

“Dangerous liaisons”

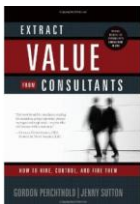
How to select management consultants and maximise value from the investment?

An article written to assist organisations who are making a decision to hire a management consultant so as to enable them to maximise the value of the engagement.

Created by Simon Gifford

GENESIS MANAGEMENT CONSULTING LIMITED.

October 2010



*Special thanks to Gordon Perchthold and Jenny Sutton, authors of the book:
“Extract value from consultants: how to hire control and fire them”
for the use of some of their ideas and teachings.*

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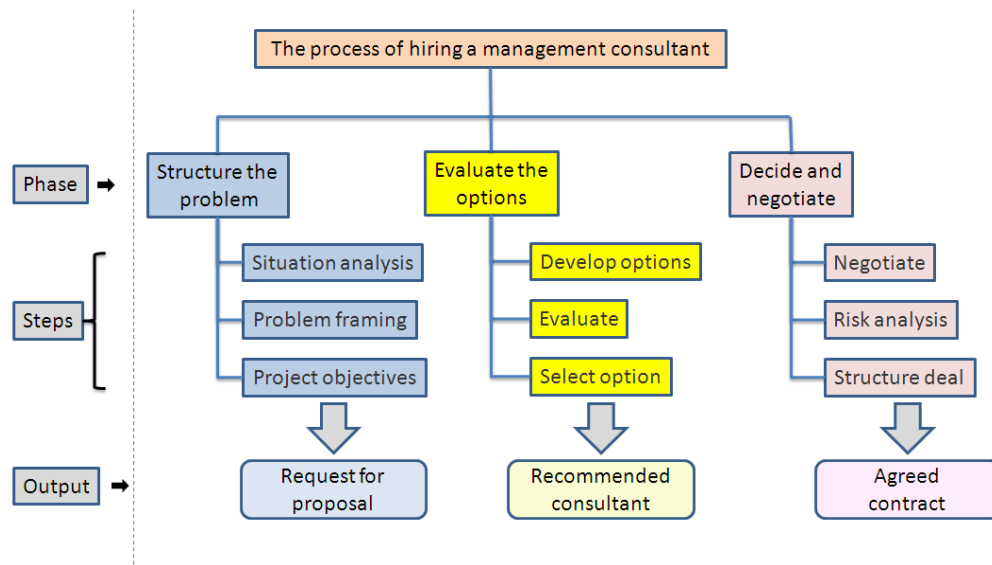
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Executive summary

The overall purpose of this article is to assist organisations in generating value from their management consultants through improving the decision-making process - from structuring the problem through to selection of the consultant and planning of the project. The intention is to benefit the industry as a whole through enhancing the value of engaging with consultants.

The document is structured around the decision making process as per the diagram below:



Each step in the process is supported by a description of the key activities that should be performed, best practices used and “pitfalls and tricks” where real life experience has been used to highlight common challenges in each of those steps.

Different readers will have varying levels of knowledge and expertise with the process and as such individual learnings will be different from one to another. However, the following are the two key principals that should be deduced from the article.

- There is a logical process that should be followed and if steps are skipped, they should be done so consciously
- The problem definition is the most critical step in gaining optimal value from the decision and the other steps should build on this to reach the desired result.

The article covers a number of potential client traps, but at a summary level, the three most common pitfalls where clients often act contrary to value optimisation are:

