



What's more, the average tenure of a consultant is under two years, very likely due to an inability to "make rain" independently (most graduate programs don't teach you to find business, but only to function within a large corporate environment) or to being a victim of the up-or-out culture at most consultancies. Consequently, most consultants don't plan on consulting as a career, and innovation in the profession remains stagnant.

Worse still is that if a consultant's approach wasn't refined within the walls of an established

business school. If you've ever been to one, you know that (prestigious) business schools are factories, proponents of the thinking of their benefactors (employers included), inexorably teaching not to innovate in their own profession (teaching), but to innovate in business tactics and implementation. They're marketing machines, administratively and aloofly unable to self-assess their losing monopoly over the process of learning, yet dictating what constitutes knowledge.

In the land of the blind, if institutions of higher learning are blind, what are their clients (students) really learning? More critically, what are those who employ MBAs or pay them as consultants for their "knowledge" truly getting for their money if no one learns to convey that knowledge in any other way than how they've been taught for the last 75 years? Clients expect, and consultants increasingly depend on, incessantly close relationships and golden Rolodexes to be their one-eyed men (and women). This is definitely not strategy or strategy consulting.

The most insulting obstacle for professional strategy consultants is the widespread belief that operational functions, such as marketing and legal, are capable of addressing enterprise-wide strategies single-handedly. Functional consultants sell their cookie-cutter "solutions," rather than address or even acknowledge that there's more to business than their single area of proficiency. The most senior executives therefore tend to disregard insights from all but the

brightest or most "acquainted" functional strategy consultants because in the daily scheme of things, the area barely registers in their radar.

A case in point is marketing consulting. "Marketing strategy" is an oxymoron. Because creativity is subjective; because there are a finite number of media format choices to reach an audience; and, most importantly, because marketing doesn't change behavior but rather simply initiates and manages relationships in the hope of causing a product to be considered when a consumer is making a transaction, marketing can never truly be strategic. It is reactionary.

Functional consultants are tactical executioners, usually biased and not always pragmatic. They tend to be a confusing and confused breed that repeatedly tosses around obsolete strategic terms in a bid to appear more "strategic" than they actually are, a group inculcated in the religion of project management and interoffice politics. Nothing pleases tacticians more than thinking that they're know-it-all strategists. Nothing boils their blood more than the mere utterance of the term "vendor." Should you be surprised at management's displeasure at all the "management consultants" who turn out to be tacticians in disguise?

The objective here isn't to ridicule, argue, or speculate, but to defend the profession of consulting against misunderstanding (thanks primarily to those who offend the profession by being "consultants, for now") and the profession's own ignorance of how to address its perceptions. Nothing is more valuable to a strategy consultant than an educated client, but with so little actually written about the philosophical foundation of professional strategy consulting, it's the obligation of consultants in this space to pick up where our forefathers left off and continue to innovate in and expound on our value and worth. **C**

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