

**THE MANAGEMENT CONSULTING PROFESSION
IN QUEENSLAND:
SOME ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES**

by

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ABSTRACT

Academics and practitioners have recently intensified the debate on the relevance or otherwise of organisational and management theory to actual practice in today's environment. A multidisciplinary team of five academics from three departments at the University of Southern Queensland has embarked upon a study to identify the major issues, perspectives and strategies espoused by leading practising management consultants in assisting their clients to become more effective in managing change within their respective organisations. The initial phase of the study involved in-depth semi-structured interviews of 24 consultants based in Brisbane, Queensland. The consultants were selected on the basis of depth and diversity of experience, size of operation and types of specialisations. This paper reports a number of themes that have emerged from the data analysis to date. In particular, the themes relate to the status of management consulting in Queensland, the quality of Australian management, differences between public and public sector clients, and the role of marketing.

a paper presented at ANZAM 1996, Wollongong.
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Introduction

Many authors have highlighted the transformation that has occurred in the global economy in the past few decades (Limerick and Cunnington, 1993; Osland and Yaprak, 1995). The changes have incorporated a shift from domestic to global competition for many firms, the deregulation of some key industries, the alteration of economic boundaries, the proliferation of new and existing technology, the changing preferences of consumers, and the increasing obsolescence of product and process life cycles. The impact of these changes has been profound, requiring managers to challenge their perspectives on organisations and their functioning (Pascale, 1990).

The recent focus on the performance of Australian management has come from different sources. First, academics and management practitioners have intensified the debate on the relevance or otherwise of organisational and management theory to actual practice in today's turbulent business environment. Second, the Karpin report on Australian management and leadership (Karpin, 1995) has focussed attention on the need to develop new managerial and leadership skills to meet the demands of the 21st century. Third, there is a current debate as to the real performance of Australian managers (James, 1996).

While there are a diverse range of studies that tackle various management issues in the Australian context, these studies generally deal with organisations as the basic unit of analysis. There are also a range of studies that focus on particular professional groups such as senior managers, front-line supervisors or human resource managers. One group that has been somewhat neglected in management research is consultants in general and management consultants in particular. This is a peculiar situation given the increasingly influential role that management consultants play in the business sector.

The purpose of this paper is to report some preliminary findings of a major study that has been undertaken to identify the perspectives and strategies of management consultants in their professional endeavours to improve the performance of their client organisations. The study is concerned with management consultants operating out of Australia and New Zealand.

The study is exploratory and qualitative in nature. Semi-structured interviews provide the main vehicle for data collection. Consultants have been selected on the basis of their diversity in experience and profile in order to obtain breadth and richness in the perspectives espoused, the strategies applied and the situations experienced. Content analysis procedures have been applied to the data with the assistance of the computer program NUDIST.

The preliminary findings are restricted to 25 in-depth interviews that have been conducted with management consultants in Queensland. While there are a diverse set of themes emerging from these interviews, the paper will provide some discussion on four themes, namely; a profile of the management consulting profession in Queensland, the quality of Australian management, differences between public and public sector clients, and the role of marketing.

The Management Consultancy Profession in Queensland

There are a number of aspects which helped to identify the status of the management consultancy profession in Queensland. First, there is the profile of the consultants themselves and the diversity of the discipline backgrounds from which they have emerged. Second, there is the fragmentation of the profession apparent by at least three different groupings - the 'Big 6'ers', the local firms, and the independent operators. Third, there is the issue of professionalism in the consultancy industry.

The Profile of Consultants. Twenty-three of the twenty-four people interviewed were males. While this sample proportion does not reflect the participation rate of females among consultants, there is little doubt that males dominate the management consulting field. There is no definitive list available that registers all management consultants in Queensland. However, the membership of the Institute of Management Consultants (Queensland Chapter) provides an indication of the male dominance. In its 1995 register, the Institute listed 25 females in a total registration of 208 members. The Institute does not account for all management consultants operating in Queensland.

