

Issue # 4, December 2004

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### Our Reflections and Future Direction

In 2004 we continued to consolidate our consultancy services at LDC also reflecting on our work and identifying key directions for the future.

Reflecting on consultancies undertaken during 2004, we identified our learning and improvements that we can make to our consulting practice, including ways to share and exchange knowledge and experiences with colleagues.

In 2005 the LDC quarterly newsletter will continue as a mechanism for maintaining contact with colleagues, providing information about LDC

consultancies and discussing a variety of subjects of interest to our colleagues and clients.

We also hope to focus this year on organisational change and development and further examining the design of tailored databases for collating and analysing quantitative and qualitative data for research and planning purposes.

The LDC website will be updated periodically and in the coming months we will provide research, planning and organisational development tools as free downloads.

To start the New Year we decided to focus this issue on some points about working with consultants.

From the LDC team we wish you a safe, healthy and fulfilling 2005.



*Liz Dimitriadis  
LDC Director*

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### What Is Consulting?

"Consulting is a common action in the world, although most people don't call themselves consultants. Consulting may be as complex as working five years with an organisation, helping to reshape its mission, strategy, structure and systems. Or it may be as profoundly simple and important as helping a child learn how to tie a shoe. Expertise and helping others get what they want are central to both these examples....So consultants are people who, when asked, agree to use their expertise to help clients narrow the gap between what they now have and what they want or need" (G. M. Bellman, 1990. *The Consultant's Calling*. Bringing who you are to what you do. P. xvii).

### Commissioning a Consultant

Consultants are commissioned to assist organisations (clients) in a variety of ways. For example, consultants can:

- Use their **expert (content) knowledge** of a particular subject to provide advice.
- Use their **process skills** (e.g. facilitation, group dynamics, and organisational change) to assist with planning and organisational development.

In many instances organisations see consultants as external project officers and some consultants may also see themselves in this way. However, there are some important differences between project officers who are employees, participating in the organisation's culture and processes; and consultants who are commissioned to fulfil the requirements of a specific, usually time-limited brief. There is also considerable literature that discusses the roles of 'internal' and 'external' consultants which is beyond the scope of this discussion.

Important components of the consulting role (whether this includes the use of expert knowledge or not)

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and therefore the client-consultant relationship, are:

- The **perspectives** of the client and consultant on the work in question. Often clients have set views on what needs to be done and are looking for a consultant that has the same perspective as them. Sometimes however, it may be more beneficial to the organisation if the consultant has opportunities to bring different perspectives, based on their experience of working across many organisations.
- The quality of the **tender brief**. In the majority of instances tender briefs are prepared with set objectives and proposed methods that consultants must respond to in the preparation of their proposal. Methodologies and even methods are often pre-determined, limiting the experience and knowledge that a consultant could potentially bring to an assignment.

Further, the consistency of the proposed methods with the methodology (i.e. are the proposed tasks going to achieve the overall objective?) are rarely questioned.

A **methodology** represents the approach for undertaking research based on a particular philosophical paradigm. **Methods** are the tasks undertaken to fulfil the research requirements, which are consistent with the methodology (Blakie, Norman W. H 1993, Approaches to Social Enquiry).

Central to the client-consultant relationship is the development of a trusting partnership between the consultant and the client that generates enthusiasm and a willingness to work together.

### What do consultants do?

**Assess and Learn**– We help our clients to take a deeper look at what they have been doing, e.g. researching and analysing the

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current situation, achievements to date, issues of concern etc.

**Alternatives** – We help our clients to develop and consider alternatives when they are unhappy with the consequences of their present actions, e.g. researching and presenting possible options.

**Decide** – We help clients to decide on possible actions, e.g. workshopping ideas for future direction.

**Act** – We help clients to implement their decisions, e.g. developing strategies and evaluating outcomes.

### What Consultants Can Bring To Clients

Clients and consultants benefit from each other in many ways depending on the context. Bellman (1990) identifies the following five abilities that consultants bring to their consulting role:

1. **Expertise** – the consultant has expertise in a particular area.
2. **Perspective** – the consultant brings an external, perhaps new perspective to the situation at hand.
3. **Authenticity** – as self starters consultants are compelled to question who they are and what they do in their consulting roles. The consultant's authenticity can be directly related to their effectiveness.
4. **Friendship** – developing effective relationships with clients often leads to developing friendships. Through friendship there is greater authenticity and enjoyment in the work undertaken.
5. **Accomplishment** – helping clients achieve results.

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“Organisations are a celebration of the engineering mind. They operate on rational models; believe in logic and data as a basis for decisions; and see change as a process of planning, installation, and constant monitoring. It is this exclusive belief in the rational that gets in the way of the very transformations they are seeking. Organisations are human communities, driven as much by intuition and feelings and archetypal urgings as by reasons. Our clients need attention at both levels, and consultants, because they operate on the periphery, are in a great position to focus on the more elusive and intangible aspects of a situation” (Belman 1990, p. xv).

If you are interested in a particular subject that you would like us to discuss, please email us. If we consider that we can competently discuss the subject then we will provide an article in the newsletter.

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