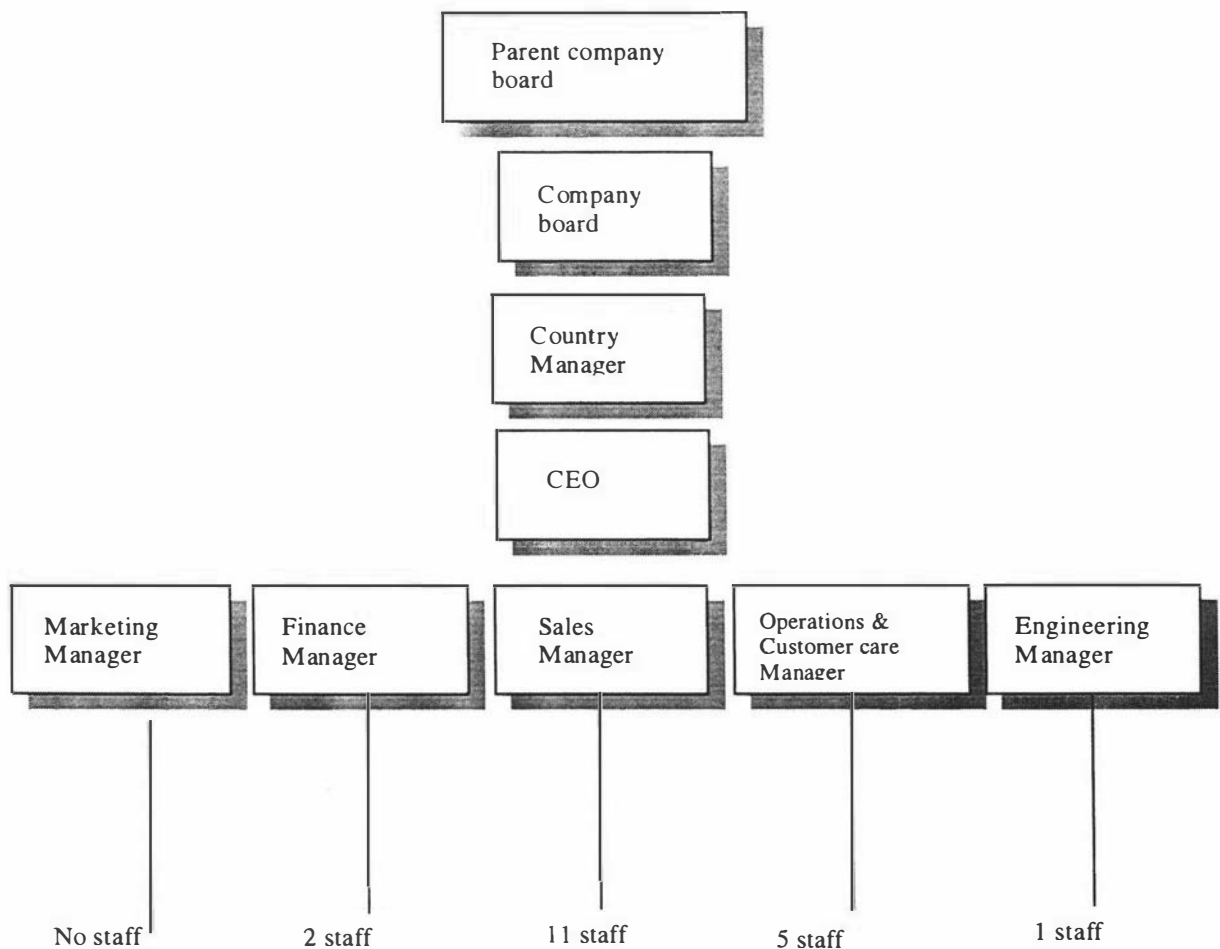
TeamTalk operates from a head office in Wellington, with staff working out of a physical environment that signals a number of things about the way the company functions. There are no desks, and chest-high workbenches are built around the perimeter of the room to act primarily as telephone stations, although computers are also plugged in at various points. The remainder of the open plan office is dominated by a cluster of couches (for informal meetings), a large sun umbrella and outdoor chairs (for formal meetings), and a Fiat Bambina, described in typical TeamTalk style as "providing space for confidential meetings or for meetings with very small people". The other significant permanent fixture is the refrigerator, which is kept well stocked with bottles of wine and beer (which are free of charge) and soft drinks (for which staff have to pay). Newer additions to the decor include items such as a racetrack for slot cars. When the researcher asked why this item was present in the main office she was told "because it won't fit in the board room".

The TeamTalk environment is the result of the influence of its first CEO, a young, entrepreneurial MBA graduate, with a flair for telecommunications. At the end of 1996 this key staff member became New Zealand Manager, with a position on the IWC Board. A new CEO was appointed to take his place, with a focus on consolidating TeamTalk's market position and securing its financial base. At the time the research was undertaken the business was employing twenty-five people, managed by the CEO with the assistance of a management team. This included the fifteen staff in the head office plus those working from the three satellite offices, which employ both sales and technical staff.

THE PROJECT

The project emerged as a result of discussions between the National Sales Manager and the CEO concerning TeamTalk's poor sales in the first half of 1997. The Sales Manager suggested that non-performing staff should be sent to a sales training session, however, the CEO was concerned about the long-term effectiveness of such a solution. In his eyes it was critical that any training should contribute to the *overall* development of the company, rather than a single function, no matter how important. The differing perspectives of the two managers were resolved by selecting a firm that specialised in the development of "bespoke" training programmes. The Sales Manager made the initial contact with the consultant. He gave her a brief introduction to the issues (from his perspective) and arranged for her to meet with himself and the CEO.

At this meeting the scope of the project was discussed in general terms and it became clear that the project was potentially more complex than the consultant had initially envisaged. While the Sales Manager had identified low sales as the key issue, during the discussion both he and the CEO identified a number of other issues, including technological problems. The initial meeting was also attended by the Sales Manager of Incredible, a company affiliated to TeamTalk. The involvement of their Sales Manager in this meeting had not been discussed with the consultant, and she later described herself as being disconcerted by his presence. No explanation was offered for his participation, and without knowing anything of the structure of TeamTalk and its parent company, she had no understanding of the reason for his inclusion.

A number of issues were raised at this meeting, some of which were not directly related to sales. As a result, the consultant suggested that the project be addressed in two phases. The first phase was to be an overall organisational assessment, which would help the company identify the best way to proceed. This identification phase would also provide the necessary foundation for phase two, when the consultant would report on the training needs of the sales team and recommend specific training options. After further discussion between the consultant and the Sales Manager, the consultant prepared a formal plan of the work she planned to undertake, and presented it to the Sales Manager as a proposal. Soon after, he gave his approval for work to begin.

The starting point was the introduction of the consultant to the sales team at a scheduled meeting. Here she was introduced as "someone who can help us", although the specific focus of her assistance was not discussed. Following this meeting individual interviews with all staff were conducted. These interviews were confidential, with the consultant assuring staff that the report would be written in such a way that would make it difficult to relate any comments to specific individuals.

The report that resulted from the interviews confirmed the consultant's initial suspicion that the issues at TeamTalk were in fact broader than "sales". Although issues were identified that were clearly having an impact on the performance of the sales team, there were also company-wide problems. As agreed in the preliminary meetings, these findings were presented first to the Sales Manager and then by him to the CEO.

It was at this point that some concern was expressed with the project. While the CEO, Sales Manager and a number of other staff could see its value, others indicated their dissatisfaction, challenging the process that the consultant had undertaken and debating the accuracy of her statements. Some staff complained that they had not been interviewed, and when the New Zealand Manager returned from Brazil he made it clear that the project (and by implication the CEO) did not have his support.

These events occurred while the consultant was away from the country on holiday, and it was not until her return that she was able to address the concerns that had been raised, through a presentation of her findings to the management team.

The focus of the presentation had been agreed with the CEO and the Sales Manager, and the latter had agreed to circulate the management team members with a copy of the report before the meeting. This was not done, and a briefing session between the consultant, the CEO and the Sales Manager, which was scheduled to take place immediately prior to the presentation, was cancelled. Without an opportunity to discuss a strategy for the meeting, the consultant started with an assumption that there was some common understanding of the findings. This was not so, and there was a high level of opposition from one individual. In response to this opposition the Sales Manager defended the project, and the meeting ended with no resolution about how to resolve the different perspectives. However the consultant did offer to interview those staff members who had not been consulted in the original process. These meetings were held, and the issues raised by the staff confirmed those views already expressed. This information was conveyed to the CEO and the Sales Manager by means of a letter.

At this point the New Zealand Manager directly intervened, telephoning the consultant to question her about the process she had followed, and to seek information about the responses of individual staff. He focused particularly on the actions of the CEO who by this time was on holiday overseas. The consultant contacted the CEO by facsimile, to advise him of her concerns about the direction the project was taking, and her wish to terminate the contract. The CEO was able to convince her to change her mind, and upon his return arranged a meeting with the consultant and the Sales Manager at his home, to ensure that the New Zealand Manager was not able to interfere. At this meeting it was agreed that the consultant's recommendation to hold a company workshop would be

followed, and that in preparation for this workshop she would work with the management team to identify the issues that would be addressed.

Following this decision, the consultant attended a scheduled management team meeting. She was asked to start work on organising the workshop, which was to function as a company planning session and to be held over two days in an outside location. However, at this point the New Zealand Manager again intervened, vetoing any further expenditure on the project. After discussions with the CEO the event was reinstated and the planning meeting did occur, although the New Zealand Manager's lack of support was made apparent to staff and the consultant, both prior to the workshop and throughout its two days.

Despite this negativity from the New Zealand Manager, the workshop was well received by staff, and generated a list of goals and actions for the company to take. Working with the consultant, the CEO and the Sales Manager summarised this thinking and circulated the plan in a report to all staff. At this point it was their intention that they would continue to work with the consultant, however, she was unwilling to continue the relationship with the company, after the negative comments received from the New Zealand manager. Soon after, the CEO and the Sales Manager both resigned, as did one of the other key members of the management team. From the CEO's perspective this decision was directly related to the New Zealand Manager's intervention in day to day issues, such as that experienced by him throughout the consultancy project.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

As a result of this set of events there was a lack of clarity about the status of the report's recommendations. While the CEO and Sales Manager had remained committed to their implementation, the New Zealand Manager consistently demonstrated his lack of support, overruling decisions to proceed with the suggested actions, and taking every opportunity to communicate his dissatisfaction with the consultant. This attitude caused the effective end of the project, with the CEO failing to gain the New Zealand Manager's support to implement any of the other recommendations, and the consultant unwilling to expose herself to any further negativity from the New Zealand Manager. The consultant had no further contact with the company after the CEO and the Sales Manager resigned, and as a result the researcher had no further access to the case.

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ASSIGNMENT 5: DISABILITY SUPPORT

The consultant in this assignment was Jo Innes, who approached the researcher in December 1997 to discuss a client project that appeared to fit the study's objectives. An initial meeting with the contact client confirmed her willingness to participate, and the researcher became involved in the assignment soon after.

The researcher wrote the case narrative after collecting data from a number of sources. She was provided with copies of key documents and she attended several client meetings, both with the project sponsor and with the project team. At each meeting she took notes, and where possible she checked her identification of the issues at the conclusion of each meeting. Once the project was completed the researcher met with the sponsor and the consultant at their formal evaluation meeting, as well as arranging separate meetings with the individual parties.

ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Disability Support Service is one of the many service delivery sections within Massey University that complement the institution's teaching function (see Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Organisational structure of Disability Support Services
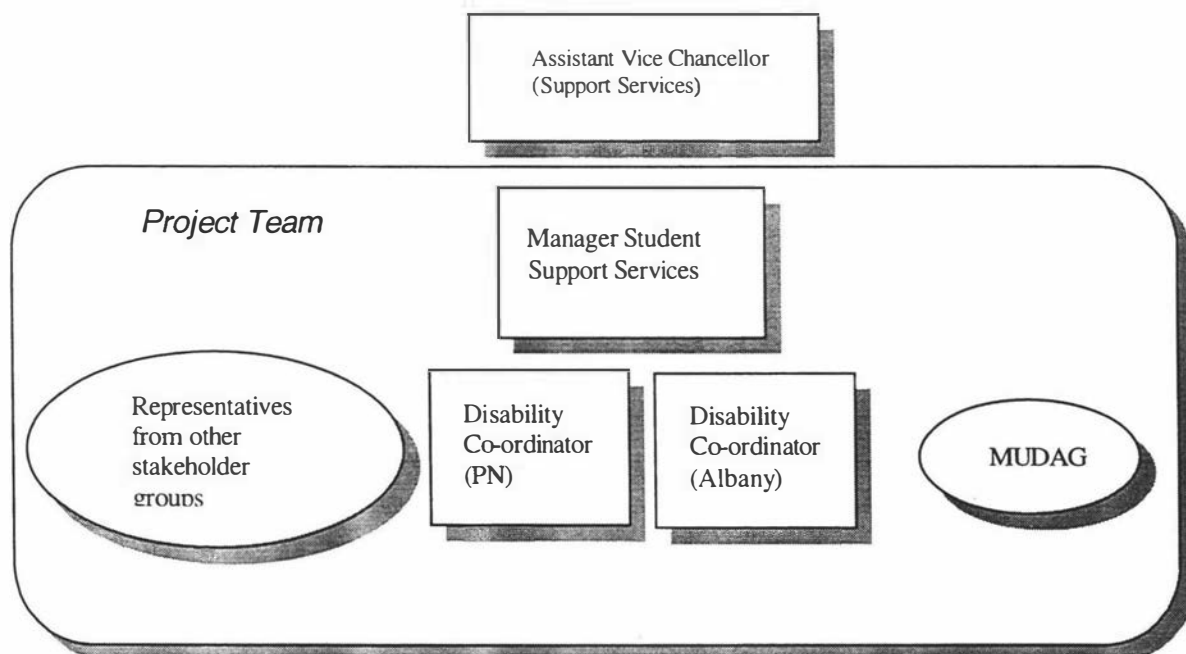
The university has large numbers of internal and extramural students (over 32,000 enrolments according to the last annual report) on a number of campuses. A natural

consequence of the institution's size is that disabled students are a normal part of the student body. In addition to this, the relatively modern construction of most campus buildings, and its comparatively flat site have contributed to Massey University's Turitea site becoming regarded as a suitable place of study for a particular group of disabled students - those with mobility constraints. The demand on university services generated by these students has meant that a disability support service has been provided for some years.

In August of 1997, the Ministry of Education announced additional funding for universities wishing to establish or extend services for disabled students. This allocation had been made in the 1997 Budget and to receive the funding the institutions were required to submit an expression of interest by the end of October 1997 and a full plan to the Ministry by January 1998. Under the direction of the Assistant Vice Chancellor (Support Services), Massey University was already working on a re-organisation of its service for disabled students, and a decision was taken to apply for the funding. The practical implication of the decision was that the planning process that was under way had to be rapidly advanced. With an approaching deadline and the disruption of the Christmas holidays, the Assistant Vice Chancellor (AVC) contacted a consultant and asked her to suggest a way of completing a plan for Disability Support Services that would meet the deadline.

THE PROJECT

The project started with an initial meeting between the consultant and the AVC in September 1997. Following this meeting the AVC provided the consultant with a written brief. This required the consultant to work with a team of appropriate people to develop a plan for Disability Support Services which would meet the university's needs, whilst also providing the basis for a formal application for funds to the Ministry of Education. The consultant responded with a proposal that provided two options; a "comprehensive" or a "concise" approach. While both of these focused on the client's needs, the former made greater use of the consultant as a facilitator, working with the stakeholders to develop a plan that was based on their detailed understanding of the services needed by their student clients.

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Despite the fact that the comprehensive approach had significant implications for the university in terms of cost and the allocation of time, this was the option chosen by the AVC. This was confirmed in a letter to the consultant that asked her to proceed with the project.

The first step taken by the consultant was the identification of the key stakeholders in the provision of disability services at Massey. These included staff already working with disabled students (on all three university campuses), representatives of the Massey University Disability Action Group (MUDAG) and the Massey University Disability Advisory Committee. From this group of stakeholders a number were invited to become part of the project team. This team, which consisted of seven people (in addition to the consultant and the AVC in her role as project sponsor), was involved in identifying the scope of the project, using the proposal as the basis of their discussion. The outcome of this meeting was agreement about a number of aspects of the project, including the key tasks in the process and appropriate deadlines and milestones. At this point a project schedule was also produced, and this detailed the individual information-gathering meetings that had been planned by the consultant and the planning sessions that were to follow. This schedule was followed throughout the project, with the consultant first coordinating the various elements of the data collection, and then facilitating the group through a series of meetings as they analysed the data and developed the plan.

While the project was chiefly driven by the consultant and the project team, the other stakeholders were consulted during the process, as planned in the proposal and the project scoping document. These key groups were identified as students with disabilities, those responsible for providing funds to this group, and university management. While members of these groups were not necessarily included in the meetings themselves, they were included on the circulation lists for project documentation.

The overall process was reasonably complex due to a number of factors that needed to be considered. There were a large number of interested stakeholders, the university vacation had begun and it was not easy to schedule meetings to suit students as well as staff members, representatives from three university campuses were involved, and it was important to accommodate the needs of the disabled members of the group. In addition, the lead consultant was assisted by two others who contributed specific expertise. Despite these challenges, the process ran smoothly, and all the agreed sessions were held

as scheduled. The agendas set for each meeting were achieved, and as the planning process went on, agreement did emerge within the group about the priorities for action.

By the end of end of November the group had developed a draft business plan for disability support at Massey, and had arranged a meeting where members of the project team presented the draft to stakeholders. Following this meeting the plan was amended, and a final version was delivered to the sponsor in early February 1998.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

The scoping exercise identified two sets of success criteria: one for the project overall and one for the plan itself. These lists of criteria were detailed, and included items such as "the plan is feasible, realistic, and acceptable to key groups" and "the project is completed on time, and to budget". However, although the consultant planned to use these criteria as the basis for a formal evaluation of the project's success, this did not occur to any great extent. This was because by the time the plan was delivered some of the actions suggested in the plan were already under way, and the implementation process had begun. As a result, the first "concluding" meeting that was scheduled between the consultant and the sponsor was spent discussing issues that had arisen as a consequence of the planning process being merged with the implementation process. There was also a considerable amount of discussion on the plan's structure, and the consultant was asked to make further changes before the document was finalised. The shift from planning to implementation and the need to revise the plan meant that there were limited opportunities to formally acknowledge the completion of the project or discuss its outcomes. This was despite the consultant's plan to undertake a "service evaluation".

ASSIGNMENT 6: HEALTH AND FERTILITY FOUNDATION

The consultant in this assignment was Dave Gaynor, who approached the researcher in June 1998 to discuss a further client project. An initial meeting with the client confirmed his willingness to participate, and the researcher became involved in the assignment soon after.

The case narrative that follows is primarily based on data collected from the researcher's participation in meetings. While the consultant provided the researcher with copies of

key documents relating to the project, the commercial sensitivity of the project and the highly technical nature of some of the documentation meant that observation became the chief method of data collection. For the same reasons the technology is not described in detail.

ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Health and Fertility Foundation was formed specifically to generate funding for a team of researchers working at Massey University. This team had developed a technique that appeared to have commercial potential, however, an external funding source was needed to ensure that the team was not disbanded and the research discontinued. This was the role of the Foundation, which had the initial task of securing sufficient funding for the team to complete their work, with the expectation that once the product was fully developed, a long term investor could be found. It was clear from the outset that the research staff would continue to be employed by Massey University, and that their arrangement with the Foundation had the full support of the institution, which was used to dealing with arrangements of this nature through the Massey University Research Office.

As well as being employed by the university, the team's members had an informal relationship with an Australian company that had been formed to capitalise on the work of a team of scientists working in the same area. While the two teams of scientists had shared their results, the fact that the Australians had been working on the technology for longer meant that the New Zealand researchers felt themselves to be significantly in their debt.

Figure 4.7: Organisational structure of the Health and Fertility Foundation
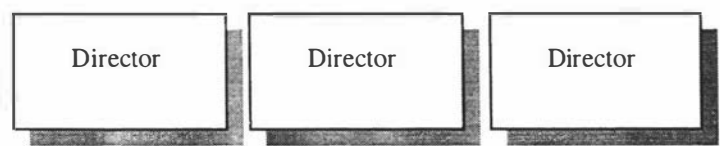
THE PROJECT

The consultant was initially contacted by one of the members of the Health and Fertility Foundation who asked if he would meet with the group and assess whether he could help them in their plans to raise funds and attract an investor. This meeting was successful,

and the consultant responded to their two-phase brief with the suggestion that they should focus primarily on attracting an investor. His recommendation was that this would then enable the Foundation to attract the necessary short term funding. His strategy was based upon his knowledge of the Technology New Zealand funding programme available from the Foundation of Research, Science and Technology (FRST). The requirements of this programme are for all funding proposals to have joint applicants: from a research institution and from a private company.

The Health and Fertility Foundation members agreed, and the consultant moved quickly into information gathering, using the industry knowledge of the Foundation members to help him identify potential investors. He also began meeting with the key scientist, first to gain an understanding of the technical side of the project. This was essential as it quickly became clear that there were several potential applications for the technology, and that the consultant was needed to help the Foundation members clarify which direction they should prioritise.

As the consultant and the scientist worked together their initial focus was on developing a summary of the situation that in the consultant's terms would "make our case". This document needed to summarise all of the important issues in sufficient detail for the potential investors to understand both the risks and the rewards involved in the investment. From the consultant's perspective the summary also had to function as the essence of the Foundation's business plan.

The importance of the document meant that the consultant expended a considerable amount of effort in its development. He held several meetings with the scientist to work through the details and provided several drafts of the result. The final result was approved by the Foundation and the consultant was asked to use it as the basis for his approach to the five companies that had been identified as potentially having the interest to invest in further development of the product's applications.

At this point the Massey University Research Office contacted the scientist to tell him they had sent out a letter to prospective investors. This came as a surprise to the consultant, who although he was aware that the Research Office had been approached by the Foundation, had understood that it had decided to take no action. Several of the companies that had been contacted by the Research Office were also on the consultant's

list, and so a meeting of all parties was held to decide what should occur next. This meeting concluded with agreement that the consultant should continue with his plans to approach the two companies that were on his list that had not already been contacted by the Research Office, and that he and the scientist should be responsible for carrying out *all* the company visits.

The scientist and the consultant visited four companies, and it was quickly apparent that one company met the requirements of a potential investor exactly. After a meeting with representatives from the company, the consultant was asked to develop a proposal for them. This was done, and after further discussions the company agreed to make a joint application to Technology New Zealand with Massey University.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

The consultant's brief had been to successfully attract an investor for the Health and Fertility Foundation that would enable the Foundation to complete the development of the technology and plan for its commercialisation. This was achieved, within the time frame set by the Foundation (six months). From the consultant's perspective the application to Technology New Zealand marked the successful conclusion of the project, and the start of a new project; to advise the Foundation on options for structuring the new venture.

THE FIRST PROPOSITION

The cases as narrated in this chapter were written at the conclusion of the research, that is, after the completion of the three research cycles that are described in Chapters 5-7. However, they are included at this point to provide the reader with an understanding of the order in which the projects occurred and a sense of the range of projects undertaken over the two years of data collection. Each case is dealt with in more detail in the appropriate chapter, with assignments 1-3 (OSA, McKenna's and the Student Finance Section) providing the basis for Chapter 5, and assignments 4-6 (TeamTalk, Disability Support and the Health and Fertility Foundation) described in Chapter 6.

These two chapters focus on different aspects of the cases, as the research partners developed their thinking on the starting proposition that was introduced at the end of

Chapter 3. This was the statement "that it is possible to identify the factors that influence consultancy outcomes by engaging in participatory research with individual consultants". This statement was first addressed in the first research cycle, which is described in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: The First Research Cycle - A Focus on the Intervention Context

"Both medicine and management deal with urgent and pressing problems. The demand for a cure is so pressing that critical faculties are often suspended. The quack who promises relief often receives a warmer welcome than the practitioner who recognises the limitations of his knowledge, and since it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of treatment, this impression may persist even after it is over" (Kay, 1993, p 35).

In the previous chapter the research partners (the consultants) and their clients were introduced, in the form of six case narratives. The narratives introduced the different projects and broadly described the way in which each project was approached and the results that were achieved (the outcomes of the intervention). The researcher also detailed the way in which the model of cooperative inquiry (introduced in Chapter 3) was used as the basis for the study. The application of this model requires the research partners to agree on an initial proposition as a starting point. For the purpose of the first research cycle this was the statement "that it may be possible to identify the factors that influence consultancy outcomes and understand their effect by engaging in participatory research with individual consultants" (page 126).

As explained in Chapter 3, this starting proposition was a deliberately general statement, designed to give the research partners a question to consider that was neither too straightforward nor too difficult. Despite its generality, the proposition does relate specifically to the third research objective: to identify the key aspects of an organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate ED, with particular reference to interventions that seek to influence organisational and individual learning.

The chapter describes the way in which the research partners addressed this initial proposition in relation to specific projects and summarises the reflections that they made on these projects. The structure is based on the four stages of the cooperative inquiry model; proposition, practice, experience and presentation. The chapter's first section, *The research partners in action*, describes the practical element, where the researcher and the consultants worked side by side on client projects. The second section, *The research partners' experiences*, deals with the way the researcher and the research

partners began to make sense of their experiences. The third section, *The research partners' learning*, assesses the learning that occurred throughout the research cycles, for the research partners, the researcher and finally, for the research team overall. The chapter concludes with the research team's first presentation.

THE RESEARCH PARTNERS IN ACTION

As Chapter 2 demonstrated, there are a number of different ways of understanding organisational consulting. The two main perspectives are those drawn from management science and organisational behaviour, and the commentators and researchers that can be identified with these two perspectives differ markedly in the way they describe consulting. However, despite the points of difference, there are also a number of areas where both groups agree. One of these is in their identification of four key variables inherent in any organisational consulting assignment. These are the client, the consultant, the project and the client organisation.

This literature provided the researcher with what seemed to be an appropriate starting point for her discussions with the consultants. At this early stage of her relationship with them she felt it was important that the discussions were focused on concepts that they were familiar with and which they would be able to discuss. The literature on the variables of consulting assignments provided this common ground, and helped to ease the initial nervousness with which the consultants appeared to be approaching the research process. This nervousness exhibited itself in a number of ways: One consultant spoke enthusiastically about being involved with the research, but appeared to be reluctant to actually nominate a suitable project. Another made it clear that she regarded the researcher as having a higher level of expertise than she did, and regularly sought confirmation that her practise was competent. This had the effect of slowing down the emerging relationship between the researcher and this research partner.

Despite having discussed the implications of action research with the consultants, the researcher was not surprised at the reactions described above once the process was actually under way. As noted in Chapter 3, Greenwood and his colleagues caution that "no one may mandate in advance that a particular research process will become a fully developed participatory action research project .... to view participation as something

that can be imposed is both naïve and morally suspect"(Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993, p 176). The researcher was therefore prepared for the participatory aspect of the project to develop over time, and for there to be some initial reluctance on the part of the consultants.

To facilitate the participation of the consultants, the researcher approached the initial discussions with an overt objective: to provide the consultants with a way of participating in the research in a manner that was comfortable for them. To achieve this she used the literature to focus the discussions, which were also designed to provide the parties with a means of developing their working relationship. In a practical sense this meant that the researcher and the consultant would discuss a concept, and then the researcher would present the consultant with some of the relevant literature, whether in the form of a summary (for example, a model or diagram) or a complete article.

Figure 5.1: The intervention context framework
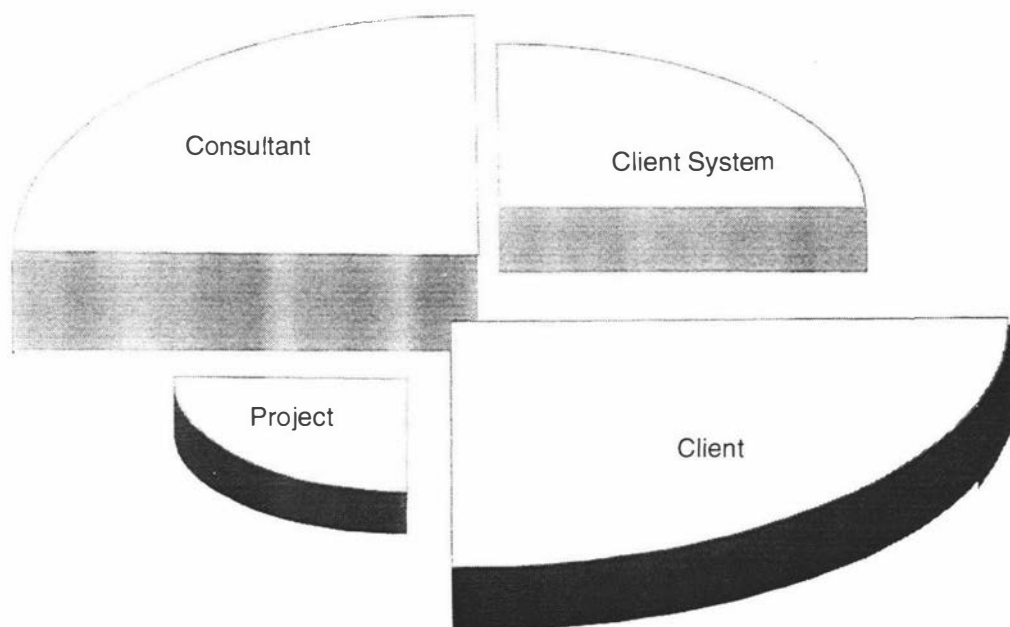
During the discussions that ensued, the researcher noted the way in which the consultants responded to the content of the material. Initially the consultants appeared unwilling to offer any comments that appeared critical of what was being presented. The consequence was that the preliminary "intervention context framework" (Figure 5.1), which was developed was primarily the work of the researcher. Despite this being the case, the framework was a useful point of focus. The consultants were comfortable with

it as a guide for the initial research cycle, which assisted them to focus on the barriers and enabling factors within an intervention. From the researcher's perspective it was also appropriate, as it was consistent with the starting proposition for the research that had been developed.

This chapter introduces the intervention framework through the first three client projects, which were undertaken between April 1996 and July 1997. It was these projects that provided the research partners with their first opportunity to critically assess their practice of consulting. This experience and the working proposition that emerged from this experience provided the foundation for the two research cycles that followed. In these cycles the consultants gradually became focused on answering more specific questions, as they became more involved in the process, and more willing to become active research *participants* rather than passive subjects.

The material presented in this section has been drawn from a number of sources: the researcher's observations, comments from the consultants, and reflections from their clients. The researcher's objective was to present an overview of the different elements of the intervention framework (using the four elements of the framework to provide a structure for the material) in a way that captures the unique perspectives of each of the parties. However, as discussed in the chapter's final section, this approach had its limitations, and in reflecting on their learning from this part of the study the research partners were later able to develop a way of describing assignments more accurately, which built upon the presentation in this Chapter.

THE CLIENT

In the McKenna's case one of the company Directors made the initial approach to the consultant, who was already known to him. As the "contact client" the McKenna's representative (who was later to become the Managing Director of McKenna's International) was solely responsible for briefing the consultant, and several of the initial meetings were held with no one else present. This process established a firm bond between the consultant and the MD, and although when asked by the researcher to identify "the client" the consultant identified *McKenna's*, rather than the individual, in the group sessions that followed this identification was not so clear cut. The good

working relationship between the consultant and the MD meant that he was often treated as the primary client.

The difficulty with working with an organisational entity (such as McKenna's) as a client is noted by Kubr (1986), who discusses the importance of making a distinction between the individual client and the client enterprise (Kubr, 1986). The situation is made even more complex when there is a lack of clarity about the organisation itself. In this case the consultant began working for a company named McKenna's, and the distinction between McKenna's (International) and McKenna's (Palmerston North) was only made part way through the planning process. Compounding this difficulty from the consultant's perspective was the fact that he was working with a group that consisted of the company's five newly appointed Directors. As the consultant commented, "the group hadn't worked together before, and therefore had to form [as a group], *before* tackling the task".

As a client McKenna's had many positive characteristics. Individual Directors were experienced in different facets of business, and all appeared to be committed to the company's success. However, the lack of time the group had spent together, and the pressures of working on a project while some Directors were also working full time in other organisations meant that effective group dynamics had not been developed. As a result individual competencies were not always maximised. A similar issue existed in terms of authority; while the Board as a whole (and therefore the client, according to the consultant) had the authority to make decisions, both concerning the project and what was to follow, the dominance of the company's founding Director made this authority difficult to exert. This dominance was a consequence of his history with McKenna's, and was exacerbated by the way in which the new Directors deferred to his obvious knowledge. The good relationship between the contact client (the MD) and the consultant was also a factor, as the MD tended to take a greater role in decision making that might have been the case otherwise.

In the case of OSA, a similar issue existed in terms of identifying the contact client as opposed to the actual client. This was due to the dominance of Ormond Stock as CEO. Not only was Ormond the founder of OSA, an internationally successful consulting engineering firm, but after eighteen years he also retained the position of Managing Director. In the context of the project that formed the basis for the case study Ormond

played the key role from the organisation's perspective. He made the initial context with the consultant, after identifying the company as needing training. Not only did he make the first contact with the consultant, but he was also the dominant participant in the project meetings that followed, which were attended by his two fellow Directors as well as the consultant. The result of Ormond's initial dominance of the project (which was paralleled by his control of all aspects of OSA) was that he personally continued to be the consultant's primary client, long after the other two Directors had ostensibly been drawn into the process.

At the outset of the project Ormond displayed suggestions of the characteristics that were later shown to be representative of his style. His initial contact demonstrated his confidence in his own ability to identify an organisational need, although he was unsure how to proceed once this had occurred. This confidence was based partly on his reading of the management literature, which in its turn was linked to his love of learning and an enthusiasm for new ideas and concepts. It was also connected to his role as founder of OSA; his knowledge of the company surpassed the other Directors, and his continuing emotional attachment to the company meant he would consider any concepts that could be of value to its future development. This attachment to the company also ensured his commitment to the development process; once he was persuaded that a particular strategy would benefit the company he would do everything in his power to ensure its success. At times this meant that he acted in ways that were contrary to his natural management style, which could be described as paternalistic, but there was never any hesitation about his commitment, once he had accepted the consultant's suggestion.

This absolute commitment to development was extremely important to the project at OSA, however, the side effect was that the other Directors were marginalised from the process. Given their personalities and backgrounds this may have occurred anyway, but the completeness of Ormond's commitment and their acceptance of the validity of his position (as founder and majority shareholder) may well have been overwhelming. Despite Ormond's efforts to involve the other Directors, and his insistence on their participation, this did not occur, and their obvious discomfort in meetings with the consultant meant that they were increasingly left out of project planning and evaluation. The result was that the consultancy became seen largely as "Ormond's project", despite

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the fact that one of its original aims had been the development of the management team as a means of preparing the company for Ormond's eventual retirement.

The complete identification of the project with Ormond was exacerbated by his commitment to ensuring that the changes that emerged from the project were in fact implemented. The key issue was the way in which this commitment was demonstrated, with Ormond taking the lead role in implementing change. Despite efforts to develop the organisation as a whole, and the Directors in particular, the effect was to emphasise Ormond's centrality to the organisation, and the inability of other organisational members to understand the nature of the changes that needed to take place. In an unfortunate side effect, the project could be seen as perpetuating Ormond's dominance of OSA, rather than providing the company with a means of minimising this dynamic.

In the case of the Student Finance Section, Manawatu Polytechnic, the contact client was the Acting Director, Corporate Services and Development. However, in an early session with the whole group of stakeholders in the project, the consultant undertook an exercise to identify roles for those involved, and at this session the Acting Director was defined as a specific type of client - the project "sponsor". As sponsor there was recognition that she had an important role in undertaking some of the clients' tasks, particularly those that related to implementing the project outcomes. Other "client tasks" were to be undertaken by the project team. In practice the ability of the project team to fulfil their client tasks was minimised by the fact that the team was not stable for the duration of the project. New members were added to the team and this hampered the team's ability to develop as an entity.

THE CLIENT SYSTEM

The literature on organisations as client systems generally assumes that the organisation is a single entity that existed before the project began. However, McKenna's was a new organisation and had two distinct entities; the local branch and the parent company. The practical implication for the consultant was that there was no clarity about the McKenna's culture, although during the project there was much discussion of the "McKenna's way".

The lack of history for the company made it difficult for the consultant to identify the organisation that comprised the client system. The result was that the local branch

became the defining system within which the project was placed. Most project meetings were held at the local offices, and so the physical characteristics of this site provided the brand new parent company with some sense of history and some tangible symbols of its culture. For example, during breaks in planning sessions, it was common for at least one of the Directors to practise his golf swing. The golf clubs, the arrangement of the furniture and the collection of books in the client waiting area all added to the impression of a company that was focused on its service, yet didn't take itself too seriously.

