Organizational Consultation: An Appreciative Approach
III. Four Models of Consultation

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When initiating any organizational consulting initiative, a practitioner carries with him or her a set of often untested assumptions about the way in which the client (an individual. an organizational unit, or an entire institution) might best be served. He or she also carry assumptions about the nature of the relationship that should be established between the person or group asking for assistance (the client) and the person or group providing assistance (the consultant). Powerful (though often unacknowledged) models exist that dictate the nature of questions that are asked within a specific scientific discipline, as well as the nature of solutions that are generated and tested. These models tend to be self-validating in that the methods and criteria used for evaluation of the model are themselves part of and fully compatible with this model. As a rule, the model is reformed significantly only by someone who can stand outside the model and question its validity. Only the outsider can readily declare that "the king [model] is indeed naked!"

Consultation and Models

In many ways, the underlying assumptions of consultation act like scientific models. It is true that as one who often stands outside of systems, a consultant often can be of value in helping a client discover and, if necessary, abandon his or her own model or assumptions about the nature of a problem. A consultant, however, also operates within certain models. These models can, in turn, limits the consultant's own perceptions of these problems.

No one can, or should, abandon those models that serve as organizing principles for a consultation. Nevertheless, one should be aware of the nature and impact of the model that is prevalent in one's own work and recognize the value of alternative change models. These strategies and models resemble scientific models in that they are working hypotheses that need to be continuously (dis)proven, and are critical to understanding any organizational consulting process. .

Most of the strategies and assumptions one could call "models" of organizational consultation seem to differ from one another in the *ways* in which one assists one's client and in terms of the basic *assumption* which a consultant or human/organizational resource developer makes about change. One can penetrate into the approaches being taken by organizational consultants to discover differences among (1) those practitioners who help to bring about a specific change in the client system, (2) those practitioners who are advocates of, but do not initiate, a specific change in the system, (3) those practitioners who advocate no specific change but begin with the assumption that change in the system is required, and (4) those practitioners who neither advocate a specific change nor begin with the assumption that the system needs to change.

We turn now to a fuller description of the four models of consultation. Each of the four models holds a set of assumptions about change, about evolution and revolution, and even about the movement between first and second order change (see essay two). Each of these four models is appropriate in some setting and creates some major problems in other areas. We will first turn to Model One.

Model I Consultation

Model One assumes that one should take immediate and primary responsibility for any change that is to take place in the life of a person or in the life of an organization. One changes things by doing it himself or herself, rather than by somehow convincing other people that they should implement it. The Model One practitioner is an administrator, an implementer, an activist. Typically, the Model One practitioner serves in the role(s) of expert, designer and/or controller. Usually, the Model One consultant is in the business of Level One Change—in large part because this practitioner has become part of the system that is being changed.

To begin use of a nautical analogy that shall be employed in describing all four models, the Model One practitioner plays the role of the captain of the ship. One of the primary responsibilities of the ship's captain is to bring the ship safely to the entrance of the harbor. At this point, as we shall note below, the captain either gives up control to a tugboat captain (Model II) or a harbor pilot (Model III), or retains control, but seeks guidance from the signals emitted by the harbor lighthouse (Model IV).

Between harbors, the ship's captain is in charge. As the captain of an organization or captain of one unit in an organization, the Model One practitioner uses position power or reward and punishment power in order to determine the direction of or guide the implementation of a specific change in the organization or in the life of a specific person. One who aspires to Model One effectiveness will seek to move into a position of power in the organization (such as Manager of Training and Development, Director of Personnel, or head of an operational unit in the organization). He or she may also attempt to influence or control rewards that are offered by the organization (e.g. becoming administrator of a professional growth fund in a college, or becoming manager of an employee compensation or merit pay plan in a corporation). If one has neither position power nor the capacity to reward or punish other people in the organization, then Model One change is unlikely to occur as a result of one's initiative.

Most practitioners work within organizations. They are given the job of planning for and running programs to improve the quality of work being done in the organization. They often devote a considerable amount of time to managing their own shop and help other units of the organization complete their work in an efficient and effective manner. Many training and development departments provide ongoing services to the corporation, such as conferences, workshops and seminars. In these various capacities, the internal practitioner is often serving in a Model One capacity and is limited to Level One Change.

Even those who work as outside consultants to organizations will often assume a Model One role for a short period of time in the organization. A social service agency, for instance, might need someone to write a grant proposal that is due in two weeks. A corporation might need someone to prepare a software package for its computer system. There is insufficient time to train people inside these organizations to perform these tasks. Hence a Model One consultant is brought in to perform this short-term, specialized task, and they are given broad powers to get the job done.