Of the sample interviewed, only one did not have formal qualifications, and they come from a diverse range of discipline backgrounds; for example, priesthood, architecture, industrial relations and engineering. Many have had a range of professional positions prior to becoming consultants, although none of those interviewed had come from chief executive officer (CEO) positions. One participant did indicate that he has consulted as an interim CEO on selected assignments.

A number had decided early in their working lives that they wanted to be a management consultant. As one participant put it, some people have gone into consulting thinking that "because they've got Masters or PhD's that they'll succeed" while another participant stated that "...the reason I am now a consultant is the organisation decided it didn't need me any more...I was one of the victims of the downsizing regime or fad that is going through most organisations these days...I decided I didn't want to work for a bunch of idiots any more who didn't really know how to run a large organisation and who were telling me to do things I knew were wrong and wouldn't listen."

This diversity can be seen as a positive attribute for the management consultancy profession because of the breadth and depth of experience and the backgrounds which are available to clients. Some of the participants have gained invaluable experience at the strategic level of operation in both public and private sector enterprises.

The Structure of the Profession. The profession is fragmented. The three groups include: 1) the 'Big 6'ers", a group dominated by international accountancy firms and other national and international firms specialising in the management consulting area. 2) the local firms, which can have between 5-50 people. These include Strategies, Livingstones Australia, and Gibson Associates. 3) the independent operators depict a diverse group of individuals offering specific strengths to their clients. This group is also known for the way particular individuals develop a personal network of

associations in order to undertake larger assignments beyond their individual capability.

There is a level of antagonism towards both the 'Big 6'ers' and the independent operators. Amongst varying comments were that "...the multinational consultancies are used for big fees by Australian management to provide those managers with a scapegoat for taking action they did not have the courage to take themselves" and "what happens in the large consulting firms is that they trade on methodology...therefore, they can bring to your organisation enough consultants with enough experience and methodology to help you get the result you're after."

Although there has been no empirical data uncovered to support the following opinion, one of the consultants from the 'Big 6'ers' commented that "...the quality of consultants in Australia is much lower than it is in Europe and North America where organisations have a greater ability to pick better organisations and consultancy firms to help them. Here they haven't got that choice." The antagonism towards independent operator's is also strong. This is highlighted by the following statement:

We've seen this proliferation of one man bands who work off a smell of an oily rag out of their garage because after they have been retrenched as a 45 year old middle executive they can't think of anything else to do but call themselves consultants. That has had a very negative impact on both quality in the marketplace and fee earning capacity [of other consultant's] because many clients, especially small to medium business clients are not sophisticated enough to be able to determine what constitutes value for money when they are buying this kind of professional service...You wouldn't worry about that if they are responsible in the end for their own decision-making except that they broadcast their poor experience with these management consultants. So that reflects badly on the profession.

In terms of fragmentation, there is an underlying issue of developing quality standards for the industry. It is anticipated that there will be ongoing arguments and debates within the ranks of consultant's as to the means of guaranteeing quality control. One contentious issue is whether all consultant's should be members of a body such as the Institute of Management Consultant's to be certified to practice.

The Move Towards Professionalism. Professionalism is a big issue in the industry, particularly in the light of fragmentation as well as the growing dependency of businesses on consulting expertise. There is one identifiable professional body, the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC). Membership is subject to classification standards, with Certified Management Consultant (CMC) being their designated competency mark for the management consultancy industry. There is also a Code of Professional Conduct.

However, consultant's vary in their attitudes toward the Institute. One practitioner commented that "if there is a consulting profession, it is certainly not represented by the Institute of Management Consultants...although in the end it may become the focal point for it". Another commented that "I think the Institute is doing great things and

the people there work very hard in developing the Institute, not only National but now international”.