Another implication of the lack of a defined culture was that it created a situation where by default, the *group* (as depicted in the organisational chart in Figure 4.3) functioned as the client system. Group dynamics dominated the nominal organisational structure, with some Directors having more credibility than others did within group sessions. This was particularly evident with the founding Director, and his son, the manager of the local branch.

OSA's core business is engineering, a field which encompasses high levels of technical skill with a need for creativity and enterprise. The combination of skills needed by individual employees ensures that the organisational culture displays an appreciation both of creativity and exactitude, a blend that at times becomes a tension. This was displayed in problem-solving sessions where the whole company (including approximately 25 individuals) was involved. At some points the creative members (the design engineers) contrasted with those who preferred to look for the underlying rules (chiefly those involved with draughting the plans that the design engineers had developed). While the contrast was marked, there was no feeling of unease about its impact, probably due to the fact that almost all members of the organisation were experienced in working on client projects. This experience appeared to provide the team with an effective background for working with an outside consultant as they seemed able to tolerate several perspectives, as long as the task in hand moved towards some sort of resolution. As a team they displayed a high task focus, and this was demonstrated in group sessions where the consultant had to do little but introduce a task before the group culture of "making things work" took over, ensuring that the task was completed efficiently. This task focus provided an extremely helpful complement to the consultant's facilitative style, with the team able to provide its own direction, leaving the consultant to contribute to the smooth running of each session and the overall coordination of the project.

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This base-line acceptance of consultancy services was extended by the Managing Director who was expansive in his views on the value of employing consultants. His enthusiasm however, was not imposed on the rest of the organisation; staff at OSA were encouraged to be active thinkers, and to make their own judgements.

In summary, the key characteristics of the OSA client system can be described as: a traditional yet individual organisational culture, an articulate Managing Director with clear opinions, and intelligent employees used to making their own assessments and experienced in using and delivering consultancy services. The result of these factors was a client system that was extremely welcoming to consultants and receptive to their ideas.

The Student Finance Section could also be understood within the context of a "client system". Manawatu Polytechnic is a long established institution, which has remained stable despite expansion. The culture is clearly defined, and the project team members would have been able to describe this if necessary. One of the defining aspects of the organisation is its emphasis on learning. All project team meetings were held in classrooms, rooms that were physically arranged to emphasis the relationship between a "teacher" and a "learner". Desks faced a white board at the front of the room, and there were always supplies of pens, flip chart paper and other "teaching tools". Despite the fact that these were brought into the session by the consultant, the participants' acceptance of these tools demonstrated their understanding of this way of working.

THE PROJECT

The McKenna's project was clearly scoped out at the beginning of the assignment. The consultant's brief was to develop a strategic plan for the company that would help them to expand the "McKenna's approach" through franchising. The extent of this project cannot be overestimated: given that at the time of the project McKenna's was operating from a single branch, there were huge changes inherent for the company in developing a product for sale to franchisees. It was the scope of the project that was the issue for the consultant, as the project was too extensive to relate to the organisation's goals (the usual starting point for a planning exercise) – it replaced them. In practice this meant that the Directors and the consultant had almost no parameters for their project, as the existing McKenna's branch was going to be overtaken by the new entity. The way in which the company was to be overtaken was signalled in the name change; previously

known as McKenna's, the new Palmerston North branch became McKenna's (Palmerston North).

A similar situation occurred at OSA. At first the project (a lack of staff compliance with operational procedures) seemed to be reasonably straightforward, and clearly related to the organisation's goals. However, as time went on the project's scope broadened, and by the time work started both the consultant and the client recognised that the focus would be broader than the delivery of training. As the assignment continued its focus continued to change, and the consultant and the client re-negotiated roles a number of times. In terms of the role groupings identified by Wooten and White (1989), at first the consultant was expected to act as a educator/trainer, but once the scope of the project was broadened her role became that of researcher. As the project continued, her role changed again, to that of advice provider. Amongst the factors that influenced this process of role negotiation were the task focus, the stage of the assignment and the developing levels of trust between the two parties.

The cooperative relationship that was secured through the course of the intervention established the conditions for an outcome that was far beyond the scope of what was initially planned. As the CEO later commented: "find a company that's good at what it does and develop a partnership with them. At the beginning the consultant just provided training, then we formed a relationship. They educated us and became our corporate development arm". These and other similar comments reflected his growing realisation that had his original brief been followed, it may have limited the consultant's potential to contribute to the company. His flexibility in allowing the consultant to modify the assignment was a critical factor in the project's success.

The project for the Student Finance Section was also clear from the beginning of the project. The project sponsor was also explicit about her understanding of the way the project would relate to the organisation as a whole. She commented particularly on the "strategic importance" of the project in terms of helping the organisation to achieve its long-term goals. However, because the project sponsor remained at a distance from the project team for much of the process, it is not clear whether the team's members understood the full implications of this statement. This difficulty was further complicated when the project team was changed in the middle of the project (as described on page 171).

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THE CONSULTANT

The consultant for OSA was Lisë Stewart, the principal and Client Services Director of The Training Company. Lisë has had considerable experience with client work, chiefly in the context of training interventions with large groups. This experience appears to have helped Lisë to develop strong interpersonal skills, which are also consistent with her formal educational background in psychology and communication. In addition, Lisë has undertaken a number of training courses outside university, including courses in accelerated learning, peer counselling and customer service skills. She speaks openly of a strong commitment to people and learning, and it is significant that The Training Company's first "mission statement" was "to change people's attitudes to learning".

This background was demonstrated in her work with OSA, in which she paid particular attention not only to choosing the intervention activities, but also to the way in which they were carried out. This care was obviously evident to the client, who commented on his satisfaction both with the activities and her skill in implementing the intervention plan. He also commented on the consultant's willingness to be flexible in arranging meeting times, her ability to accept negative responses and her commitment to identifying issues of importance to the client. However, by far the most important factor in the client's mind was the establishment of a close personal relationship between the consultant and the client; in his mind a precondition to a successful outcome. His opinion was that "a partnership is essential for the client-consultant relationship to be successful; unless it is that way you won't achieve the degree of honesty needed".

The consultant for McKenna's was Dave Gaynor from FR Development. Dave's curriculum vitae reveals a strong background in applied science. Interested in science as a schoolboy, Dave left university with a master's degree in science, majoring in crop production. He immediately began his working career as a scientist, gradually moving into the management of scientific institutions and the commercialisation of research.

Despite this move into management, Dave's scientific training remains a strong legacy. His logical approach to planning client intervention was apparent from the beginning. Dave has extremely good systems, with colour coded contact sheets, and well-organised files. He is also systematic in the way that he approaches clients, working from an implicit understanding of all client work as single projects. However, he also has a good appreciation of the complexity of client work. Several times he commented on the fact

that clients rarely understand this complexity, and the challenge of designing an effective intervention, and that their impatience to achieve quick results means that they often under-estimated the time that is needed.

The consultant for Student Finance Section was Jo Innes from Partners in Performance. Jo's undergraduate university qualification is in psychology, which she followed with a masters degree in business studies while working in health management. As a result of her university experience Jo has access to a number of different models that she is able to apply to her client assignments. For example her psychology training has provided her with a way of understanding the motivations of individuals, and an appreciation of the value of systematic approaches to client interventions. The business models that Jo was introduced to during her second degree have complemented this foundation, and given Jo a way of viewing organisations both from an individual and a corporate perspective.

THE RESEARCH PARTNERS' EXPERIENCES

As the researcher worked with the research partners on their client projects it became clear that there were similarities between their experiences and the literature. While interested in capturing these similarities and differences for the purpose of comparison, the researcher was also interested in disseminating the findings from her review of the relevant literature to the consultants. For example, in relation to the elements of the intervention, as identified in this chapter, the researcher was aware that the consultants had not had previous exposure to important works by writers such as Schein (1968), Kubr (1976, 1993, 1996), Margerison (1988) and Lippitt and Lippitt (1979). In order to present this material to the consultants the researcher gathered together the key models from the literature into a single ring binder, and used this as a resource in a series of interviews that were designed both to gather data and disseminate information. A list of the models used in this way can be found in Appendix H.

The process followed in these interviews was that the researcher arranged a formal meeting with each consultant after the completion of the client project. As described in Chapter 3, these meetings were designed to help the research partners reflect on their learning in the context of the relevant research proposition. During this interview the researcher took each element of the intervention framework in turn, asking the research

partners to identify the characteristics of the "ideal" client (or client project, consultant or project). Once they had offered their ideas, the researcher used the material in the ring binder to introduce the consultants to some of the ideas relating to the element of the intervention they had been discussing. For example, the researcher asked each research partner to identify the characteristics of an ideal client. Once they had exhausted their own thinking on the subject, the researcher showed them Kubr's (1993) checklist. This practice usually generated more discussion, and as already noted, was a way of gathering more data while at the same time disseminating the literature. The process offered a framework for the researcher to contribute to the development of the research partner's practice, consistent with the fourth research objective; to assist consultants and their clients to maximise ED outcomes.

The following section summarises the reflections of the research partners as they worked through this process, with each of the four elements of the intervention framework. The major themes from the literature are also summarised, and the section concludes with a comparison of these themes with those identified by the consultants.

THE CLIENT

CLIENT ASSIGNMENTS

Each research partner was asked to define an "ideal client" (from the perspective of a consultant) and they all found this extremely easy to answer, quickly identifying a number of characteristics from their own experiences.

Dave identified a list of factors that could function either as enabling factors (through their existence in a project) or barriers (by their absence). His list included: that the client has the ability to learn from a consultant; has had previous positive experience of using a consultant; is accessible; has a vision/goal; understands own business/industry, and has the ability to "see it through". At this point he made no reference either to client "competence" or to the need for the consultant to identify the client "correctly". Nor did he appear to consider the client's strength or weakness in terms of the characteristics that he had identified.

From Lisë's perspective, one of the key issues was access. This means that clients themselves have to be accessible, and sufficiently senior within the organisation to

provide access to other relevant people. A second theme was their attitude to the change process; she commented on the importance of their commitment to change, their feeling of responsibility for change, their willingness to take risks, and their ability to make decisions that would ensure that the change process would be implemented. A third theme was the client's personal qualities, with honesty and integrity two of those that were valued most highly. Lisë also indicated the value of a "knowledgeable" client in a broad context - knowledgeable about the industry the organisation operates within, as well as management theory and change processes.

Jo's description of an ideal client was a similar mix of personal qualities and commercial awareness. In her eyes clients need an ability to deal with the "big picture", need to be result-oriented and should understand the implications for the actions that will follow the consultant's intervention. They should be in a senior position within the organisation, but Jo felt it was important that they should have an understanding of the "front line". She added that this meant that the CEO would not necessarily be a suitable contact. In terms of the project, the ideal client would be concerned about its long-term effectiveness, and be open-minded - without a pre-set agenda. Jo also commented on the issue of access, both in terms of the client's time and allowing access to relevant documents. Her final point was that a client needs experience and a depth of knowledge (probably academic). She was emphatic about the need for a client to "frame up a project in terms of strategic direction of organisation, and have the power to implement".

While the factors identified by the consultants touched on a number of different issues, in the discussions with the researcher that took place immediately after each of them had completed their own lists, a number of strong themes emerged. The first was the need for the client to be committed - to the project in the short term and the way its outcomes are integrated into the organisation in the long term. The second theme was that of the client's competency, in terms of knowledge, attitudes, skill and personal qualities. While this competency is in part concerned specifically with the management of a consulting project, it also relates to the client's competency as a manager. The third theme was the position of the client within the organisation - his or her ability to provide the project with whatever resources are needed and then to ensure that the changes are implemented. These themes are discussed further in the summary of this section (page 187).

Figure 5.2: Characteristics of an ideal client according to the research partners

An ideal client....	Dave	Jo	Lisë
Is accessible	✔	✔	✔
Can make decisions			✔
Takes responsibility for change			✔
Has ability to "see it through"	✔		
Understands implications for actions to follow		✔	
Is knowledgeable			✔
Understands own business & industry	✔		
Has experience (of business)		✔	
Has depth of knowledge (probably academic)		✔	
Has a vision/goal	✔		
Has ability to deal with big picture		✔	
Plans in terms of result orientation		✔	
Is committed to change			✔
Is open to change & thinking about options		✔	
Is senior &/or allows access to senior people			✔
Is senior, with front line understanding		✔	
Is honest & has integrity			✔
Is willing to take risks			✔
Is concerned with long term effectiveness		✔	
Does not have a pre-set agenda		✔	
Provides access to relevant documents		✔	
Has the ability to learn	✔		
Is appropriate type of client			
Has had positive previous experience of using a consultant	✔		

THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

The literature makes a number of points regarding the client of an organisational consultancy. Several contributors suggest that accurately identifying the client is important as it can have a major impact upon the project's success or failure. Schein (1987) suggests a number of different types of client, including the contact client, the intermediate client, the primary client, and the ultimate client (Schein, 1987). Similarly, Kubr comments on the importance of making a distinction between the individual client and the client enterprise (Kubr, 1986).

The identification of different client types is related to the discussion on role reciprocity, which implies that the client has to undertake a specific role in relation to the particular role undertaken by the consultant (Wooten & White, 1989). The central core of this material is the implication that there is a relationship between the client and the consultant, and that the dynamics of this relationship can be critical to the way the client "feels" about the project as well as the outcomes for the organisation.

The literature is also clear about the need for the client to be "competent", in choosing a consultant (Kubr, 1996; Patterson, 1995; Scarbrough, 1996). One of these competencies is their degree of openness to learning (Steele, 1975). A related concept is the need for an effective client to be open to collaboration, both with the consultant (Tovar, Gagnon & Schmid, 1997) and with his or her own staff (Kilmann, 1995).

THE CLIENT SYSTEM

CLIENT ASSIGNMENTS

Again, the consultants found it straightforward to identify the characteristics of an ideal client system from the perspective of a consultant, although at times they found it difficult to separate the "client system" from the "client".

In the case of McKenna's, Dave was concerned with the organisation's financial ability to commit to the consultant for the duration of the project, having found that some projects had been constrained due to lack of client funds. He was also clear about the advantages of working with an organisation with clear goals, as his experience was that organisations of this type were better equipped to understand the potential contribution that his project could make. Another factor was in terms of the organisation's culture. Dave specifically commented on the need for an organisation to have an absence of internal politics.

Basing her thinking on her experience with OSA, Lisë also commented on the need for the client system to have a realistic understanding of the possible cost of a project and to have sufficient funds to cover this cost. She also noted the need for the organisation to have a clear vision or set of goals. Connected to both of these ideas was Lisë's description of an ideal client organisation as "stable". By this she was referring to both internal volatility and financial stability, and connected to her understanding that effective

change needs the "correct" conditions. On a pragmatic level she identified the need for a strong project champion, a factor that related to her thinking on the need for a client to "take responsibility for change". While these factors were similar to those identified by Dave, Lisë's final factor was particularly telling; she described an ideal client organisation as "one that values people". Here she hinted at her fundamental notions about organisations, which at the time were unexpressed, although they were revealed more fully as the study progressed.

Interestingly, although Jo had considerable experience with large organisations such as the Student Finance Section, she was less able to identify aspects of the client system that influenced the success or failure of a consultancy assignment. The only factor that she identified that was specifically connected with the organisation (rather than the client) was the need for a project administrator.

Figure 5.3: Characteristics of an ideal client system according to the research partners

An ideal client system....	Dave	Jo	Lisë
Can provide a project administrator		✔	
Can afford the consultant	✔		✔
Is an organisation with a goal/vision	✔		✔
Has an absence of internal politics	✔		
Values people			✔
Provides a strong project champion			✔
Is a (reasonably) stable organisation			✔

While the result of this process meant that the researcher had collected the thinking of all three consultants on the topic of an "ideal" client, the nature of the research meant that is was difficult to align the consultant's comments with each other within a roughly similar time frame. For example, the researcher first discussed the elements of the intervention framework with Lisë when the project with Ormond Stock was begun in April 1996. She was not able to discuss the same topic with Dave in any meaningful way until his first project started in August 1996. Similarly, Jo was not drawn into the researcher's thinking on this topic until May 1977. The result was that although each of the consultants gave the researcher important feedback, there were limited opportunities for

them to participate in summarising the data at this time: rather it was the researcher who undertook this role. Reviewing the lists that had been compiled by the consultants in the context of three different projects over the course of more than a year, the researcher reduced this list to three key factors (as presented in Figure 5.6).

The first is the issue of resources. The client system must be able to provide the necessary resources to the team involved, and be seen to do so. The second factor concerned the organisational culture, which from the experiences of the consultants could act both as a major barrier to a project, or function as an enabling factor. The third factor was again the notion of competency, this time as it applied to an organisation as opposed to an individual.

THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

The literature that contributes to this topic is drawn mostly from the area of organisational development. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, this is the area in which there is more discussion of the inter-relationship between organisational consulting and organisational processes. Contrary to the rational model of management science, OD acknowledges the complex nature of organisational processes, and the need to give as much thought to "change process theory" as to "implementation theory" (Porras & Robertson, 1987). While this discussion on process theory is continued in the next chapter, there are some comments that can be drawn from this literature that are relevant here.

The first is Argyris's contribution (1970) concerning organisational learning. He suggests that "the more closed a client system is, the lower is the probability that an interventionist can help" (Argyris, 1970, p 136). On a related topic, Schein identifies three possible organisational cultures: the "operator culture", the "engineering culture" and the "executive culture" (Schein, 1997b). He comments that a lack of alignment between members of an organisation results in learning problems and barriers to effective reinventing, and goes on to suggest that "both the executive and engineering culture operate on the implicit assumption that people are the problem" (Schein, 1997b, p 10).

Kilmann (1995) also offers some specific advice. He argues that organisations which are old, large and entrenched; that have experienced autocratic leadership in the past; that were highly successful before the turbulence of the 1980s, and that have implemented

numerous cycles of singular intervention approaches will have barriers to successful interventions.

THE PROJECT

CLIENT ASSIGNMENTS

In terms of the client assignment, the consultants were also able to identify some factors that they saw as relevant. Following the same process as that used previously in asking the research partners to identify "ideal" clients for the perspective of a consultant, the research partners created the list in Figure 5.4. All identified similar issues, with a particular focus on the need for the organisation to relate its short-term plan (the project itself) to the long term (the organisation's plan). Consistent with the comments already made about the role of the client, Jo identified the need for a strong internal project champion.

THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

There is very little literature that specifically deals with the project itself as a factor in the intervention. However the literature implies that a project needs to be carefully defined, and that the task of deciding upon its scope is important.

Figure 5.4: Characteristics of an ideal project according to the research partners

An ideal project....	Dave	Jo	Lisë
Relates to long term development (not crisis)	✔		
Relates to organisation vision			✔
Is more than a "Band-Aid"			✔
Has an up-front rationale			✔
Is concerned with global issues		✔	
Is positive for the organisation (not down-sizing)		✔	
Has a strong internal champion		✔	
Allows degree of adviser involvement in implementation	✔		
Is one where the consultant can take an integrated approach			✔
Has "goal posts" that stay the same (though objectives may change)			✔
Can be clearly described by client in terms of what he/she client wants in the end			✔

In a more specific reference, Kubr (1986) comments on the need to relate the choice of an intervention technique to the type of problem that is being dealt with. He argues that if the problem is closed-ended the "correct" technique will emerge from logical analysis, whereas if it is open-ended there will be many possible solutions.

THE CONSULTANT

CLIENT ASSIGNMENTS

Again, at this point the researcher asked the consultants to discuss the particular intervention elements (in this case the consultant) in "ideal" terms. The researcher encouraged the consultants to draw upon their own experience as well as their reading in answering the question.

Dave was very clear in his mind, starting with the type of knowledge needed for a consultant to be effective. Here he emphasised the need for the consultant to be knowledgeable about a range of intervention tactics. He then moved on to the skills needed for managing a client assignment; the ability to focus on client's starting point, to match appropriate interventions with the type of business and its stage; and to get the client to act. He also identified a set of skills that relate to the consulting business; an ability to manage the operation, market his products and services and be proactive in building networks.

Lisë also noted the need for an effective consultant to be effective at running a business. Having guided her own business through a period of rapid growth, she was conscious of the commercial perspective this had provided her with, and that she felt was useful to her clients.

Jo's focus was more concerned with the mechanics of the intervention. She particularly stressed the need for an effective consultant to have good technical skills. This included knowing a range of intervention tactics and having the ability to select (and use) the tactics appropriately, depending on the client's situation. She also noted the value of a consultant who is knowledgeable about the client's industry.

After further discussion with the research partners the researcher summarised the factors that were identified. Firstly, an ideal consultant would be "competent", that is, he or she would have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal qualities that are necessary to

undertake the range of tasks implied by the general term of "consultancy". Secondly, an ideal consultant would have the necessary systems for undertaking the whole process of consultancy - from responding to the client's initial inquiry to delivering the final report. Thirdly, an ideal consultant would need to have adequate resources for maintaining his or her own business, as without this continuity, the client's needs cannot be met.

Figure 5.5: Characteristics of an ideal consultant according to the research partners

An ideal consultant....	Dave	Jo	Lisë
Can match appropriate interventions with stage of organisation (PLC)	✔		
Has ability to select (& use) appropriate roles (for group & project)		✔	
Spends time in pre-planning (process as well as industry knowledge)		✔	
Can match appropriate interventions with type of business	✔	✔	
Has ability to focus on client's starting point	✔	✔	
Analyses the issues			✔
Asks questions			✔
Has interpersonal skills		✔	
Has skill at getting the client to act	✔		
Has technical skills/consulting speciality			✔
Is proactive at building networks	✔		✔
Is skilled at managing consulting business	✔		✔
Is skilled at marketing consulting business	✔		✔
Knows range of intervention tactics	✔	✔	
Thinks strategically			✔
Understands him or her self			✔
Understands the client			✔

THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

The literature that relates to the consultant as a variable within a client assignment is extensive. Much of it is concerned with the process of consulting within a client context and the choices that a consultant must make in relation to various situations that present themselves during the assignment. There is also a large amount of literature that deals with the skills and personal qualities that an effective consultant needs. This topic is discussed at length in the literature, and a number of different skill sets are identified. For example, Margerison (1988) identifies technical skills and interpersonal abilities, and

Porras and Robertson (1987) list interpersonal competence, problem-solving ability, the ability to create learning experiences and the skill of personal insight. Despite the different perspectives, there is a degree of commonality, with Margerison's (1988) division of technical and interpersonal skills widely supported as a broad framework (Kubr, 1996; Porras & Robertson, 1987)

In more specific terms, the technical skills are regarded as relating to the consultant's underlying discipline or speciality (Dash, 1994; Vieira, 1995), as well as providing an understanding of a relevant systems model (Dash, 1994). Interpersonal skills are also discussed and listed in more detail, as are personal qualities such as emotional maturity, ethics and integrity (Kubr, 1986).

The commentators who discuss consultants' training needs provide further material. It has long been thought appropriate for consultants to have some general preparation in conceptual-diagnostic training; orientation to theories and methods of change; orientation to the ethical and evaluative functions of the change agent; knowledge of the sources of help, and operational and relational skills (Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958). These same writers go on to suggest that consultants would need to specialise, by type of client system, diagnostic orientation and method, areas of change objectives, "level" of problem, or type of change method (Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958). This comprehensive approach has been somewhat modified in recent times, with Kubr's (1986) framework for preparing consultants including a greater emphasis on the technical skills of management consulting rather than understanding the dynamics of the consultant as a change agent.

This change in emphasis has been exacerbated by the practical focus of the various professional associations such as the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC). These groups have their own "body of knowledge" which focuses on the consultant's technical skills, and his or her capability to run a consulting practice.

The consequence of this volume of material is that despite the different perspectives on the specific skills that a consultant needs, there is agreement that consultants need to possess a blend of interpersonal skills, background knowledge, and personal qualities. Without entering the debate over the value of identifying managerial competencies, it is

clear that the implication is that the competent consultant will have the appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal qualities.

In the context of a client assignment, the implication is that a competent consultant will be effective. Although there is little in the literature that deals directly with the question of how to assess a consultant's effectiveness, there is an understanding that a competent consultant will be able to develop a strong "psychological contract" with the client (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). As indicated in Chapter 2, the existence of a psychological contract is seen as important to the assignment's success.

A SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PARTNERS' EXPERIENCES

The consultants began the research with a working framework that would enable them to visualise the different elements of their work with clients. This intervention framework, introduced in Figure 5.1, demonstrated the four elements of a client project, and suggested that inter-relationships may exist between the elements. In this sense the elements could be regarded as variables, as it appeared possible that the relationship between the different factors could be described and that the result of this would be a means of predicting the outcomes of different combinations. If this proved possible the outcome would be a practical tool for consultants to use in planning an intervention.

As the previous section demonstrated, it was possible for the consultants to identify the characteristics of "ideal" assignments. As explained on page 176, once the consultants had done this, the researcher used the ring bound collection of models (Appendix H) to introduce them to some of the key concepts found in the literature. For example, after discussing the client, the researcher introduced Schein's (1987) list of client types: the contact client, the intermediate client, the primary client and the ultimate client. This framework provided the consultants with a way of making the important distinction between the contact client and the ultimate client, a concept that they could apply to their own projects once they had been provided with the language to describe the different client types.

The researcher used the same approach with each of the consultants, guiding them individually through a similar process over the course of a single meeting. After completing the process with the three consultants (which did not occur until June 1997), the researcher compared the lists that they had generated with those characteristics

suggested in the literature. During this comparison the researcher found that the factors identified by the consultants in Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 were also noted in the literature (as summarised n the previous sections). The language used to describe the factors was not always exactly the same, however, the researcher was confident enough of the similarity of meaning and the links between the *themes* (rather than the individual factors themselves) to develop Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6: Characteristics of ideal assignments

Intervention element	Success factors
Client	Authority
	Commitment
	Competencies
Client system	Resources
	Culture
	Competence
Consultant	Competencies
	Systems
	Resources
Project	Relates to organisational goals

This list was a summary of the characteristics of ideal assignments and was based on the literature and the themes identified by the consultants. The researcher had two objectives in developing this summary. Firstly, it drew together some of the themes that had emerged from the first research cycle in a way that might be of immediate use to the consultants in their client work. Secondly, it provided the research team with a basis for further study.

THE RESEARCH PARTNERS' LEARNING

As each of the client assignments drew to a close, the researcher and the consultants started to try to articulate their thinking, in terms of the cycle's starting point. At the completion of each assignment the researcher arranged a meeting with the consultant, and they started by discussing the items that the consultants raised. For example, at the meeting with Jo after the Student Finance Section project was complete in July 1997 she

was interested in discussing some of the issues that had emerged from the contact client's feedback. Once she had explored this issue, the researcher was able to guide the discussion onto the broader issues that had emerged during the project as a whole. This included the concepts from the literature that the consultants had been introduced to, as described in the previous section. With Dave this discussion took place within the course of a single meeting, but with both Lisë and Jo several meetings were needed to cover all of the issues.

These discussions were held over the course of more than a year, as the three initial projects each came to a conclusion, and they were primarily focused on the individual consultant's reactions to their own project, within the context of the research process. However, despite the fact that the meetings were held over an extended time, there was some opportunity for the consultants to gain from the experience of the others, at least for Lisë and Jo who completed their projects after Dave.

The ability for the consultants to learn from each others' experience was an additional influence that the researcher had not originally foreseen when planning the research, but which gradually developed as time went on, and the consultants became more involved in the process as participants. This involvement was demonstrated in their growing awareness of the other consultants as participants in the research process, and the questions that they asked concerning their reactions. At first the researcher was not sure how to respond to questions such as "is Lisë [or Dave or Jo, depending on the identity of the questioner] finding the same difficulty in identifying the client correctly?" In responding to the question the researcher was initially concerned with any breach of confidentiality, but after explaining her hesitation to the questioner, and gaining his or her permission to discuss their responses with the others, this issue was resolved. From this point onwards, all of the consultants were aware that their observations about the process of consulting in general (as opposed to the specifics of a client assignment) could be discussed with the other consultants involved.

The interest of the consultants in the experiences of the others, and the researcher's method of dealing with their questions in a way that respected confidentiality while at the same time sharing something of their experiences led to an added benefit for the participants. Not only were they introduced to new ideas from the literature, the researcher was able to facilitate their development through "cross pollinating" their ideas

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with each others'. As described in the previous paragraph, before sharing any specific comments the researcher sought the permission of the consultants. In retrospect this appeared to be an important step in increasing their awareness of the other two research partners.

This aspect of "cross pollination", was consistent with the project's action research method, and as noted in Chapter 3, the result was "learning" of a number of different types. Firstly, there was the learning of the individual consultants, who during the course of the client assignments were able to learn more about consulting approaches. Secondly, there was the learning of the researcher, who learned about the research process as well as organisational consulting. Thirdly, there was the learning of the research team as a whole, which focused on the cycle of proposition; practice; experience and presentation introduced in Chapter 3. In the following sections the researcher has attempted to identify and explore these three types of learning.

THE CONSULTANTS

The chief result for the consultants was that they were able to reflect on the project already described in this chapter, retrospectively comparing it to the summary of success factors listed in Figure 5.6. This exercise frequently generated additional insights for the consultants.

For example, the client's "success factors" were seen to be the client's degree of authority, commitment and competency. In the case of the Student Finance Section, the division of the client's task responsibilities between the project team and the project sponsor complicated the consultant's ability to assess the assignment against these success factors. While it was important for the sponsor to be committed to the change process, this was even more critical for the project team, as it implied a task focus that was of more relevance to them. By contrast, the sponsor was the only one with the authority to implement changes that were recommended and to provide the project team with the resources that were needed. Similarly, the consultant had to assess the client's competency on two levels: the project team needed to be competent in some areas, and the sponsor in others. While this example has showed that it was not easy to assess the assignment, the final result was not always the critical factor. Rather it was the process of the exercise itself. In this case the exercise added to the consultant's understanding of

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the particular project and provided her with a way of assessing future projects in terms of the client's potential.

The consultant involved with OSA had a similar experience by assessing one aspect of the client's competency - that of their experience of "positive consultancy" (as identified in Figure 5.2). As a firm engaged in the provision of professional services to others and with considerable experience of using a number of different consultancy services, OSA can be described as an "educated" consulting consumer. This assessment can be seen at all levels of the organisation; virtually all staff are involved in client servicing, and as a result, are aware (from a personal perspective) of the issues of "successful consulting". Individuals can discuss matters such as "providing a satisfactory service to clients", and define the dimensions of a "satisfactory" consultancy intervention.

As with Jo and the Student Finance Section, by discussing OSA with the researcher, Lisë was able to see some of the implications for the project overall. For example, she was able to formalise the distinction that she had intuitively already made: that OSA was different from other projects she had undertaken, because of the particular skills of the contact client.

THE RESEARCHER

The researcher's learning at the end of the first research cycle (which focused on the intervention context), was concerned both with relating the data to the research objectives and with changes that needed to be made to the research design in the light of the data that was emerging.

In terms of the data, the first research cycle provided the researcher with a number of possible answers to the questions posed by the research objectives, particularly the second objective. This was "to identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers". The first research cycle had focused on identifying these factors and had produced a working framework for refining the thinking of the research partners through another research cycle. However, in order for the researcher to increase her understanding of the key factors that influence a consultancy intervention it was clear that the research design needed to be modified.

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For example, as the previous section described, the consultants gained considerable value from assessing the different elements of the intervention against the factors in Figure 5.6. However, while it was straightforward to assess the client, the client system and the project, it was particularly difficult for the consultants to assess themselves - at least in a way that they were comfortable to share with the researcher. It was also difficult for the researcher to do this as an external observer. Although there was an agreement between the research partners and the researcher that she would provide feedback to them on their practice of consulting, there was a tendency amongst the research partners to ascribe a high level of authority to the researcher's opinion. For the researcher this presented a difficulty, as it ran counter to her objective for the research, of developing a number of research partnerships that were truly participatory. The challenge of finding a more effective way of assessing the consultants was one of the main issues for the research team at this point in the study. In response to this issue the researcher decided to focus the second research cycle on the consultants (described further below).

THE RESEARCH TEAM

The discussions that took place as the projects were concluded provided the research partners with a profusion of rich material and new ideas. This situation produced a number of consequences. The first was that they each became more interested in the topic, and more committed to participating in the study. Here the turning point for each of them seemed to be at the point when they were able to describe their involvement in the study as part of a personal strategy of "professional development". The second related consequence was that they became more interested in the *researcher's* purpose, and were eager to contribute to the emerging concepts for "better practice consulting" that she was developing. From this point on their role changed, as they were more aware of themselves as "research partners", rather than research subjects.

This change in the consultants' perspective was significant, as from this point on they became more involved in refining the research design. For example, once the researcher and the research partners were agreed on the importance of the ten success factors listed in Figure 5.6, they started to focus jointly on finding a way of applying their developing understanding of the practice of consultancy. While this work continued to be undertaken in meetings attended by the researcher and one of the consultants, rather than in meetings with the whole group, there was a growing sense of the research partners as

participants in a single process. At this point the research partners also began to take the initiative in arranging meetings with the researcher, either contacting her by telephone or electronic mail to set up a session to continue their discussions.

The result of these additional discussions was very similar. The three consultants felt that although discussing general aspects of the intervention framework was useful, they needed a mechanism for describing the elements in detail, and then assessing the strength or weakness of each element in terms of the success factors. They would then have a tool that could be used to assess any project in terms of its likely "pre-conditions" for successful consulting. For example, a client assignment that had been assessed as having reasonable strength across all four elements would have the potential for a successful outcome, and one with weak elements would have a lower likelihood.

The consultants' enthusiasm for developing a process for assessing the success factors and mapping a client assignment in some way led to further discussions on the best way of approaching this task. A number of options were discussed, most of which relied on some type of quantitative assessment. For example, at first Dave favoured some sort of scoring system or scale for each element. This would then be weighted, in line with his thinking that some elements are more important than others in affecting the project outcome. The researcher discussed this suggestion with the other consultants, who could also see the advantages of such an approach. However, after much thought, it was clear that far more work would need to done to validate a method of this type. While all of the consultants were committed to this task, after reflection they could see that it was beyond the scope of the study. As a result of this decision the research partners focused on finding a less complex method for assessing the four factors. The result was a simple assessment of each factor in terms of "strength" or "weakness".

This assessment was to be conducted by the consultants themselves, a process that they each saw as relatively straightforward. For example, Dave assessed himself in the context of the McKenna's assignment as "strong", given his considerable experience of strategic planning. He also assessed McKenna's as a client as "weak". His reason for this was primarily the lack of experience that the Directors had of working with each other, which made it difficult for their individual strengths to be maximised. In terms of the other elements of the intervention framework Dave assessed the McKenna's project as "weak" (given its scope in relation to the organisation), and the client system as "weak", given its

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lack of sufficient resources to ensure effective implementation. In this case his overall assessment was that the consultant was strong and the other three elements were weak. As explained below in the final section of this chapter, this approach to assessing an assignment's potential was the basis for further exploration by the researcher and the research partners.

THE FIRST PRESENTATION

Chapter 3 introduced the model of cooperative inquiry in which the researcher begins with an initial proposition and then moves through three subsequent phases of practice, experience and presentation. This process was followed for the first time at the conclusion of the first research cycle, in which the researcher worked with each of the three consultants on a single client assignment.

At this stage the research partners could identify some personal learning, As noted in Chapter 1, this had been one of the researcher's objectives. However, more importantly in the context of the other objectives, the research team had begun to develop a framework for assessing a client project. Initial attempts at a visual representation of the preliminary assessment framework produced a number of options, such as the use of colour or shading to indicate different levels of "strength" or "weakness". Eventually the simplest format was selected. Firstly, each element was given a letter code, with "C" representing the consultant, "S" representing the client system, "L" representing the client, and "P" representing the project. Secondly, a table was constructed and the researcher listed the different combinations of strength and weakness. Classifying each of these elements as strong or weak, the researcher signalled a "strong" assessment by the presence of the letter code. Conversely, the absence of the code indicated an assessment of the factor as "weak".

The table that resulted from a systematic matching of all the factors to one other produced fourteen possible combinations. However, the researcher excluded those where the consultant was weak, assuming that the consultant's strength would be a necessary precondition for an assignment's success. This had been one of the strongest themes of the literature, and one that was corroborated by the experience of the consultants. The

eight combinations that remained (as listed in Figure 5.7) were described as "intervention profiles".

Nothing similar to this presentation had been found in the literature, and at this point in the research it appeared to be a useful innovation. In particular, the research partners considered it possible that they would be able to produce a "profile" of a prospective client project in terms of these combinations. The resulting intervention profile (IP) would allow them to plan their approach to an intervention.

