MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Building Client-Consultant Partnerships

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by Martin White

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PREFACE

I enjoy writing books. For me there are two important outcomes of the book writing process. The first is that I have to think carefully about the knowledge I have on a subject, and perhaps have to go back to basics on areas where this knowledge is not as good as it should be. The second is that I have a philosophy of being open to my consulting clients about my approach on content management, intranet management and enterprise search management, the subjects of six of my eight books. It is probably because I am a chemist by training and in science publication of research for peer review is immensely important. My books are my business cards and my references all brought together with an attractive cover.

My career as a consultant information scientist started in 1980 and continues to this day. I have long since lost track of the number of projects I have worked on but it is probably at least 400. I've had the great fortune to work in countries as diverse as Lithuania, Cyprus, Kuwait and the USA. External temperatures during these engagements have ranged from 43C in Kuwait to -24C in Finland, and my clients have ranged from the government of Sri Lanka to a convent in London. The most complex was an intranet strategy project that required over 170 interviews to be undertaken around the world, including China and Japan. The fact that this project delivered exactly what the client expected to schedule and budget was largely due to the very close partnership between the client's project manager and the consulting team. In particular the project manager had a mandate from their organisation to make immediate decisions to maintain the momentum and direction of the project.

Since setting up Intranet Focus Ltd. in 1999 I have found that in many cases I am working with communications managers, intranet managers and search managers who have had limited experience of selecting and working with consultants. On many occasions I have had to explain what is possible to achieve within the schedule, staff resources and scope that have been agreed for the project I have been engaged for, which is often only one element of a much larger and inevitably business-critical project.

In the 1980s I wrote two books on setting up a consulting business. This book is not written for consultants but for managers who have identified a gap in the expertise within the organisation and are now starting to look for a consultant to help them. The objective is to help managers understand a project from the perspective of a consultant and build an effective relationship so that the engagement is a win-win for the organisation, the manager and the consultant. It is all about managing the expectations of all concerned, hence the title for this book.

This book sets out how I work with clients. Other consultants may have different approaches but I suspect that the differences are in the details and not the principles. I hope that my fellow consultants will forgive me for disclosing some (but not all!) of the ways in which we manage client expectations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During my career I have learned a great deal from some very experienced project managers. These include Larry Wells (Creative Strategies) Elizabeth Thomas (International Data Corporation), Monica Giles (Logica), Russ Nathan (Romtec), Howard McQueen (McQueen Consulting), and Peter Jackson (Network Strategies). Others who have shaped my perspectives on consulting include Jed Cawthorne, Caroline Coetzee, Paul Corney, Andrew Gilboy, David Hobbs, Gerry McGovern, Sam Marshall, Susan Quain, Ian Roddis, Maxime Uhl, Dr. Sandra Ward and Christiane Wolff.

From 2003 to 2011 I was a Non-Executive Director of CABI. During that time CABI engaged with two of the leading management consulting companies and this gave me an opportunity to learn from the client side. CABI also undertook consulting projects around the world and I gained many insights from working with Trevor Nicholls (Chief Executive) and Ian Barry (Chief Financial Officer) as we sought to improve project quality and performance.

Both Sandra Ward and Sam Marshall read through a draft of this book and suggested changes that have significantly improved it. I am grateful to Kara Pernice, Managing Director, Nielsen Norman Group, for permission to quote from the 2016 Intranet Design Annual in Section 1.2. Jane McConnell (NetStrategyJMC) wrote Section 1.3 on Strategic Facilitation for me based on her considerable expertise in this area. I would like to record my appreciation of Kristian Norling for allowing himself to be persuaded that this book would be a good addition to his list of titles. Time will tell!

I owe a great deal to the collective wisdom of the consulting team at TFPL from 1994 to 1999, including Peter Kibby, Elizabeth Parker and Dr. Sandra Ward.

TFPL also gave me the opportunity to work with Angela Abell, who sadly died in 2012. Angela was without doubt the most able consultant I have had the good fortune to work with. She was a consummate professional and was

totally focused on exceeding client expectations within the agreed budget. Angela had a wealth of experience that she was always ready to share with her colleagues and a sense of humour that could defuse the most challenging of consulting problems. This book is dedicated to her memory.