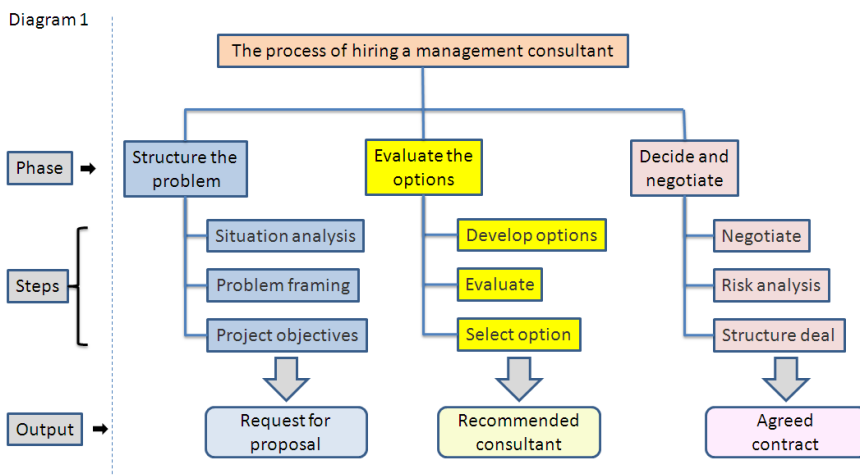
- Not planning for, and/or implementing, sufficient client participation in the project.
- Not maintaining focus on the selection criteria throughout the process (and so confusing comparisons and capability measurement).
- Over-emphasising the price element and underplaying the delivery capability component.

Introduction

The overall purpose of this article is to assist organisations in generating value from their management consultants through improving the decision-making process - from structuring the problem through to selection of the consultant and planning of the project. The intention is to benefit the industry as a whole through enhancing the value of engaging with consultants.

The document is structured to make for easy reading and rapid access to those areas of specific interest to the reader. The structure is as follows:

- The overall decision making process is broken down into three phases as per diagram 1 below. Each phase has 3 steps and an output.
- In the body of the text, the key elements of these steps and outputs are described under the following headings:
 - Objectives and key activities of each step
 - Best practices
 - Common pitfalls and consultant “tricks”.



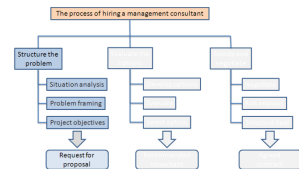
There are a variety of different types of consultant project, including strategy development, operational improvement, technology implementation and outsourcing. The detail of the process of defining the project and selecting consultants will vary for each type. This article is aimed at the generic level (for the sake of brevity) and so when using this process, the organisation may need to adapt it to fit the particular requirement.

Note also that we have used the term “problem” to describe the issue that the consulting project will address. We recognise that not all issues will necessarily be defined as problems but have remained consistent with the description for ease of reading.

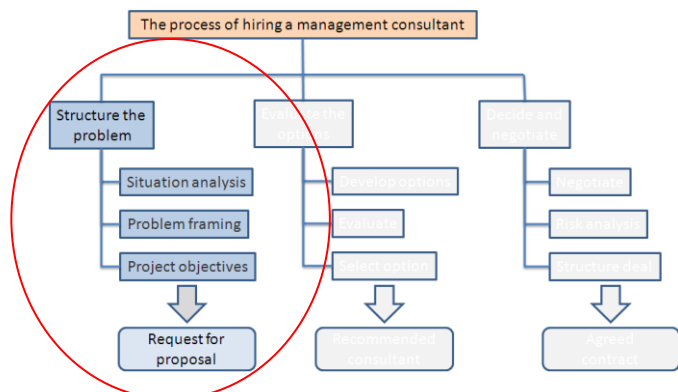
Each phase will be considered in turn and the article will finish with a conclusion and bibliography.

The following are the main information sources for article:

1. The **strategic decision making process** that Genesis Management Consulting has developed and which is used in consulting assignments when supporting our clients’ strategic decision making activities.
2. The contents of the immensely insightful book: **“Extract value from consultants: how to hire, control and fire them”** written by Gordon Perchthold and Jenny Sutton. These two professionals make transparent the consultants business models and how to restore the balance between consultants and clients in contracting and managing assignments. If you find this article useful, I would strongly recommend that you read the book too.
3. The **personal experience** of myself and a number of other colleagues who have the “war wounds” and wish to improve the process and experience of both client and consultant in the future. Special thanks to Nicky Bicket of Strategic Thinking Group for input and encouragement.
4. One or two other books and articles were considered and have been included in the bibliography



Phase 1: Structure



The structuring phase is where we

- Confirm (or not) that we should hire consultants
- Define the objectives to be achieved (and related selection criteria)
- Set the context and parameters of the assignment
- Develop a request for proposal

Phase 1: Step 1: Situation analysis

Objective of situation analysis:

- Understand full context of problem
- Identify key strategic issues and risk factors
- Map relations between issues
- Identify root causes
- Outline information needs

Key activities:

- Select project team to drive the process
- Conduct brainstorming workshops

Best practices

- Use facilitator to drive brainstorming session (see sidebar for ideas)
- Have a diverse team running with the evaluation and selection and always include the Executive Sponsor and the person who will eventually manage the project.
- Do not rush to conclusions too quickly.
- Encourage challenge and positive conflict.
- Actively seek different perspectives.
- Allow sufficient time for the exercise and allocate second session if necessary.