**Figure 5.7: Possible combinations of intervention elements**

Consultant (C)	Client system (S)	Client (L)	Project (P)	Intervention Profile
Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	CSLP
Strong	Weak	Strong	Strong	CLP
Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	CSP
Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak	CSL
Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	CL
Strong	Weak	Weak	Strong	CP
Strong	Strong	Weak	Weak	CS
Strong	Weak	Weak	Weak	C

For example, as described above, in Dave's experience of McKenna's, he assessed himself as "strong", the client as "weak", the project as "weak" and the client system as "weak". This combination of factors produced the intervention profile "C", implying that Dave should have developed strategies to overcome the potential of the project's overall "weakness". The fact that he had not done this formally suggested to him that in the future the IP would be a valuable addition to his consulting "toolbox".

Despite the unrefined nature of the IP the research partners were all enthusiastic about applying it to a client project. From their perspective the important issue was not the tool's validity – rather it was the possibility that it could help them to refine their approach to client projects. Until then they had been content to assess projects in an unstructured manner, but after this exercise they all spoke of a commitment to being more systematic in this task. To the researcher this enthusiasm signalled that the study was providing the individual consultants with a framework for developing their thinking

about the practice of consulting. To summarise their development she mapped their thinking on the model of cooperative inquiry, producing Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8: The first research cycle
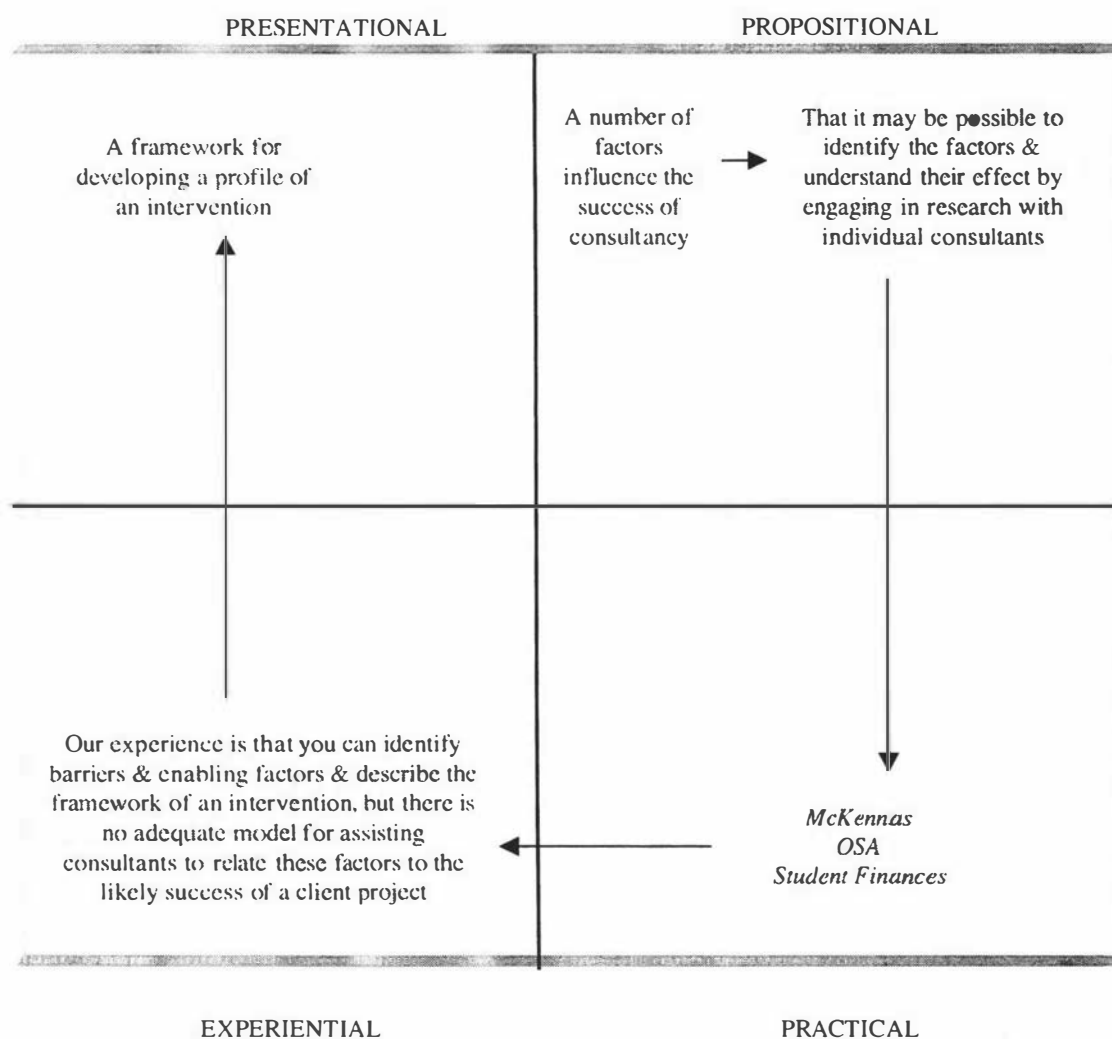
The thinking represented in this figure became the basis of the research partner's second proposition; "that assessing a particular client assignment with the help of the IP would assist a consultant to make choices about appropriate intervention strategies". The iterative nature of action research meant that this proposition provided the basis for the second research cycle and a second set of client projects. After its application through the second research cycle it was possible for the research partners to assess the value of the IP. Both the research cycle and the research partners' conclusions are described in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: THE SECOND RESEARCH CYCLE - A FOCUS ON IMPROVING INTERVENTION PRACTICE

"I have at my fingertips diagnostic techniques for every 'issue' in the cosmos. On my bookshelf I find more models for fixing things than there are stars in the galaxy. Yet I am strangely undernourished by this intellectual cornucopia" (Weisbord, 1987, p 13).

In the previous chapter the first research cycle was described. This cycle focused on the starting proposition "that it may be possible to identify the factors that influence consultancy outcomes and understand their effect by engaging in participatory research with individual consultants". The researcher worked with each of the consultants separately, using a single client project as a means of developing an initial working presentation. At the end of the research cycle (which lasted from April 1996 to June 1997) the research partners were agreed that all interventions could be described in terms of four elements; a client, the client system, the project and the consultant.

The implication was that these four elements could be regarded as variables within an intervention, and that their relative strength or weakness could potentially influence its outcome. For example a project in which the client was continuously inaccessible would create a situation for the consultant that could prove to be an insurmountable barrier to ultimate "success". Similarly, a "pie in the sky" project could fail, despite the best efforts of the consultant, the client, and the support of the client system. At the completion of the first research cycle the research partners had developed a method for describing the elements of an intervention that would assist the consultant to identify any areas of high risk.

This chapter describes the second research cycle, in which the research partners applied the method, known as the intervention profile (IP) to a client project. The proposition inherent in this second research cycle was "that the IP can assist the consultant to assess the intervention conditions and make choices about appropriate intervention strategies". This proposition was primarily focused on addressing the second research objective: to identify the key aspects of an organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate ED, with particular reference to interventions that seek to influence organisational and individual learning.

As with the last chapter, the structure is provided by the headings of the cooperative inquiry model. In the first section *The research partners in action*, the researcher describes the application of the intervention profile (IP) in the context of the client projects that were undertaken during the second research cycle. In the chapter's second section, *The research partners' experiences*, the researcher discusses the way in which the consultants were able to make use of the IP. This is followed by the reflections of the research partners in the section, *The research partners' learning*. The chapter concludes with the research partners' second presentation.

THE RESEARCH PARTNERS IN ACTION

The projects discussed in this chapter were undertaken between April 1997 and July 1998. This research cycle therefore overlapped with the first research cycle, as the Student Finance Section project (the first project undertaken with Jo Innes) was still in progress when TeamTalk (the second project to be undertaken with Lisë Stewart) was begun. All the projects in this chapter are the subject of case narratives (included in Chapter 4).

As was the case with the last chapter, the material presented here has been drawn from a number of sources: the researcher's observations, comments from the consultants and reflections from their clients. However, from this point on the research partners were also formally introduced to material from the other consultants. As described in Chapter 5 (p 189), this formal introduction to the thinking of the other research partners was deliberate, as the researcher was extremely careful about maintaining confidentiality within each of the three research partnerships until the point at which all three agreed to an exchange of information. As will be seen in the third research cycle, the link between the consultants continued to develop until the point at which they all asked if it would be possible for them to meet, and have a formal exchange of views.

However, at this point the consultants were all working on their own, with the assistance of the researcher. This assistance was given during the meetings that the researcher held with each consultant at the end of their respective projects (as described in Chapter 5, pp 176-177). In the context of the first research cycle these meetings were focused on developing the intervention framework (IP). This process had enabled the research

partners to identify the factors that they regarded as likely to influence the success of an intervention (by their existence within an assignment) or its failure (by their absence). The researcher had then introduced the relevant material from the literature, such as Schein's (1988) client types, those who comment upon roles (Champion, Kiel & McLendon, 1990; Williams & Woodward, 1994; Wooten & White, 1989) and those who discuss the various multi-stage models (French & Bell, 1995; Kolb & Frohman, 1970; Kubr, 1993; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1969; Lippitt & Lippitt, 1986; Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958).

The material was reviewed by the consultants in comparison with their initial reflections, and, as described in Chapter 5, after further discussion the researcher compiled a list of key "success factors" for each element of the intervention framework (see Figure 6.1, initially presented as Figure 5.6).

Figure 6.1: Characteristics of ideal assignments

Intervention element	Success factors
Client	Authority
	Commitment
	Competencies
Client system	Resources
	Culture
	Competence
Consultant	Competencies
	Systems
	Resources
Project	Relates to organisational goals

In relation to clients, the research partners identified three factors. The first is the client's commitment - to the project in the short term and the way its outcomes are integrated into the organisation in the long term. The second is that of the client's competency, both in terms of knowledge and interpersonal qualities. The third is the position of the client within the organisation - his or her ability to provide the project with whatever resources are needed and then to ensure that the changes are implemented. In relation to the client system there were also three factors. The first is the client's resources. The second is that of the culture of the client system. The third is the client system's competencies. In

relation to the project there is a single key factor - whether the project is related to organisational needs or not. In relation to the consultant there are also three factors. The first is that the consultant is competent, the second is that he or she has appropriate systems in place, and the third is that resources are available.

These ten factors were considered in relation to the three projects described in this chapter, which describes the second research cycle. Here the researcher guided the consultants into discussing the application of the IP to the specific projects that the consultants were working on, namely, TeamTalk, the Health and Fertility Foundation and Disability Support Services. The purpose of this exercise was to explore the proposition that had been developed at the end of the first research cycle: "that assessing a particular client assignment with the help of the IP would assist a consultant to make choices about appropriate intervention strategies".

The observations made by the consultants in respect of their projects are noted in the following sections.

TEAMTALK

As described in Chapter 4, TeamTalk was the fourth assignment undertaken as part of the study. The primary issue for the consultant in the case, Lisë Stewart, was defining the scope of the project. While she had originally been called in to the company to undertake some sales training, her preliminary analysis showed that a more extensive intervention was needed, to address other company-wide issues. As a result the consultant suggested that the project be carried out in two phases, with a "global" company analysis being followed by a specific training programme. In other words, the consultant advised that the project be redefined in a way that explicitly demonstrated the way it would contribute to organisational goals. The CEO accepted the value of the two-phase approach suggested by the consultant, and on this basis the consultant was able to describe the project as "strong".

The negotiation exercise also demonstrated the client's strength. The CEO was experienced in the use of consultants, committed to the project, and exhibited a range of competencies that indicated his ability to maximise the advice provided. However, the CEO made it clear that he expected the consultant to liaise primarily with the Sales Manager, thus sharing the client role with a less experienced manager who had little

interest in the global perspective inherent in the first phase of the project. The consultant was not entirely comfortable with this arrangement, but after some discussion on the different roles they would take she agreed that the Sales Manager would act as the "contact client", with the CEO as the "ultimate client". Despite this discussion, there was no explicit mention of different client roles in the proposal that she developed.

A further complication in terms of identifying the client was the fact that TeamTalk is part of a multi-national corporation, and during the project the position of New Zealand Manager was created. While at the beginning of the project it appeared that the CEO had the authority to make decisions on the project's implementation, by the end of the project it was clear that the New Zealand Manager saw this as his role. From the consultant's perspective the lack of a single client, with the authority, commitment and the competency to perform effectively, led her to assess the TeamTalk client as weak overall. However she added the caveat that without intervention from the New Zealand Manager the CEO had the ability to fulfil this role effectively.

In terms of the client system there were also factors that indicated strength as well as weakness. The company was large enough to be able to provide the consultant with the resources for the project; it was possible for staff to have time for meetings with the consultant, and there were already scheduled meetings that she could use for the purpose of the project. In addition, the company made a point of demonstrating its culture as being innovative, fast moving and open to change. However, there were some staff members that were obstructing the project. While the reasons for this lack of support were unclear, to the researcher it appeared that they were taking this position as a method of demonstrating their loyalty to the New Zealand Manager. Despite this lack of wholehearted support for the staff, the consultant assessed the client system as "strong".

In summary, the consultant assessed TeamTalk as having a strong project, a weak client, a strong consultant and a strong client system. Based on the format introduced in Chapter 5 this gave TeamTalk the intervention profile of CSP.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

In Chapter 4 Disability Support Services was introduced as the fifth assignment in the study, and the second that the researcher undertook with Jo Innes. In this case the scope of the project was clear from the outset. After the University's Executive Committee had

decided to apply for the special funding available from the Ministry of Education to institutions providing services to disabled students, the Assistant Vice Chancellor (Services) was asked to develop a funding application. This application was required to include a plan for the service, and it was the development of this plan that provided the project's scope. The straightforward nature of the project, and its clear link to the organisation's goals led the consultant to assessing the project element of the intervention profile as "strong".

The consultant's early experience of the client also indicated that this was an element of strength. The Assistant Vice Chancellor (AVC) had experience in a number of change initiatives, and was previously employed as a lecturer in management. This background provided her with a basis for understanding the processes and nature of change. However, the consultant had made a distinction between the project sponsor (the AVC) and the project team, with the consultant being contracted to provide the sponsor with a specific outcome, *through* a process involving the project team.

The result of this way of managing the project was that the client's role was divided into two and this in turn meant that the consultant had to assess the different parties in terms of their complementary client roles. For example, the sponsor was the individual with the ability to guide the project through the organisation, and her authority was critical to the project's overall success. However, this authority was not sufficient without a high level of commitment from those involved at the planning level. This was not always forthcoming. From the initial meetings it was clear that not all project team members were able to come to all meetings, and two members in particular were frequently absent. Since these two members were senior Massey University staff, their lack of participation changed the composition of the project team, affecting its status as perceived by remaining group members. The non-participation of these individuals also concerned the consultant, who was anxious about the effect this would have on the implementation of the plan.

In terms of competencies, there was also an implication caused by the division of the client into a sponsor and a project team. The project sponsor had experience in a number of change initiatives, and her management experience provided her with a basis for understanding the processes and nature of change. By contrast, several members of the project team were participating in their first formal planning process, and were being

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exposed to an external consultant for the first time. As a result, the consultant assessed the client as weak, despite the strengths of the project sponsor.

In terms of the client system, the most important factor was the institution's reputation as entrepreneurial and being open to change. The organisation is currently facing a rapidly changing operating environment, and has been proactive in seeking out new market opportunities and facing the challenges that these imply. Nonetheless, despite the organisation's reputation for innovation, there have been reported difficulties in managing change projects.

This may in part relate to the organisation's past practice of using staff to undertake change projects, which have been approached as "internal reviews". At least one of these projects ended contentiously - with some staff laying personal grievances against the organisation. Instances such as this are widely discussed on the organisation's internal grapevine, and may be a factor in engendering the resistance to change that appears to remain.

In the context of this project the resistance was demonstrated in two ways. Firstly the project team members were critical of the university, sharing anecdotes of mis-management, and remaining alert to any signals they could interpret as negative, in relation to the university's support for the project. Secondly there appeared to be a lack of support for the project by some stakeholders (who did not attend meetings as expected). However, overall the consultant was comfortable in describing the client system as "strong".

In summary, the consultant assessed Disability Support Services as having a weak client (despite the authority of the project sponsor), a strong consultant, a strong client system and a strong project. Based on the format introduced in Chapter 5 this gave Disability Support Services the intervention profile of CSP.

HEALTH AND FERTILITY FOUNDATION

In the context of the study the Health and Fertility Foundation was assignment six. From the perspective of the consultant, Dave Gaynor, this assignment was almost ideal. His previous work experience in a research institution had prepared him for working with scientists, and his skill showed in his quick grasp of technical issues. He also demonstrated a high level of confidence in dealing with scientists as people with

particular characteristics. These characteristics were ones that he had generalised from his previous experience, and in meetings it was clear that he was returning to a familiar role; as a former scientist turned commercial manager. During one meeting, when he was trying to plan the next steps for the project, he commented "what I am going to do is to be a little bit provocative, because I know you will try to weasel out of the timeframes". He added "I know this, because I used to do the same thing". He also was open about his feeling that scientists in general are poor at providing information in an accessible form.

Not only was the consultant dealing with the sort of people that he was familiar with, the project was one where he was confident of success. He also enjoyed the fact that it was focused on an achievable outcome. However, there was one major issue concerning him in relation to the project. This was the fact that the technology provided the basis for a number of potential applications (as noted in Chapter 4, the technology is not described in detail for reasons of commercial sensitivity). While the Foundation members had their own opinions regarding the most logical product to focus upon, in the consultant's mind there were choices to be made in the way the technology's capability was presented to a potential investor.

There were also some real challenges regarding the client. The first issue was that the Health and Fertility Foundation, which from the consultant's perspective was the client, had only been established to provide the funding for the scientists who were developing the technology. While both the lead scientist and the Foundation wanted the additional funds, it was not totally clear to the researcher that their other objectives were the same. For example while the principal scientist did speak of his commitment to commercialising the technology, his primary interest was in its *development*. By contrast, while the Foundation members were interested in the development of the technology, their primary interest was in its commercial possibilities. This potential for their interests to conflict became particularly apparent when deadlines were discussed. The scientist was cautious about committing himself to specific milestones, while the consultant's imperative (on behalf of the Foundation) was to have the scientist provide a firm undertaking to have the testing completed by a certain date.

The added complication in terms of the client was that the scientist had been working on the technology in parallel with an overseas academic. This individual had been able to

commercialise at least one product through a private company, and the New Zealand scientist was understandably nervous about any course of action that could be seen as taking undue advantage of this relationship.

The final complexity related to the client system. As a recently formed independent structure, at the time of the consultancy the Foundation had no legal connection with Massey University. However, if the project's objectives were successful, then a contractual relationship would have to be established. The consequence for the consultant was that at the time of the consultancy he was working within a client system with little going for it in the way of stability or resources. The fact that this would change immeasurably once an investor was found made it difficult for the consultant to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the client system accurately. Despite this, he made a tentative assessment of the client as weak, the consultant as strong, the client system as weak and the project as strong. This gave the project the intervention profile of CP.

THE RESEARCH PARTNERS' EXPERIENCES

As noted in *The research partners in action*, the research partners reached their conclusions about their projects with the help of the researcher, during the meetings that the researcher held with each consultant at the end of the project. Here the researcher guided the consultants into discussing the application of the IP to the specific projects that the consultants were working on.

The meetings followed the same process as was used at the end of the first research cycle: The researcher first asked each consultant to comment upon the project in relation to the research proposition. Once the consultants had provided some preliminary comments, the researcher offered her own observations. The discussion that ensued was essentially about the project, but was often illustrated with examples from the literature. This literature was drawn from the material compiled by the researcher into a single ring binder as described in Chapter 5 (see Appendix H for a list of the models used in this way).

In each case the researcher arranged the meetings to assess the value of the IP after a project was substantially complete. By this stage the consultants had usually invoiced the

client for their professional time, and it could be argued that the psychological contract between them and their clients, as noted by Ring and Van de Ven (1994), was drawing to a close. However, there still appeared to be difficulties for the consultants in terms of assessing the projects. For example, some of their comments were phrased in ways that suggested that assessing a project against the IP created a dilemma for them. In respect of TeamTalk, Lisë introduced one of her observations with the phrase "I don't know if I should say this". Similarly, Jo and Dave used phrases such as "with the benefit of hindsight" and "it's easy to say so now". These phrases suggested to the researcher that the consultants were uncomfortable with making any comment that appeared to have the potential to violate what they saw as their continuing obligations to their clients.

A further issue was that applying the IP to a project meant that the consultants were required to assess themselves as "strong" or "weak" consultants. Although the researcher emphasised that this assessment was within the specific context of a single project, and was not necessarily a reflection on their ability with other projects, this self-assessment appeared to pose a major challenge for the consultants. Reluctant to comment on their own performance, they looked to the researcher to offer an assessment. This posed a challenge for the researcher, who was aware of the way in which the consultants has originally regarded her at this point as an "expert", involved in undertaking research in which they were the subjects. Although during the first research cycle this relationship had developed, and the researcher was confident that the consultants were beginning to regard themselves as "research partners", their anxiety to gain the researcher's approval which was exhibited at this point appeared to be a backward step in the relationship. Given the sensitivity of this issue, and the delicate balance of the developing relationship between the researcher and the research partners, at this stage of the process the researcher assessed all the consultants as "strong".

The strong psychological contract that existed between the consultant and the client and the consultants' reluctance to comment on their own performance meant that they tended to focus on the future rather than the past. While a retrospective assessment was interesting, and could help each of the research partners in their long-term development, they were all more concerned with an immediate practical application: their objective was to develop a tool that could help them in the early stages of a project.

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Their first step in developing a tool of this kind was to try to understand the implications of the different profiles for themselves as consultants. Using the specific experiences described in this chapter as the basis for thinking about clients in a general sense, they extended the IP, by developing a set of "intervention conditions" for the eight possible profiles. Their conjectures were based on their own experience, as well as their reflections on the literature introduced in the previous research cycle. In terms of the literature, the thinking of the research partners was based both on what the literature did provide, as well as the gaps that they identified.

These discussions (between the researcher and each consultant individually) were scheduled immediately after the sessions in which the consultants had been asked to assess the projects in relation to the IP, and were usually held within a week of the first meeting. The researcher introduced the topic (the implications of the various intervention profiles for the consultant) with the assistance of the model for effective inter-organisational relationships provided by Ring and Van de Ven (1994). In their opinion these relationships, which they describe as "socially contrived mechanisms for collective action, which are continually shaped and restructured by actions and symbolic interpretations of the parties involved", go through a "repetitive sequence of negotiation, commitment and execution" (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994, pp 96 & 97). In guiding the research partners as they reflected on different intervention conditions, the researcher used this terminology to describe the process of a typical client assignment.

As occurred at the end of the first research cycle, the concluding meetings were spread over a considerable time. The researcher scheduled the final meeting with Lisë regarding TeamTalk in December 1997, with Jo regarding Disability Support Services in February 1998, and with Dave regarding the Health and Fertility Foundation in June 1998. One of the results of this delay in completing this part of the process was that the researcher had a particularly large influence in drawing together the contributions from the research partners, and developing the list that is presented as Figure 6.2.

The researcher commented upon this influence when she presented the framework to the research partners at their next session, which was arranged after the meeting was held with Dave at the end of 1998. As described above, the Health and Fertility Foundation was the last project to be completed within the context of the second research cycle, and

the researcher delayed introducing Figure 6.2 to the consultants until this project was complete and the final meeting with Dave had been held.

Figure 6.2: Possible combinations of intervention variables

Intervention Profile		Intervention Conditions
CSLP	Strong consultant, client system, client, project	Ideal situation.
CSP	Strong consultant, client system, project, weak client	Conditions poor for negotiating project and carrying it out. Conditions good for implementing recommendations.
CSL	Strong consultant, client system, client,weak project	Conditions good for negotiating project and carrying it out. Conditions poor for implementing recommendations.
CLP	Strong consultant, client, project, weak client system	Conditions good for negotiating project and carrying it out. Conditions poor for implementing recommendations.
CS	Strong consultant, client system, weak client, project	Conditions poor.
CL	Strong consultant, client, weak client system, project	Conditions good for negotiating project and carrying it out. Conditions poor for implementing recommendations.
CP	Strong consultant, project, weak client, client system	Conditions poor.
C	Strong consultant, weak client, client system, project	Conditions poor.

The initial reaction of the research partners to the extended framework, as presented in Figure 6.2, was that it was a useful addition to the IP. They speculated that using the framework as a way of identifying the potential weaknesses of a project would enable them to be more effective in planning an appropriate intervention. However, although the research partners were optimistic about the value of the framework to each of them personally, and were convinced of its validity as a planning tool, they were conscious that they would be unable to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of its validity within the parameters of the study.

Despite this reservation, they were enthusiastic about reviewing the cases already introduced in this chapter in the light of the intervention conditions that they had identified. Their primary focus here was on assessing their own practice in the light of

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this framework. For example, in an assignment with the intervention profile CLP (strong consultant, client and project with weak client system) would it have been possible to have developed a strategy for minimising the risks caused by the weak client system? The following sections summarise the thinking of each of the consultants in respect to the three assignments described in this chapter.

TEAMTALK

Once the consultant had assessed TeamTalk's intervention profile as CSP she was able to identify some of the possible implications for the project. Her first conclusion related to the conflict inherent in the different individuals who were sharing the role of client. In retrospect she could see that the separate (and at times conflicting) interests of the CEO, the Sales Manager and the New Zealand Manager created a situation where conditions were poor for negotiating the scope of the project. This was exacerbated by the absence of the New Zealand Manager from the country at the time when the project was negotiated and the terms of reference agreed. By the time he returned the project was almost complete, and his failure to "buy-in" to the project was almost a foregone conclusion. She also recognised the drawback of failing to be more explicit about the separate client roles agreed with the CEO and the Sales Manager. Even after the proposal for a two-phase project was accepted the consultant continued to liaise exclusively with the Sales Manager. In retrospect, she concluded that the CEO should have been appointed as the client for phase one, with the Sales Manager stepping in to take over the client role for phase two.

She felt that this clarification of roles would have strengthened the explicit two-phase nature of the project, which in her mind depended on the ability of the project team (the consultant, the CEO and the Sales Manager) to clearly separate "improving sales" from "developing the company". One way of ensuring this separation was addressing the objectives separately in the proposal, and this was done. However, a more effective way of ensuring that the division occurred may have been a clear identification of different "clients" for the different components of the project. This did not occur, with the Sales Manager continuing to act as the client for phase one, despite the fact that this phase focused on issues beyond the scope of his authority.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Once the consultant had assessed Disability Support Services' intervention profile as CSP she was able to identify some of the possible implications for the project. Her first conclusion related to the way in which she separated the role of the client between the sponsor and the project team. In general she was satisfied that she had taken a number of steps to minimise the weaknesses of the project team. She had developed a comprehensive proposal that set out the assignment in five stages. This order was followed by the project team, according to the project plan attached to the proposal.

Once the proposal was accepted she undertook a scoping exercise with all stakeholders and discussed the different roles that would be played by the sponsor and the project team. This exercise included the development of a "project way of working" for each workshop. This detailed a process for the workshops, ground rules for the sessions and the role of the project team in any decisions that would be taken subsequent to the project's conclusion. This exercise was particularly important in forcing the members of the project team to develop relationships with one another, and gaining their commitment to the project.

Following the scoping session the consultant kept to the schedule provided in the proposal and followed the ground rules developed. Focus groups were held with a number of different university stakeholder groups, and the project team was involved in a series of planning sessions. As agreed in the scoping document, these sessions followed a set pattern, starting with a review of the previous session, followed by facilitated group work on the item of the day and concluding with an introduction to the next session. The effect of this format was to emphasise the link between each session and the project's objectives, although a greater advantage may have been the way the process allowed the consultant to direct the group without appearing to compromise her commitment to a facilitated way of operating. In short, the consultant also undertook each session in a way that would maximise the skills available within the project team. However, she could not entirely negate the effect that was felt by the whole team when some members consistently failed to be present at planning sessions.

In terms of the project, one of the issues that was raised by the researcher was that the AVC had chosen to undertake it in a particular way – by involving a project team rather than contracting the consultant to draft a plan in isolation. Although this was discussed

with the project team it is not clear whether the members of the project team fully understood the implications. The key implication was that it guided the consultant towards balancing her role of "expert" with that of "facilitator". This dual role affected the consultant as well as the members of the project team. Given their importance to the completion of the task, their lack of understanding of this key concept may have had an impact on their ability to take roles that were appropriate, in relation to those taken by the consultant.

In retrospect the consultant felt satisfied that she had assessed the elements of the intervention correctly, and made appropriate modifications to her planned approach to make allowances for any weaknesses that were present.

HEALTH AND FERTILITY FOUNDATION

In this case the consultant was able to assess the characteristics of the assignment early in the project. He was particularly aware of the implications of working with scientists and on a project that involved the commercialisation of their research findings. He also spoke openly about certain actions that he was undertaking as "strategies to minimise the risks of the project". However, he was clearly identifying a single "risk factor" as being of primary importance; the personality characteristics that he was assuming would be demonstrated by the scientist. While the scientist did in fact demonstrate some of Dave's expected behaviours, such as being extremely cautious in committing himself to deadlines, it is possible that by focusing on a single barrier, the consultant was not able to recognise others that were of equal importance. For example, the company that had been started by the overseas academic clearly had the ability to disrupt the Foundation from forming a successful relationship with the investor within the required timeframe. This risk factor did not appear to have been considered in any serious way. Another issue was the potential for the Massey University Research Office to unwittingly interrupt the developing relationship between the Foundation and the investor. The consultant paid little attention to this possibility. As a result the potential weaknesses in the client system were not foreseen, despite the fact that the consultant had identified the possible repercussions.

The researcher and the research partners had started the second cycle of client assignments with the proposition "that the intervention profile (IP) assists the consultant to assess the intervention conditions and make choices about appropriate intervention strategies". As the client assignments drew to a close, the researcher and the research partners started to try to articulate their thinking, just as they had at the end of the first cycle. As described in *The research partners' experiences*, the process for collecting this data was a series of interviews held after the completion of the client projects, in which the research partners were asked to reflect upon the proposition in light of their experience with the second projects.

This thinking was partly led by the researcher's observations. Her perspective had enabled her to assess the consultants' actions in the three stages that were implicit in the proposition; applying the intervention profile, assessing intervention conditions and evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention strategies that were used. As well as offering observations, the researcher asked each consultant whether he or she could see any value in using the extended IP framework. By using questions such as these, the researcher emphasised the participatory nature of the research, and the value of cooperative inquiry.

As with the first research cycle, the result of the process was that learning occurred for the researcher, the consultants and the research team. This is summarised in the following sections.

THE CONSULTANTS

Figure 6.2 provided the consultants with a structured way of assessing a client assignment that enabled them to develop new insights into the particular assignment as well as any that they might undertake in the future. However, it was clear from the researcher's observations and the consultants' responses within the sessions where the IP was discussed, that applying this framework was not straightforward. While they were able to identify some issues quite easily (for example, Jo was articulate in discussing the general issues surrounding the client in the Disability Support Services project) others proved more challenging. As has already been noted, all of the consultants appeared to find it difficult to comment upon their own "strength" or "weakness". They also

appeared to find it difficult to comment on specific details about the contact client. For example, Lisë avoided making any negative comments about the CEO and the Sales Manager at TeamTalk. This was despite the fact that it appeared in retrospect that they could have handled the project differently, and that a more successful outcome could have been the result.

In addition to their reluctance to offer what could be seen as negative comments about the projects, another issue was timing. Although it had initially appeared to the research partners that applying the IP would help them to identify potential problems for the project and therefore to develop strategies to avoid these occurring, they found that it was not always easy to apply the IP at the start of the project. For example, once the project was completed, Lisë was able to assess the TeamTalk assignment as high risk. Despite the strong project, there were real difficulties with identifying the client, and potential difficulties with the client system. Lisë's initial reaction to this exercise was that she would have approached the assignment differently, if she had been able to make this assessment earlier.

A further issue was related to how the IP could be used. In the TeamTalk project Lisë found it extremely difficult to describe the changes that she would have made, even if she had been able to apply the IP earlier. Her explanation for this was that so many of the barriers within the assignment were outside her control, and her only option for minimising the barriers would have been to decline the assignment at the beginning. A similar assessment about the value of the IP in practice was made by Jo concerning Disability Support Services, although in this case her reservations were based on whether it provided her with any additional insights. She felt that while the IP was useful, even without it she had been able to correctly assess the risks inherent in the project and had taken appropriate action.

In summary, all three research partners initially reported that the IP had proved to be of limited value. At first this appeared to suggest that the IP was flawed, either because it was incomplete or too general. However, the fact that all the research partners expressed its limitations in a similar way encouraged the researcher to probe more deeply into their responses at subsequent meetings. This resulted in comments that appeared to refer less to the completeness or incompleteness of the IP than on the capability of the consultants to apply it. This is best summarised by Lisë's statement that "at times I feel that I don't

know enough about the choices that I have, especially when I am dealing with a tricky client". In effect, this was a comment on her own capability as an organisational consultant and her knowledge of the literature relating to organisational interventions. It was this sort of comment that typified the way in which the meetings that were scheduled between the researcher and the consultants at the end of each research cycle provided the starting point for the subsequent cycle.

THE RESEARCHER

The intervention profile that was developed in the first research cycle identified ten characteristics of "ideal" interventions. In the context of the second research cycle the consultants' first task was to assess their clients in relation to these characteristics. At first the consultants appeared to find this assessment quite straightforward. They were able to identify the client, and discuss the different types of client according to a typology of their own or one adapted from the literature. In general this was sufficiently robust for them to separate the "contact client" from the "ultimate client", using Schein's (1987) typology. The ease with which they accomplished this assessment at first suggested to the researcher that the consultants were used to assessing their clients in these terms. However, as the excerpts from the cases demonstrate, this assessment did not occur in any formal sense. Nor did the assessment occur at an appropriate time for the consultant to be able to use the analysis in planning the assignment.

By contrast with the client assessment, the consultants had more difficulty with identifying the characteristics of a client system. This was partly caused by the lack of information available about the client system, particularly at an early stage of an assignment. At this point consultants are usually dealing with a single contact person, and at the mercy of their interpretation of the "facts". Thus a consultant who is told that "there will be no problem with finding sufficient resources for the consultancy" will not be able to assess the veracity of this statement. However, despite the fact that the task of assessing whether a client system would be effective was difficult, the consultant's answers did suggest that they did attempt to do so.

A similar situation occurred in terms of the project. The consultants were able to evaluate its relationship to organisational goals, and make some assessment of whether it would be of sufficient importance to the organisation to ensure its continued support.

However, despite the researcher's observation that the consultants were able to apply the intervention framework and in broad terms develop an IP for specific clients, they seemed to be less able to use this assessment in any practical way. For example, despite the presence of a weak client in the TeamTalk case, the consultant was not able to develop any effective strategies to minimise the risk of the assignment reaching an unsuccessful conclusion. This was partly because the consultant's initial assessment of the client was favourable, and it was not until the New Zealand Manager started to intervene that the full implication of his lack of involvement in negotiating the project became clear.

Another issue was that in practice the consultants carried out their assessments intuitively. This was despite their ability to construct their own "checklists" of effective intervention elements, and the existence of the ten characteristics of an ideal assignment that they had participated in developing. They also had a tendency to rate the relative strength and weakness of their assignments not by comparing them to the "ideal assignment characteristics", but to their previous experiences.

The reality of the situation was that no assessment occurred in any formal sense. Nor did any informal assessment seem to impact on the way in which any of the consultants approached the assignments. This failure to apply his or her own understanding of the characteristics of an ideal client was probably due to the commercial reality involved. Whether the client was "ideal" or not had very little impact on the consultant's acceptance of the project.

In terms of the data, the second research cycle provided the researcher with a number of possible answers to the questions posed by the research objectives, particularly the third objective. This was "to identify the key aspects of an organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate ED, with particular reference to interventions that seek to influence organisational and individual learning".

The researcher's original thinking had been that certain organisational characteristics would appear to be most effective for creating the right conditions for a successful intervention outcome. These characteristics would combine with each other, as in the algebraically phrased suggestion from Dave: "the outcome = client + client problem +

consultant + process". This representation implied that weakness in any one area (such as the consultant) could be compensated for by strength in another.

However, the second research cycle provided the researcher with an important alternative possibility; that the consultant's capability was not merely one of a number of variables that interrelate to form an "answer" (the project outcome) – it was the most important factor.

This possibility emerged from the researcher's observation of the way in which the consultants were able to apply the IP. In reference to TeamTalk and the Health and Fertility Foundation, it appeared that the information needed for the IP could only be gathered near the end of the project – in other words, once the value of its application had passed. The researcher concluded that if these cases were typical then there would be practical consequences for consultants using tools such as the IP.