Despite the mention of more stringent accreditation processes, one executive member of the IMC commented that he was never in favour of registering or setting up strong parameters for a consultancy profession so that it becomes something similar to accountancy. One of the dangers is to create a elitist group that forces the exclusion of some practitioners and becomes entrenched in membership criteria rather than professional development strategies for the profession as a whole. There is a need to individuals to adopt a more professional approach to their relationship with clients regardless of any regulating body. A range of associated issues have been raised in this regard.

Some consultants’ believe that it is primarily a case of buyer beware to start with and the industry has not been terribly effective in educating people as to what a consultant is. Some suggest that it is an art to pick a good consultant, while others believe that they have a lot to do in terms of establishing credibility. There is a need to develop an ability to be able to take professional responsibility for updating knowledge and information and be prepared to be engaged in research of what it is they are doing.

The issue of accountability arose, and the IMC is looking at changing their code of conduct. This is a difficult issue because consultants are frequently working against corporate cultures and hidden agendas and middle management who have a vested interest in undermining the advice which is given by a consultant. Holding a consultant accountable in that environment would be onerous and probably unfair.

Honesty is an ethical issue which has emerged in several guises. Some consultants believe that the consultancy industry has to bear some of the responsibility for shaping its own marketplace because that is what they are paid to do. At the other extreme, there is damning criticism that “when I was sitting on the receiving end of consultants, what used to annoy the hell out of me, particularly with the larger companies, was that they were using organisations because it was easy money...that is just fundamentally dishonest and wrong.” This contradicts the statement of one of the ‘Big 6’er’ consultants who said that “more specifically because of the size of the Queensland market we don’t have a lot of doors to knock on. like our Sydney and Melbourne colleagues. If they make a mistake there’s another big door ready to open.”

Apart from the influence of a professional body, such as the IMC, the resolution of issues which impact upon the professionalism of management consultants could be subjected to similar government regulations and standards as those that apply to other professions, such as medical practitioners and accountants. However, this consideration was not mentioned by the participants, and it is improbable that the profession would tolerate such an imposition at this stage.

A final area which received considerable attention was the variable usage of consultants by business organisations. It was pointed out that because Australia is such a large country geographically, with a small population, people are very much individualistic and independent. This means that business managers can be very

innovative, decisive, and creative on the one hand but on the other hand, it also means that these same people can be reluctant to seek an outsider's opinion.

However, it helps if people understand why they use consultants. An analogy that one participant used is "that although it's technically feasible to take your own appendix out, wouldn't you rather someone do it who's done it before, to remove an element of risk?. So you know to use us [consultants] must bring an element of comfort and we can obviously use the anaesthetic well, and dull the pain a little bit."

This section has present a number of issues that assist in determining the status of the profession in Queensland. However, it is recognised that a lot more research is need to fully come to grips with what is happening because of the fragmentation and the variation is professionalism. While the IMC is providing a very important forum for the continuing development of the profession, it is the intellectual property and confidentiality of client affairs that limit the profession from learning and developing collectively.

The Quality of Australian Management

Management consultants derive their title from the work they do with managers about the different functions, techniques and strategies involved in improving an organisation's performance. Because of this close association, the consultants involved in this study are in a strong position to make comment on the quality of the leaders and managers they associate with in a consultant-client relationship. Their impressions are based on years of experience involving diverse and rich cases of successes, mistakes, humour and contention.

The comments regarding the performance of Australian management and leadership range from ordinary, to not so rosy, to abysmal. The Karpin Report (1995) on renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century, verifies the general concern expressed by consultants about the quality of Australian management. But as one participant put it "I'm a cynical optimist" indicating that all is not lost. In fact, Fred Hilmer and Lex Donaldson have suggested that people should stop bagging Australian managers who are unfairly represented in the media. (James, 1996) Their performance needs to be judged in longer time frames.

Given the close association that consultants, including Hilmer and Donaldson, have with managers, it is important that their concerns are identified. There were many issues contained in the data. Five issues were prominent and they related to the limited perspectives that managers held, the inability to deal with organisational politics, the need for a strong decisive style, the capacity to deal with the paradox of leadership, and taking account of the personalities of leaders.