Pitfalls and consultant tricks

- Not having best team members involved from the beginning.
- Starting with the preferred consulting firm in mind.

Brainstorm the situation analysis

Suggested questions to pose

- What are the main issues (direct and indirect) that influence the issue?
- How are they related and how do they impact?
- What are key risk factors (high impact but over which we have limited control)?
- What are the key strategy drivers (high impact, but which we can influence)?
- How is our business being impacted (past and future)? Quantitatively and qualitatively?
- What are implications if we do nothing?
- What are the root causes? Can we get beneath the symptoms?
- What areas are impacted and what are not (ie boundaries of the issue)?
- What is the “value” of the problem? What is it worth to get it fixed?

Use creativity aids

In these sections (pitfalls and tricks):

- Represents a potential pitfall, and
- ❖ A possible consultant “trick”



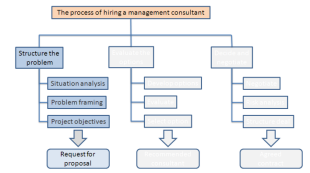
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Phase 1: Step 2: Framing the problem

Objective of problem framing:

- Reach own (client) understanding of problem and gain consensus.

Activities

- From the output of the situation analysis, craft and document the problem statement.
- Present the problem definition to key executives and obtain their agreement thereof.

Best practices

- Use root cause analysis if it appears as if the symptoms (rather than the cause) are being discussed
- A useful framework to assist in defining the problem is that of Barbara Minto's Pyramid Principle (see sidebar) used by many of the top consulting firms.
- Consider using a consultant to help in this phase if the problem is complex and/or there is insufficient experience to do this – but that consultant must not then be allowed to bid for the actual assignment.

Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- Not using people with different perspectives in this step (“If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail”).
- Not obtaining the agreement of senior management that this is the problem that must be addressed.
- ❖ When consultants eventually become involved, they may try to re-frame the problem such that the solution better suits their skill-set.

The Minto Pyramid Principle. Problem definition

1. Describe the current situation
2. State what is unsatisfactory about the situation to create the complication that now concerns you
3. Define the critical question that needs to be answered in order to resolve that complication – this is the problem that you need to address
4. Propose a possible answer or your hypothesis of what would solve the problem. Note that there may be more than one hypothesis to be explored.

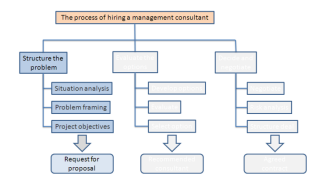


Example of Minto-structured problem framing (Fictional example, not a real case):

The market for executive education grew strongly through the decade leading up to the recession in 2008. Simultaneously, competition increased. More of the existing Business Schools offered executive courses and new schools also sprung up. In addition some of the large corporates started developing in-house universities.

Our school managed to maintain growth through that decade and into 2009. However, recently student numbers have dwindled significantly to the extent we are barely breaking even. What has gone wrong and what can we do to reverse this trend and return to previous levels of profitability?

- Hypothesis 1: Gain market share at the expense of current players
Hypothesis 2: Identify or create new under-served markets



Phase 1: Step3: Objective definition

Objective of objective definition:

- Detail a prioritised list (maximum 5) of key objectives to be achieved
- Assess skills and experience that will be required to achieve objectives
- Assess if consultants are needed or if the work can be conducted in-house
- Develop a list of criteria by which to judge the possible consulting firms

Activities

- Conduct a workshop to develop the objectives and criteria
- Undertake the necessary analysis to decide on in-house versus external consultants (see sidebar)



Best practices:

- The problem defines the objectives which in turn dictates the need (or not) for external assistance. These objectives then also define the criteria for selection.
- If it is decided to use consultants, be clear what value they should add and ensure appropriate levels of own staff on the project team.
- If unsure about conducting work in-house, allow an internal team to bid for the project alongside the external vendors
- The "Extract Value" book suggests that consultant selection criteria should be developed within the formula:

Value gained is a function of:
(capability to deliver/commercial relationship)
 See sidebar for possible sub-criteria.

Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- Not narrowing down the objectives to the key goals to be achieved.
- Being too critical of own resources to do the job.
- ❖ Consultants will seek ways to leverage in low level (probably inexperienced) consultants to undertake work that could be done by cheaper and better client people.

In-house versus external consultants

Key issues:

- In-house capability (ability, timing, available resources)
- Credibility and acceptance of outputs
- Preparedness to invest in external input
- If externalising, what level of own resource can be dedicated to the project (and for which tasks)
- Sensitivity to confidentiality
- Need for fresh thinking and ideas
- What value could externals add (over and above what could be done in-house)
- How could this value be delivered

Examples of selection criteria

Approach
 Experience
 Individual consultants
 Ownership & accountability
 Knowledge transfer
 Ease to work with
 Our experience with them



Capability to deliver

 Commercial relationship



Pricing
 Contract terms
 Expense policies
 Project vs contract focus
 Leverage model

How will you know when goals have been achieved?

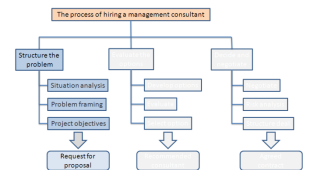
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Phase 1: Output: Request for proposal (RFP)

Objectives of request for proposal:

- To produce a document that will guide the submission of the prospective suppliers in terms of objectives to be achieved, format of submission, timing and other client expectations.

Activities

- Write document and assess against outputs developed in the “structure” phase

Best practices:

- In the RFP allow consultants sufficient time (and information) to develop their best proposal.
- The more precise the RFP, the fewer consultants will bid and the more effort they will put into the response.
- Give specific guidelines on format and style – use templates where possible but without overly restricting the creativity of the submission
- If the problem is extremely complex / unclear, it may be worthwhile adapting a form of “competitive dialogue process” (refer UK Office of Government Commerce) to engage with 2 or 3 firms before finalising an RFP (or at least start with an request for information (RFI)).

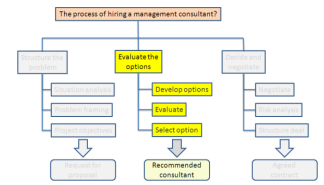
Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- Not being sufficiently specific resulting in competing bids being difficult to compare.

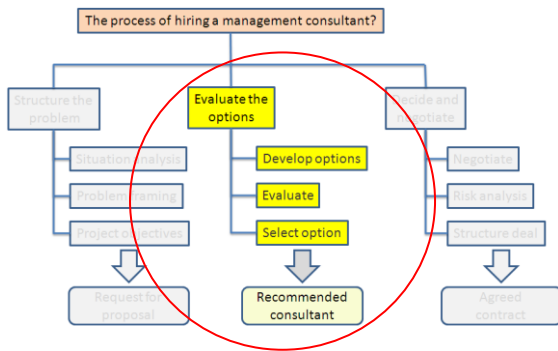
Structure of a Request for Proposal

- Company and RFP background
- Problem statement and definition of success
- Consulting services and roles required
- Pricing proposition
- Proposal format
- How we work with the consultant
- Process and timeline for consultant selection
- Proposed conditions and requirements





Phase 2: Evaluate



The evaluation phase is where we:

- Search for possible consulting firms
- Evaluate those firms against our criteria
- Select a first choice and an alternative choice

Phase 2: Step 1: Developing options

Objective of option development:

- To develop a list of possible suppliers of consultant services that could potentially do the required work and who will respond to the RFP

Activities

- Search the web and gather experiences of colleagues (inside & outside the organisation).