While at the beginning of the research cycle it had appeared that the IP may have offered a way of assisting consultants to plan effective client interventions, and be particularly useful to those consultants with little experience or training, by this point the researcher had reached an apparently paradoxical conclusion: while the IP was designed to assist consultants, particularly those with little experience, to be able to maximise the insights provided by its application, it appeared that the user would have to be highly experienced. This conclusion was one of the ideas that was explored in the third research cycle, as described in Chapter 7.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

When the researcher shared these observations with the research partners during a second round of post-project interviews, there was general agreement with her provisional conclusions. They were satisfied with the IP and its ability to provide the basis for assessing intervention *conditions* and selecting intervention *strategies*, but they were aware that they had not demonstrated an ability to apply the tools in a way that maximised their contribution to the assignment's overall success.

They concluded that although the IP is useful, on its own it is not enough to help consultants to develop appropriate strategies for minimising the risk of the intervention conditions in a particular assignment. They realised that they could not depend on the IP

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to provide them with a foundation for planning an intervention – by the time it could be used, the intervention was frequently complete.

Their conclusion was tempered with a high level of pragmatism: for the IP to be a useful tool it needed to be accurately applied at the beginning of an assignment. This would give the consultant the best opportunity to assess the conditions and develop appropriate strategies. However, sufficient information was not always available at this point, and by the time this did emerge, it was likely that a consultant would already be committed to a course of action that could not be modified without risk. Rather than depending on the IP, the effective consultant has to be well grounded in a range of different consulting theories, strategies and tools. He or she is then in a position to plan appropriate interventions, irrespective of what conditions exist.

After this conclusion emerged from their discussions the research partners made another significant "mindshift" in relation to the research. Until this point they had been involved in the research, gradually moving from the role of research subjects to research partners (as noted in the literature on action research, for example in Bunning's (1994) discussion on the roles of the research partners and the researcher/facilitator). Despite this move, they had still been *primarily* motivated by a desire to help the researcher and contribute to the body of knowledge of consulting. However as the second research cycle drew to a close, the researcher's conclusions firmly focused the research on their needs. This shift in the focus of the research, (away from the client assignment to the consultant) coincided with their growing awareness of the importance of the consultant's actions in a successful intervention.

THE SECOND PRESENTATION

The researcher has already noted (in Chapter 4) that none of the consultants had undertaken any formal training in organisational consulting, although all had postgraduate qualifications. In addition, each of them had attempted to develop their skill as consultants further, through attendance at short courses, formal study in subjects that seemed relevant to their work with organisations, or informal personal development. However, as each of the consultants signalled, this process was limited.

Firstly there are very few courses in New Zealand that specifically address the needs of consultants. Secondly there is the constraint, either of money or time, that make the undertaking of further study difficult while full-time work is also necessary. But by far the largest factor in the fact that none of the consultants was currently engaged in what they saw as satisfactory courses of personal development was the lack of a framework for assessing their developmental needs.

The fact that the research partners identified this lack of a suitable assessment framework was a direct result of their involvement in the present study. While previously they had seemed to be reasonably confident with their own abilities and knowledge, their participation in the study had exposed them to a far wider literature on aspects of organisational theory and consulting practice. The result was that they were able to identify their own lack of understanding of these topics. A related outcome was that they were able to articulate their lack of knowledge in a way that was critical of the material that does exist on the topic of consultant training and development. For example, the practitioner literature provides a number of examples of different approaches to a training programme for consultants. In response to a request from Dave for more information on the curricula of consultant training programmes, the researcher had provided Dave with material from Kubr (1996) and the Institute of Management Consultants (no date). Dave reviewed these lists and was highly critical of their omissions. He was particularly concerned at the absence of any material on the theory of organisational change, and overall felt that there was too much emphasis on the tools of consulting rather than its underpinning frameworks. In the same discussion he identified his need for a framework that he could apply to his particular needs, based on the skills he would need for his particular client base.

This discussion was typical of those that the researcher had with the other research partners, and the result was that they each agreed individually to continue the study through a third research cycle, focusing on the needs of the research partners themselves – in their role as organisational consultants. They were specifically seeking to develop a tool that they could use to assess their strengths and weaknesses as organisational consultants, and a framework that would help them to plan a programme of professional development. The researcher had not anticipated this direction, which focused on the consultants themselves, rather than on a further cycle of client assignments. However, it

was consistent with the principles of action research and the research objectives, and it seemed to be a useful direction to take in terms of building upon the conclusions of the first two research cycles.

Figure 6.3: Skills & knowledge of effective consultants

Effective consultants understand and apply consulting theory, as it relates to:

Diagnostic orientations

Dominant modes

Consultancy roles

Consultancy processes

Effective consultants understand and apply organisational theory, as it relates to:

Organisational processes

Effective consultants have well-developed:
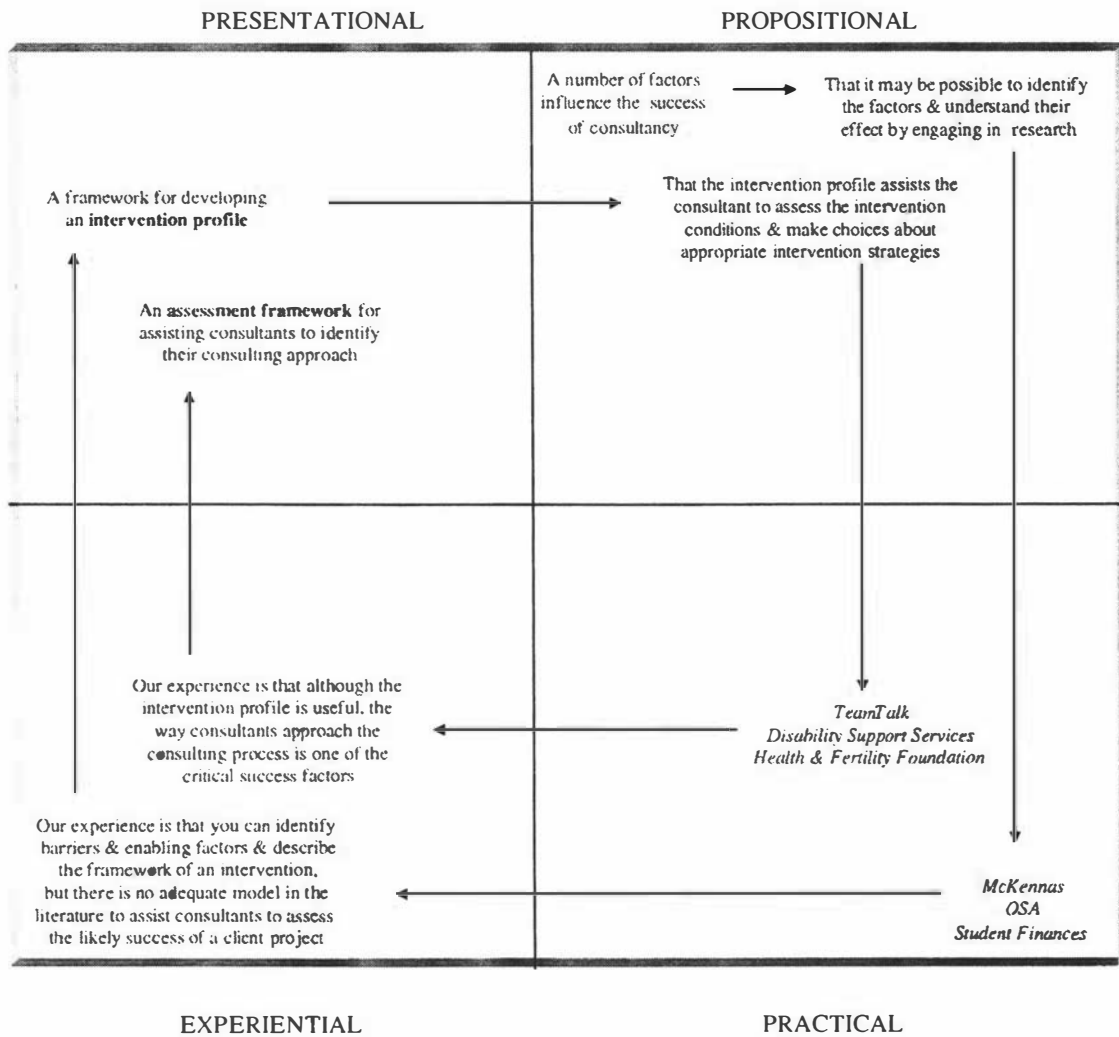
Technical skills

Interpersonal skills

As a starting point for the development of an assessment tool the consultants worked with the researcher to summarise some of the main concerns of the literature. This occurred during another set of meetings that were held after the research partners had all agreed to participate in a further research cycle. The result was a list of seven topics that the literature identified as being central to the practice of effective consulting (presented as Figure 6.3).

The research partners decided to develop an assessment tool based on the thinking represented in this figure. This became the basis of the research partner's third proposition; "that a tool for assessing consultants' strengths and weaknesses will assist them to plan a programme of professional development that will improve their practice of organisational consulting". To summarise their thinking the researcher updated the model of cooperative inquiry, producing Figure 6.4.

This proposition provided the basis for the third research cycle which is described in Chapter 7.

Figure 6.4: The second research cycle

PRESENTATIONAL   PROPOSITIONAL

A number of factors
influence the success   →   That it may be possible to identify
of consultancy   the factors & understand their
                                    effect by engaging in research

A framework for developing   →   That the intervention profile assists the
an **intervention profile**   consultant to assess the intervention
                                    conditions & make choices about
                                    appropriate intervention strategies

An **assessment framework** for
assisting consultants to identify
their consulting approach

Our experience is that although the   *TeamTalk*
intervention profile is useful, the   ← *Disability Support Services*
way consultants approach the   *Health & Fertility Foundation*
consulting process is one of the
critical success factors

Our experience is that you can identify
barriers & enabling factors & describe
the framework of an intervention,   *McKennas*
but there is no adequate model in the   ← *OSA*
literature to assist consultants to assess *Student Finances*
the likely success of a client project

EXPERIENTIAL   PRACTICAL

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CHAPTER 7: THE THIRD RESEARCH CYCLE - A FOCUS ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

"Research reports frequently give the appearance of confident, well-organised progress through the lengthy period of research. This probably is rarely the case, and certainly does not apply to our study ... It was characterized more by stops and starts, false trails and blind alleys. There were long periods of routine data collection – and some flashes of excitement; alternating experiences of being promoted and obstructed, of being deeply involved and almost totally marginalized" (Measor & Woods, 1991, p 59).

In the previous chapter the second research cycle was described. This cycle focused on the second proposition; "that the IP can assist the consultant to assess the intervention conditions and make choices about appropriate intervention strategies". This proposition was primarily focused on addressing the first research objective: to identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers.

The experience of the research partners in relation to the proposition was that identifying an intervention profile was helpful in assisting the consultant to assess the intervention conditions of a particular project. On this basis the consultant was able to develop a list of potential strategies that would minimise the weaknesses inherent in the project and capitalise upon its strengths. However, during the second research cycle the consultants became aware that they were limited in the way that they were able to make use of the framework.

They concluded that this was primarily because of their own capability as consultants. While they were all confident about their strengths, they were also aware of their limitations. They were particularly aware that their methods of developing strategies for client projects were primarily influenced by their knowledge of organisational consulting. This knowledge base had been developing as a consequence of their involvement in the study, and by this time they were more aware than ever before of the extent of their knowledge. However, they were also increasingly aware of their lack of knowledge. This realisation influenced their separate conclusions at the end of the second research cycle. At this point they each expressed a commitment to developing a tool that they

could use to assess their strengths and weaknesses as organisational consultants, and a framework which would help them to plan a programme of professional development.

This chapter describes the third research cycle, in which the research partners focused on their third proposition; "that a tool for assessing consultants' strengths and weaknesses will assist them to plan a programme of professional development that will improve their practice of organisational consulting". In the first section, *The research partners in action*, the researcher describes the development of a framework for exploring the way in which the consultant approached the activity of consulting. In the chapter's second section, *The research partners' experiences*, the researcher discusses the limitations of the framework that were revealed, and the modifications that were made to the original format as a way of gathering more relevant information from the research partners. This is followed by the reflections of the research partners in the section, *The research partners' learning*. The chapter concludes with the research partner's third presentation.
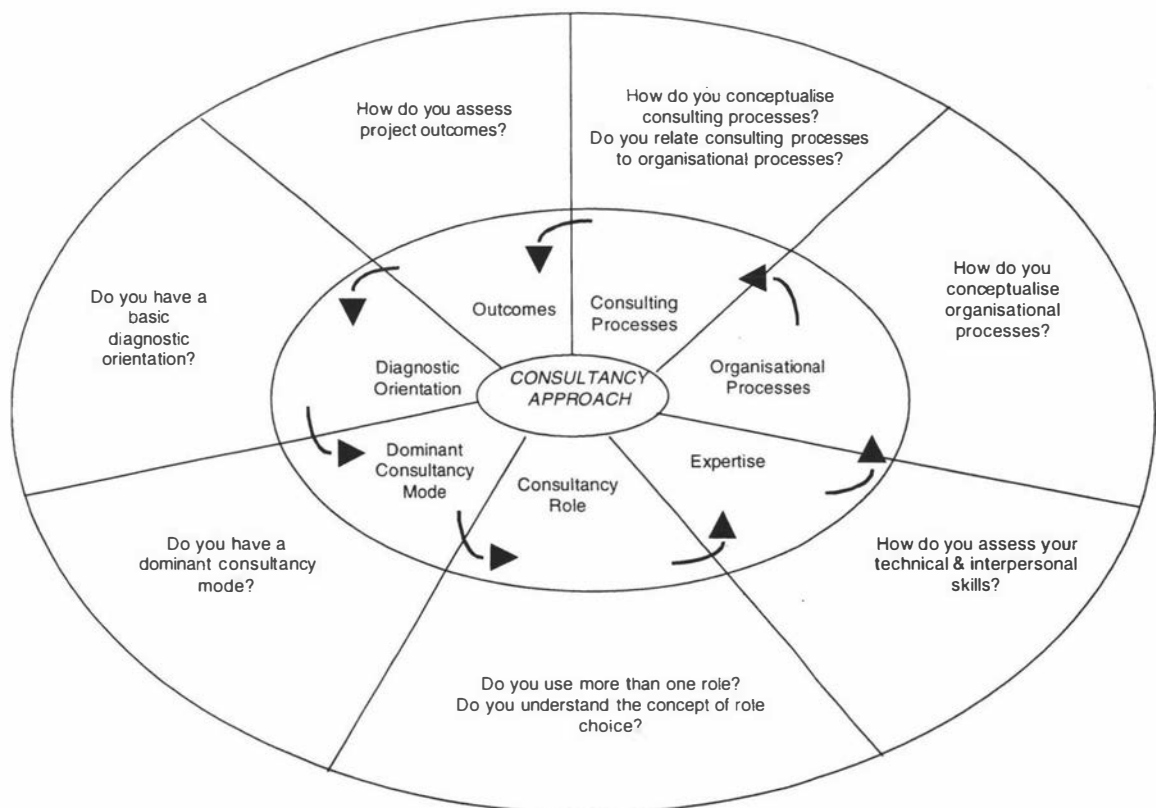
THE RESEARCH PARTNERS IN ACTION

In Chapter 4 the consultant research partners were introduced and their educational qualifications and applied experiences described (see pp 130-131). While this revealed that there were wide differences in the routes taken by the consultants to their current situations, there were some similarities that were worth exploring. One of these was the fact that none of the consultants had undertaken any formal training in the practice of consulting. As a result, they were all lacking a formal foundation for their client work. This issue was raised by the consultants themselves during the second research cycle, and this was one of the factors that influenced their decision to explore the possibility of a relationship between their backgrounds and their practice of consulting.

The starting point for this exploration had already been undertaken as part of the second research cycle. During this cycle (described in Chapter 6) they worked with the researcher to summarise some of the main concerns of the literature on organisational consulting. This produced the list of seven topics that was introduced in Figure 6.2, grouped around three main concepts. The first concept is that effective consultants understand and apply consulting theory, as it relates to diagnostic orientations, dominant modes, consultancy roles and consultancy processes. The second is that effective

consultants understand and apply organisational theory, as it relates to organisational processes. The third is that effective consultants have well-developed technical and interpersonal skills.

The researcher used this list as the basis for developing a framework for exploring the way in which the research partners approached the practice of consulting. The researcher had designed the diagrammatic overview of this framework (Figure 7.1) in a way that suggested the possibility of a relationship existing between each of the seven topics. However at this point she did not seek to impose a relationship, nor did she present the concepts in terms of a hierarchy.

Figure 7.1: An overview of the consulting approaches assessment

This framework was consistent with the conclusions that the research partners had reached at the end of the second research cycle. These conclusions were based on their exposure to the consulting literature and their work with the researcher on two client projects. This experience had provided them with an awareness of the range of factors that can potentially impact on the success of a client intervention. They had also participated in the development of the intervention profile, and explored its application to identifying intervention conditions. However, despite their acknowledgment of the value

of these tools, at this stage of the study they were more acutely aware of the importance of the *consultant's* actions in a successful intervention.

On the basis of this conclusion - that the consultant is of great importance in affecting the outcome of an intervention - the researcher used the framework of Figure 7.1 as the foundation for designing a set of seven exploratory activities. As the first step the researcher reviewed the literature that related to each of the seven topics. For example, in relation to the concept that "effective consultants understand and apply consulting theory, as it applies to consultancy roles", the researcher reviewed the contributions of Lippitt, Watson and Westley, (1958), Steele (1975), Blake and Mouton (1969), Lippitt and Lippitt (1986), Wooten and White (1989) and Williams and Woodward (1994). Although there were some differences in the way these authors viewed the practice of consulting, all implied that the effective consultant uses a number of different roles, and that he or she will select a role that is appropriate to the situation.

The second step in developing the activities was for the researcher to use the literature as the basis for developing a question for the consultants. In the case of roles, two questions were developed, to explore the consultants' use of roles and their understanding of role choice.

The same process was followed as the researcher developed activities that related to the other six topics, and which were designed to examine the consultant's approach to each of the concepts in more detail. This "consulting approaches assessment" (Appendix I), which was a set of inter-related activities, became the central focus of the third research cycle.

During this cycle the researcher interviewed the consultants separately, although the process that was followed was different to that used in the first two research cycles. In this cycle the researcher took a more directive role, guiding the research partners through the activities of the assessment tool over the course of one or more structured interviews. This exercise provided the researcher with data about the way in which each consultant perceived their approach to a consulting assignment. It also allowed the researcher and the consultant to discuss the results of each activity in the light of the relevant literature. This provided the consultant with the opportunity to consider how

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these new concepts could be applied to their consulting, and the researcher to gain some insight into the way in which this process occurred.

An additional outcome was due to the way in which the consultants used examples from projects that had been undertaken as part of the study. This allowed the researcher to check facts and impressions, and gain a deeper understanding of the way in which the consultant had approached the particular assignment. Perhaps more important was the way in which the assessment tool allowed the consultants to review the conscious and unconscious choices that they had made with the client projects in the first and second research cycles. From this perspective the assessment tool was one of the most rewarding elements in the study for the research partners: It appeared to provide some real insights for the consultants, who for the first time became fully immersed in observing *themselves*, rather than looking at their actions solely from the perspective of the researcher.

A particularly strong reaction came from Lisë. As the consultant with the most experience of professional self-reflection (she keeps her own learning diary, using the principles of mind mapping as explicated by Buzan, 1994), the researcher had assumed that the consulting approaches assessment would add little to her understanding of herself as a consultant. However, at more than one point of the exercise she appeared surprised at her own answers. In a comment that sounded almost like an aside she mused over the implications of her unconscious choices. "I really thought I knew how I operate as a consultant".

It was responses such as these that made this stage of the process exciting for the researcher. For the first time she could see the research partners begin to open up to her, revealing more of their concerns about their practise of consulting than had been the case when they were directly involved in a client project.

The application of this assessment is described in detail in the following sections.

DAVE

Working through the "consulting approaches assessment" with Dave was relatively easy. When the research was initiated he had only recently established his business, but by this stage of the study he had survived the first crucial years, and was ready to take on new ideas, and explore his thinking about his consulting.

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In terms of approaching a project (or in terms of the framework, talking about the diagnostic orientation), Dave seemed to display a strong tendency towards the developmental end of the spectrum, as explicated by Weisbord's 6-Box Model (Burke, 1994), for example, as opposed to Barcus and Wilkinson's (1995) problem-centred approach. The researcher based her assessment on Dave's avoidance of the word "problem" when responding to the first activity. When questioned, Dave confirmed that his use of language had been deliberate; "I like to have people describe the circumstances before making a judgement, so avoid using language that suggests this". However, when this issue was discussed in more depth, his comments were revealing; " I already know that he's got a problem - I don't need him to tell me. What I want to know is, what are the opportunities for improvement?" This approach was consistent with Dave's obvious action-orientation; his focus on "deciding what can be done", rather than "identifying the cause".

In the activity that focused on the consultant's dominant mode, Dave demonstrated a definite preference for guiding the client towards action, rather than undertaking tasks on their behalf. In this sense he could clearly be identified in Schein's terms (1988) as a process consultant; he described his usual response to a client as being "what are the things that *we* need to deal with?"

However, when the discussion turned to roles, this identification as a process consultant appeared to be problematic. Although Dave identified a number of roles he was comfortable in using, (technical expert; coach; facilitator; teacher; reflective observer and hands on expert, to use those identified by Champion, Kiel, and McLendon, 1990 and Williams and Woodward, 1994), he commented "I normally see myself as an expert - I probe first and then become directive". Given that Schein identifies the expert and the process consultant as different approaches to consulting, Dave's statement appears contradictory in the light of his previous assessment of himself as primarily a process consultant. However, since Schein also identifies specific roles to be taken by the process consultant, such as coach and counsellor, Dave's approach actually confirms the distinction between "dominant mode" and "roles" that seems to be implied.

Dave was similarly confident in identifying the situation in which these roles would be used, and of the need to modify his role choice if the situation demanded. In this discussion he identified the client's capability as the key factor in determining his role

choice; his preferred way of operating being to have clients undertake the tasks under his guidance. In other words, Dave would assess the client's capability, and choose whatever role would be the most appropriate in providing the basis for their action; such as coach or expert. When introduced to the concept of role reciprocity, as explained by Wooten and White (1989), Dave could immediately understand its implications; "Yes, if I act as technical expert, I expect them to give me information".

Discussing organisations revealed a great deal about the way Dave approaches his consulting work: Asked to "depict an organisation" he quickly sketched an organisational structure diagram, with the different components labelled as "business units". He talked at length about the value of this model for his particular type of work, showing an awareness of its limitations for other types of consultant. For example, shown the Weisbord model from the researcher's resource material (Appendix H), he commented on its suitability for projects where no obvious issue existed, and where the identification of the "correct" starting point was not vitally important.

**Figure 7.2: Dave's approach to organisation structures**
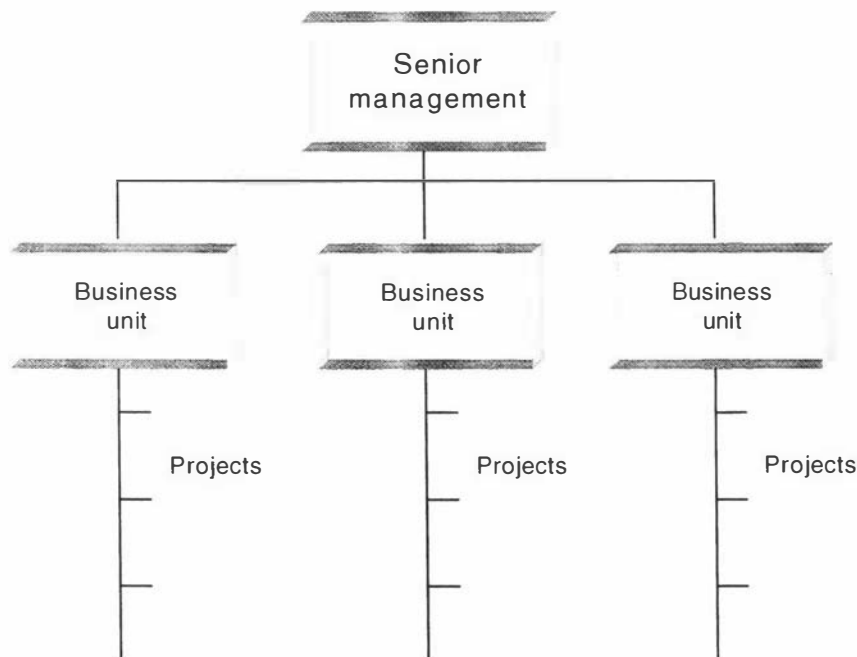
This discussion helped the researcher understand the most important element in Dave's approach to consulting; his view of his work as entirely "project based". This view is clearly fundamental to Dave, accounting for the particular work that he undertakes as a consultant, the way in which he approaches a client assignment, and the way in which he

conceptualises the different components of an assignment. For example, he commented "I work for the project - not the people". He explained his apparent lack of a client-centred approach (such as that described by Cockman, Evans & Reynolds, 1992) to the influence of his scientific training, which emphasised the value of objectivity, and the importance of seeing individual behaviours within context, whether of an experiment or project. He went on to describe how the most important aspect of this training was its emphasis on a logical structure; "I have had it drummed into me - aims first, then method, results, discussion and conclusions. Always the same".

Asked to describe the way in which he viewed the consulting process, Dave continued to emphasise the project-based nature of his work, producing a diagram in which the project had a clear end point (the objective), and a number of "gaps". He explained that the gaps signified points at which the client would bring in a consultant to strengthen their own limitations.

Figure 7.3: Dave's approach to the consulting process
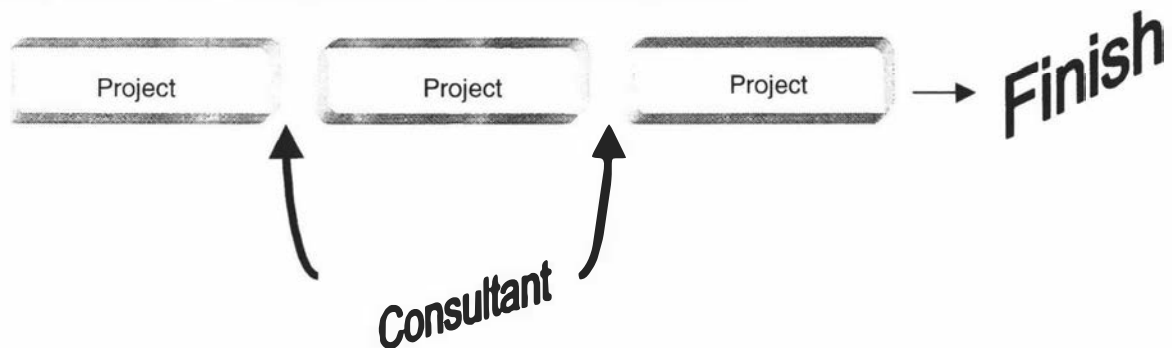
Dave was also clear that the consultant's primary role was in the context of the project only - not the organisation's overall objectives. But again, he related this attitude to the particular work that he does, which in his eyes can be compartmentalised into projects: "I don't get involved in Business Process Reengineering (BPR) for example - I'm looking for a specific outcome, and people doing BPR have to get involved in the big picture".

Asked to reflect on "a successful project", Dave easily identified a number of outcomes; "the client is happy; the goal has been achieved; all individuals are comfortable; all the actions are complete; new projects have been identified; the results of implementation are excellent; there has been a tidy end point". In discussion, he commented on the importance of the words "happy" and "comfortable". These he applied primarily to the client.

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LISË

Working through the "consulting approaches assessment" was also extremely easy for Lisë. By this stage of the research she was sufficiently involved as a research partner to have developed her own objectives for her involvement with the study. These included "to see if I am doing 'it' right, to see what I can learn and to get some clarification of my own role as a consultant". These objectives were met by the exercise, which allowed Lisë to gain an understanding of her strengths as a consultant and identify any developmental needs to be addressed.

In terms of approaching a project, Lisë's mode was generally "problem-centred" although at first this was a surprising outcome for her, given her perception of herself as fundamentally "developmental". Reflecting on this, she felt that she had been influenced by clients' approaches; "we don't get called in unless the client thinks they have a problem, and they probably frame it like this because it validates their calling in a consultant". The discussion that immediately followed the exercise was based on the resource material from Kubr (1996) and Schein (1988). Lisë's conclusion was that she needed to be more aware of her choice of words when speaking to a client about a project, given the consultant's ability to influence the way the client conceived of their issue as a 'problem' or not.

By contrast with her "problem-centred" approach, Lisë's dominant consultancy mode was clearly based on her philosophy of "empowerment". She felt that she always considered a range of factors before deciding whether the client system had the capability to undertake the task themselves. The factors she considered in the final decision included client expectations, client systems resources (skills and time), and the advantages of taking one option or other. For example, involving the client may increase their level of commitment to the project.

Lisë provided a similar answer to the questions on roles. While clearly feeling comfortable with roles such as "model", "coach" and "facilitator", she commented on her growing confidence in choosing roles according to the situation, such as a "technical expert". She also identified a role that was not listed; that of "inspirer", described by her as the "provider of epiphanic moments". In discussion, Lisë could clearly articulate the concept of role choice; "I *always* know I have the choice of role", and was able to identify the specific circumstances in which she would choose each role. This discussion

showed her awareness of the implications that the choice of different roles could have on the client project, and her understanding of the way in which roles change within projects, and within specific interventions. Introduced to the concept of role reciprocity, she was immediately interested, and able to relate this concept to her own behaviour; "Yes, I look for all the signals about 'what dance are we dancing today' - I listen to the music first and then dance".

Talking about skills, Lisë identified both interpersonal and technical skills and identified those that were relevant to a particular intervention as well as those that related to the project overall. She could identify with Margerison's (1988) model, despite the fact that she had not been able to visually conceptualise her own skills in any satisfactory way. This was partly because of her tendency to denigrate her interpersonal skills; as she said "I shouldn't be here (as a consultant) if I don't have them". Her obvious sense of her interpersonal skills as fundamental was emphasised by her comments that these skills were relevant to *all* projects, whereas technical skills related to specific jobs only.

**Figure 7.4: Lisë's ideal organisation structure**
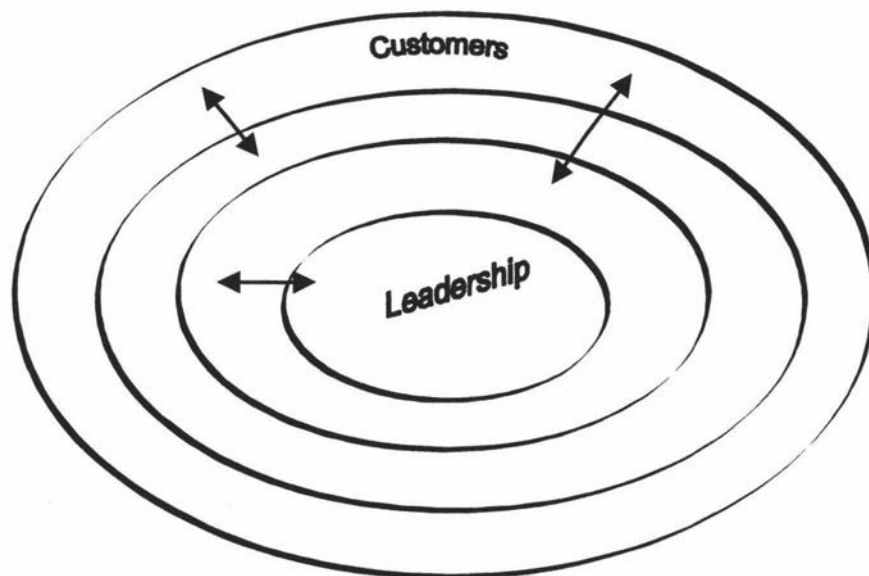
Discussing organisations with Lisë proved to be a topic that evoked very strong feelings. After much discussion, it was clear that she could visualise two different models; "how I would like to see an organisation operate" and "how most people experience their employing organisations". Given her description of herself as "passionate about empowerment", and some of the examples that she related, she clearly had a strong sense of frustration about what she saw as rhetoric from some of her clients. Drawing a

circular company structure (see Figure 7.4), she commented "that is exactly how half of our clients would like to think they operate, but when you talk to the people at the coal face, it's just not like that at all".

Lisë provided another structure (see Figure 7.5) and added "they actually operate more like this". Given Lisë's assessment that "the way I conceptualise an organisation affects the work that I do", this comment was revealing. Further discussion confirmed that although she had previously been unaware of it, she approached client assignments with these two models in mind.

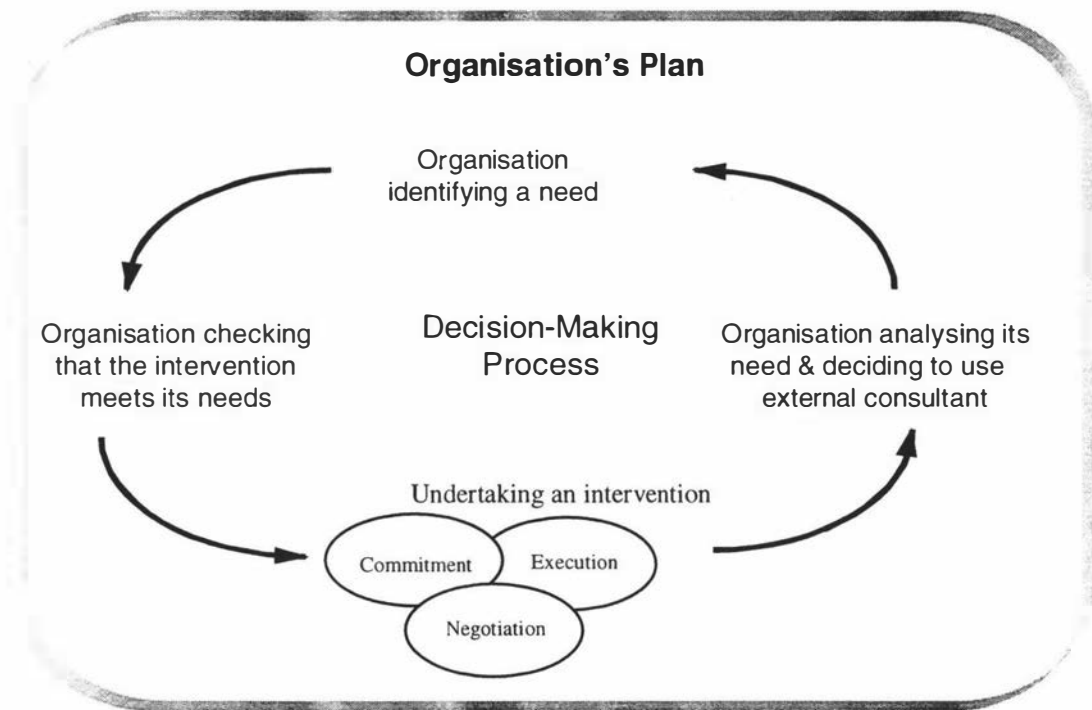**Figure 7.5: Lisë's experience of organisation structures**
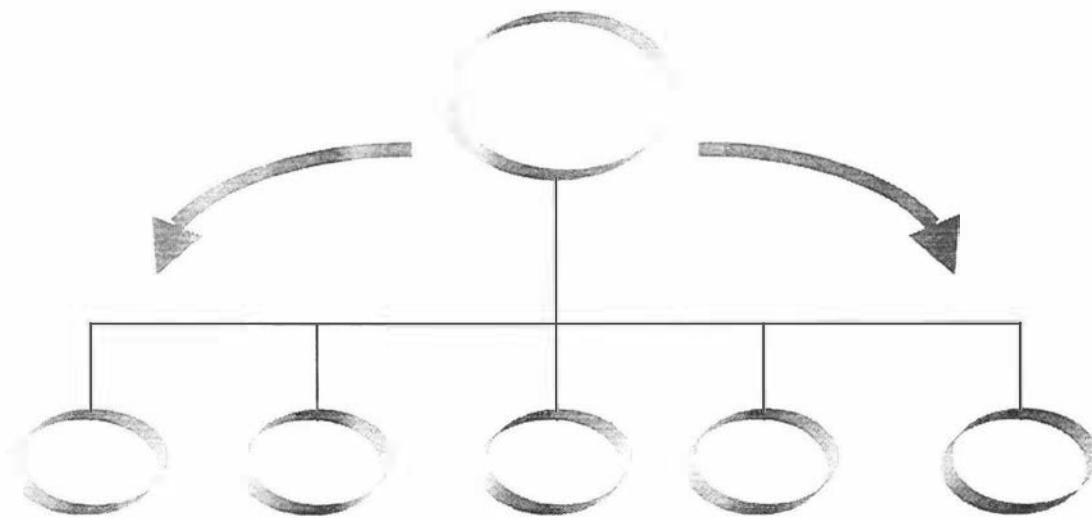
Asked to describe the way in which she viewed the consulting process, Lisë had a clear conception of the consulting process as *one element* of the organisation's own processes, identifying both decision-making and planning as two of the most important. This led her to describe the consulting process as occurring *within the context* of organisational processes, a view that differs from the prevailing view of the consulting process as discrete (as presented by Kubr, 1996).