Limited Perspectives. A number of participants pointed to the limited perspectives that managers had in general. Such perspectives not only relate to a knowledge of organisations per se but of the dynamics of business environments that are becoming increasingly global. One of the challenges for some consultants is to present models to client groups in order to stimulate discussion and learning about different ways of viewing the nature of organisations and the roles, functions and responsibilities of

their client managers. One participant refers to the limitations in perspectives as a form of incompetence but acknowledges a change in one client group from "...unconscious incompetence to conscience incompetence". The use of models and graphics as well as the debriefing of local and imported organisational war stories are useful tools for at least challenging current in-house paradigms.

Whether any heighten consciousness translates to skills is a more complex question that leadership trainers in particular, are confronted with. This general lack of understanding limits the ability of managers on the one hand. On the other hand, there was also a perceived inability of managers to translate their intentions to behavioural outcomes by "...not demonstrating to their people how to begin mimicking what is good about or best about the business or improving these things we live and work in".

Organisational Politics. A second significant issue relates to the ability of managers to deal with organisational politics. One consultant expressed a mild form of contempt for the lack of intestinal fortitude that some senior managers display in dealing with strategic issues and the sense of helplessness that middle managers in the public service in particular express when engaging this "...shadow side" of their organisations. The irony is that there is also a sense of security in not being able to act. The intervention of a consultant is very much a political process and Tichy (1983) points to the technical and cultural processes that are also involved in the intervention as well. If organisations are to meet the challenges of the 21st century, then political skills and effective power sharing must be on the agenda.

But what responsibilities do consultants have for improving an organisation's political competence? The responsibilities depend on the consultant-client brief and the tactics for change vary among consultants. Some consultants provide political factions and coalitions with options. Some act as personal mentors. Many apply team development strategies. There are an increasing number of consulting firms engaging in organisation-wide change strategies. While these strategies may improve relationships in familiar settings, there is still a lack of evidence indicating their impact on the political competence of organisations. Further research needs to be undertaken in this regard.

Leadership Style. A third issue was raised in relation to leadership styles. The current management literature strongly promotes visionary leadership and empowerment as essentials for success. While the importance of these concepts are not rejected by the participants, a number placed a deal of importance on strong decisive leadership styles. One participant perceived the leadership literature as presenting a "warm and fuzzy feeling" about the role of effective leaders. This was contrary to some of that participant's experiences where "ruthless" leaders were the order of the day because they confronted issues, made the hard decisions, and were up-front in dealing with people. This point is somewhat reinforced by the research of Dunphy and Stace (1991).

While participation and empowerment are ingrained in the current management rhetoric, one consultant believes that the push in public service organisations towards consensus in decision making has gone overboard. This participant separated operational responsibilities from more strategic responsibilities. While the tenets of

empowerment had some applicability at the operational level, the strategic issues were seen to be very much an individual concern where a specific manager takes account of the risks involved and accepts total responsibility for the significant decisions and actions taken. What these views point out is the inherent paradox in leadership - giving oneself to the group and taking the group for oneself simultaneously.

This is further reinforced in the transcripts by one view of the manager out the front, sparkling with vision and literally leading, pushing and pulling the group with charisma, carrots and sticks while the other manager is following the group from behind with all sorts of support mechanisms that allow the group members to be leaders in their own right. The greater emphasis that has recently been placed on value-based and principle-centred leadership is, in some way, a recognition of this paradox by placing a strong emphasis on the importance of values, morals and ethics in managing systems of competing values.

The Paradox of Leadership. A fourth issue is related to leadership as a collective issue rather than an individual issue. Much of the discussions on leadership suggests that it relates to individuals and hence, the focus has been on the impact that particular individuals have on a situation, on subordinates or others generally known as followers. A variety of comments by various participants would suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the mutual causality involved in the dynamics of influence and that the traditional and linear model of leader-followers may have detracted from a more comprehensive understanding of the role that each person plays in influencing the direction and intensity of energy in an organisation. This perspective can be seen in the following statement about the impact of so-called successful leaders:

“...they are successful leaders only in that meaning of the term ‘success’ and only because they have a hell of a lot of help in doing it which they don’t recognise and they are successful because they need to be successful and not because they are good.”