Alternatively, an organization might hire an outside consultant to perform a task that is infrequently needed. A corporation, for instance, might contract with a consulting firm to conduct an executive job search, or a community mental health clinic might bring in an outside consultant to conduct a short-term stress-management program for men and women who have become unemployed as a result of a recent factory closing. In all of these various capacities an outside consultant often serves as a Model One practitioner. Yet, Model One is most typically found as a part of the work assignment of a human resource or organization development practitioner. The projects being run by external consultants require Model One administration, as do the day-to-day operations of training and development offices within or outside formal organizations. Model One is a frequent source of problems, however, especially when a practitioner does not recognize that this model is being employed. An organization gradually becomes dependent on the internal or external practitioner and soon requests that he or she do the work rather than training someone else in the organization to do this work.

The Model One role is often appropriate early in a consultation if it is acknowledged and accepted by both parties. Unfortunately, the rhetoric may be Model Two (or even Three or Four) consultation, when Model One is in operation. This leads to miscommunication, role confusion, and unrealistic expectations concerning the outcomes of the work that the consultant is performing. An expectation that an organization will become increasingly "self-reliant", for instance, often is unmet when Model One practices and their accompanying tools predominate.

Model One practice is sometimes being used, unfortunately, as a means of bypassing affirmative action guidelines and/or formal personnel review procedures. A personal friend or member of the "old boys" network is brought in as a "consultant" (rather than being formally reviewed for employment) in order to bypass established procedures. Such abuses are likely to be particularly prevalent among Model One practitioners, when the leaders of an organization have (or believe they have) insufficient time to hire an in-house person to do the work..

At other times, Model One practices are used because the organization is in a crisis mode. Someone is brought in to fix things. Leaders of the organization expect this "fire-fighter" to leave the organization in their hands after fixing it. Unfortunately, the organization usually returns to its previous crisis state, regardless of the wisdom and skill of the Model One consultant, for the organization has not increased its own internal capacities to identify and solve problems. A vicious cycle of crisis and dependency sets in and is hard to break. Crisis management prevails. People within the organization scramble for more position and reward/punishment power, while the leaders of the organization demonstrate their lack of respect for internal- resource people by bringing in more of the "fire-fighters".

Model II Consultation

The second model is used for the advocacy of a specific change. The organization (the “client”) brings someone in to help promote, organize, or implement a specific program or cause in which both the client and practitioner believe. As the advocate for a specific change, the Model Two consultant usually must have access to power in order to ensure that the change will occur. With this power, the Model Two consultant can sometimes help to bring about Level Two change—though this attempt at Level Two Change through the use of power is often counter-productive and even destructive. Typically, The Model Two consultant will have expert power, as the "prophet from another land" or as an internal practitioner with credentials and prestige. Alternatively, the Model Two practitioner will have referent power. As an internal advocate for a specific change, she attempts to closely affiliate with a person who is in a position of authority. This contrasts with strategies of the Model One practitioner, who usually has direct position power as one who runs the program. A Model Two practitioner must work more indirectly through his or her relationship with someone who does have direct position power.

Sometimes, the Model Two practitioner has direct power, but restrains its use or holds it in reserve. A Dean of Instruction, for instance, might serve as a consultant to a faculty curriculum committee at her college. She may not be able to control the outcomes of this committee directly, but she will have considerable influence over the committee because of the position she holds.

A third type of power is employed by experienced Model Two practitioners: This is the power associated with charisma or effective salesmanship. The successful Model Two practitioner will be enthusiastic and persuasive in his or her presentation. Most nationally-known consultants combine expertise with the capacity to hold an audience's attention and with the capacity to interest members of the audience in a specific idea. With charismatic power, a Model Two consultant might be able to bring about Level Two change (a “conversion” experience for the organization); however, this Level Two change is often short-term (as members of the organization return to “reality”).

If a Model Two practitioner does not have expert, referent or charismatic power, then he or she probably should look to one of the other three models for direction. Without his or her own power, a practitioner must rely on the power of the client. This, in turn, requires that the client feel some ownership for the ideas that have emerged from the work done with the practitioner -- necessitating the use of Model Three or Four practices.