Working on this task, Lisë quickly produced the diagram shown in Figure 7.6, although she hesitated at first when it came to the detail of the stage she called "undertaking an intervention". Shown the three different models of the consulting process, she immediately identified with that of Ring and Van de Ven (1994), using their words to explain her view of the actual intervention as entailing a number of processes which cannot be described chronologically.

Asked to reflect on "a successful project", Lisë identified a number of factors, some of which were based on the perspective of the consultant. For example, she mentioned that the project should be "profitable, within budget and on time, with quality aspects met", clearly indicating her understanding of the consultant as a stakeholder in the project. Other factors assumed the client's perspective, such as "the delivery of negotiated and agreed outcomes".

Figure 7.6: Lisë's conceptualisation of the consulting process

Organisation's Plan

Organisation identifying a need

Decision-Making Process

Organisation checking that the intervention meets its needs

Organisation analysing its need & deciding to use external consultant

Undertaking an intervention

Commitment   Execution

Negotiation

Jo

In terms of approaching a project, Jo's mode was generally problem centred. Although the questions she developed in response to the researcher's prompting covered all of the main dimensions of a project plan (budget, timeframe, and desired outcomes), the questions were usually phrased in the context of "the problem". Discussing this response, Jo echoed Lisë's comment that clients approach consultants with problems – a need that they wish to resolve. The consultant's tendency is to respond in kind, as a way of providing clients with reassurance that they are being "listened to".

By contrast with her "problem-centred" approach, Jo's dominant consultancy mode clearly owed much to Schein's "process mode". This was her "favoured mode", chosen as a deliberate way of avoiding high-risk situations (implied when a client employs an "expert") and of incorporating learning goals into client intervention. Despite her

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preference for this mode, Jo also expressed an aim of having the ability to act as expert, doctor *or* process consultant depending on the circumstances.

Jo was also aware of herself as a practitioner when it came to the questions on roles. She identified a number of roles that she was comfortable with using, and also some that she rarely used. Interestingly for a consultant using Human Performance Technology as an approach (which developed from the field of training and development), she was clear that "educator/trainer" and "teacher" were two roles that she did not use. In this discussion Jo demonstrated an awareness of role reciprocity, and described how at times she would identify roles for clients and articulate this for them. She explained that she was most inclined to do this "if it's a change from the way they are used to operating".

Discussing organisations with Jo revealed something of the way she has successfully combined theory with her practical experiences. She was able to identify her model as being "systems based", and having a number of options in the way it could be presented. The correct perspective depended on the client's issue; if it was a "performance need" then one model would be suitable, while if it was a "business need" another approach would be more appropriate. This perspective is demonstrated in Figure 7.7 which demonstrates the central element of Jo's approach to organisations; that they are a single entity, comprising of a number of inter-related organisational levels.

Figure 7.7: Jo's ideal organisation structure

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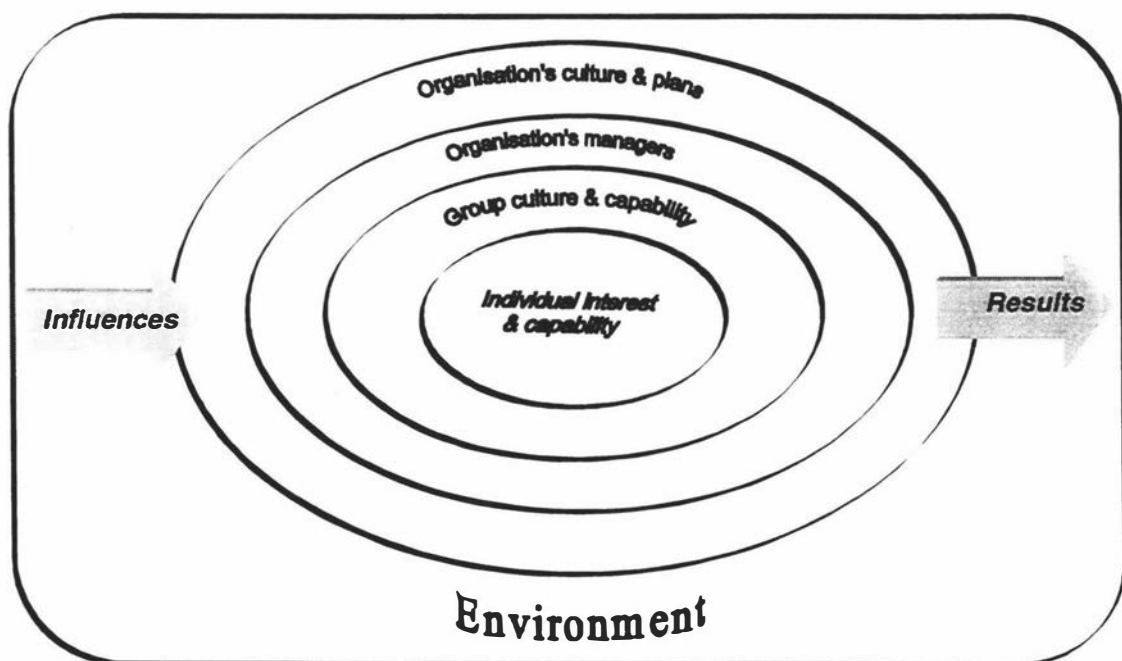
Asked to describe the way in which she viewed the consulting process, Jo described her role as integrating the various organisational functions. To conceptualise this, she uses an input-output model. Jo has also developed a diagrammatic representation of the work she does with clients. In describing this process she referred to it as essentially a focus on "problem solving".

Figure 7.8: Jo's conceptualisation of the consulting process
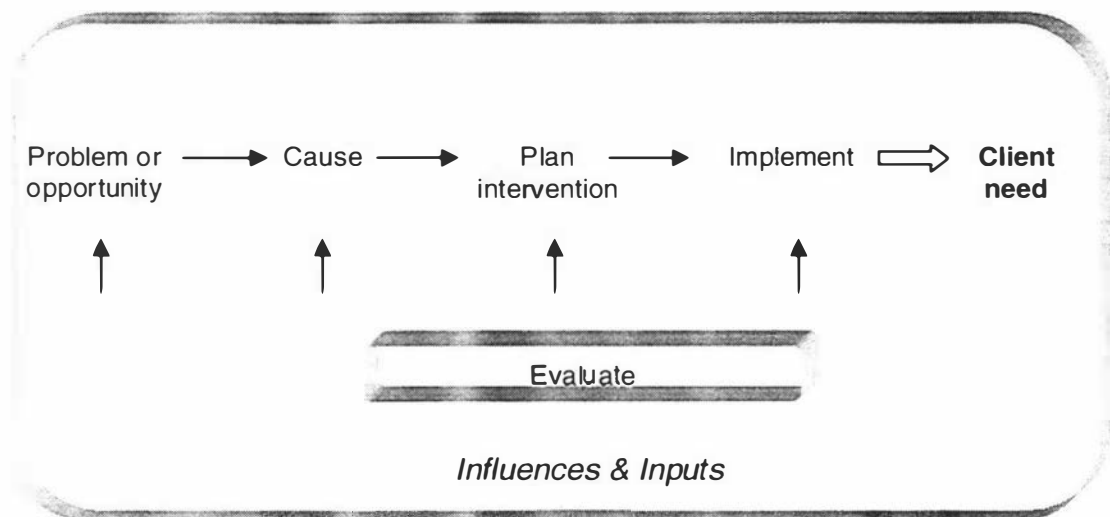
THE RESEARCH PARTNERS' EXPERIENCES

As each consultant worked through the exercise, the researcher focused on identifying relationships between their answers and the practice of consulting that they had demonstrated with their clients. Addressing this question, at first it appeared that this exercise was helpful in helping the research partners to describe their practice of consulting. However, the researcher was also looking for an indication that one or more of the factors inherent in the consulting approaches assessment was more important than any other in influencing the way in which the consultants planned and carried out their client work. At this point it became clear that the assessment tool failed to identify the fundamental model or theory that provided the underpinning for each consultant. The consequence was that the researcher was unable to make sense of the data that had emerged, as no one concept appeared to have any more importance than any other.

This issue - the possible existence of a single factor that would fundamentally affect the consultants' practice of consulting – had not been envisaged by the researcher when she

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initially designed the research plan. Nor had it emerged as a strong possibility from the literature review, although the review had noted the existence of different approaches to change. For example Van de Ven and Poole (1995), Kubr (1986), and Bartunek and Moch (1987), comment upon different approaches to change that can be taken by different consultants. Similarly, Dawson (1992), McKenna and Wright (1992) and Morgan (1997) identify different approaches to understanding organisations. However, none of these authors comment upon their relevance, in terms of their influence on the practice of consulting.

As a consequence, the researcher reached this stage in the study without an appreciation of the potential importance of the change models that were used by the three research partners. Nor did she possess a framework for identifying the ways in which they viewed change. Given the sense that the researcher had at the conclusion of the consulting approaches assessment (that an important aspect was missing from her understanding of the consultants' approaches), at this point in the study this lack seemed to be potentially significant. As a result the researcher sought to identify an appropriate way of identifying the fundamental model or theory that the consultants applied to their client assignments. Her starting point was to review the work on organisational metaphors (McKenna & Wright, 1992; Morgan 1997), as well as the work by Dawson (1992) on understanding organisations.

Here the researcher drew upon the important contributions from writers who are concerned with the nature of knowledge (see for example Pepper, 1942). This thinking provided the basis for more recent writers such as Tsoukas (1994), who presents a typology for understanding management knowledge, McKenna and Wright (1992), who discuss the existence of organisational tunnel vision, and Weick (1995), who suggests that what "we see" determines what "we don't see". This last notion has been popularised in the well-known work by Gareth Morgan on "images of organisations" (Morgan, 1997). Here Morgan identifies some of the ways in which we view organisations, such as machines, natural organisms, political systems and cultures. For the organisational consultant, who is dealing with organisations daily, this contention has potential ramifications: If consultants have particular favoured metaphors for viewing organisations, then this may affect the way they choose interventions.

After considering these contributions to the literature the researcher decided to undertake a further session with each of the consultants separately, in which she would ask them to develop a metaphor for an organisation, either through images or diagrams. They were specifically asked to select a metaphor that would be "useful" in terms of their work as consultants within organisations.

DAVE

In response to the question Dave depicted a project in terms of a boating analogy, with the consultant as the pilot and the client as the captain of a ship embarked upon a particular course (see Figure 7.9). He was able to draw this picture quickly, with very little prompting from the researcher, suggesting that it was a metaphor he was at least partly conscious of having used in the past.

Figure 7.9: Dave's metaphor for consulting
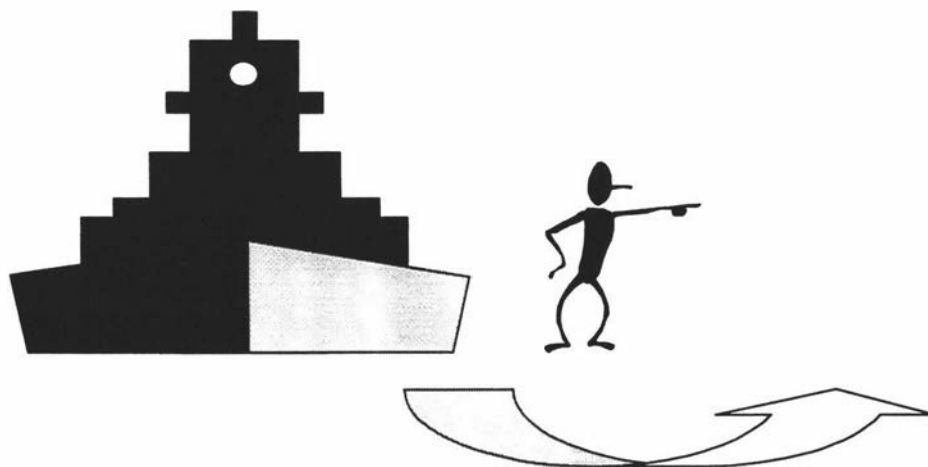
Discussing the relevance of this image it became clear that it did influence Dave's practice of consulting; his ease in identifying his model implied that he had used it often. It was also possible to see a relationship between the model and the teleological category of change theories identified in Chapter 2, which implies that an organisation is a self-determining entity. This assumption that organisations are self-determining appeared to underpin Dave's description of an organisation as a ship on a journey, with a captain, and on occasion a pilot (a consultant). This link was confirmed by Dave, who once he had identified the model was aware that it could be seen to underpin his approach to any assignment, influencing the way he chose the roles that would be appropriate and the techniques that he would use.

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Lisë

The researcher undertook the same exercise with Lisë, who produced a drawing of an entire ecosystem with trees, a volcano and a river (Figure 7.10). Having drawn this model Lisë's reaction was similar to that of Dave's – she could see how her ecosystem model affected her practice of consulting.

Figure 7.10: Lisë's metaphor for consulting

Lisë was able to make this connection quickly, as while working through the consulting approaches assessment she had become conscious that there was another perspective that she had not been able to articulate that had a strong influence on her practice of consulting. Once she had identified the ecosystem as her image of an organisation in change she could relate it to the life cycle approach to change. She was particularly struck by the way that it helped her understand the difference between her approach to consulting and that of other organisational consultants. Reflecting on a training programme on facilitation skills that she had attended, Lisë recalled the way in which the presenter had used an image of a staircase. This was meant to convey the idea of a client at "the bottom of the stairs", wishing to travel to the "top". Quickly reproducing this visual for the researcher, Lisë posed the rhetorical question that summed up her objection to the staircase: "what if the client doesn't want to get to the top?"

After further reflection, Lisë concluded that her holistic approach to assignments (with a focus on improving organisational processes at the same time as achieving results), could be explained by her understanding of organisations as ecosystems.

Jo

By contrast with Lisë and Dave, Jo preferred to articulate her underlying change model using the concepts of management. She produced a simple diagram, again using the concepts of "inputs", "process" and "outputs" (see Figure 7.11).

Figure 7.11: Jo's model for consulting
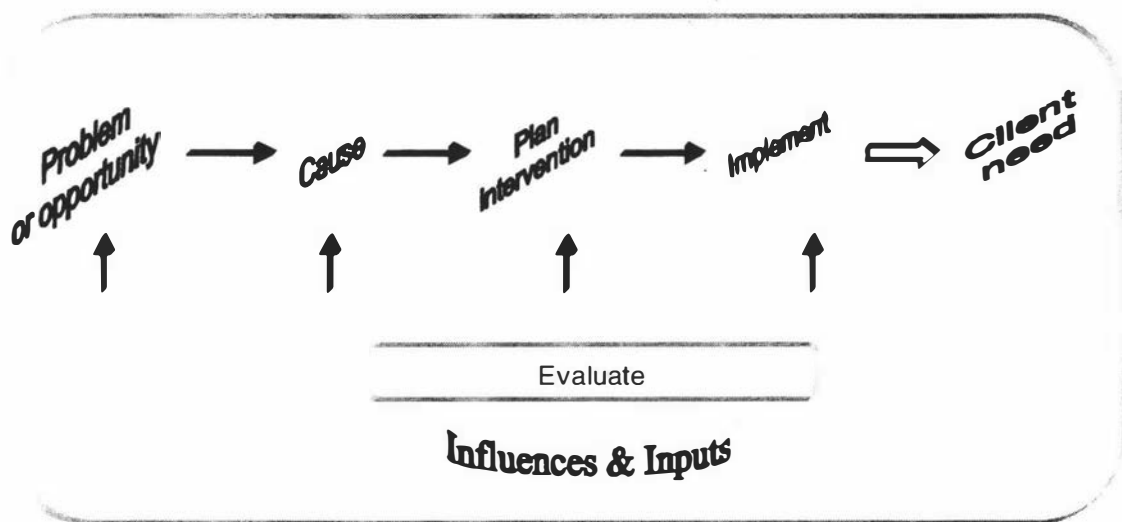
While at first Jo's approach seemed to be markedly different to that taken by Lisë and Dave, on reflection the researcher was able to draw out from Jo's presentation her primary concern. Drawing upon Morgan's (1997) work the researcher could see the relationship between Jo's model and the organisation as a machine metaphor. This clearly suggested that her concern within organisations is on identifying the direction in which it should be moving. As was the case with Dave, it was possible to see a relationship between the model and the teleological category of change theories identified in Chapter 2. Both of them seemed to base their practice of consulting on this approach to change, in which it is assumed that organisations can determine their own future.

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The researcher and the research partners had started the third cycle with the proposition "that a tool for assessing consultants' strengths and weaknesses will assist them to plan a programme of professional development that will improve their practice of organisational consulting". As the third cycle drew to a close, the researcher and the research partners started to try to articulate their thinking about the value of this proposition, just as they had at the end of the first and second cycles. As had occurred at the end of the previous cycles, the researcher formally arranged a meeting with each of the consultants to discuss this topic, although the discussion was often extended to further meetings or communications via electronic mail.

In terms of process, the researcher again led the discussion. She was able to offer an external perspective on the way in which the consultant's practice of organisational consulting appeared to relate to the material described in this chapter as well as to the conclusions of the first two research cycles.

With each consultant her first comments related to the way that he or she had approached the two client assignments that had been included in the study. While there were some differences between the three consultants, there was also an important similarity. This was the researcher's observation that each of the consultants had taken the same broad approach to their two client projects.

At first consideration this similarity was understandable, as the projects themselves were often alike. For example the Disability Support Services and the Student Finance Section of the Manawatu Polytechnic both required operational plans to be produced. The fact that Jo used a similar process with both projects was not surprising. Similarly, Lisë's projects both required her to address behavioural changes within her client companies. In the case of OSA the MD required staff to start using the procedural manuals, and at TeamTalk the CEO's objective was to increase his team's sales.

However, when presented with this similarity the consultants offered an interesting reflection of their own: that perhaps they had unconsciously influenced the client to present the project in a particular way. As Lisë observed, "I'm really interested in people and learning, and so I probably emphasise the developmental possibilities of a project – the way a company can get more out of its team – no matter what they called me in for".

The researcher concluded that although there were a number of factors that the consultants consciously used in deciding what approach to take to an assignment and what intervention techniques to use, there were also factors that they applied unconsciously.

One of the most important of these subconscious factors was their tendency to guide clients towards describing a project in a way that aligned it with their "comfort zone". This could either be at an operational level (in terms of tools) or at a conceptual level (in terms of his or her unconscious mental model). For example, Dave was aware of his tendency to guide clients into the development of a strategic plan. After drawing the model of the ship embarking upon a journey he was also aware of the way this could influence his clients, into viewing their organisation as having an ultimate destination.

The researcher felt that this tendency to guide clients in terms of favoured approaches was demonstrated particularly strongly in the second research cycle. In the assignments that were part of this cycle the consultants showed that they rarely used a formal process for assessing a new assignment, and that even when they tried to do so, the information needed was not always available until the intervention had already been planned. As a consequence, the consultants' usual approach was to plan the intervention based on their own knowledge and skills, rather than on circumstances that were specific to any one client. The practical implications were that the consultants depended on their knowledge of consulting theories, strategies and tools and their skill in application more than their ability to develop client-specific strategies. Given that none of the research partners had been formally trained in organisational consulting this suggested that they were drawing upon knowledge derived from other fields. Another possibility was that they were unconsciously drawing upon a model of change that enabled them to make sense of their work within organisations. Trying to evaluate whether this was the case was the purpose of the metaphor exercise.

THE CONSULTANTS

It was during this research cycle that the consultants demonstrated the most satisfaction with their participation in the study. By this time they had all developed good relationships with the researcher, and during this cycle they were formally introduced to material from the literature that the researcher had selected for its relevance to their

interests, in a structured way (see Appendix J). This contrasted with their previous informal introduction to some of the same material as an adjunct to the interviews at the end of research cycles one and two (see Appendix H).

The first component of this cycle was the consulting assessment. Although the researcher had introduced some theoretical material to each of the consultants during earlier meetings, this was the first time that they had seen it framed in a way that demonstrated the implications for them as consultants. The structured nature of the exercise (compared to the informal way in which they had been introduced to material up to this point) also meant that their answers were focused on comparing their experiences to the literature. For example, in response to the activity which was designed to identify the consultant's diagnostic orientation as problem-centred or developmental, Dave commented "what I am always looking for is what can be done – an action focus". After a pause he continued "is action-focused the same as developmental?" This was in reference to his recently gained knowledge of Kubr (1996), who makes the distinction between problem centred and developmental approaches to consulting.

Sometimes the exercise provided surprises. For instance, Lisë was clearly shocked at her own responses to the consulting mode question. Even though she was already sensitised to the concept of "expert" and "process" consultancy through her own reading, without thinking, she answered the question in a way that suggested her affinity with a problem centred approach. This provided the opportunity for her to consider the implications of her answers, and she later referred back to the personal learning that followed this discussion. "I am so used to being instrumental in helping other people to learn – I suppose I have ignored my own learning needs, until you gave me a way of identifying them".

The second component of the cycle was the organisational metaphor, and this appeared to provide the consultants with another valuable opportunity for personal learning. Once the consultants had identified their metaphors the researcher asked them to consider the way in which it affected their consulting. Again Dave was quick to identify the link between his metaphor (the boat on a journey) and his approach to consulting. "I do like to think of my clients as undertaking a journey – it helps me focus as well as them".

In terms of the data, the third research cycle primarily provided the researcher with a number of possible answers to the questions posed by the first research objective. This was "to identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers".

Figure 7.12: The importance of the model of change in forming perspectives on organisational consulting
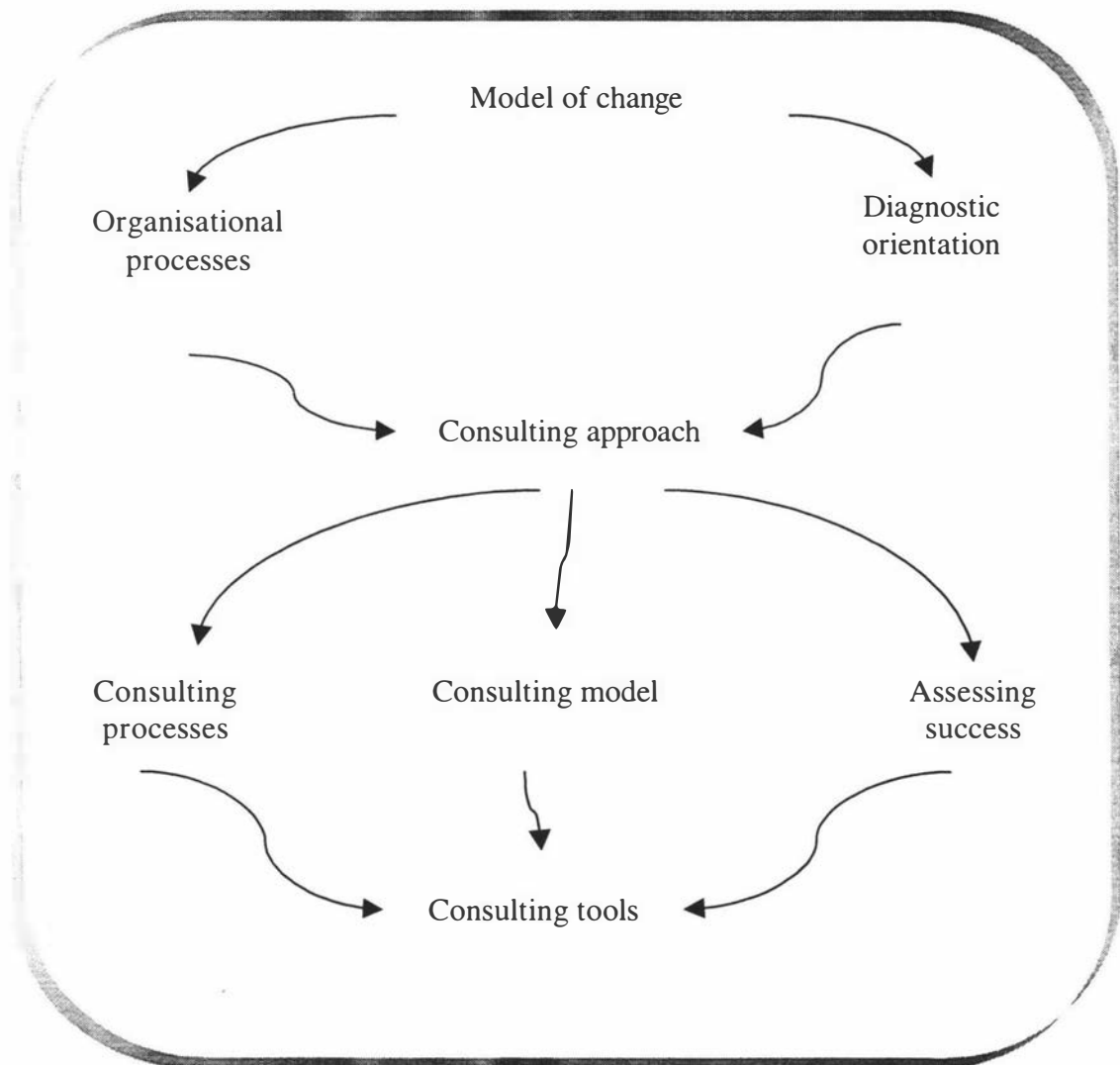
However, due to the iterative nature of action research, and the way in which qualitative research has the effect of building up "layers" of conclusions, the end result was that the third cycle also addressed the other three objectives. This included the fourth objective; "to assist consultants and their clients to maximise ED outcomes".

From the researcher's perspective the third cycle, and its focus on the consultants, was a useful way of reviewing the six client interventions that had been the subject of the first two research cycles. The first element of the cycle, the consulting approaches assessment, provided the consultants with a way of identifying the factors that influenced the choices that they made with respect to a client project. These choices included such dimensions of an assignment such as the choice of a particular tool or the process that was used.

However the researcher was not able to make sense of the data gathered during this exercise until the consultants were asked for their metaphors of organisations. This extension to the original exercise provided the researcher with a way of conceptualising a relationship between the seven elements that were the basis for the consulting assessment. In this conceptualisation (presented in Figure 7.12) she identified the consultant's model of change as the factor that was most significant in relation to the other decisions that are made during the course of an assignment. In effect, the consultant's metaphors provided the key to the researcher understanding their answers to the consulting approaches assessment.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

By the time the research partners were introduced to the researcher's revised framework they had already experienced the value of the initial representation (as in Figure 7.1) individually. Lisë had also arranged for the researcher to conduct the assessment with her own staff at a team training day. Although this exercise was undertaken outside the context of the study, the results did confirm the apparent value that the consulting approaches assessment had for other consultants (Massey & Walker, 1999b).
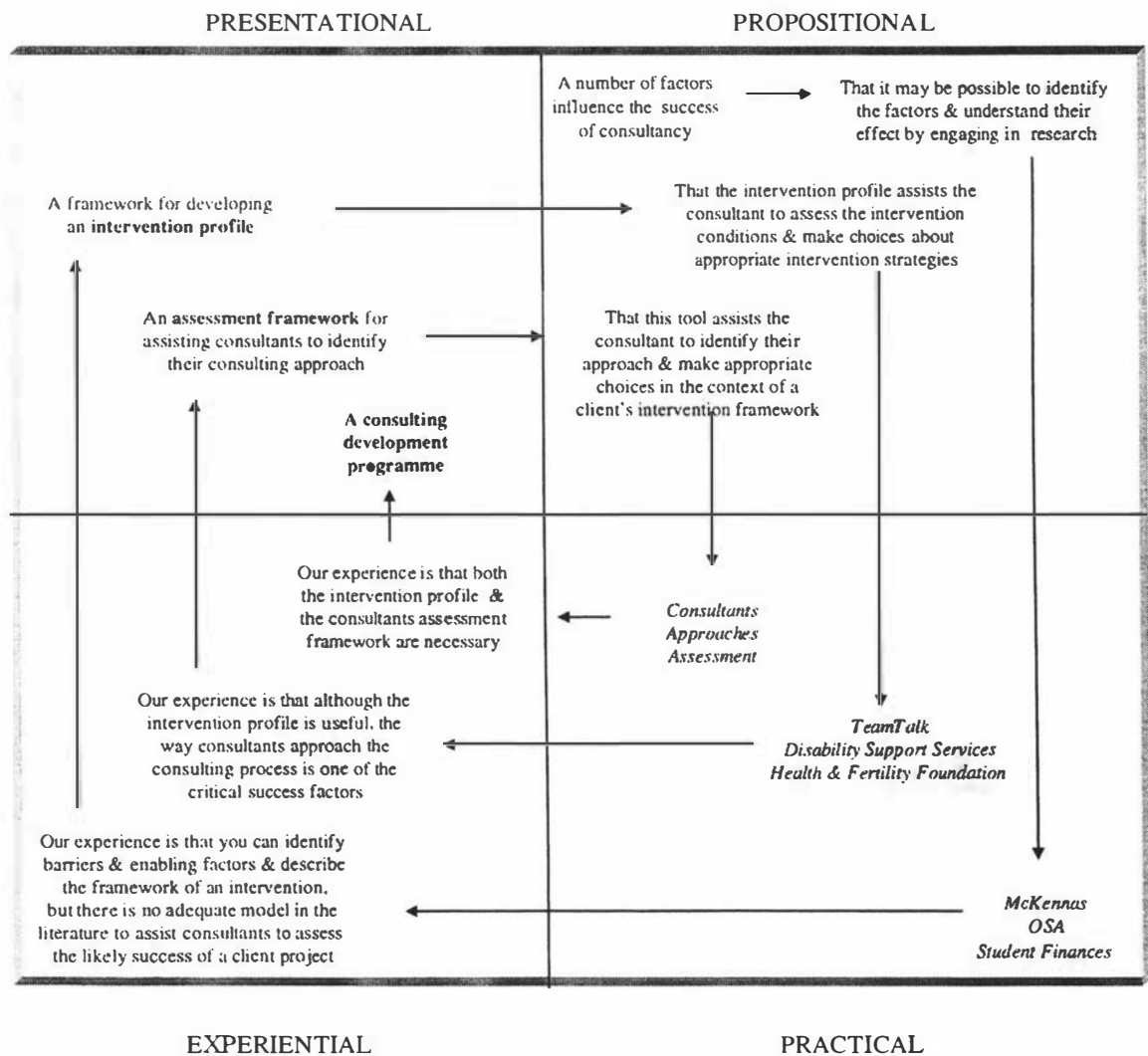
It was around this time that it became clear to the research team that the study was drawing to a close. Although the team had not discussed the need for a certain number of research cycles or client assignments, the third research cycle did not result in the posing of any new question that the research team needed to consider. Rather it ended with each of the consultants taking the first steps in devising a personal plan for professional development. Part of this was that each of them asked the researcher if she would continue to be involved with them as a mentor. While there was the opportunity for this

mentoring relationship to be examined through a fourth research cycle, at this point the researcher decided to bring the study to a close.

THE THIRD PRESENTATION

By the time this research cycle was complete, the research team had an understanding of the factors that prevent assignments concluding successfully. The researcher also had a working representation of the way in which the consultant's model of change appeared to influence their perceptions of other dimensions of the practice of consulting (Figure 7.12). In addition, the researcher had concluded that the way consultants practise consulting is influenced by a range of factors, including their education and experience, as well as those that are less easy to identify.

Figure 7.13: The third research cycle

PRESENTATIONAL   PROPOSITIONAL

A number of factors influence the success of consultancy → That it may be possible to identify the factors & understand their effect by engaging in research

A framework for developing an **intervention profile** → That the intervention profile assists the consultant to assess the intervention conditions & make choices about appropriate intervention strategies

An **assessment framework** for assisting consultants to identify their consulting approach → That this tool assists the consultant to identify their approach & make appropriate choices in the context of a client's intervention framework

A consulting development programme

Our experience is that both the intervention profile & the consultants assessment framework are necessary ← *Consultants Approaches Assessment*

Our experience is that although the intervention profile is useful, the way consultants approach the consulting process is one of the critical success factors ← *TeamTalk Disability Support Services Health & Fertility Foundation*

Our experience is that you can identify barriers & enabling factors & describe the framework of an intervention, but there is no adequate model in the literature to assist consultants to assess the likely success of a client project ← *McKennas OSA Student Finances*

EXPERIENTIAL   PRACTICAL

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The result of these conclusions was the final proposition. This incorporated the conclusions embodied in the first and second propositions, demonstrating the development within the research team that had occurred over the course of the study. The final proposition was "given that the way consultants approach the consulting process is one of the critical success factors, a consulting development programme that assists consultants to develop an IP, assess intervention conditions and develop intervention strategies in the context of their own consulting approach will improve their practice of organisational consulting". This proposition provided the researcher with the final addition to the model of cooperative inquiry, producing Figure 7.13.

"The use of social science as a technique for generating knowledge to help sustain, develop or change society, together with the fact that it is conducted and evaluated within the context of bureaucratic structures, often tends to squeeze out the role of doubt in favour of a production-oriented mentality that emphasizes the importance of achieving significant, useful results" (Morgan, 1983, p 384).

In this study the researcher's initial aim had been to contribute to understanding aspects of the role of the consultant during an assignment and the relationship between roles and subsequent organisational outcomes. Her focus was on the implied relationship between the consultant's actions, the client's reactions and the organisational outcome. Three broad research questions emerged immediately from this concern; "what does the consultant do" (in the context of a client project), "how does the client respond" and "what is the result for the organisation". These questions provided the researcher with an initial set of research objectives:

1. To evaluate the potential role of the consultant in enterprise development, by identifying the effects of interventions carried out by consultants in the context of an assignment.

2. To identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers.

3. To identify the key aspects of an organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate enterprise development, with particular reference to interventions that seek to influence organisational and individual learning.

While these research questions reflected the study's aim of understanding organisational processes, an additional aim was needed to reflect the researcher's commitment to providing an opportunity for those participating in the research to gain from the theory building component of the research as it unfolds. This factor influenced the development of an additional research objective:

4. To assist consultants and their clients to maximise enterprise development outcomes.

The purpose of this concluding chapter (as described in the first section, *Progressive focusing*) is to draw together the strands of the research, in a way that does justice to the complexity of the data that was collected, and the researcher's desire to resist the pressure of the "production-oriented mentality" noted in the above quotation from Morgan (1983). In the chapter's second section, *Learning from the research cycles*, the researcher restates the conclusions that were reached at the completion of the three research cycles. She then presents a summary of the literature, under the heading *Working with the literature*. In the section *Addressing the research objectives*, the researcher draws upon the learning that was achieved through the research cycles, relating the insights gained to the research objectives, and evaluating the degree to which she met her original objectives. Under the heading *Synthesising the research*, the researcher reflects on the implications of the study as a whole.

PROGRESSIVE FOCUSING

The researcher's role in any study is to synthesise the data obtained during the project with what is already known about the field, as seen from the perspective of his or her particular background. This is always challenging, as the necessary immersion in the data can prevent the researcher from being able to stand back and view the study from a distance. In a study in which action research has been used, this task can be even more challenging, as the tension between "standing back" and being "drawn in" does not become an issue merely at the completion of the research; it is inherent in the entire process.

This situation (where there is a continuous balance between the act of participating and the act of observing) results from the essential differences between action research and traditional research. Unlike traditional research in which the researcher addresses the research objectives as directly as she knows how, action research, (with its implied participation by "research partners") uses research objectives as guidelines only. The real research agenda is set by the research team - the researcher working with the research partners to develop a starting point and then plan a way of gaining a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the starting point. After undertaking the planned action (described as a "research cycle"), the research team reflects upon the experience,

and attempts to develop another proposition that will be acted upon in a subsequent cycle. The degree to which the researcher puts herself in the research partners' hands is of course a matter of choice (as described in Chapter 3, where the literature on action research as a research methodology was examined), but even if the researcher remains firmly in control of the study's direction, the time and energy needed to continuously reaffirm the study's objectives cannot be overestimated. In the present study, this proved to be the case, and one of the researcher's chief challenges was to satisfy the interests of the individual research partners, whilst continuing to focus on her own initial research questions.

Figure 8.1: Study timeline

| Jo | SFS May 1977 | DSS December 1997 |

| Lisë | Ormond Stock April 1996 | TeamTalk May 1997 |

| Dave | McKenna's August 1996 | Health & Fertility Foundation June 1998 |

February 1996   July 1998

As described in Chapter 4, this study was initiated in November 1995, when the researcher contacted the Manawatu and Wellington Business Development Boards, and discussed the possibility of their sending out a letter on her behalf to their database of consultants. The first of the three consultants agreed to take part in February 1996, and the first client project was started in August 1996. Between this date and when the fieldwork was completed (August 1998) the researcher was involved in six client projects, as demonstrated in Figure 8.1. For the researcher the time commitment was

particularly heavy when a project was in progress, as meetings were often arranged at short notice.