There is a need to develop more comprehensive models about influence in organisations. Such models need to go beyond the focus on individualism and the leader as hero syndrome to at least incorporate the concepts of collaborative individualism described by Limerick and Cunnington (1993) and organisational energy identified by Millett (1994). The consultants have identified the paradox between the group and the individual. Leadership theories need to provide more insights about how consultants can direct clients in dealing with the paradox.

Personalities. The fifth and final issue relating to the quality of Australian management deals with personality types. One consultant pointed out that a majority of the senior executive service in Canberra were INTJ’s according to the Myers-Briggs personality assessment ratings. This type was seen to be at odds with what many of his colleagues were trying to do with members of the senior executive service. INTJ’s are tagged as field marshals who are intuitive, innovative organisers and they are also aggressive, analytic, systematic and

more tuned in to new ideas and possibilities rather than to people's feelings (Robbins et al, 1994). His colleagues want to make people feel good and focus on the people issues. While important, it is a secondary issue for most senior executive service if they are INTJ's.

Another consultant made the point that most leaders are type A personalities. A type A includes traits such as aggressiveness, ambitiousness, competitiveness, hostility, impatience and a sense of time urgency (Johns, 1996). The significance of this, according to the consultant was that

“...a lot of people believe that these are the people who change the world but if you really know them, you know that they cause a lot of ill will and a lot of pain and they have no idea how many people run around after them patching up”.

While the leadership literature puts a great deal of emphasis on style, scant attention in recent years has been given to the implications of personality for various leadership roles. The early work included personality traits but found inconclusive evidence to make any strong statements about particular personality traits and leadership effectiveness. However, the points that the consultants make about personality suggest that both managers and consultants need to be aware of the implications of different personality types operating in different contexts.

Differentiating Public and Private Sector Clients

Given the extent to which the public sector has embraced *managerialism* during the past five years, it is important to examine whether consultants make any fundamental distinctions between public and private sector organisations when formulating change strategies for government agencies. Indeed, can government agencies - with their conflicting and typically short-term objectives, myriad stakeholders, multiple managers and decision-makers, bureaucratic cultures and political oversight - be expected to be receptive to change management strategies designed for arguably more rational, apolitical and autonomous private sector organisations?

The consultants in the study were asked whether they consciously differentiate between public and private sector organisations. The question elicited a diverse and at times desultory range of responses. While most consultants agreed that there had been a 'blurring' of public and private sector management approaches during the past five years, there was no common or even typical view which characterised their responses. Not surprisingly, many consultants made reference, *inter alia*, to the public sector's adoption of *managerialism* (that is, a rational, output-oriented, plan-based and management-led view of organisational reform) and the inexorable trend toward the commercialisation, corporatisation and privatisation of government agencies.

The introduction of the Hilmer-inspired National Competition Policy (NCP), which took effect at all three levels of government this year, was also cited as evidence of the irresistible shift to market-driven public sector management in Australia. Notwithstanding these 'shared' views, which have been well-documented in public

sector management journals in recent years, most consultants viewed contemporary public sector management and the implications of these trends - for change management - in somewhat different terms. For the purposes of analysis however, it is possible to categorise these range of views into three broad groupings; generalist, specialist or hybrid (or uncommitted) perspectives.

The first group of consultants, who espouse the so-called **generalist** perspective, make no real distinction between public and private sector organisations and environments, as typified by the response by one participant:

“ The real agenda in terms of change programs is the size of the organisation and the number of variables it brings to bear on the change process - rather than whether it is public or private.”