THE AUTHOR

Martin White is an information scientist with a passion for intranets, enterprise search, information management and French organ music. Between 1984 and 1994 he held senior consulting management positions in International Data Corporation, Logica and Romtec. He set up Intranet Focus Ltd. in 1999. In the course of his career he has gained business experience in nearly 40 countries. He has been a Visiting Professor at the Information School, Sheffield University since 2002. Martin is the author of eight books, most recently the 2nd edition of Enterprise Search, published by O'Reilly Media in 2015. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and a Member of the British Computer Society.

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CHAPTER 1

BRINGING THE OUTSIDE INSIDE

Most managers seem to have a vast collection of stories about consultants that failed to deliver. When I listen to these stories I start to have a concern about whether the consultant failed or whether it was the organisation that failed. Let me explain as this concern forms the basis for the book you are reading.

Although an organisation may use a number of consultants over a period of time it would be unusual for an individual manager within the organisation to have extensive experience of working with consultants. A manager may well have experience from other organisations they work for but consulting engagements are specific to a particular organisational culture. No matter how experienced the consultant or the manager building a good working relationship at speed, especially when the career of the manager may hang on the outcome, will be a significant challenge.

This is especially the case where the manager (as is usually the case) has not been a consultant themselves. On the other hand, most consultants will have had previous business experience and will also have the knowledge gained from many earlier engagements.

One of the things that you learn very quickly as a consultant is that every project is different. It is easy to carry across methodologies that worked well in a previous engagement and find that they are not appropriate to the current engagement. As a consultant the exhilaration often lies in clambering up a near vertical learning curve with each new engagement and having the wisdom to know what to discard along the journey.

This process is eased substantially when working with a business manager who has prepared themselves and their organisation to work with a consultant as a partner, integrating them seamlessly with others in the business but always making sure that the consultant is able to maintain their independence of thought and to deliver an outcome which is fit for purpose, not necessarily fit to specification.

Information management projects

Although I hope that this book will be of value to anyone planning to use a consultant my particular focus is on what I would broadly class as information management projects. These might include:

- Content migration
- Information architecture development
- Information asset audits
- Information risk assessment
- Information management strategy
- Intranet strategy and implementation
- Knowledge management strategy and implementation
- Records management strategy and implementation

- Website and enterprise search strategy and implementation
- Website development

The characteristics of all these projects are that:

- They are not based around workflows
- They rarely have a direct impact on the bottom line
- Project deliverables are difficult to define
- There is little if any previous experience of using external consultants
- There can be an indirect impact on the IT systems of the organisation
- Identifying consultants with the required skills may not be easy
- There are many small (often one-person) consultancies
- Rarely will major IT and management consulting companies bid for these projects
- The organisation's project team may be a single person; the records manager or the intranet manager, who has to fit in managing the project with a job role that is already taking a very considerable amount of their working week

For all these reasons establishing the best possible working relationship with the best possible consultant is of the greatest importance in achieving business objectives for projects in this area.

At the risk of an over-simplification, where there is a work flow the deliverable will always be for a new system that is cheaper to run, has less down time and meets well-defined corporate and regulatory requirements. When implementing intranets and enterprise search applications it is much more difficult to decide whether the specification set out at the beginning of the project has been met. Indeed it might well be the case that as the project proceeds it becomes clear that the specification is not totally aligned with changes in the business environment. This makes working with consultants both more valuable (as they will have solutions to offer from similar projects) and more challenging because the role of a consultant may change during the course of the project.

Intranet projects

My particular interest is in intranet projects, which often turn out to be more complex than anyone anticipated. I was writing this book as the Nielsen Norman Group published its 2016 Intranet Design Annual, in which there were some interesting comments on the use of consultants and contractors.