Despite the time needed to attend the client meetings, the more significant time was spent talking to the research partners about prospective projects. One consultant in particular delayed identifying a suitable project, and the researcher needed to maintain regular contact in a way that respected this apparent reluctance. This completion of this intensive phase of relationship building was signalled when the consultant contacted the researcher with the offer of a client project.

Figure 8.2:Model of cooperative inquiry

PRESENTATIONAL   PROPOSITIONAL

Start here ———————▶ Seed idea (phase 1)

First presentational portrayal of data ———————▶ Provisional knowledge

Second presentational portrayal of data ———————▶ Refined propositional knowledge

Second experiential grounding ◀——————— Second action plan & practice

First experiential grounding (phase 3) ◀——————— First action plan & practice (phase 2)

EXPERIENTIAL   PRACTICAL
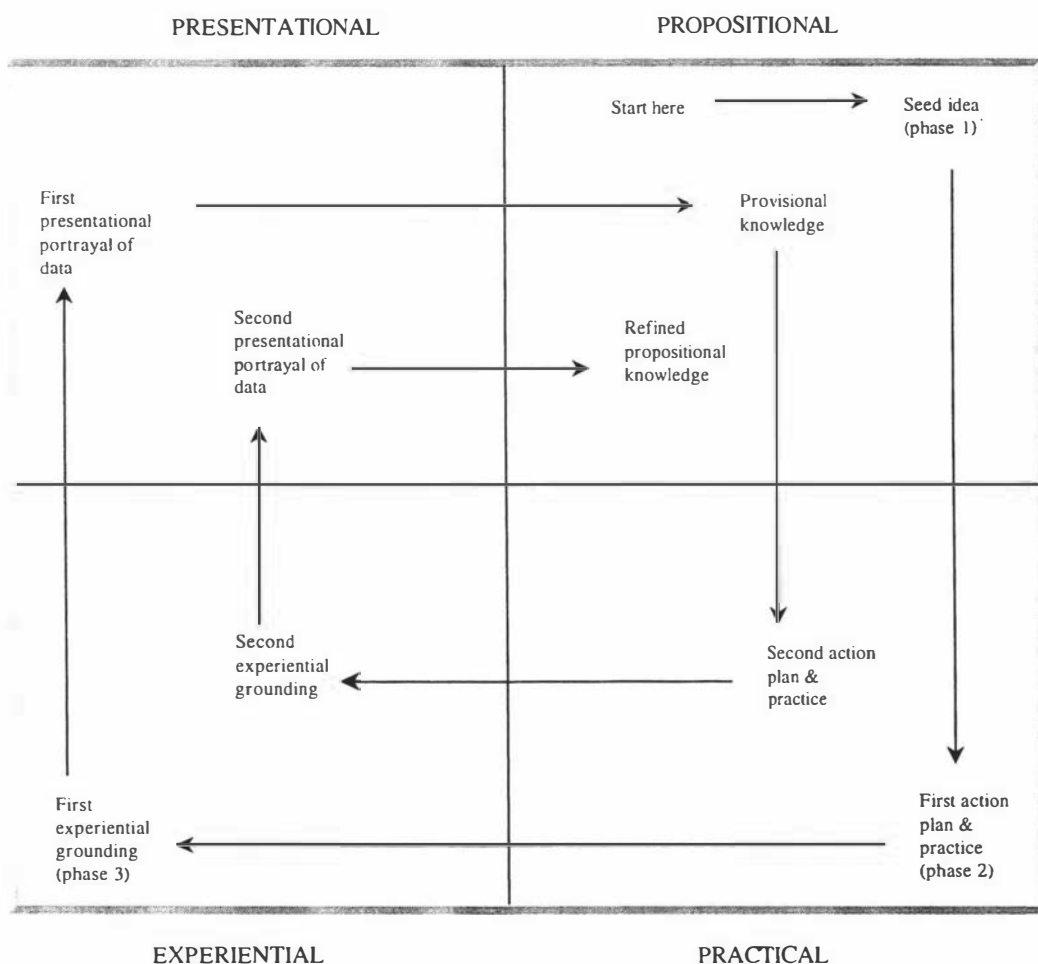
The relatively small amount of time taken to undertake the research, compared to the larger amount of time needed to plan for, and consider the implications of, the research is well illustrated in the model of cooperative inquiry first introduced in Chapter 3 and reproduced in Figure 8.2.

As the model demonstrates visually, the stages of "proposition" and "presentation" are of equal significance to those of "practice" and "experience". In this study the equal significance of the four stages also meant that similar amounts of time were allocated to each. For example, reviewing the researcher's field notes shows that more than half of the conversations between the consultant and the researcher were concerned with the practice of consultancy in general terms, rather than with specific projects. From the researcher's perspective this appeared to suggest that the time that the research partners spent together on the study was allocated roughly in the proportions that the model implies.

Chapter 3 also introduced the model of "cognitive/action" which provided the researcher with a way of conceptualising the study as a whole (see Figure 3.7). Developed by Reinharz (1981), the model is built on the experiential learning cycle, and in the context of this study provided the researcher with a way of understanding her own "learning cycle", as distinct from that of the research partners.

While the model of cooperative inquiry guided the researcher during the research cycles, it was the cognitive/action cycle, and the modification that was made to it by the researcher (see Figure 8.3: *The study's multiple learning cycles*, first presented as Figure 3.11), that was most useful as the study drew to a close. This was because of the particular nature of this study, in which there was no *single* team of research partners, working together on a *single* research proposition. Rather there were three research teams, as the researcher worked with each of the consultants individually. However, despite this feature of the study, there was also a link between the research teams, and the researcher used Figure 8.3 to provide her with a visual model of her primary challenge. This was to prevent the study from diverging totally from the original research questions, while at the same time allowing the research partners to contribute to modifying the study's focus.

The model of the study's multiple learning cycles also provided the researcher with a way of relating the action phase of each of the research cycles to the most important themes within the literature. This comparison between the literature and the data happened continually (described in the three chapters dealing with the research cycles), and the result was cumulative. Each research cycle generated more data, which was

added to that previously gathered, and at the same time the researcher drew upon more of the literature.

Figure 8.3: The study's multiple learning cycles
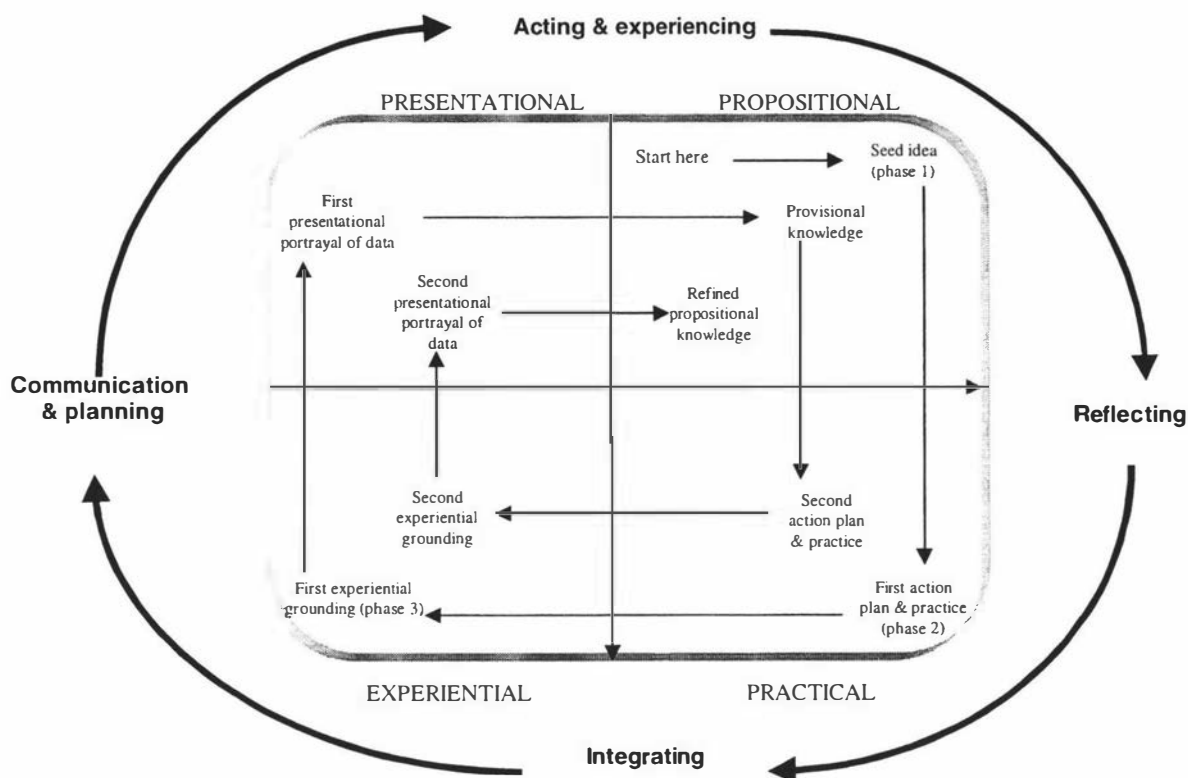
In practical terms this meant that by the time the researcher came to draw final conclusions she had "circled" the literature and the data several times, each time "drawing conclusions". The final conclusions are therefore both a repetition of earlier insights and an attempt to provide a further level of analysis on the final point of focus, using the notion of progressive focusing (after Woods, 1986).

The next section of the chapter presents the conclusions that emerged at the completion of the research cycles, which were earlier included in the chapters that dealt with the three cycles respectively (Chapters 5, 6 & 7).

LEARNING FROM THE RESEARCH CYCLES

In traditional research the research objectives provide the researcher with a set of parameters for the study. He or she focuses on fulfilling the objectives and answering the central research question. In this study research objectives did exist. However, given that

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the research method in this study was action research, with the implication that the research partners would be involved in guiding the direction of the study, the researcher also needed a starting proposition that would provide a focus for the research team. This proposition (stated initially in Chapter 3, p 126) was "that it is possible to identify the factors that influence consultancy outcomes by engaging in participatory research with individual consultants". Although by the time this proposition was developed the researcher was aware of the "checklists" in the literature for selecting competent consultants (for example, see Goulter, 1996; Holtz, 1989; Kubr, 1993; Patterson, 1995; Scarbrough, 1996; Shenson, 1990), she was also aware that there was no single model that allows a consultant to assess his or her weaknesses and consider the implications for the client project. This apparent gap in the literature provided the researcher with an opportunity for contributing to the practitioner literature, which was also consistent with the research objectives. As a consequence, the proposition was the basis for the first research cycle.

RESEARCH CYCLE 1: DESCRIBING THE INTERVENTION CONTEXT

In this cycle (already described in full in Chapter 5), the research partners began with a working framework that they hoped would enable them to visualise the different elements of their work with clients, in a way that they had previously been unable to do. This "intervention framework" demonstrated the four elements of a client project, and suggested that inter-relationships may exist between the elements. The implication of the framework was that if it were possible to describe these elements the outcome would be a practical tool for consultants to use in planning an intervention.

In practice the research partners were able to apply this framework to their client assignments and after some consideration could list the different aspects of each of the elements that they felt were characteristics of "ideal" assignments. The researcher compared this list with the existing literature on organisational consulting to produce a list that combined both contributions (Figure 8.4, previously presented as Figure 5.6).

Once they were agreed on the importance of these characteristics, the research partners sought a way of applying their understanding. Given their inability to find a similar tool in the literature, they were free to develop a framework that was solely based on their experience and the literature incorporated in Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4: Characteristics of ideal assignments

Intervention element	Success factors
Client	Authority
	Commitment
	Competencies
Client system	Resources
	Culture
	Competence
Consultant	Competencies
	Systems
	Resources
Project	Relates to organisational goals

The result was a simple framework that was based on an assessment of each element in a particular assignment as "strong" or "weak". To make the application as simple as possible each of the four elements of the intervention framework was given a letter code, with "C" representing the consultant, "S" representing the client system, "L" representing the client, and "P" representing the project. A "strong" assessment was signalled by the letter code - its absence showed a "weak" assessment. Classifying each of these elements as strong or weak produced a number of combinations, described as "intervention profiles" (previously presented as Figure 5.7).

Figure 8.5: Possible combinations of intervention elements

Consultant (C)	Client system (S)	Client (L)	Project (P)	Intervention Profile
Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	CSLP
Strong	Weak	Strong	Strong	CLP
Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	CSP
Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak	CSL
Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	CL
Strong	Weak	Weak	Strong	CP
Strong	Strong	Weak	Weak	CS
Strong	Weak	Weak	Weak	C

Once this framework was complete the research partners agreed that describing the elements of the intervention framework and then assessing their strength or weakness in

terms of the characteristics could be a potentially valuable process. They would then be able to assess any assignment in terms of its likely "pre-conditions" for successful consulting. Cases demonstrating a reasonable strength across all four elements of the intervention framework could be identified as having a strong likelihood of success. By contrast, it could be presumed that those with a weak match would be less likely to be successful. After applying this framework (as presented in Figure 8.5), the consultants would then be able to plan their approach to an assignment.

For example, in a situation with an inaccessible client but a strong project and a supportive client system, the consultant could develop an appropriate strategy to minimise the effect of the client's "weakness".

The research partners' reflections on this extension of the original tool led to the development of a second proposition; that assessing a particular client assignment with the help of the IP would assist a consultant to make choices about appropriate intervention strategies. This proposition provided the basis for the second research cycle.

RESEARCH CYCLE 2: IMPROVING INTERVENTION PRACTICE

The intervention profile that was developed in the first research cycle identified ten characteristics of "ideal" interventions. In the context of the second research cycle the consultants' first task was to assess their clients in relation to these characteristics.

The consultants appeared to find this assessment quite straightforward. They were able to identify the client, and discuss the different types of client according to a typology of their own or one adapted from the literature. A similar situation occurred in terms of the project. The consultants were able to evaluate its relationship to organisational goals, and make some assessment of whether it would be of sufficient importance to the organisation to ensure its continued support. By contrast they had more difficulty with identifying the characteristics of a client system.

However the difficulty with developing an intervention profile was that sufficient data was usually only available at the conclusion of the assignment. While a retrospective assessment was interesting, the consultants were all more concerned with finding a way of improving its ability to be immediately practical.

Their first step in developing this application was to try to understand the implications of the different profiles for themselves as consultants. Using the specific experiences

described in the second research cycle as the basis for thinking about clients in a general sense, they developed a set of "intervention conditions" for the eight possible profiles. Their conjectures were based on their own experiences, as well as their reflections on the literature introduced in the previous research cycle.

Figure 8.6: Intervention profiles and possible intervention conditions

Intervention Profile		Intervention Conditions
CSLP	Strong consultant, client system, client, project	Ideal situation.
CSP	Strong consultant, client system, project, weak client	Conditions poor for negotiating project and carrying it out. Conditions good for implementing recommendations.
CSL	Strong consultant, client system, client, weak project	Conditions good for negotiating project and carrying it out. Conditions poor for implementing recommendations.
CLP	Strong consultant, client, project, weak client system	Conditions good for negotiating project and carrying it out. Conditions poor for implementing recommendations.
CS	Strong consultant, client system, weak client, project	Conditions poor.
CL	Strong consultant, client, weak client system, project	Conditions good for negotiating project and carrying it out. Conditions poor for implementing recommendations.
CP	Strong consultant, project, weak client, client system	Conditions poor.
C	Strong consultant, weak client, client system, project	Conditions poor.

This presentation (previously introduced as Figure 6.2), offered the consultant a way of assessing the conditions inherent in any assignment and then developing appropriate strategies. However, there was still the issue of timing; sufficient information was not always available at the start of an assignment, and by the time this was available, the consultants were often already committed to a course of action that could not be modified without risk.

Their conclusion was that the IP was of value, although this was limited. This conclusion was tempered with a high level of pragmatism: for the IP to be a useful tool it needed to

be accurately applied at the beginning of an assignment. This would give the consultant the best opportunity to assess the conditions and develop appropriate strategies. However, given the lack of information, this was not always possible.

To the researcher it appeared that the consequence of this situation (where the information needed for the IP can only be gathered once the value of its application had passed) was that consultants need to be skilled in developing assignment plans that are independent of the actual conditions. They cannot depend on the IP to provide them with a foundation for planning an intervention – by the time it can be used, the intervention is frequently complete. Rather than depending on the IP, the effective consultant has to be well grounded in a range of different consulting theories, strategies and tools. He or she is then in a position to plan appropriate interventions, irrespective of what conditions exist.

The researcher had already noted that none of the consultants had undertaken any formal training, although all had post graduate qualifications in different fields. In addition, each of them had attempted to develop their consultancy skills further, through attendance at short courses, formal study in subjects that seemed relevant to their work with organisations, or informal personal development. However, as each of the consultants signalled, these opportunities were limited. Firstly, there are very few courses in New Zealand that specifically address the needs of consultants. Secondly, there is the constraint, either of money or time, which makes the undertaking of further study difficult while full time work is also necessary. But by far the largest contributing factor to the situation (in which none of the consultants was currently engaged in a satisfactory course of personal development) was the lack of a framework for assessing their developmental needs.

In the third research cycle the research partners were specifically seeking to develop a tool that they could use to assess their strengths and weaknesses as organisational consultants, and a framework that would help them to plan a programme of professional development. As a starting point they worked with the researcher to summarise some of the main concerns of the literature. This produced a list of seven topics (first introduced as Figure 6.3) that emerged from the literature review as being central to the practice of effective consulting.

Figure 8.7: Skills and knowledge of effective consultants

Effective consultants understand and apply consulting theory, as it relates to:

Diagnostic orientations

Dominant modes

Consultancy roles

Consultancy processes

Effective consultants understand and apply organisational theory, as it relates to:

Organisational processes

Effective consultants have well-developed:

Technical skills

Interpersonal skills

The research partners decided to develop an assessment tool based on the thinking represented in this figure. This became the basis of the research partners' third proposition; "that this tool will assist the consultants to assess their strengths and weaknesses as organisational consultants, and to develop a framework that will help them to plan a programme of professional development that will improve their practice of organisational consulting.

RESEARCH CYCLE 3: DEVELOPING EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS

The second research cycle demonstrated that the consultants rarely used a formal process for assessing a new assignment, and that even when they tried to, the information needed was not always available until the intervention had already been planned. As a consequence, the consultants' usual approach was to plan the intervention based on their own knowledge and skills, rather then on circumstances that were specific to any one client. The practical implications were that the consultants depended on their knowledge of consulting theories, strategies and tools and their skill in applying these tools, more than their ability to develop client-specific strategies. Given that none of the research partners had been formally trained in organisational consulting this suggested that they were drawing upon knowledge derived from other fields, as well as their practical experience of consulting.

This possibility led the researcher and the research partners to examine the aspects of their backgrounds that had provided them with their basis for organisational consulting.

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Drawing upon the literature, the researcher developed a list of the areas of knowledge and the skills that effective consultants were expected to have. This list included seven topics, ranging from conceptual models to practical skills. She then devised a series of exercises that would assist the research partners to identify their perspective on the seven topics identified.

As each consultant worked through the exercise (described in detail in Chapter 7), the researcher focused on identifying relationships between the consultant's answers and the practice of consulting that they had demonstrated with their clients. She also looked for an indication that one or more of these factors was more important than any other. This exercise was immensely helpful in helping the research partners to describe their practice of consulting. However, it soon became clear that the exercise failed to identify the fundamental model or theory that provided the underpinning for each consultant. As a result the researcher arranged a followup interview with each research partner with the specific objective of identifying the fundamental model or theory that they applied to their client assignments.

The answers to the exercises enabled the researcher to identify the consultant's model of change as an important factor in determining how the consultant conceptualised other aspects of a consultancy intervention. On this basis the researcher was able to develop a working representation of the way in which the consultant's model of change influenced their perceptions of other dimensions of the practice of consulting (previously presented as Figure 7.12).

The result of these conclusions was the research team's final proposition. This incorporated the conclusions embodied in the first and second propositions, demonstrating the way in which the research team had progressively focused their thinking. At first the research team had assumed that they would be able to identify the barriers to successful consulting as well as the factors that enable it to occur. However, as the study progressed, it appeared that the proposition mooted early in the study - that it would be possible to assess the four elements of the intervention framework in terms of strength and weakness, and that this would be useful in determining how to deal with a specific client project in advance - was too simplistic.

Figure 8.8: The importance of the model of change in forming perspectives on organisational consulting
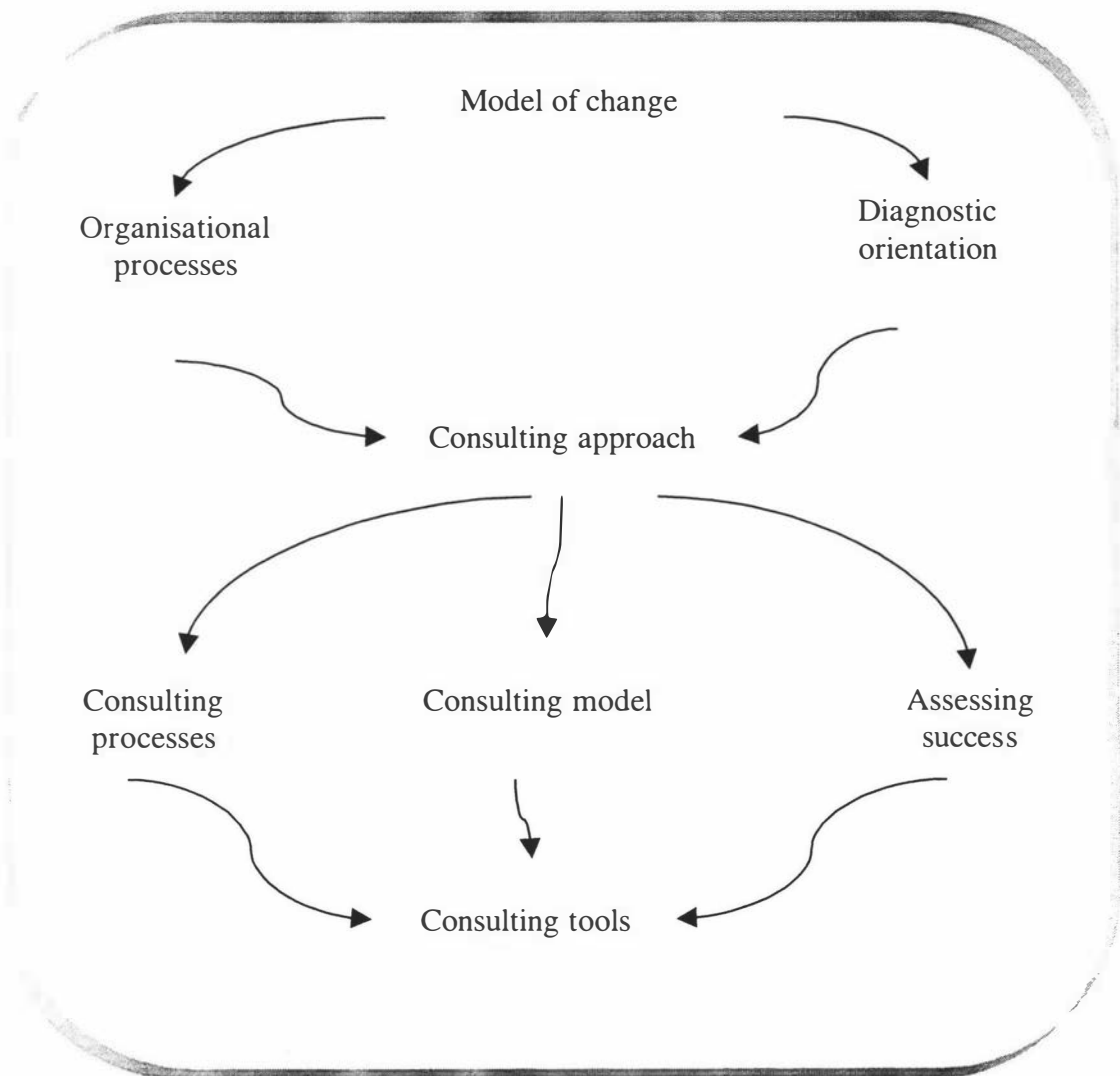
Despite this conclusion, the research partners did identify an issue that they were able to explore - that the metaphor that they use for understanding organisations is important.

Based on this thinking, the research partners were able to develop a final proposition. This was "given that the way consultants conceptualise a client assignment is an important factor in their practice of consulting, a professional development programme that assists participants to identify their own consulting approach, develop intervention profiles, assess intervention conditions and develop intervention strategies will improve the practice of organisational consulting". This final proposition is shown in relation to the other propositions in Figure 8.9 (already presented as Figure 7.13).

Figure 8.9: The completed research cycle

PRESENTATIONAL   PROPOSITIONAL

A number of factors influence the success of consultancy → That it may be possible to identify the factors & understand their effect by engaging in research

A framework for developing an **intervention profile** → That the intervention profile assists the consultant to assess the intervention conditions & make choices about appropriate intervention strategies

An **assessment framework** for assisting consultants to identify their consulting approach → That this tool assists the consultant to identify their approach & make appropriate choices in the context of a client's intervention framework

A **consulting development programme**

Our experience is that both the intervention profile & the consultants assessment framework are necessary ← *Consultants Approaches Assessment*

Our experience is that although the intervention profile is useful, the way consultants approach the consulting process is one of the critical success factors ← *TeamTalk Disability Support Services Health & Fertility Foundation*

Our experience is that you can identify barriers & enabling factors & describe the framework of an intervention, but there is no adequate model in the literature to assist consultants to assess the likely success of a client project ← *McKennas OSA Student Finances*

EXPERIENTIAL   PRACTICAL

WORKING WITH THE LITERATURE

In this study the researcher found that the relevant literature could be drawn from a number of different fields. As a result the overview of the literature on organisational consulting (Chapter 2) was presented under the three headings of context, process and outcomes. This proved to be an effective preliminary way of grouping the various contributors to the main themes in the literature. However, as the researcher concluded, a more important distinction within the literature was between the two core disciplines from which the field of organisational consulting has emerged; management science and organisational behaviour. It was these fields that provided the theoretical basis for a field

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that is now dominated by practitioners, who provide much of the recent writing on best practice management consulting.

This is quite unlike the situation that existed when organisational consulting first emerged as a field. The first consultants were using the findings of key figures such as Taylor (1911) and Mayo (1933), and depending on their clearly stated theories for the practice of consulting. These theories were derived from their alternative perspectives on the way organisations function, and these two perspectives still provide today's practising consultants with different ways of approaching their work within organisations.

The researcher concluded that the literature is so clearly divided between these two main disciplines that it is likely that practising consultants would tend to be influenced by one field or the other. This would result in some points of difference between a "management consultant" and an "OD consultant", although it would also be possible for there to be some points of similarity.

While this conclusion was important, it was the experience of the three research cycles that enabled the researcher to develop the concept further. Partly this was because the frequent contacts between the researcher and the research partners meant that there were many opportunities for data gathering. The action research approach also meant that the contacts were two way – the researcher often came away from a meeting or a telephone call with questions to answer, as well as data to record. This meant that she continued to refer back to the literature throughout the duration of the study. The result of this continued reflection between the data and the literature was that the researcher was able to synthesise the results of the literature review with Figure 8.7.

Combining this representation of the way in which the consultant's model of change influenced their perceptions of other dimensions of the practice of consulting with the literature produced Figure 8.10. In this list of eight factors the researcher included the seven topics that had been originally identified in the second research cycle (Figure 6.3) as well as the "model of change" that emerged during the third research cycle as the single factor that appeared to influence the consultants most fundamentally.

As this table suggests, it is possible to use the two disciplines of OB and management science to identify the main themes within the literature and to summarise the differences

between the two approaches that seem to exist. However, while this table identifies the points of difference clearly, it suggests that there is no common thinking between the two disciplines. This is not the case, as there is some convergence in the literature, particularly at the level of practice. This is evidenced by writers who provide frameworks for viewing both types of consultant, such as Schein's (1988) typology, which includes expert, doctor and process consultant. This material provides a context for another topic that crosses over the "management consultant/OD consultant divide": the literature on roles.

Figure 8.10: Different dimensions of organisational consulting according to OD and management science

	Management Science	Organisational Behaviour
Model of change	Self determined (teleological)	Life cycle based
Organisational processes	Emphasise decision making, planning	Emphasise learning, communication
Diagnostic orientation	Problem-centred	Developmental
Consulting approach	Gap analysis	Process congruency
Consultancy model	Expert	Process
Consulting process	Discrete	Interrelated to organisational processes
Assessing success	Based on organisational objectives	Based on the organisation's processes
Consulting tools	BPR, strategic management	OD

Another theme in the literature in which the OD consultants and management consultants agree is in the skills that are needed, although there is a difference in emphasis. While the management consultants focus on a specialist area, the OD consultants emphasise the skills required to deal with individual and group processes.

In summary, although there does seem to be some value in identifying the differences between organisational consulting from the perspectives of management science and OB, there is also value in identifying the points on which they agree.

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This section provided a summary of the researcher's reflection on the significance of the literature in the light of the research cycles. As noted in Chapter 3, researchers who are engaged in projects that are theory generating go through an iterative process, in which theory (as described in the literature) and data are compared to each other continuously. The result of this approach is that theory and data are "enfolded" within the literature.

The following section addresses the four research objectives, as listed at the beginning of this chapter.

ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

After reflecting on the research partners' conclusions at the end of the third research cycle and reviewing the literature in relation to these conclusions, the researcher started to synthesise the findings. Her first step was to evaluate whether she had achieved her research objectives. Despite her initial concerns (as noted in Chapter 3) that the interests of the research partners would subsume the research objectives, on reflection the researcher found that it had been possible to remain true to both points of focus. This is not to say that the research objectives were necessarily answered, because the findings of the first research cycle offered the researcher a new perspective that forced her to refocus her original points of interest. In the following section the researcher briefly restates the context for the development of the research objectives, lists the original research objectives and assesses the degree to which they were met.

THE CONSULTANT'S DILEMMA

In Chapter 1 the researcher described "the consultant's dilemma" as a situation where there is a known body of knowledge for organisational consultants, there is continued pursuit of organisational success on the part of managers, and where the ultimate formula for its achievement has not been found. The researcher argued that these factors have created a situation where consultants are caught in the grip of two opposing forces. On one hand there is the possibility of providing clients with a better outcome than ever before, based on the advances of management thinking that have occurred. On the other hand, clients' beliefs that continual advancements in organisational success are possible are putting pressure on the consulting industry to achieve "quick fixes".

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This situation provided the context for the study. Against this background the researcher identified an initial point of interest; the organisation that is engaged upon a search for organisational improvement of some form, with the help of an external consultant. The term used to describe this particular state was enterprise development (ED).

The researcher also identified the research objectives that are listed at the beginning of this chapter. These objectives guided the study in an overall sense, while the research propositions developed by the research partners guided the research cycles (described in Chapters 5, 6 & 7). In the following sections the four research objectives are addressed in turn.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1

The first objective was to evaluate the potential role of the consultant in enterprise development, by identifying the effects of interventions carried out by consultants in the context of an assignment. Projects were selected for the study that fitted into the researcher's definition of enterprise development - a situation in which the organisation's managers undertake a set of activities with the objective of achieving a positive organisational outcome of some kind.

The potential challenges inherent in this objective had guided the researcher when she designed the research plan. The result was the multi-method matrix, as presented in Figure 3.9. Uppermost in the researcher's mind was the need to distinguish between effects on the organisation and effects on the individual manager or client, and the difficulty of making a distinction between effects that were real rather than perceived. In addressing these issues the researcher found the Swartz and Lippitt (1975) framework useful.

This framework was designed for evaluating the consulting process and provided three points of focus. These were the client/consultant relationship, the event, and the progress of the system towards its goal. This framework (as presented in Figure 8.11) allowed the researcher to guide the consultants and their clients as they were asked to evaluate the project in terms of the three points of focus. They were specifically asked to comment upon; their *satisfaction* with the relationship between themselves and the other party, the *effectiveness* of the event (the single meeting or training session that had been encountered), and the *impact* of the project as a whole on the organisation's progress.

After the projects were complete the consultants and clients were asked to evaluate the project from these three perspectives.

Figure 8.11 Evaluating the consulting process
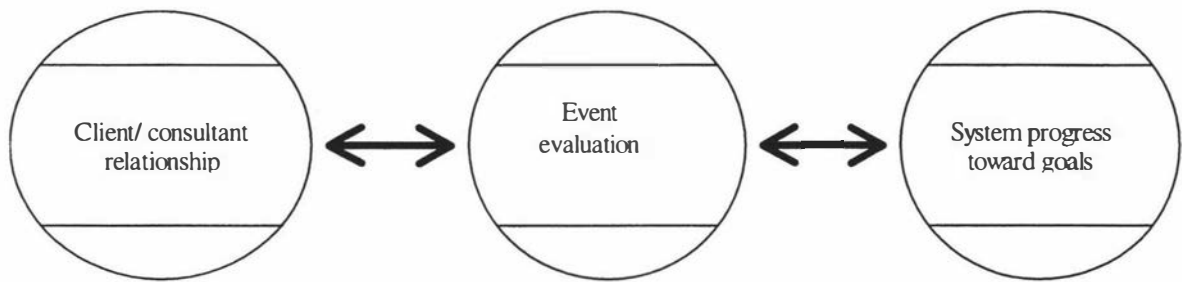
(Source: Swartz & Lippitt, 1975).

As noted in the case narratives in Chapter 4, satisfaction with the client/consultant relationship was the easiest concept for both consultants and clients to comment upon. For example, at TeamTalk the contact client commented "Lisë instilled confidence from the start - people wanted to talk to her". In the Student Finance Section case the members of the project team described their desired outcomes for the project. One of these outcomes was the need to "have fun", and their feelings about this objective were checked regularly by the consultant. With OSA, Lisë described herself as "happy with the project", basing her assessment on the fact that the Directors were "forthcoming and open in speaking about issues that were troubling them". She based this assessment on the strong relationship that she had built up with each of the Directors individually.

While these comments suggest a strong emphasis by both the consultant and the client on assessing "satisfaction" (as opposed to effectiveness or impact, following Figure 8.11), they were also able to comment to a certain extent upon the effectiveness of a particular meeting or training session. For example, Ormond Stock commented that he assessed impact by asking himself "could we have done it ourselves", "did it add value", and "were we equipped with new tools". Similarly, the McKennas' Directors were complimentary about the way in which the consultant handled the strategic planning exercise, and particularly pleased with Dave's efficiency and professionalism in the various meetings that were held during the course of completing the plan.

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By contrast, it seemed to be much more difficult for those involved to make an assessment of the impact of the project on the organisation as a whole. Partly this was because at the time the researcher interviewed them the project had only recently been completed. While some implementation may have occurred, in most cases this had not. As a result there was not sufficient time for any impact to have been noted. However, although the difficulty that the respondents had with this question may have related to timing, it may also suggest a more fundamental issue. It appeared that the consultants and clients were not used to assessing projects, (which are usually short term), in relation to how they impact upon the organisation in the longer term. An alternative interpretation may be that the consultants were aware of the complexity involved in assessing the impact of their actions, and avoided the task for this reason.

Both of these interpretations are consistent with the researcher's experience of consulting, as described in Chapter 1 (p 15). Here she noted that not only is it unusual for "organisational impact" to be assessed, but it also appears that in some instances attempting to assess the "success" of an assignment is not addressed. This experience appeared to be corroborated by the literature review in Chapter 2, where the researcher found a notable lack of useful models for those interested in assessing the results of a consultancy assignment.

In summary, while having a positive impact on the organisation was usually an underlying objective of each of the projects, neither the consultants nor the clients spent much time considering ways of measuring how successful the intervention had been in these terms. In most of the projects the consultant and the client focused on the project itself; was it completed on time and within budget, and was the client "satisfied" with the result?

In these terms, there were a number of "successful" projects, as reported by the clients, for example OSA, the Disability Support Services of Massey University, and the Health and Fertility Foundation. After reviewing the cases the researcher concluded that the consultants in these cases had contributed to ED. However, she noted that there were differences in the way that the consultants approached the cases. They selected different intervention approaches, scoped out the projects in quite different ways, and chose different consultancy roles.

For example, at OSA the consultant became a trusted confidante, and was described by the client as his "business partner". By contrast, in the Disability Support Services project the consultant acted as a "contractor", employed to deliver a defined service according to the client's specifications. Despite the wide variance in the two roles of contractor and business partner, both projects were described by the consultants and the client as "successful". The important factor in this success seemed to be the degree of congruence that existed between the needs of the project and the ability of the consultant to meet this need effectively, no matter what role was used. This conclusion caused the researcher to reflect upon the way roles in the client projects had been selected. Reviewing the cases, she concluded that there were two factors that had influenced this choice.