This view reinforces the widely-held perception among respondents that the technical skills - both for facilitators/external change agents or those internal managers who are charged with implementing the change program - are much the same for both sectors. This, of course, is consistent with the view that there is an ever-increasing ‘blurring’ of public and private sector management approaches in Queensland and elsewhere in Australia. Indeed, the CEO of Australia’s largest local government, the Brisbane City Council (BCC), reveals that his organisation has had to go well ‘beyond local government and government [consultants and facilitators]’ and benchmark against the best private sector corporations in order to be at the ‘leading edge’ of public sector reform and innovation in Australia.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that most, if not all, of the many ‘Change Management’ publications produced by Australia’s leading consultancy firms (eg *Better Change* by the Price Waterhouse group) identify a range of generic ‘guiding principles’ (for example, confront reality, summon a strong mandate for change, continuous communication, shared ownership of the change process) and fail to distinguish between public and private sector organisations when advocating such strategies. Accordingly, a large number of consultants - particularly those employed by the so-called ‘Big Six’ firms - and a number of leading public sector managers and change agents clearly subscribe to the generalist perspective.

The second group of consultants, who can be said to espouse the **specialist** perspective, contend that public sector organisations and environments present particular challenges and dilemmas for consultants and other change agents. Such respondents typically referred to the tendency for ‘public sector inertia’ to thwart change strategies. As one consultant from one of the “Big Six’ firms averred

“ The public sector has a certain inertia and a certain history to it, and unless you’ve got a very, very strong government directive to make it [change] happen, it becomes very difficult to generate the sort of momentum from within [public sector agencies] that a private sector organisation can generate.”

To this end, **timing** is seen as a critical factor in the success of public sector change strategies. For example, some change agents argued that a ‘circuit breaker’ (for

example, such as the change of government in Queensland in 1989 which was occasioned by the Fitzgerald Inquiry) is often needed to help overcome such inertia and implement comprehensive reform across the public sector. In such cases, it was argued that you must 'go for broke' in implementing wholesale change strategies because 'there would be no political imperatives driving such changes in a second term of government and because of inertia'.

A similar strategy can also be discerned in the Victorian public sector following the election of the Kennett government in 1992, when the new Liberal government implemented landmark 'privatisation' reforms as expeditiously as possible. Accordingly, timing associated with the election of a new government (and that government's commitment to public sector reform) and the electoral cycle in general appear critical in respect of the successful implementation of wholesale public sector reforms. (Some consultants also made reference to the tendency for many politicians to display a fairly 'limited interest' in such internal reforms, which strengthened the case for expediting such changes while they were still on the government's political agenda).

Moreover, public sector organisations are more widely accountable for their performance and experience 'close public scrutiny, amplified and distorted by the media, with their own particular interests' (Sinclair 1989, p. 385). While private sector organisations are, of course, also subject to cyclical factors (eg business and economic cycles/trends, product cycles; company takeovers and mergers), it would appear, however, that they generally have a greater degree of *flexibility* in respect of the timing of such change strategies than do most of their public sector counterparts.

The third group of consultants, which we have referred to as being **uncommitted**, did not subscribe to either the generalist or specialist perspectives. Rather, they espoused a so-called hybrid perspective which maintains that both sectors can learn from one another. Moreover, some of these consultants cited examples of where certain public sector organisations were arguably more advanced and sophisticated in their change management strategies than their private sector counterparts. For example, one consultant contends that

“ The Department of Administrative Services' senior managers are more client focused, commercially sophisticated and committed to their people than any [managers] from the private sector...some of the client focus strategies you see in the public sector beats anything you see in the private sector.”

Another consultant, with extensive experience as a change agent in both sectors, emphatically asserted that

“ I think the public sector interestingly enough has led them [the private sector] in many ways. They've had the ideas. The private sector comes along and spots these ideas and implements them so quickly that it always appears that it is in the vanguard, but it is the public sector that has been talking about it and digesting it for some time. I think what will convert thoughts into action in the public sector will be the whole thing of downsizing.”