Best practice

- Make sure the list of possible suppliers covers a range of different types of consultants so as to receive responses with different approaches (process, price, and proposition) to the work.
- Beware: a hint in the market that there is a possibility of major work could provoke an inundation of calls, visits and emails from would-be suppliers.
- Decide whether to stay with known consultants ("the devil you know") or to go into the market (sidebar).
- Have strict rules around who consultants may contact and other protocols to control the "feeding frenzy"
- Be aware of compliance requirements of procurement rules (internal and legislated).

Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- Not limiting the number of responses and making evaluation too time-consuming.
- ❖ Would-be bidders are likely to try and approach different people in the organisation to gain support for their bid.

The devil you know versus the devil you don't know?

Advantages of "the devil you know".

- Know the business and so less learning curve.
- May have good relationship with staff and so are trusted
- References are more trustworthy
- You know their strengths AND weaknesses
- You know the calibre of their people
- Possibly lower hiring costs
- Less risk in employing

Advantages of "the devil you don't know"

- Likely to try harder in the proposal process and possibly the project
- New thinking brought into the organisation
- Eventually incumbent consultants get stale and start resembling your own employees
- The devil you don't know may be better!
- Procurement rules say you have to go to market anyway

Note: if "the known devil" has done his job well, they should still come out of the procurement process ahead through a better targeted proposal.



Big is not always best!

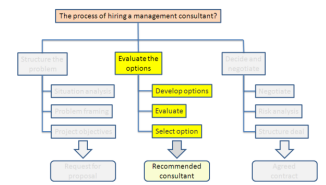
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Phase 2: Step 2: Option evaluation

Objective of option evaluation:

- To evaluate all submissions and select a short-list to go forward to the selection phase.

Activities

- Analyse submissions and compare against criteria

Best practice:

- Focus initially on the criteria that show delivery capability (before focusing on pricing issues).
- Normalise the data to ensure “apples are compared with apples” – be particularly careful with pricing comparisons (see sidebar).
- Where business cases have been developed (e.g. to claim savings), check underlying assumptions carefully.
- Have a clear rating process.
- Rigorously assess against the pre-agreed criteria and develop a rating score (tools are available for this) for each criterion.
- Consider using technology such as the Macbeth system to more accurately evaluate qualitative criteria.
- Use visualisation tools that allow for better inter-team communication
- Develop a short-list of firms (probably 3) with whom the team can meet to investigate each proposal more thoroughly and to obtain a better assessment of the individuals who have been put forward for the work.

Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- Not being aware of behavioural issues (conscious and unconscious; group and individual) that can impact on evaluations.
- Look out for the “small print” in the proposals. A favourite includes putting forward a highly skilled team and then inserting a “subject to availability” footnote.

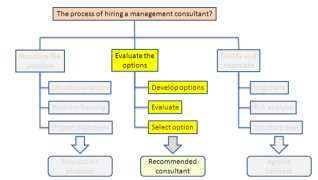
Normalising fees

Although this is not the negotiation, it is important at this stage to ensure an understanding of the fee structure to allow for comparisons as well as reduced opportunity for surprises in the negotiation phase.

Here are the key items to look out for:

- Fixed price versus time and materials
- Contingency fees
- Basis of out-of-pocket expenses
- Likely travel requirements and expense estimates
- Inclusion of quality assurance fees
- Payment schedule
- Interest or charges for late payment
- How fees and expenses will be presented
- Foreign exchange issues
- Link to scope and activities
- Communication costs eg mobile phones
- Boundary of estimates
- Individual rates versus “blended” rates
- Daily rates versus hourly rates
- Number of hours per day
- Administration or overhead costs





Phase 2: Step 3: Selection

Objective of selection:

- To select a preferred supplier and an alternative from the short list.

Activities

- Meet teams and select preferred option and first alternative.