The first factor that appeared to influence the consultants' choice of roles was the way in which the organisation presented its needs. Here there were two issues: the scope of the project (whether it was concerned with a single need or organisational function, such as human resources, or with the whole organisation) and its duration (as a project or as an ongoing developmental need). For example, Ormond Stock presented the needs of his company initially as short term, and he assessed that the scope of the project was narrow – aimed at increasing staff use of the procedure manual. Lisë responded to this claim, initially taking on the role of consultant as "trainer", and it was not until she had gathered more information that she concluded that this was not the best way of responding to the organisation's challenges. By contrast, the client at Disability Support Services was clear from the start - that she was seeking to contract out a defined task.

However, other cases demonstrated that the way in which the client described the project was not always the most important factor in the role selection. Sometimes the consultants led this process, by the way they chose to present their ability to meet the organisation's needs. This presentation could either emphasise their skill in a particular functional area, such as human resources, or across many functional areas. For example, in the discussions with Ormond when the project was broadened, Lisë described herself as "an OD consultant with a special interest in training". By contrast, Jo tended to define herself more narrowly, as "a performance improvement specialist".

In reviewing the six cases the researcher concluded that where there was congruence between the client's presentation of his or her needs, and the consultant's presentation of

his or her skills, there seemed to be the possibility that a successful role negotiation would occur. On the basis of the cases the researcher further concluded that there was more than one role that could result in "successful ED".

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2

The second objective was to identify the key factors within a consultancy intervention that enhance the client's potential to gain value from the assignment as well as those that act as barriers.

This objective was directly addressed during the first research cycle, in which the research partners identified factors that could contribute to an assignment's likelihood of success. As described in Chapter 5, and summarised earlier in this chapter, it was possible for the consultants and clients to identify factors that they regarded as acting as barriers as well as those that they regarded as "enablers". These included the client's authority, commitment and competence; the client system's resources, culture and competence; the consultant's systems, resources and competence; and the degree to which the project related to organisational goals.

While the identification of these factors did address the research objective, the more interesting outcome of this research cycle was that the consultants had difficulty in applying their findings. For example, although they had been able to describe an "ideal" consultant, they were all aware that they fell short of this standard. Despite this, they had not necessarily identified their own personal development as a priority. Similarly, although they had been able to identify an "ideal" client, in the cases that the researcher observed, not one of them had considered refusing to undertake the project on the basis that the client did not measure up to this standard. To address this difficulty a method for assessing intervention *conditions* and developing intervention *strategies* was developed during the second research cycle. This was necessary as the literature does not provide a framework of this kind.

Reviewing all six cases the researcher was able to identify other factors that influenced the outcomes of a consultancy intervention, such as successful role negotiation (as described in the previous section). She concluded that while it is important to identify the characteristics of a particular project that have the potential to enhance or prevent its likelihood of success, value is only gained from the exercise if the consultant is able to

apply the insights gained. This ability (as demonstrated in the second and third research cycles) is primarily contingent on the consultant's ability.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3

The third objective was to identify the key aspects of an client organisation's structures, strategies and processes that facilitate enterprise development, with particular reference to interventions that seek to influence organisational and individual learning.

The literature did provide some suggestions, such as Argyris's suggestion that "the more closed a client system is, the lower is the probability that an interventionist can help the client system" (Argyris, 1970, p 136). Schein (1997b) identifies the need for organisations to have a culture that individuals can align themselves with. Kilmann (1995) argues that organisations which are old, large and entrenched; that have experienced autocratic leadership in the past; that were highly successful before the turbulence of the 1980s, and that have implemented numerous cycles of singular intervention approaches will present barriers to successful interventions.

The research partners were also able to make some suggestions, when they were asked to identify the characteristics of "ideal" client systems (as described in Chapter 5). However they found the task difficult, and the result was that their contributions were very general. This seemed to be because the consultants were rarely asked to undertake projects that formally brought them into contact with organisational processes such as learning. A further factor (as noted in Chapter 5) was that whether a client system was ideal or not had little impact upon the consultant accepting the project; the commercial imperatives for independent consultants meant that this was rarely possible.

Reviewing all six cases the researcher concluded that client systems with clear goals (such as the Student Finance Section), a strong project champion (Disability Support Services), an identifiable culture (TeamTalk), and that were open to outsiders (OSA) and to learning (Student Finance Section), provided an environment that was conducive to success. By contrast, those that were affected by internal politics (TeamTalk) or that were constrained by cost (McKenna's) did not offer this environment.

However, just as her reflections on the third research objective had led the researcher to the conclusion that the consultant's effectiveness is the key factor in whether the client is able to gain full value from a consultancy intervention, she reached a similar conclusion

here. While there are identifiable factors in the client system that will affect the project's ultimate outcome, without a skilled consultant, the act of identifying these factors is of little value, unless the consultant is able to minimise their potential negative impact.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4

The final objective was to assist consultants and their clients to maximise enterprise development outcomes. This objective was addressed throughout the study, as the researcher sought to provide the consultants with ways to improve their practice of consulting. A number of methods were used to achieve this objective, from the provision of relevant articles on areas of special interest, to the provision of observation and feedback sessions. This meant that the researcher was able to contribute both to specific projects and to the consultants' development in a more general sense. This objective was the focus of the third research cycle, described in Chapter 7, and summarised earlier in this chapter.

SYNTHESISING THE RESEARCH

After reviewing the research objectives, the researcher made a final assessment of the data that was gathered from the literature and the research cycles. The following section presents the researcher's reflections on the study as a whole, in the light of the limitations that were encountered.

RESEARCH CHALLENGES

As noted in Chapter 3, undertaking research with human subjects is a process that taxes the researcher emotionally, physically and intellectually. This is particularly the case with action research, where the researcher is literally "inside" the study itself. In the present study this created challenges for the researcher that only became visible as the research progressed.

The first issue related to the intensive nature of the data collection. It was clear from the projects that were undertaken in the initial stages of the study (described in Chapter 3, pp 120 -121), that the researcher would need to be prepared to spend a lot of time in the field, often at very short notice. This was not always possible, and the researcher had to balance the possible consequences of her absence (damage to her relationship with the

research partner involved) with the demands on her time, which included fieldwork with the other research partners as well as writing up the study.

Another challenge was the small number of research partners involved. As noted in Chapter 3, the researcher's original intention had been to involve more research partners, but two other consultants who had originally signalled their interest were unable to continue for different reasons. The result was that three research partners only were able to participate. However, this made it possible for the researcher to build close relationships with Dave, Lisë and Jo, and more cases were able to be included in the study. As a result the researcher was able to study the client assignments that were included in more depth than would have otherwise been possible.

A more important issue relating to the researcher's particular approach to the study was the need to manage the development of personal relationships between the researcher and the research partners in a way that enhanced the research process. As described in Chapter 7, in an account of the final research cycle, all three research partners came to describe the researcher as a mentor. That this did not occur until some eighteen months into the fieldwork indicates the way in which the relationship between the parties gradually developed. This gradual "engaging" in relationships with the research partners, which was central to the researcher's ability to collect meaningful data, also implied a period of "disengagement" once the study was concluded. For the researcher this period of disengagement coincided with the point at which she began to reflect upon the data, a factor that allowed her to see the research experience with the benefit of an external perspective.

A further challenge for those involved in this study, which is arguably inherent in all research that is theory building, was the lack of models that were situation specific. Particularly problematic was the absence of an accepted framework for assessing the effectiveness of a consultancy intervention. This lack of appropriate models is discussed further in the following section, where the study's contributions are identified.

Reflecting upon the issues noted above, the researcher concluded that had she been starting the study again she may given more thought to a formal structure for developing the relationship *among* the three research partners. This was a consequence of her gradual realisation that she was dealing with multiple learning cycles (her own, in

addition to those of the three consultants). While conceptually this was solved by the use of the model for cooperative inquiry (after Reinharz, 1981), the full impact of the existence of multiple cycles did not emerge until the completion of the first set of client assignments. At this point it was obvious that the first presentation (the final stage of the research cycle) could not be developed until all three consultants had concluded their projects, and this meant that there was some delay for Dave. It may have been useful to explore the possibility of the consultants being brought together as a group at the beginning of the study, which would then have worked with the researcher as a single entity.

IMPROVING THE PROCESS OF ED

Despite the limitations of the study that have been noted above, in terms of the researcher's primary focus (on improving the potential for ED, where ED is defined as a set of activities in which an organisation attempts to achieve a positive organisational outcome of some kind), the researcher was able to draw a number of conclusions.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the researcher concluded that there are a large number of factors that have the potential to act as barriers to success within a client assignment that has ED as its objective. Some of these factors relate to the client, others to the projects, and some to the client system. As described in the previous section of this chapter, where the findings of the three research cycles were summarised, the researcher concluded that the most important influence on whether ED occurs is the consultant. He or she plays a key role in assessing the project elements and developing an appropriate strategy for the client. This task is of great importance, however, the researcher did not find an integrative framework which consultants could use to assess client projects in a systematic way.

To assist consultants with this task the researcher and the research partners worked together to develop the "intervention profile" (IP), a framework for consultants to use when identifying weaknesses in any of the intervention elements. Once this had been done, it would be possible for them (although not always straightforward) to identify intervention conditions and develop strategies that would minimise any negative effect.

Although this tool appeared to be a new development in terms of the consulting literature, and of real use to the consultants in this study, it had its limitations. In the

context of this study, this appeared to be chiefly due to the consultants themselves. Their ability to develop strategies for specific projects (and therefore to maximise the value of the IP) appeared to be dependent on their being highly skilled consultants already, with a strong foundation in the theory and practice of working with organisations. This was problematic, given that none of the three research partners had undertaken formal education in the practice of consulting.

This conclusion (that the limitations of the consultants is an important factor) guided the researcher in the development of a framework that would assist consultants to assess their own approach to consultancy and guide their professional development. The researcher aimed to raise the research partners' awareness of organisational consultancy as a field that is rich both in theory and in practical tools. As demonstrated in this study, this relationship is not always explicit for practising consultants. A consultant may be trained in a particular discipline and yet take an eclectic approach to practice, picking up new tools as the opportunity presents itself. The resulting personal portfolio of products and services is not necessarily based on a single theoretical base, and the consultants in this study made little effort to assess whether the tools they were selecting in a particular case were consistent with their conceptual understanding of organisations that derived from their theoretical grounding.

It was the researcher's conclusion that the lack of an acknowledged link between theory and practice, and the absence of a framework for understanding the way in which the two interrelate are two of the most important barriers in preventing enterprise development from occurring within the context of client projects.

The framework that was developed in the third research cycle (the consulting approaches assessment), was based on the key themes within the literature. As shown in Figure 7.1 (p 223) a circular representation for the seven elements of this framework was chosen, based on the researcher's reluctance to impose a relationship between the dimensions that were identified. However, after completing the assessment with each of the consultants, and reflecting further upon the literature, the researcher was able to identify what appeared to be a hierarchy within the dimensions. This hierarchical relationship (presented in Figure 8.10) suggests that the differences between OD consultants and management consultants can potentially be observed in relation to eight dimensions; the

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model of change, organisational processes, diagnostic orientation, consulting approach, consultancy model, consulting process, assessing success and consulting tools.

In a further extension of this concept, and in the final development within the context of the study, the researcher developed Figure 8.12, which groups the eight concepts in terms of three distinct levels: conceptual, strategic and practical. This presentation draws upon the cases in this study as well as the body of knowledge for organisational consulting as described in the literature review. Here there are contributions to the body of knowledge, which focus on organisational consultancy at different levels. For example, Kubr (1996) and Porras (1987) address technical (or practical) issues, French and Bell (1995) focus on strategic issues, and Schein (1988) and Weisbord (1987) address conceptual issues. The cases in this study also demonstrated the way in which consultants operate on different levels, and the researcher adapted the notion of levels to the seven activities in the CAA and the further activity that was added at the end of the third research cycle (the exercise for identifying the consultant's underpinning metaphors).

The way in which the conceptual, strategic and practical levels fit together are explored below, in the researcher's final reflections upon the study. At the *conceptual* level the key issue is the way in which the consultant views change, and the two main bodies of literature provide a way of comparing the different approaches. Whereas the discipline of management science perspective assumes that organisations are "self determining", OD consultants conceptualise the organisation as an entity undertaking a "journey of change". This may create a situation in which management consultants identify key organisational processes such as decision-making and planning, and OD consultants focus on communication and "organisational learning". Another possible consequence of the focus on self-determination (or a teleological perspective) is that management consultants will tend to take a diagnostic orientation that focuses on identifying and solving problems. By contrast, OD consultants are more likely to be interested in "developing" the organisation's potential.

At the *strategic* level the difference is seen in the way the consultant approaches the client organisation, either focusing on "gap analysis" or "process congruency", depending on whether a problem centred or a developmental diagnostic orientation is taken. This choice then influences the choice of the consultancy model that is selected

(expert or process), the process that is followed, and the way in which success is assessed. Thus, management consultants will tend to operate as "experts", view the consulting process as discrete and attempt to assess the project's success in terms of how well the organisation meets its objectives.

Figure 8.12: A model for organisational consultants
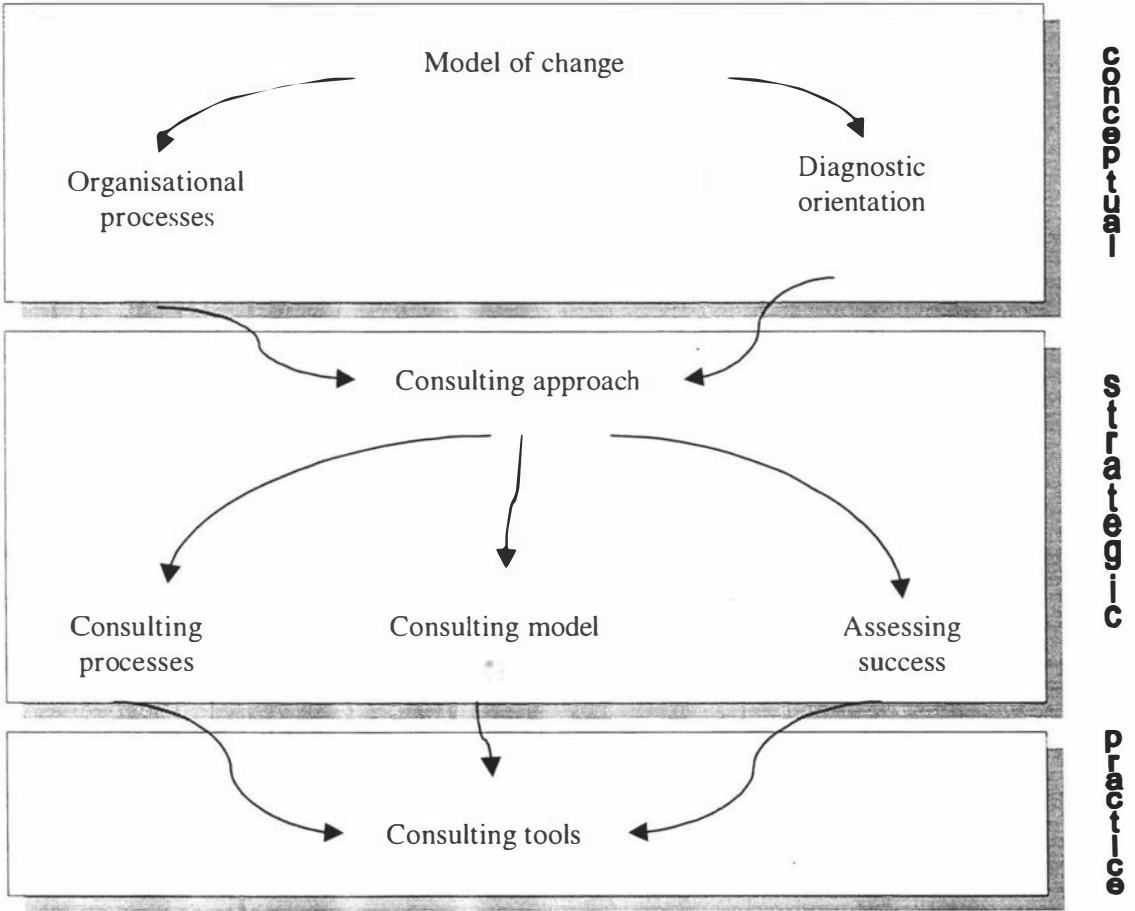
By contrast, an OD consultant may be more likely to operate as a "process consultant" will view the consulting process as inter-related to other organisational processes, and assess success in term of the "value" of the process.

At the level of *practice* the difference is in the tools that are selected. Whereas management consultants may use strategic management or Business Process Reengineering as a way of approaching an organisational assignment in terms of practice, an OD consultant would use other techniques and tools such as action learning.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

At the conclusion of a research project the researcher has the opportunity to re-examine the project and speculate on how it might have been otherwise executed. In this section the researcher offers some final reflections on the study, on the basis that no matter how extensive the scope of the research is there are always perspectives that are omitted.

CONSULTANTS & THEIR IMPACTS ON THE CLIENT SYSTEM

In this study the researcher was engaged with consultants who by the very fact of their involvement in the study could be regarded as "ideal": They chose to engage in a process of professional reflection and development. However, it is appropriate to observe at this point that the research partners may not be representative of consultants in general, and that the positive outcomes experienced by the clients in this study are not necessarily universal.

Negative outcomes for organisations are reported in the literature, as are consultants who are not "ideal", such as those who offer the "quick fixes" and formulaic approaches that were noted in Chapter 1. One of the issues that is most frequently identified in this context (of negative impacts upon the client system and consultants who focus on their own needs rather then those of the client) is that of power. For example, Huczynski (1993) and Bloomfield and Danieli (1995) note that the relationship between consultant and client is often characterised by various forms of power being exercised. They argue that the use of power is inherent in the change process, but others point out that consultants can exert undue influence on clients. Engaging the consultant for a further project may be the result of a real client need, however, it may also be the result of the consultant's success in 'selling-on' related services (Sturdy, 1997).

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE TOPIC OF STUDY

Neither negative outcomes of the consultancy process nor unscrupulous behaviour by consultants (such as the misuse of power) were examined in this study, which was concerned with *improving* the practice of independent consultants. In order to address this question, the researcher deliberately selected an empirical approach and the strategy of action research, rather than alternatives such as critical theory. As explained in Chapter 3 the rationale for this selection was that it was the most appropriate for the particular question that the researcher had posed in relation to the subject under study.

However, if a different question had been posed at the beginning of the study this would have had important implications for the research approach. In addition, if negative outcomes or unscrupulous behaviour had emerged during the course of the fieldwork (as reported by the parties or observed by the researcher), this would have forced the researcher to re-evaluate her approach. This did not occur, possibly because the consultants were operating in a provincial city which meant that in most cases they knew their clients socially as well as professionally. The relationship between the parties was not characterised by dynamics of influence, at least on a conscious level. As a consequence, the dynamics of power within the consulting relationship was not an issue that was addressed directly by the researcher.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BETTER PRACTICE

Given that external consultants are increasingly present in organisations today, it is critical to organisations everywhere that their use is maximised. The existing literature already provides consultancy purchasers with ways of developing their skill, and there are a number of guidelines on the best way of choosing a consultant (for example, Goulter, 1996; Holtz, 1989; Kubr, 1993). Similarly, the literature offers consultants with a number of opportunities for improving their practice. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, there is an extensive literature for practitioners, which deals with *the practice of consulting*, as distinct from the practice of a particular specialty, such as performance management or strategic planning.

However, despite the extensive literature, there is no single framework for assessing a client project in an integrative way. Nor is there a widely accepted method for individuals to use as they seek further development as practising consultants. For the consultant the absence of frameworks such as these presents significant challenges, both in terms of client interventions and in the task of self-development.

In relation to client interventions, the IP that was developed in the course of this study is an addition to the literature that may make consultants' tasks easier, although further refinement will be necessary if its potential is to be maximised. The chief limitation is due to the researcher's observation that the IP can only be of value if it is used by consultants who are already highly skilled in practice and in the evaluation of their work. In this study, where the researcher worked intensively with three consultants, it became

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apparent that none of them was completely satisfied with their own level of skill. Despite this assessment, and their commitment to further development, they had difficulties conceptualising the specific areas that they wished to address.

The "consulting approaches assessment" (CAA) was developed as a way of assisting the consultants to identify their own strengths and weaknesses in a way that helped them to see the relationship between practice and the underpinning theory in the literature. This contrasts with other diagnostic tools such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which although it may assist consultants to identify their personality types, does so in isolation from the consulting literature. As with the IP, the CAA is an addition to the literature for practising consultants, although it needs to be used with greater numbers of consultants before its reliability as an assessment tool can be confirmed. Similarly, further work needs to be done on the model in Figure 8.12 to reflect any changes to the CAA.

Despite this caveat, the researcher suggests that further development of these tools will contribute to improving the practice of consulting. This is critical given the multitude of consultants that are operating today, and the variety of roles that they take. Not only do consultants act as agents of improvement in organisations, disseminating "best practice" and contributing to enterprise development, they are key participants in the process through which "management knowledge is constructed, reconstructed, negotiated and substituted" (Sturdy, 1997, p 409).

Reflecting upon the study at its conclusion the researcher was particularly struck by this notion: that consultants have a role in "knowledge creation". If they are to contribute to this important process their role must be recognised, and consultants must be encouraged to engage in professional reflection and development. The researcher contends that action research is highly suitable for this purpose, and the account of its use that is provided by this thesis is a further contribution that this study makes.

The use of reflective, self-directed methods such as the process described here would enable practising consultants to re-establish *for themselves* the link between theory and practice that existed in the early days of organisational consulting. Recognising this link would provide the foundation for developing a "body of knowledge" for ED consultants, that incorporates good practice and sound theory. This would give consultants a way of

assessing themselves, both in terms of the ways in which they differ from their colleagues as well as identifying the ways in which they are similar.

However, this body of ED knowledge will not develop unless organisational consultants and their clients are prepared to invest the necessary time in personal development. Although it is likely that most practising consultants would say they would be prepared to change, a combination of commercial imperatives and market demands may prevent this from happening.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As noted above, there is further work to be carried out in relation to the IP and the CAA. In particular, the value of frameworks such as these should be explored in the context of the established consulting practices, if the findings of this study are to have a real impact. This is not a straightforward task, given the commercial imperatives that drive the international industry giants, and their commitment to "in-house" training.

In terms of research design, further work on this topic which uses action research should take into account the researcher's reflections on what she would have done differently (as discussed on p 272), and her comments on the implications (and limitations) of the empirical approach chosen in this study. At this final point the researcher concludes that further improvements could be made to the broad action research approach used here which would enhance its developmental capacity.

In the broader context it is appropriate to note that the study of organisational consultancy is still in its infancy. There are many more areas to explore before the subject can be said to have been exhausted, and much that remains to be answered about the development of effective consultants.

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא-אתה בן-חורין להבטל ממנה

"It is not thy duty to complete the work, but neither art thou free to desist from it" (Ethics of the Fathers, Chapter 2, Verse 21, trans Singer).

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Information pack for consultants

INFORMATION FOR CONSULTANT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

RESEARCH SCOPE & METHOD

The study focuses on the role of the professional adviser in projects where the objective of the client-consultant relationship is to develop the client's enterprise. The aim of the research is to identify the factors that make a successful project outcome (described as enterprise development) either more or less likely. The findings will contribute to the development of 'best practice' consulting and be of practical value both to advisers and clients aiming at enterprise development (ED).

The research takes place within a number of 'research teams', consisting of a consultant, a client and myself. The team's primary focus is the client project, in exactly the same way as would occur in any other client-consultant relationship.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT

I invite you and one of your clients to be participants in a research team. This team would be established with the client's consent and exist until the advisory relationship between you ended (usually on completion of the client project). If you consent to participate I will attend meetings between you and your client, and view reports related to the project. I will also ask you to keep a written record of the meetings between you and the client.

MY ROLE

My role in the team will be as 'expert researcher', contributing where appropriate to the client-consultant relationship. The exact nature of my role will be negotiated with each research team, as noted in paragraph 1 of the *Research Agreement & Code of Conduct* on the following page. This code also covers aspects of the research such as confidentiality.

If you would like further information please contact:

Researcher : Claire Massey
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RESEARCH AGREEMENT & CODE OF CONDUCT

Research Outline & Scope

1. The research focus will be on a number of research teams, made up of the client, the consultant and the researcher. Each team will work together on a specific client assignment, with the researcher functioning as an integral part of the team, contributing where appropriate, as agreed by the parties.

2. A formal agreement on the scope, nature, and objectives of each assignment will be drafted at the beginning of the assignment.

Participant Consent

3. Consultants who are interested in participating will be briefed on the implications of their involvement. If the consultant agrees to take part, a consent form will be signed.

4. When an assignment is identified that may be suitable for the research, the client will be invited to participate and the researcher will brief the client on the implications of their involvement. If the client agrees to take part, a consent form will be signed.

Client Requirements

5. For the duration of the assignment, the clients' requirements and interests will be regarded as paramount. The primary objective of the research team is to deliver an appropriate service to the client, in order to provide the client organisation with a positive outcome.

6. A research team will only be established around an assignment where the consultant and the researcher are qualified to perform the tasks involved, and where the clients' needs will be effectively served.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

7. The researcher will not disclose any information about the project to any third party.

8. The client has the right to exclude data from the research, by asking the researcher to leave the room during meetings, or by specifying that data already collected will not be disclosed.

9. Material gathered from the research may be used in academic publications and journals. Drafts of material to be published during the course of the research will be submitted to the client and the consultant for approval.

10. All data collected during the course of the research will remain confidential to the client team, and will be held in secure storage for five years. The consultant has the right to view written records at any time.

11. The consultant has the right to ask the researcher to withdraw from a discussion or meeting at any time.

Liability

12. The researcher agrees to take all due care in the assignment, but shall not be liable for any loss or damage incurred by the client.

Time commitment

13. The research team will exist for the duration of the assignment. During this time there will be times when the researcher will be unable to be present at meetings due to teaching commitments.

Fees

14. The researcher will not earn fees from the project.

Termination

15. The client and consultant participants have the right to ask any further questions about the study at any time during the research.

16. Any party in the research team has the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The Role of Professional Advisers in Facilitating Enterprise Development

Consent Form for Research Participants

I have read the *Research Information* and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate and I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researchers on the understanding that my name or the name of my organisation will not be used without my permission.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the *Research Information.*

Signed   _____

Name   _____

Date   _____

Appendix C: Information pack for clients

INFORMATION FOR CLIENT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

RESEARCH SCOPE & METHOD

The study focuses on the role of the professional adviser in projects where the objective of the client-consultant relationship is to develop the client's enterprise. The aim of the research is to identify the factors that make a successful project outcome (described as enterprise development) either more or less likely. The findings will contribute to the development of 'best practice' consulting and be of practical value both to advisers and clients aiming at enterprise development (ED).

The research takes place within a number of 'research teams', consisting of a consultant, a client and myself. The team's primary focus is the client project, in exactly the same way as would occur in any other client-consultant relationship.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT

I invite you to be a participant in a research team, which will also include your consultant. This team will exist until the advisory relationship between you ends, for example when your project is satisfactorily completed. If you consent to participate I will attend meetings between you and your consultant, and view written communication with respect to the project. I will also ask you to keep a record of the meetings between you and the consultant.

MY ROLE

My role in the team will be as 'expert researcher', contributing where appropriate to the advisory relationship that exists between you and the consultant. The exact nature of my role will be negotiated with each research team, as noted in paragraph 1 of the *Research Agreement & Code of Conduct* on the following page. This code also covers aspects of the research such as confidentiality.

If you would like further information please contact:

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Research Outline & Scope

1. The research focus will be on a number of research teams, made up of the client, the consultant and the researcher. Each team will work together on a specific client assignment, with the researcher functioning as an integral part of the team, contributing where appropriate, as agreed by the parties.

2. A formal agreement on the scope, nature, and objectives of each assignment will be drafted at the beginning of the assignment.

Participant Consent

3. Consultants who are interested in participating will be briefed on the implications of their involvement. If the consultant agrees to take part, a consent form will be signed.

4. When an assignment is identified that may be suitable for the research, the client will be invited to participate and the researcher will brief the client on the implications of their involvement. If the client agrees to take part, a consent form will be signed.

Client Requirements

5. For the duration of the assignment, the clients' requirements and interests will be regarded as paramount. The primary objective of the research team is to deliver an appropriate service to the client, in order to provide the client organisation with a positive outcome.

6. A research team will only be established around an assignment where the consultant and the researcher are qualified to perform the tasks involved, and where the clients' needs will be effectively served.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

7. The researcher will not disclose any information about the project to any third party.

8. The client has the right to exclude data from the research, by asking the researcher to leave the room during meetings, or by specifying that data already collected will not be disclosed.

9. Material gathered from the research may be used in academic publications and journals. Drafts of material to be published during the course of the research will be submitted to the client and the consultant for approval.

10. All data collected during the course of the research will remain confidential to the client team, and will be held in secure storage for five years. The consultant has the right to view written records at any time.

11. The consultant has the right to ask the researcher to withdraw from a discussion or meeting at any time.

Liability

12. The researcher agrees to take all due care in the assignment, but shall not be liable for any loss or damage incurred by the client.

Time commitment

14. The research team will exist for the duration of the assignment. During this time there will be times when the researcher will be unable to be present at meetings due to teaching commitments.

Fees

14. The researcher will not earn fees from the project.

Termination

15. The client and consultant participants have the right to ask any further questions about the study at any time during the research.

16. Any party in the research team has the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Appendix D: Data collection forms

Assignment	Consultant	Client
Objectives	Name ph/fax street address mailing address	name ph/fax street address mailing address
	skill/experience/knowledge	skill/experience/knowledge
Outcomes	favoured consulting style/approach	organisational culture
	plan cf process	expectations

Intervention		Consultant	Client
Objectives	outcomes/follow-up	Style	style
Physical environment	stage/focus	role/function	role/function
Planned activities/agenda	unplanned activities	Feeling	feeling
non-verbal communication	non occurrences		

Event	Consultant		Client	
Objectives	Behaviour	Result	Behaviour	Result

Reported by Client	Reported by Consultant	Observed by Researcher
Barriers to success	barriers to success	barriers to success
Stimulants of success	stimulants of success	stimulants of success

Appendix E: Data collection pack for consultants

The diary has been designed to capture your reflections on the project you are undertaking with your client, and is an important part of collecting data on the role of consultants in enterprise development. The entries you make will describe your feelings and thoughts about a particular project, however the main purpose of the research is to help identify some of the issues that prevent consultants and clients in general from operating together effectively.

Any observations will be treated as completely confidential, as explained in the *Research Agreement & Code of Conduct* which is attached.

The diary format asks you to record your thoughts and feelings about two aspects of the project you are undertaking with your client; satisfaction and effectiveness. These topics provide a way of examining the relationship between a client and a consultant from two different but complementary perspectives.

INSTRUCTIONS

There are two different types of entry you can make within the diary. The front of the page is for you to use when recording your observations about a 'contact' with your client. For the purposes of this research project a *contact* is any planned appointment with the client where it is possible to identify a desirable *outcome,* such as a meeting or a training session. The back of the page is for you to use when recording your observations about an 'event'. For the purposes of this research an *event* is any incident that takes place *during* a contact that either affects the client-consultant relationship or the project outcome.

There are four steps to completing the diary entry after each contact:

1. Enter the appropriate details in the heading section of the page.
2. Answer the questions about the contact in terms of i) your satisfaction and ii) its effectiveness within the assignment as a whole.
3. Identify an event (or a number of events) that occured during the contact. Try to identify all the consequences of the event and record these.
4. Send the completed entry to me by e-mail or post.

DATE	TIME	CLIENT	CONSULTANT
MEETING TOPIC		PARTIES PRESENT	
Satisfaction with contact		*Effectiveness of contact*	
Was there a satisfactory working relationship between you and the client during the contact?		Was the contact useful in the context of the project as a whole?	
What factors assisted the development of a good working relationship?		What factors assisted the effectiveness of the contact?	
What factors hindered the development of a good working relationship?		What factors hindered the effectiveness of the contact?	

Impact of event	
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?

The main purpose of the research is to help identify the issues that prevent consultants and clients from operating together effectively and being able to achieve a positive outcome for the client organisation. It is probable that the consultant's ability is one of the main factors in helping (or hindering) this outcome and so one part of the study focuses on the consultant's personal and professional development.

The diary has been designed to capture your reflections on your development as a consultant. The entries you make will describe your feelings and thoughts about the process of working with clients, with a focus on how you *learn* from different client projects. In the process of writing entries in the diary you will be asked to comment on you personal reflections and will not be asked to reveal details concerning particular clients.

Any observations will be treated as completely confidential, as explained in the *Research Agreement & Code of Conduct* which is attached.

The diary format is very simple. It aims to provide you with a framework to use when thinking about your professional development. You may wish to use a different framework to the one provided and this is completely acceptable. If you find it easier to use diagrams, mindmaps or bullet points please do so.

INSTRUCTIONS

You may complete as many or as few diary entries as you wish, although it will probably be most useful to you if you do this regularly; for example a couple of minutes every day or 10 minutes once a week.

Each time you make a diary entry you will focus on the same questions:

1. what are the factors that assist the development of a good working relationship between a client and a consultant?
2. what are the factors that hinder the development of a good working relationship between a client and a consultant ?
3. what are the factors that assist me in providing the client with an effective outcome?
4. what are the factors that hinder me from providing the client with an effective outcome?

Each time you consider these questions you will be reflecting on any new insights that you have about the questions, no matter what the source (working with a client may have given you a new idea, or a conversation with a colleague).

Once you have completed a whole page send it to me by e-mail or post.

DATE		CONSULTANT	
Satisfaction with contact		*Effectiveness of contact*	
What are the factors that assist the development of a good working relationship between a client and a consultant?		What are the factors that assist me in providing the client with an effective outcome?	
What are the factors that hinder the development of a good working relationship between a client and a consultant ?		What are the factors that hinder me in providing the client with an effective outcome?	

Appendix F: Data collection pack for clients

THE PROJECT DIARY

The diary form has been designed to capture your reflections on the project you are undertaking with the help of your consultant, and is an important part of collecting data on the role of consultants in enterprise development. The entries you make will describe your feelings and thoughts about a particular consultant, however the main purpose of the research is to help identify some of the issues that prevent consultants and clients in general from operating together effectively. Any observations will be treated as completely confidential, as explained in the *Research Agreement & Code of Conduct.*

The diary form asks you to record your thoughts and feelings about two aspects of the project you are undertaking with your consultant; satisfaction and effectiveness. These headings provide a way of examining the relationship between a client and a consultant from two different but complementary perspectives. When designing the form my aim was to make it easier for you to focus on the questions, but if you prefer to summarise your comments in a different way that is completely acceptable. If you find it easier to use diagrams, mindmaps or bullet points please do.

INSTRUCTIONS

You will need to complete a diary entry after each meeting with your consultant. There are four steps:

1. Enter the appropriate details in the heading section at the top of page 1.
2. Enter your comments in terms of i) your satisfaction with the working relationship between you and the consultant and ii) the effectiveness of the meeting within the assignment as a whole.
3. Identify an event (or a number of events) that occured during the meeting. Try to identify all the consequences of the event and record these on page 2. The consequences may be feelings, thoughts or other events. For example, a diary note may read something like this "the consultant was late and we now need to schedule a further meeting to catch up".
4. Send the completed entry to me by e-mail or post.

DATE	TIME	CLIENT	CONSULTANT
PURPOSE OF MEETING		PARTIES PRESENT	
Satisfaction		*Effectiveness*	
Was there a satisfactory working relationship between you and the consultant during the meeting ?		Was the meeting useful in the context of the project as a whole?	
What factors assisted the development of a good working relationship?		What factors assisted the effectiveness of the meeting?	
What factors hindered the development of a good working relationship?		What factors hindered the effectiveness of the meeting?	

Impact of event	
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?
What was the event?	What happened as a result of the event?

Appendix G: The research partners

Profile

Dave Gaynor

Fitzherbert Rowe Business Development Limited (FR Development)
Private Bag 11-016, Palmerston North
Phone: (06) 351 4714 (DDI)
*   (06) 356 6431*
*   (025) 453 648*
Fax: (06) 351 4728
E-mail: D.Gaynor@Fitzrowe.co.nz

CURRENT ROLE

- Managing Director of FR Development.
- Business and technology consultant.
- Developing innovative business strategies to grow companies.
- Managing complex projects to establish new business opportunities.
- Assisting companies plan, fund and commercialise new technology projects.
- Finding grant funding for company expansion and product development.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

- 14 years advising on and implementing business strategies.
- Commercialising new technology.
- Business to business networking.
- Linking business and research institutes.
- New technology licensing.
- Commercial Manager DSIR (8 years).
- Scientist - (Entomology).