While such assertions clearly need to be subjected to more rigorous testing, they do, however, appear to partially reflect Mintzberg's (1996, pp 82-83) contention that

- Government may need managing, but management could do with a little governing too; and
- business can learn from government no less than government can learn from business.

A critical factor relating to change management in the public sector is the prevalence of 'multiculturalism' in public sector organisations. As Sinclair (1989, p.392) argues, 'subcultures are an inevitable feature of most large organisations and may be particularly characteristic of public organisations'. The existence of myriad subcultures in public sector organisations is particularly important when a central agency (eg the Public Sector Management Commission appointed by the Goss government in 1990 to review the Queensland public sector) is charged with overseeing wholesale reforms across an entire public sector. It is apparent, therefore, that the existence of such subcultures - be they agency-based (a 'Treasury' or a 'Main Roads' culture) and/or intragency (a 'HR' or an 'Engineering ' culture) - clearly have the potential to affect the success of strategies designed for the public sector at-large. This not only relates to whether such subcultures may be 'enhancing' or 'countercultural', but to the sheer number of subcultures - many of them predicated on diverse departmental and/or professional affiliations - which central agencies have to contend with.

In the landmark reforms overseen by the Public Sector Management Commission in the Queensland public sector in 1990-94, it was noteworthy that certain departmental amalgamations (eg the complex merger of Housing, Local Government and Planning) were much more successful than some others (eg that involving the Department of Primary Industries), in *large part*, because of the inability of some of the new departments to accommodate or integrate new subcultures. As Sinclair (p. 394) argues

“ Public sector organisations require more pluralistic cultures with norms which embrace and encourage cultural complexity and uncertainty and affirm subcultures, or even 'countercultures.'”

Moreover, contention, paradoxes and dilemmas are often more acutely felt in public sector organisations, where conflicting and typically short-term objectives, less measurable and quantifiable outcomes (for example, pertaining to many transport services which are designed merely to be 'available' to everybody) and the constant threat of political intervention often create widespread paranoia and suspicion among public sector employees. Accordingly, public sector change 'strategies must explicitly recognise multiple subcultures and construct opportunities to realise their unique contribution' (Sinclair, p. 394). This, of course, is much more easily prescribed than realised.

The foregoing assessment is predicated on a fairly small sample of Queensland-based consultants and must, therefore, be heavily qualified. It should be re-iterated that most major Organisational Behaviour texts (eg Robbins et al., 1994) and consultants'

change manuals do not differentiate between public and private sector organisations when discussing change strategies. Rather, they focus on a range of generic ‘pre-requisites for success’ or ‘guiding principles’ which presumably have application for *all* large organisations. Accordingly, a larger sample of consultants may well result in much stronger, if not overwhelming, support for the generalist perspective outlined earlier.

Nevertheless, on the limited evidence cited in this exploratory study, the issue of whether public sector change agents have to contend with some unique challenges and contentions - public sector inertia, myriad subcultures, greater accountability and scrutiny, short-term government imperatives and less measurable outcomes - is surely worthy of further research as the Australian public sector continues to be subjected to unrelenting managerial reform and downsizing.

The Role of Marketing

One issue that was explored with the participants was the role of marketing in their client organisations. Consultants were in general agreement on the importance of marketing and consumer/buyer orientation as they variously perceived them. Most agreed with the proposition that marketing is an important contributor to the success of an organisation and that a central organisational focus should remain upon satisfying needs and wants in customers. The view was expressed that few organisations have adopted truly marketing oriented philosophies and that there is “still a long way to go in accepting and practicing the concept that marketing pervades the whole organisation”. In this respect, many organisations pay lip service to marketing.

A number of consultants were of the view that no single functional area should dominate organisational activity. However, there was a view expressed a number of times that larger, so-called ‘enlightened’ organisations do recognise that marketing should drive all their activities and that a full understanding of client needs is an essential prerequisite to successful production and delivery of goods and services. On the other hand, acceptance of marketing’s all pervasive role appears weakest in smaller firms and organisations.