With regard to our nautical analogy, the Model Two practitioner acts as the tugboat captain. While not having direct control over the ship, as it is being guided into a harbor berth, the tug boat captain does make use of the energy and other resources of his own boat to move the ship into or out of the berth. The tug boat captain in some sense "persuades" the ship's captain that it is appropriate for his tug boat to take over control of the ship, because he (the tug boat captain) has expertise (knowledge of the harbor). The ship's captain does not (in most instances) have to provide any energy or other resources in order to move the ship into the berth. All of the power that is needed to bring about the change (safe movement of the ship) is found initially in the practitioner (tug boat captain) and is transferred to the client(ship's captain) during the change process. Similarly, the Model Two practitioner typically agrees to provide the resources (expertise, motivation, etc.) that will bring about the changes that he or she has advocated to his or her client. The client agrees to the practitioner's goal (the "berth") and requests help from the practitioner in meeting this goal.

Model Two expresses itself in at least six ways: (1) prescription, (2) promotion, (3) instruction, (4) behavior modification, (5) evaluation and (6) linkage.

When *prescription* is used with Model Two, a practitioner usually collects, analyzes and feeds back data to his or her client. The practitioner provides specific recommendations concerning alternative programs, procedures, personnel, and so forth. The recommendations themselves are the intervention. When a recommendation is documented substantially (expert power), it often will carry the day, although problems frequently are encountered in getting people to follow up on the recommendations.

The *promotional* style of Model Two specifically addresses the problem of getting the client to accept and implement a suggestion. Emphasis is placed on actively selling the advice being given. A practitioner uses persuasion (charismatic power) and even a touch of "snake oil" salesmanship to get over the idea. He or she may call on the endorsement of someone who is well known in the field or describe a successful program at a comparable (and often competitive) institution.

To insure the implementation of an idea, the practitioner who makes use of promotional strategies may encourage the client or other significant people in the organization to endorse the project, or the practitioner may begin publicizing the project elsewhere in the community, thereby increasing informal pressure on the client or leader to follow through on the project. At other times, the practitioner may suggest that external funds will be forthcoming if the organization can enact the project on its own, initially, or that in initiating this project, the organization will gain a reputation that draws customers.

A third way of enacting Model Two change is through *instruction*. To be effective in the presentation of theory and principles, one helps the client "internalize" the material presented so that it becomes a source of guidance that is of personal value and use rather than being nothing more than a lovely theory. This internalization is made possible by first collecting information about the client. A practitioner then gears his or her presentation to the needs and conceptual framework of the client.

Behavior modification is occasionally appropriate as a Model Two style and differs from instruction in that the practitioner does not tell the client what he or she should do, but rather influences and controls the reward system so that the client will perform as desired. Behavior modification is often useful in eliminating annoying mannerisms or debilitating habits. A related tool, progressive desensitization, can be used to reduce a client's level of anxiety about a specific task or event.

A fifth way in which Model Two change can be enacted is through *evaluation*. In many instances, the only way in which a client system will give a Model Two practitioner enough time and resources to get acquainted with the system is to bring the consultant in as an evaluator. As a consultant-evaluator, one can collect, analyze, and feed back information about an organization before providing a series of recommendations regarding the program or procedure being evaluated.

The sixth style of Model Two practice, *linkage*, has been given considerable attention in recent years. Organizational consultants can link a client with other people and resources that are appropriate to his or her needs and styles. To be an effective linkage agent, the consultant must know the client's strengths and weaknesses. This requires an emphasis in the practitioner's work on information collection, analysis and feedback. As in the case of instruction and evaluation, linkage requires that a practitioner become fully acquainted with the client system before advocating a specific change. Even the prescriber, promoter, and behavior modifier must, of course, be very knowledgeable about their client if they are to do an effective job.

Model III Consultation

Having been inspired by the extraordinary insights and practices of Kurt Lewin during the 1930s and 1940s, many behavioral scientists believe that an effective organizational consultant need not (or should not) promote a specific change, but should instead assist the organizational client in accomplishing the changes that the client identifies as being desirable and valuable. The practitioner serves as a *change agent* and a Level Two change may often occur—for the Model Three consultant is assisting her client in being successful in not only engaging a specific change but also in reviewing and altering the fundamental strategies of change being used by the organization.