AREAS OF SPECIALISIATION

- Dynamic Business Strategies
    - Strategic plans
    - Business action plans
    - Innovation audits
    - Marketing action plans
    - Capability assessments
- New Technology Development
    - TechLink projects
    - Technology New Zealand grants
    - Technology commercialisation

- Innovative Project Management
    - Business management advice
    - New project management
    - Business networking
    - Tenders
    - General business advice
- Professional Grants and Tenders
    - BIZ Better Business Programme
    - Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Grants

QUALIFICATIONS

- BSc (Hons) Canterbury University, NZ.
- MSc (1st Class) Reading University, UK.
- Papers in Marketing, Accounting and Finance, Entrepreneurship, Massey University.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND DIRECTORSHIPS

- Member of New Zealand Grassland Association.
- TechLink Consultant (Technology New Zealand).
- Manager Manawatu Rugby Trust (1994-1995).
- Chairman of The Knowledge Centre, Palmerston North (1992/1995).
- Facilitator Manawatu Defence Cluster.
- Member of HerbLink Cluster (Chairman 1997-98)
- Member Manawatu Food Cluster

7th Floor · State Insurance Building · 61-75 Rangitikei Street · Private Bag 11016 · Palmerston North
Telephone (06) 351 4714 · Mobile Phone (025) 453 648 · Facsimile (06) 351 4728

PRODUCTS and SERVICES

Dynamic Business Strategies

- Strategic Plans
- Business Action Plans
- Innovation Audits
- Marketing Action Plans
- Continuous Delivery Programmes
- Capability Assessments
- General Business Advice

Innovative Project Management

- Business Management Advice
- New Project Management
- Business Networking
- Tenders

New Technology Development

- TechLink Projects
- Technology New Zealand Grants
- Technology Commercialisation
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade Grants

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THE TRAINING COMPANY LTD

Established in 1993, The Training Company is centrally located in Palmerston North, which maximises our ability to work with clients throughout New Zealand.

Our team of consultants takes a fresh approach to workplace development, addressing a wide range of human performance issues and building effective, long term relationships with our clients.

The Training Company offers a personalised service which addresses all of the "who, what, when, where and how" questions about people and business performance.

Our Vision

> **To empower through learning**

To enable our clients to plan and achieve business results we provide human resource development programmes that are effective for the organisation and enriching and empowering for participants.

Our aim is to enable our clients to take control of development programmes within their own organisations, in the long term.

Awards

The Training Company has won a number of awards, including:

→ Manawatu Business Development Board Quality Recognition Award

→ Ernst and Young Highly Commended Quality Award

→ Service Industry Merit Award, Manawatu Commerce Centre Business Awards.

WE BELIEVE in respecting the dignity of the individual.

WE BELIEVE that companies have the resources to create change from within.

WE BELIEVE in lifelong learning.

WE BELIEVE that the best results come from forming partnerships.

WE BELIEVE our company can be financially successful while operating in a socially responsible way.

A KNOWLEDGE BUSINESS

Managing organisational knowledge has been recognised by a wide range of authorities on organisational performance as a critical issue for the next decade and beyond. 'Knowing what you know' is vital for business success.

Identify Organisational Knowledge

We will help you to identify the skills and knowledge that already exist within your organisation. What is it, where is it, how vulnerable is it?

Practical, useful approaches to revealing unconscious competence. A variety of methods for analysing training needs.

Capture that Knowledge

Capture your organisation's priceless knowledge through frequently asked questions and their answers, electronic "desk files", process maps, induction programmes or databases of staff skills and fields of specialist knowledge.

There is a method and model to fit your business.

Supplement and Pass On Knowledge

We can help you with formulating a strategic staff development plan and answering all your operational staff development questions. Should we provide a formal or on the job training programme? Is there an option for self paced learning? What about mentoring, buddy programmes?

Come to The Training Company for friendly, practical help.

When a knowledge gap is identified, we provide a 'one stop shop' for all your staff development needs. We offer access to specialist facilitators and consultants in:

- Interpersonal skills
- Communication skills
- Team building
- Customer service
- Leadership development
- Performance management
- Presentation skills
- Myers Briggs Type Inventory
- Belbins Team Roles
- DISC Model of Behaviour
- Business writing
- Project management
- Quality systems including ISO accreditation
- Human resource strategic planning
- Human resource legislation and contracts.

If we can't help you, we know who can. Let us assist you to source exceptional trainers and consultants in other areas.

Tutaki Rd
RD 10
Palmerston North
Ph 06 357 6790
Fax 06 357 6764
Email joinnes@clear.net.nz

A focus on the performance of people at work

Focus of services - Are you looking to improve the performance of your people at work? Partners for Performance assists managers develop the performance and productivity of their people at work.

Partners for Performance offers a range of services which focus on integrating
❑ Identifying the performance improvement need
❑ Designing a Performance Improvement Plan
❑ Supporting the implementation
❑ Evaluating the impact.

Partners for Performance has recent experience with service and knowledge work industries; for example local government, tertiary education sector, science organisations, health & disabilities industries.

A new way of thinking
A performance improvement approach addresses the performance needs of your business and people together; not isolated learning or training needs.

When it comes to developing your people you have options:

❑ Make a best guess - listen to what your people are saying and respond with a few training programmes you hope will make a difference - maybe, wonder what return you get for your training dollar, or

❑ Take an integrated approach - complete a comprehensive performance needs assessment - understand the gap(s) between the desired and actual performance. Plan actions which impact on the quality of your service and the performance of your people. Know the return of your investment.

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Business partnership

Partners for Performance is Jo Innes, the Principal Consultant. Jo partners with your senior people to add value to your business.

A business partner offers relevant and effective results. Jo, as your business partner, develops an understanding of your industry, business and organisation.

A business partner saves time and money. You and your staff know your partner; you do not need lengthy introductions, past work can be integrated into present work.

Outsourcing specialist services enables you to focus on your core business. Your organisation also benefits from the experience and knowledge of a senior advisor without having the overhead.

Independent service

Partners for Performance is an independent management consultancy. As an independent, Jo is free to focus on your needs and consider every possible approach to achieving your objectives. She is not constrained by commission agreements or prescribed practices.

Staff often relate more openly to an independent "outsider". A professional facilitator is perceived as being objective and open to listening from no fixed position. Jo Innes, Principal Consultant, partners with you and your staff to offer any of the following integrated services. The design and scope of each service is dependent on your needs. The approach can be applied to organisations, work groups and individuals. Processes can be facilitated, coached or completed independently.

Appendix H: A resource for the consultant interviews

DEFINING CLIENTS

- Contact clients make the initial contact

- Intermediate clients participate in some aspects of the assignments

- Primary clients 'own' the problem for which the investigator was brought in and are likely to be the investigator's key collaborators

- Ultimate clients will be affected by the assignment, so they must be considered in planning the intervention, although they may not be directly involved with the consultant

- Sponsoring clients provide financial resources for the consultancy

(SCHEIN, 1988)

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THE CONSULTANT'S INFLUENCE MODEL

Credibility

	high	low
high	Therapist Facilitator	Collaborative/ Interdependent
Trust		
low	???	Pair-of-hands expert

(BARCUS & WILKINSON, 1995)

THE CONSULTING ROLE GRID

Consultant responsibility for project results

Counsellor	Coach	Partner
Facilitator	Teacher	Modeler
Reflective observer	Technical adviser	Hands-on expert

Consultant responsibility for client growth

(CHAMPION, KIEL, & McLENDON, 1990)

CONSULTANCY ROLES
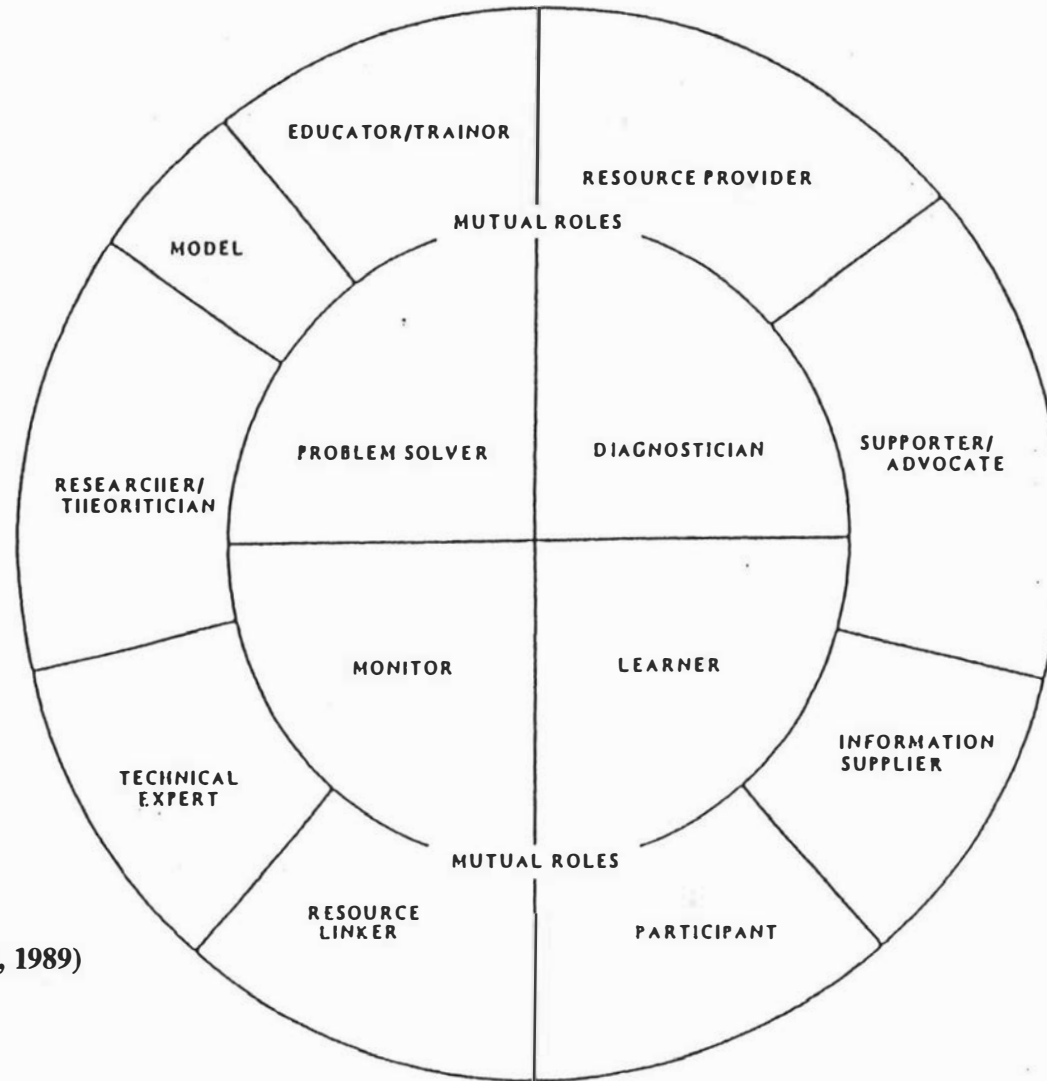
(WOOTEN & WHITE, 1989)

DIRECTIVE & NON-DIRECTIVE CONSULTANTS

MULTIPLE ROLES OF THE CONSULTANT

Reflector	Process specialist	Fact finder	Alternative identifier	Collaborator in problem-solving	Trainer/ educator	Technical expert	Advocate

CLIENT
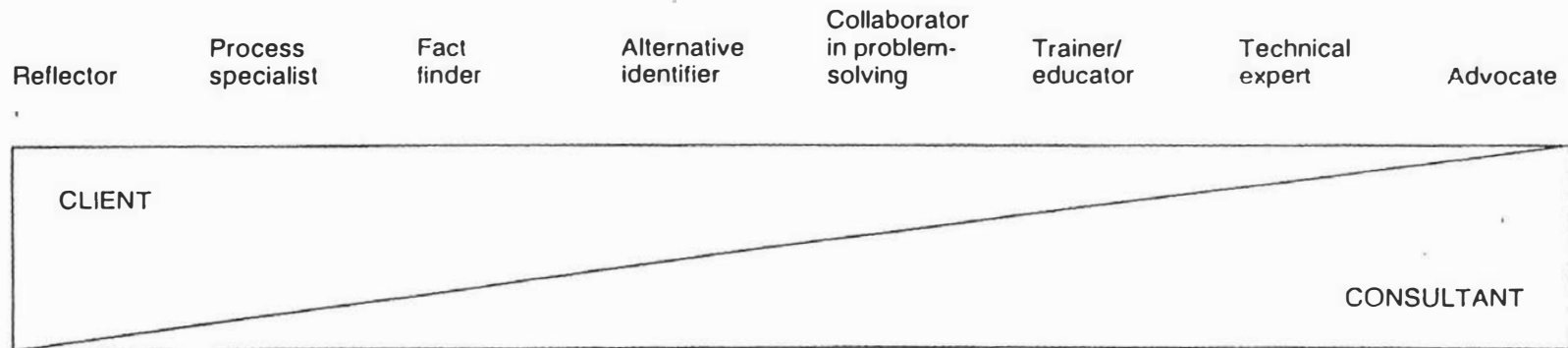
CONSULTANT

LEVEL OF CONSULTANT ACTIVITY IN PROBLEM-SOLVING

Non-directive   Directive

	Observes problem-solving processes and raises issues mirroring feedback		Identifies alternatives and resources for client and helps assess consequences			Provides information and suggestions for policy or practice decisions	Proposes guidelines, persuades, or directs in the problem-solving process
Raises questions for reflection		Gathers data and stimulates thinking		Offers alternatives and participates in decisions	Trains the client and designs learning experiences		

(LIPPITT & LIPPITT, 1986)

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Appendix I: Consulting approaches assessment

The client is not very specific about his situation: "I'm not sure what to do - punctuality is starting to be an issue".

What are some of the questions you might ask?

The senior consultant who assigns jobs to consultants takes you aside: "There are at least two ways we could approach this job that will work. We either help them tackle the task themselves, or we do it for them. What do you think?".

What are some of the factors you consider before you reply?

Below is a list of roles that may be used by the consultant in the course of a client project. Identify the ones that you think you sometimes use.

- educator/trainer
- model
- researcher/theoretician
- technical expert
- resource linker
- counsellor
- coach
- partner
- facilitator
- teacher
- reflective observer
- hands on expert

Using the roles that you selected in the previous exercise, identify the situations in which you would use these roles

- I sometimes/often/usually take the role of .... when ....
  ....
- I sometimes/often/usually take the role of .... when ....
  ....
- I sometimes/often/usually take the role of .... when ....
  ....
- I sometimes/often/usually take the role of .... when ....
  ....
- I sometimes/often/usually take the role of .... when ....
  ....
- I sometimes/often/usually take the role of .... when ....
  ....

When I undertake a consultancy assignment, I need to be skilled in.......

Using the list of skills you identified in the previous exercise, arrange them in groups of similar ideas.

You can do this in any manner that feels right; try a mindmap, a table or a matrix.

I think most organisations can be depicted like this....

I think the consulting process can be depicted like this....

A successful project is when.....

How do they assess project outcomes?

How do they conceptualise consulting processes?
Do they relate consulting processes to organisational processes?

Scenario

Unstructured mapping

Swartz & Lippitt's satisfaction, effectiveness & impact

Linear, feedback or overlapping

Do they have a basic orientation?

How do th conceptual organisatic processe:

Problem c.f. developmental

Outcomes

Consulting Processes

Weisbord or input/output

Diagnostic Orientation

CONSULTANCY APPROACH

Organisational Processes

Scenario

Unstr. maj

Dominant Mode

Consultancy Role

Expertise

Do they have a dominant mode?

Resource or process

Technical & interpersonal

Champion's 9 or Wooten & White's 3 roles

How do they asses: their technical & interpersonal skills

Scenario

Unstructured mapping

Do they use more than 1 role?
Do they understand the concept of role choice?

Structured mapping

Appendix J: Consulting approaches resource material

Technical ability

High

Technician   Specialist

Interpersonal and   Low ———————————————— High
process skills

Beginner or   Facilitator
incompetent

(MARGERISON, 1988)

Low
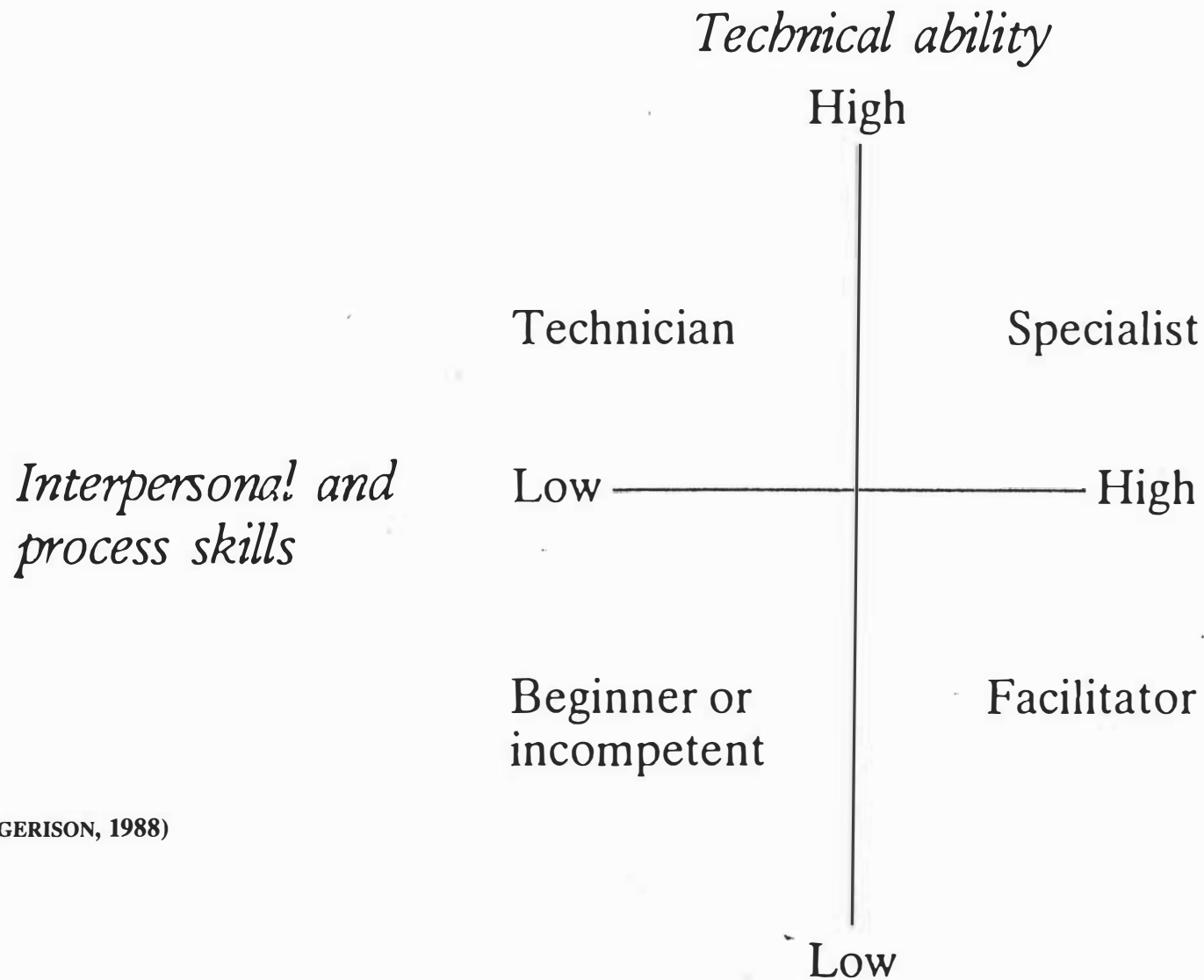
WEISBORD'S 6-BOX MODEL OF ORGANISATIONAL PROCESSES

PURPOSES:
What business are
we in?

RELATIONSHIPS:
How do we manage
conflict among
people? With
technologies?

STRUCTURE:
How do we divide
up the work?

LEADERSHIP:
Does someone
keep the boxes
in balance?

HELPFUL MECHANISMS:
Have we adequate
coordinating technologies?

REWARDS:
Do all needed tasks
have incentives?

ENVIRONMENT
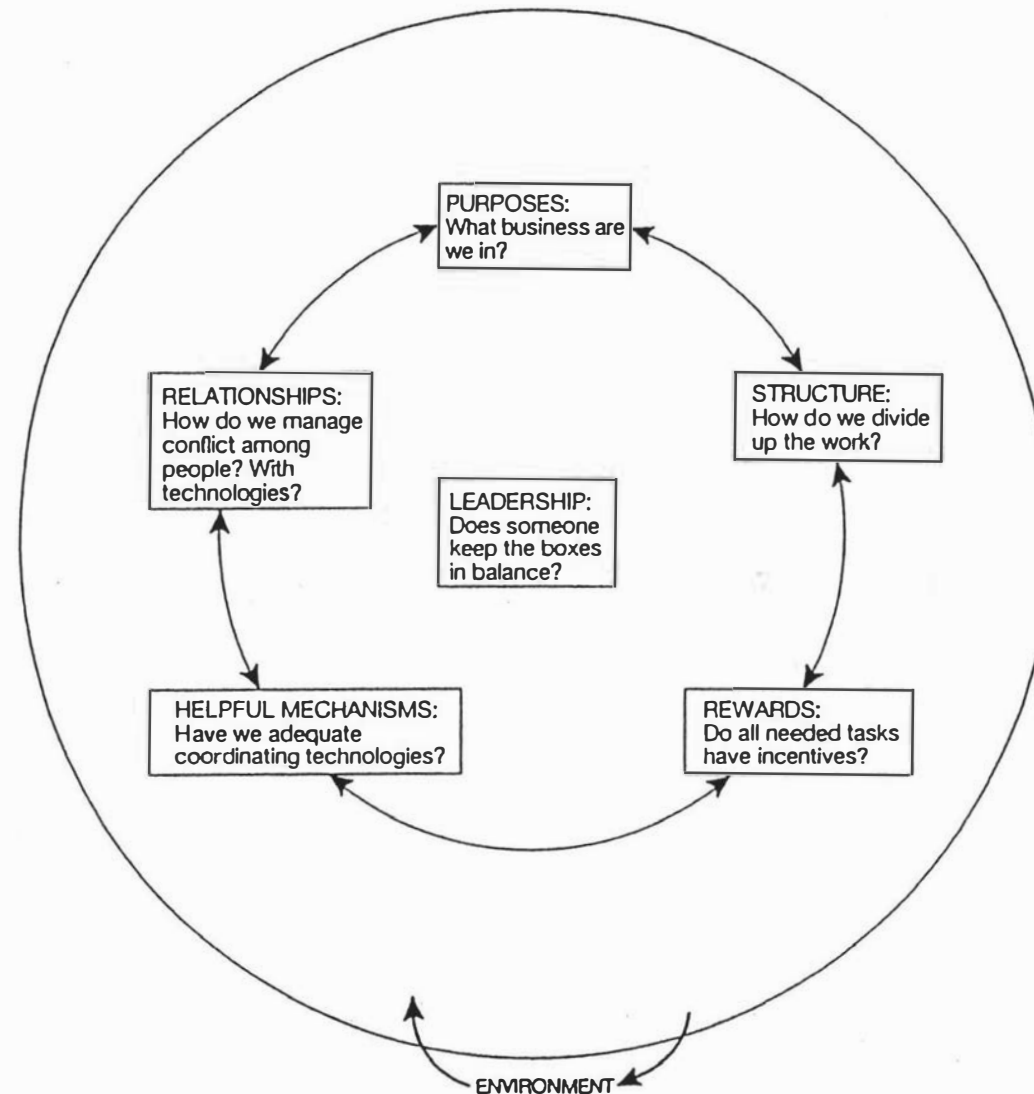
(FRENCH & BELL, 1995)

THE ORGANISATION AS A SYSTEM

Environment

| **Inputs**
Information
Energy
People | → | **Transformations**
Social Component
Technological Component | → | **Outputs**
Finished Goods
Services
Ideas |

Feedback
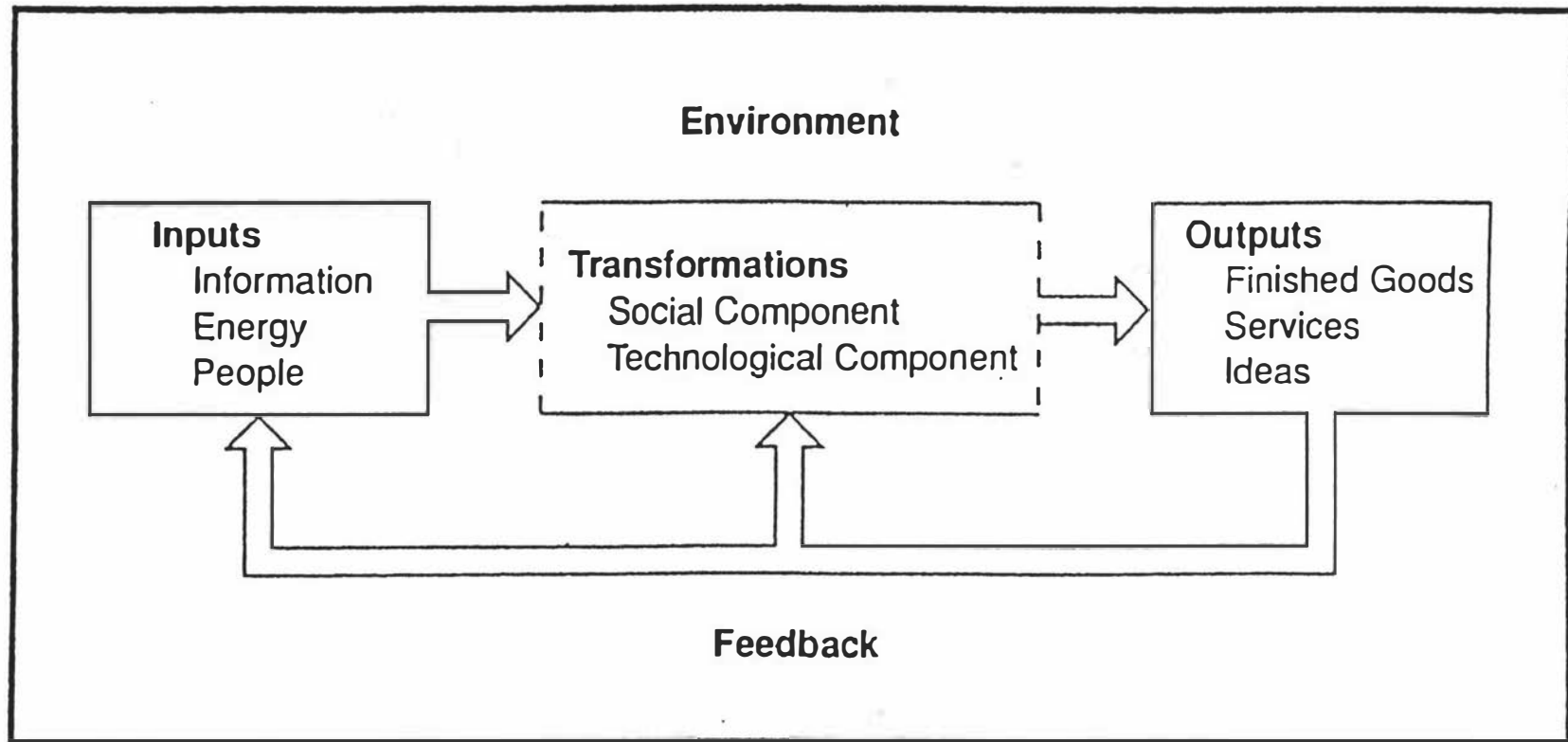
(FRENCH & BELL, 1995)

FUNCTIONAL ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Organisation

Work Groups

INDIVIDUALS

(FRENCH & BELL, 1995)

THE CONSULTANCY PROCESS AS A CYCLE

By consultant   By client

1 → 2 → 3 → 4
IC   GE   Cont.   Collecting data on
client's problem
and current behaviour

8
Follow-up

8
Disengagement

7
Implement the
change

5
Share/reflect:
make sense of
data/diagnose
problem

Consider options
Make decisions
Plan new behaviour

Theory
input
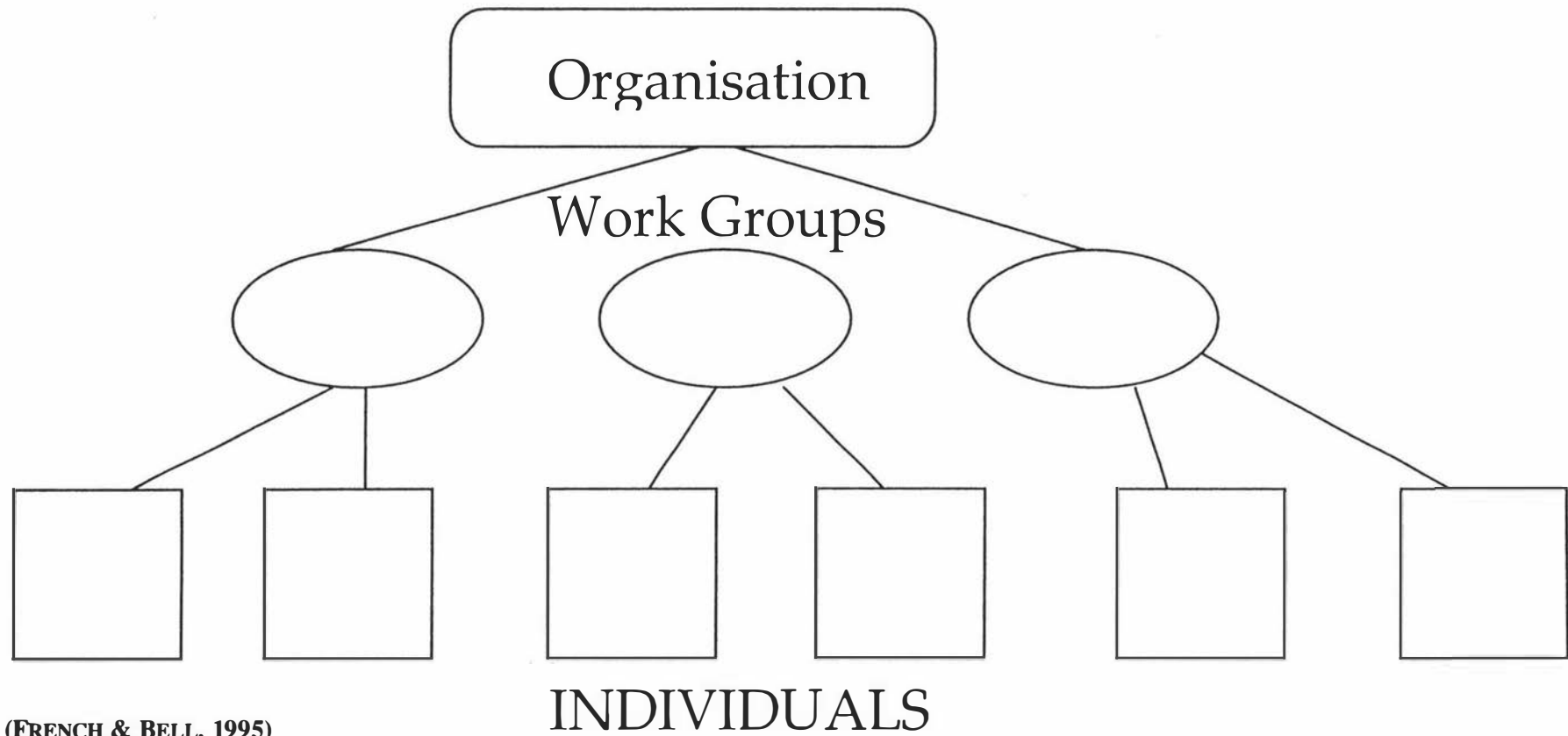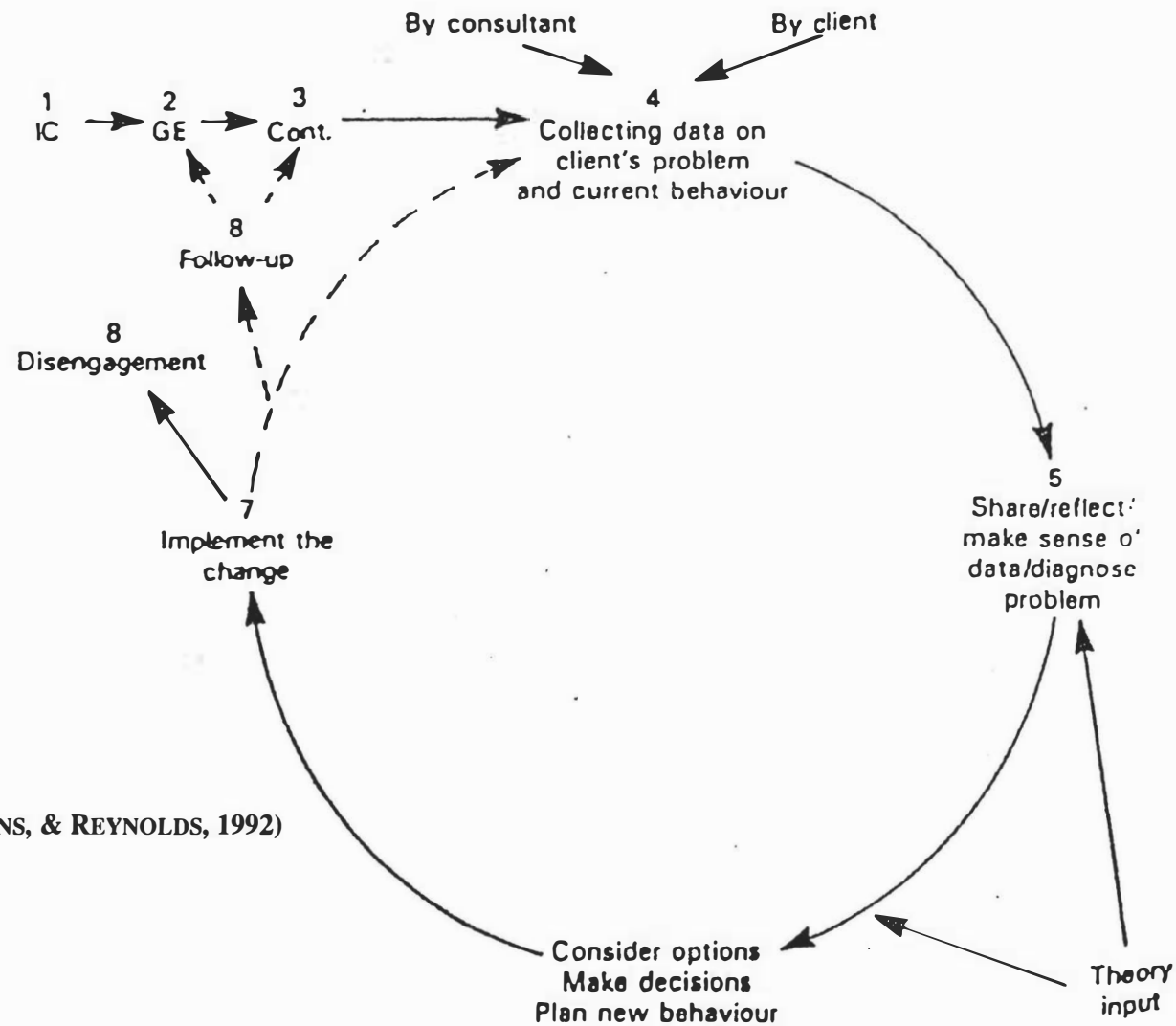
(COCKMAN, EVANS, & REYNOLDS, 1992)

INTER-ORGANISATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

NEGOTIATIONS

of joint expectations
risk & trust through

formal bargaining

informal sense making

COMMITMENTS

for future action through

formal legal contract

psychological contract

ASSESSMENTS

based on:

efficiency

equity

EXECUTIONS

of commitments through

role interactions

personal interactions

(RING & VAN DE VEN, 1994)

CONSULTING PROCESSES

ACTION PLANNING
mission
objectives
strategy
costs/benefits

ACTION RESEARCH
method
data collection
data feedback
review

ACTION
IMPLEMENTATION
decisions and
commitment
change management
restructuring
organization and
personal development

(MARGERISON, 1988)

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THE CONSULTANCY PROCESS AS A LINEAR MODEL

```
┌─────────────────────────┐
│                         │
│       1. Entry          │
│                         │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│                         │
│      2. Diagnosis       │
│                         │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│                         │
│    3. Action planning   │
│                         │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│                         │
│    4. Implementation    │
│                         │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│                         │
│     5. Termination      │
│                         │
└─────────────────────────┘
```

(KUBR, 1986)

EVALUATING CONSULTING

3. Sources of Data
(Sponsor—Client—Client System—Consultant)

2. Evaluation Criteria

Cost/Profit Related

Behavior Observation

Reaction

1. Evaluation Areas

Client/ Consultant Relationship Evaluation

Event Evaluation

System Progress Toward Goal Evaluation

4. Methods of Data Collection
(Observation—Questionnaires—Interviews—Documentation—Instruments)

(SWARTZ & LIPPITT, 1975)