One consultant expressed the view that ‘greenfield’ enterprises should be designed from the very beginning around the needs of targeted consumer groups. Consultants specialising in marketing areas invariably believe that marketing should drive all organisational activity. One consultant was of the strong opinion that marketing cannot be divorced from overall organisational behaviour, and in this sense, how marketing is perceived and practiced depends largely upon all employees within an organisation, from managing directors to customer/buyer interface personnel. As one participant explained: “all employees of an organisation must understand the importance of their individual roles in serving the needs of their organisation’s clients appropriately”.

While it may be concluded that consultants conceptually agree that success for an organisation is built upon the appropriate coordination of all organisational activity to the basic end of delivering customer satisfaction, reservations arise from their own

personal experiences and those of their client firms in practice. Most would agree that organisations generally have not reached Webster's (1994) model of the 'enlightened' organisation. "...it is now understood that marketing is a total organisational commitment, pervasive throughout the organisation's systems and culture, not the province of a few specialists. Even more basically, businesses of the 1990s are taking on new forms in which the traditional functional boundaries have disappeared and the boundary between the organisation and its environment is increasingly blurred. Bureaucratic, divisionalised, hierarchical, functional organisations, like their cousins the dinosaurs, have evolved into more efficient organisations in the rapidly changing environment." This philosophy was expressed some 40 years ago by Drucker (1954) when he asserted that the only valid definition of a business organisation's purpose is to create a satisfied customer.

Now, if academics and consultant practitioners give support (albeit qualified) to the proposition that marketing orientation is an important contributor to an organisation's ability to change and adapt to a rapidly changing external, customer and competitive environment, then why are organisations somewhat reluctant to embrace the marketing orientation philosophy in practice?.

First, there remain differing definitions of marketing and the various terms and concepts associated with it, within both the academic and practicing communities. This contributes to difficulties in communication among academics, consultants, marketers and organisational management and personnel generally. Marketing is still viewed widely and simplistically as 'selling and promotion', and a distinct functional area in its own right. A convergence of definition of terms appears to be a necessary prerequisite for meaningful debate over how to build a marketing focussed organisation.

Second, organisations remain functionally structured. This encourages function-based goal setting and activity direction and mitigates against a customer/buyer driven focus. Inevitable inter-functional conflict exacerbates the effects of this.

Finally, insufficient attention is given to the sets of internal and external contextual peculiarities among organisations. Such contextual variables impart behavioural characteristics to organisations and impact importantly upon the functions and roles of marketing within each organisation. Examples of internal contextual variables include size, profit motive, nature of products and services, managerial orientation, structure, personnel complement, history, ownership and culture. External contextual variables include industry, competitive hostility level, Government (taxes, regulation, legal), technological change and economic conditions generally.

It can be concluded that virtually all consultants interviewed recognised the importance of organisations becoming more customer oriented, and this has become an imperative in today's dynamic environment. However, problems remain in translating this into practice.

Conclusions

This paper reported some preliminary findings from interviews conducted with Queensland-based consultants. The study to date is part of a larger Australian and New Zealand study that is attempting to identify the perspectives that management consultants articulate about their profession and the strategies they attempt to implement to bring about successful change in the client organisations.

While the data collected covers a wide range of topics and the final analysis of the data is concerned with a diverse set of questions, this paper has focused on five particular issues, namely the status of management consulting in Queensland, the quality of Australian management, differences between public and public sector clients, and the role of marketing. The discussion of these issues is preliminary and further data collection and analysis is being conducted. However, one concluding comments is appropriate to end on.

For whatever reason and despite differing criticisms, the Australian and New Zealand business community is developing an increasing commitment to outside advisory groups and consultants. The consultancy profession has grown tremendously since the end of the 1970s. For the reasons expressed previously, the industry is fragmented and will remain fragmented in the near future. However, if the business community is to continue to benefit from these services and develop greater expectations of service providers, then the consulting industry may have to seek external advice, possibly from the business and client community, on how to become an effective learning profession.

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