The term, "change agent", bring to mind the functions served by a travel agent. When one asks a travel agent to plan a trip, an assumption is made that the agent will not try to convince her client that he should travel to a specific location, but rather will help the client get to the place he has identified in as quick and inexpensive a manner as possible. A customer wishing to travel to Syracuse would be very surprised if his travel agent tried to convince him to go to Boston instead. Similarly, a change agent is supposed to help a client attain his goal as quickly and inexpensively as possible, and possibly become more effective in planning their own travel in the future (though some travel agents like some organizational consultants would rather foster “client dependency”). The change agent has not been hired to advocate for a specific change, but instead has been hired to help her client become a better agent of change himself.

Our nautical analogy further clarifies the Model Three function. In directing a ship into or out of a berth, the Harbor Pilot often takes over direct control of the ship, temporarily, in order to move the ship safely through the harbor. The power or energy that is needed for this change (ship's movement) to take place resides within the system being changed (the ship) rather than in the system doing the changing (the harbor pilot). By contrast, with Model Two change, the energy resides in the system that is causing the change: the tug boat. With Model One change, the changing system and the system causing the change are one and the same: the ship and its captain. The Model Three practitioner -- and the Harbor Pilot -- is given temporary authority over the changing system in order to help this system move toward a goal that is identified and valued by the client.

The roles played by Model Three change agents are as varied as those of the Model Two practitioner: *negotiator, trainer, facilitator,* and, less frequently, *diagnostician, expert* and *judge*. Whereas the Model One and Two practitioners must have access to power, the Model Three practitioner must have superior interpersonal skills and be knowledgeable about change principles and strategies. The effective Model Three change agent will know a client system intimately and can identify the points of leverage for change in this system as well as the resources that are to be employed in sustaining change once it has been initiated. While planning for a specific change, one must not only plan for a specific change, he or she must also plan for "unfreezing" the client system, so that it will be open to change and must help "re-freeze" the system so that it will maintain the change that has been enacted. Most change agents make use of a common set of strategies in the initiation and maintenance of such change.

Model IV Consultation

Some practitioners believe that the client system should play a central and independent role in any developmental effort. Models One, Two and Three can limit the freedom of the client, make the client dependent on the practitioner, and place the practitioner rather than the client at the center of the developmental work. Model One, Two and Three practitioners begin with the assumption (often expressed by the client) that change (usually Level One) is required of the client organization. Model Four practitioners do not begin with this assumption, believing that such an assumption biases the subsequent perceptions of both the practitioner and client, limits the number of options available to the client, and diminishes the client's ownership of both the problem and its solution.

It is not wise to begin with the assumption of change in the client system—especially if the consultant is being asked to engage with her client at Level Two. If an interventionist assumes that the client's biggest problems can be fixed by change, he has already made a choice for the client. It may very well be that change is the most important problem or need facing the client. However, it is important that the decision not be prejudged by the interventionist; and, according to the framework, the client should be helped to make the decision. The interventionist can help the client first by assisting him in obtaining valid and useful information about the real issues.

If the majority of interventionists conceptualize problems as involving and requiring change, the potential clients may come to perceive their problems as those of change. The definition of the expert may become the expectation of the non-expert. But when the executive non-expert decides (and the interventionist agrees) that he wants to create change in the system, those subordinates responsible for working in the system may prefer to generate valid information and then see if change is their choice. Such action may be viewed by the top executive (and the interventionist) as resistance to progress, a view which would be incorrect.

Perhaps if the people making interventions, at any level in our society, would focus more consciously and with greater commitment on their primary tasks, we would not experience as much pressure for change. Change may be our biggest societal problem, but it may not be the deepest problem. Indeed, if the deepest problems were dealt with effectively, change might not be as important. Thus, a Model Four practitioner often finds that change itself is actually a problem in some institutions. Indiscriminate and repeated change (especially at Level One) often will produce an instability that insures minimal or unpredictable impact of a planned change effort.

To return to our nautical analogy, the Model Four practitioner serves as a lighthouse, which can be used by the captain and crew to guide the ship safely into or out of the harbor. Control of the ship resides with the captain and crew. If the information provided by the lighthouse is ignored, the client (ship) may crash on the proverbial rocks. However, the responsibility for this crash resides with the client and cannot be attributed to the practitioner—provided that the practitioner is giving the client valid and useful information.

Neither power nor interpersonal skills are of primary importance to the Model Four practitioner. In many instances, the effective Model Four practitioner will be low-keyed. He or she is likely to be hesitant in promoting specific ideas or programs. This type of consultation tends to build on the skills of the practitioner in *generating and integrating information*. He or she will be knowledgeable about the specific institution and about organizational life in general. The roles he or she is most likely to assume are those of diagnostician, facilitator, trainer, and negotiator.