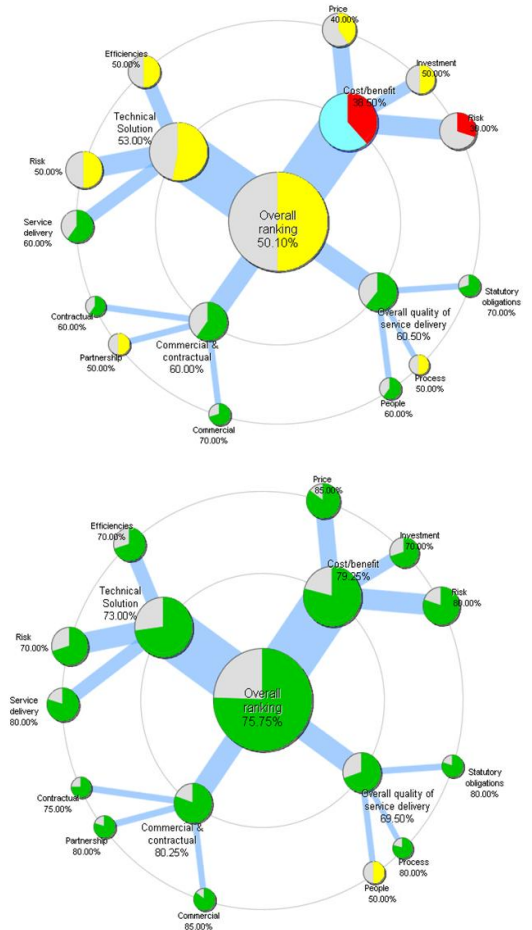
Best practice:

- Meet with all the short-listed consulting firms and allow them the opportunity to put their case forward.
- Interview the firms and the individuals who will be allocated to the project and probe for depth of skills and “congruency” with what was claimed in the proposal.
- Pre-plan these meetings and ensure all of the selection team are aware of their role and pre-agreed questions.
- Have a scoring sheet for each of the team members so they are able to give ratings with supported commentary.
- Build on the scoring agreed in the previous phase.
- Have a pre-agreed deadlock breaking mechanism in case of lack of consensus among the team (eg Chairman has veto) and ensure that there is support for the way forward by all – even if individual views are not accepted.
- Always maintain an alternative to the preferred vendor to ensure maintenance of negotiation position; as well as allowing for transfer to the alternative if something untoward is uncovered.

Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- ❖ A slick sales presentation can distort the picture created through the analyses of proposals – keep the criteria in mind at all times.
- ❖ Be **absolutely sure** about guaranteed availability of individual consultants put forward for the project.

Simplified example of visual rating system (EIDOS software)

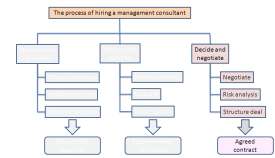


This example demonstrates the comparison of 2 vendors. The overall ranking is broken down into the 4 main criteria and the sub-objectives are also shown. The results are shown via shading (and colour-coded) where the more “filled in” is the circle, the higher the scoring. This allows for a quick, visual analysis of the differences.

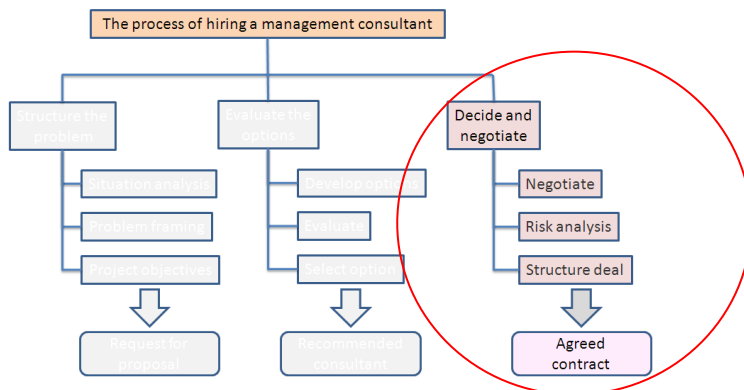
In a large firm the Senior Manager is key.
In smaller firms it's the owner or director

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Phase 3: Decide and negotiate



The decide phase is where we:

- Negotiate internally on the selected provider
- Agree contract and project structure with preferred supplier (or alternative if fail to reach agreement with first choice).

Phase 3: Step 1: Negotiate contract

Objective of negotiate phase:

- Agree selection (first and alternative choices) with key individuals who were not part of selection team
- Negotiate contract with preferred supplier

Activities

- Present to, and get 'buy-in' from, key individuals in the organisation re the preferred options.
- Negotiate contract with consultants

Best practice:

- Start with an in-house contract – not one proposed by the consultant.
- The contract should reflect the intention of the project. Per the "Extract Value" book, the contract should *reflect the marriage vows more than the pre-nuptial contract*. However – the contract should allow for necessary actions if a major negative event should occur.
- The original RFP must be considered in drawing up the contract.
- Ensure the names and availability of consultant team members appear in the contract
- Be clear on confidentiality and IP issues
- Control the lawyers, not vice versa.
- Not all problems can be controlled by the contract – see sidebar on next page of what can go wrong.

Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- Not treating this in the same way as any other contract negotiation – see sidebar
- Commencing the work before the contract is signed.
- ❖ Beware phrases such as "this contract is the sole agreement all previous marketing material should not be considered". Make that material an appendix to the contract!

Negotiation lessons from the experts

From Roger Fisher's "Getting to Yes"

- Separate the people from the problem
- Focus on interests, not positions
- Invent options for mutual gain
- Insist on using objective criteria
- Have a BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement)

Adapted from James Senibus of Harvard Business School

- Do not neglect the other party's problem
- Do not let price bulldoze other interests
- Do not search too hard for common ground (look for new ground)
- Be aware of distorted perceptions caused by behavioural issues
- Remember the negotiation is part of a relationship not a one-off event



Ask for fees-at-risk!

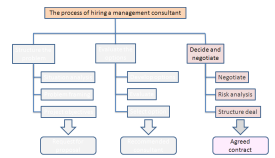
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Phase 3: Step 2: Risk analysis

Objective of risk analysis:

- Before the contract is signed, undertake a thorough risk analysis of what could go wrong.

Activities

- Brainstorm and build contingencies

Best practice:

- Hold a workshop to brainstorm the risks and include members who have not been part of the selection team as well as the team itself (refer to the Challenge Board” concept in the article on “unknown unknowns” our blog.
- Use “pre-mortems” to allow for negative views to be voiced in a non-threatening environment (see explanation below).
- Review the risks identified in the situation analysis in the first phase of this project.
- Develop contingency plans and early warning systems to detect increasing probability of a negative event.
- Be aware of typical consulting assignment problems and ask if they have been considered and dealt with – see sidebar
- If there is a medium to high impact and/or a medium to high probability of the event occurring, it should be covered in the contract.

Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- Allowing natural management optimism (and criticism of “negativity”) to leave the team with an overly positive perspective of the project and ignorance of the potential risks.

The top 12 things that go wrong with a consulting engagement

- Abdication of project to the consultants
- Insufficient client input into the project (including staffing)
- Consultant style does not fit the organisation culture
- The real problem is not being addressed
- The project goes “contractile”
- Politics disrupt the project (executive sponsor does not have the “clout”)
- Consultants roles (vis a vis client) are unclear
- Project issues drift and are left unaddressed
- Scope creep of project
- Personality clash between client and consultant
- Micro management of consultants by client manager
- Consultant unable to obtain sufficient “face time” with executive sponsor



The pre-mortem:

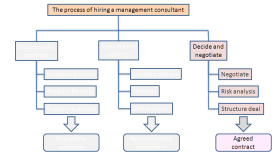
Using a “pre mortem” (as described by cognitive scientist Gary Klein).

Make the statement:

“It is 1 year on (or whatever is appropriate time-frame) and the consulting project has gone spectacularly wrong.....”

Then ask individuals to write a short story completing the statement, being as radical as they like. After the exercise, debrief to see what new issues have been uncovered.

This is a great way to surface negatives, encourage positive criticism and allow team members to play the role of ‘devil’s advocate’ in a risk-free environment.



Phase 3: Step 3: Structuring the project

Objective of structuring the project:

- Structure the project to focus on the business outputs.

Activities

- Form and build team
- Develop the project charter and put governance structure in place

Best practice:

- Put the contract in a drawer and forget it (but not where you put it)!
- Implement the agreed governance roles (see sidebar).
- Have a detailed project plan in place at the start – that includes a system of measurement of progress towards goals.
- Form the team and undertake some team-building / getting-to-know you activity.
- Convert the RFP and subsequent material into a project charter and ensure the project plan reflects the contents of that document.
- Ensure appropriate logistics are in place to optimise the use of the team – office space, communications, technology and access.
- Have a clear skills transfer process in place (and a system to measure it)

Pitfalls and consultant tricks:

- No clear handover from the selection team to the project team.
- Not insisting that the pre-agreed client resource is available and willing.
- ❖ Be conscious of “scope creep” as consultants may try to grow the project from its original intention.

Key governance roles

- Establish roles & responsibilities
- Develop clear protocols and lines of communication
- Enable project resourcing
- Define desired outcomes
- Control project direction, costs & delivery
- Monitor progress
- Ensure active risk management
- Sign off on deliverables
- Facilitate delivery of project within organisation
- Change order system in place (including a mechanism to challenge)
- Manage stakeholders expectations



Single point of accountability for project success

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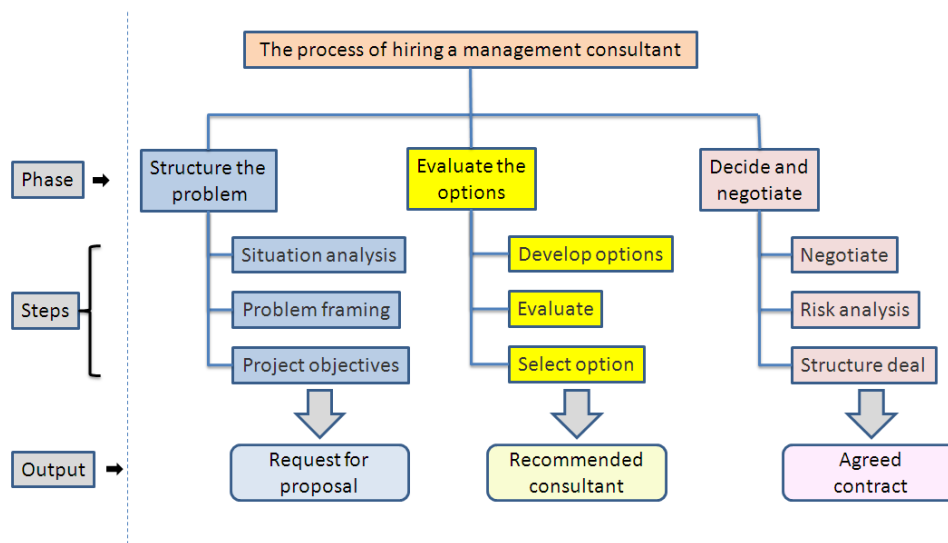
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Conclusions



In this article we have covered the three phases of: structure, evaluate and decide. All are important in their own right and each builds on the previous one and so none may be skipped over. Although there can be no guarantees of success, if any consulting assignment is commenced with due consideration, investment and focus given to the problem design and selection process, the odds of a successful outcome will be greatly enhanced.

Within the Genesis blog (www.genesismc.wordpress.com), we have published an interactive pdf file that may be purchased for the price of a cup of Starbucks coffee – appropriately the staple (hot) beverage of choice of management consultants all around the world. This document contains the content of this article plus some further information such as consulting pricing models and consultant value-adding roles – all in one portable document.

As mentioned in the introduction, we have not covered the critical aspect of implementation (start-up, management and closure) of the project as it would have doubled the length of this already-long article. However, although many surveys and articles indicate that most projects fail through to poor implementation, it is quite possible that the seeds of destruction are planted in the problem-framing and consultant selection phase. Genesis Management Consulting will shortly publish an article on this topic.

We must again thank Jenny and Gordon for allowing us to use parts of their book and strongly recommend that if you wish to delve further into how to hire, manage and / or fire your consultants, then purchase a copy of *Extract Value from Consultants* (there is a buying link in the bibliography).

Finally, we wish you all the success with your projects (be you client or consultant) and we hope that this article will have gone some way to assisting you with that success. If you require further detail on any of the subjects covered, or perhaps support in your hiring or bidding process, please contact us at Genesis for a no-obligation discussion.

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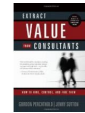
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Extract value from consultants: how to hire, control and fire them

Gordon Perchthold and Jenny Sutton



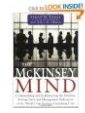
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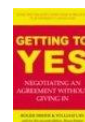
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