This year's winning organizations utilized agencies and consultants in all stages of the project:

- Audience targeting
- Benchmarking
- Branding
- Concept creation and review
- Content migration
- Development
- Documentation
- Functional specifications
- Information architecture
- Interviews
- Needs analysis
- Process reviews
- Prototyping
- Quality assurance
- SharePoint implementation

- Support
- Taxonomy
- Training
- Usability testing
- Video creation
- Visual design
- Wireframing

The authors of the report comment:

> *"Organizations brought in an average of two outside agencies to assist. The extensive external help may be another possible reason for this year's lower team-size numbers. Working with consultants can be inspirational, contribute varied expertise and perspectives, and give the team a needed jolt of excitement. The costs of hiring a consultant may be lower than hiring a full-time employee; it also gives a team specific expertise when they need it, without requiring the organization to commit to keeping a person on staff beyond that point. However, the fact that every winning team needed outside help to create a great intranet does give us pause. Is this is a commentary about something intranet technologies being so difficult to deal with that teams require outside help to use them effectively?"*

Of course not every organisation profiled by the Nielsen Norman Group used consultants for all these tasks. However what often seems to happen is that once a consultant is brought on board a precedent is set within the organisation. The work undertaken by the initial consultant will almost certainly identify tasks and skills that are not available within the organisation, and so more consultants are added to the roster.

Indeed this list might be used checklist for intranet managers to assess the extent to which these skills are available within the organisation.

The end result can be that over the course of an intranet design or redesign there are likely to be several consultants. Each will need the level of support outlined in this book, and quite quickly the intranet manager can become so overwhelmed with managing these external resources. The result is that either they cannot spend enough time working with the internal team or supporting the consultants, and then the overall project loses focus and momentum.

Strategic facilitation

Another important role that a consultant can play is to be a strategy facilitator. This is the approach that Jane McConnell (NetJMC) has taken over many years, and I will let her outline the way she develops a relationship.

"I have worked as a strategy facilitator in the field of "internal digital work environments" for 17 years. In reality, I have never actually worked like a consultant. My clients have often told me they work with me because "you're not a consultant."

Strategy consultants traditionally work in two steps: A. Interview, explore and investigate. B. Analyze and write a report with recommendations. That has never been my approach.

First I sell a one-day scoping workshop where we define the goals, approach, players, deliverables, etc. together. The client pays for this. The client is not committed to go any further. The outcome is a document, co-authored by them and myself. They are completely free to use it with another partner. They usually retain me at this point, but the freedom not to do so encourages them to take the first step quickly.

Then, assuming the scoping exercise has gone well, I do a proposal encouraging the client to play a leadership role in the activities —

usually workshops and user needs research. My role is one of coaching the leader and facilitating the process. Positioning the client contact person as both project owner and project leader brings greater visibility and credibility to the outcome. It's no longer a consultant on a "hit and fly" mission — stepping in for the strategy development phase and leaving before it materializes (or not). I also encourage the client to take responsibility for the final report for which I give input as required.

I always do an additional short report myself on the project and other points that may have come up. Doing a separate report which is not the official project report gives me flexibility and freedom to say things in writing that I could not include in the official report because they may be out of scope. These reports almost always get read by senior management, curious to see what an external expert has to say, and I'm sometimes called upon to present them personally to management.

When user research is required, I get the agency used by the company or people within the company itself to do the interviews and write ups. The second approach gives better results. It is part of the change process, and a key step in bringing the voice and needs of people on the edges of the organization to the attention of the project team which is usually at the centre of the organization. We have frequent check points among all the people involved, usually in tele conferences, as they move through the research phase."

Jane provides more information on her approach, together with a set of success factors, in her blog Tips for working with a strategic facilitator.

Managing expectations

The scope of a project is never scary to a consultant. If they felt they did not have enough expertise to complete the project then they would not bid for it or agree to accept the invitation to work on it. However clients can be scary. This is because on one hand they know they need additional experience and expertise. On the other hand they feel that they may be demonstrating that they lack the experience and expertise that was the basis for them being recruited by the organisation in the first place.

Consultants are not infallible but if you have engaged one it is sensible to at least listen to them and discuss with them the information they bring, the information they uncover and the advice they offer.

In this book I offer advice specifically to organisations seeking to engage a consultant by highlighting what the organisation can expect from the consultant, and what the consultant expects from the organisation. The closer the gap between these two expectations the greater will be the success of the project. The consultant will have added to their reputation, skills and knowledge, the organisation will benefit from a new direction and you as the project manager will be seen as making a significant impact on the performance of the organisation.

There will always be an initial gap in the expectations because whatever skills they have to offer consultants are not professional mind readers. The skill of good project management from the beginning to the end is that the gap narrows very quickly and tends to zero by the conclusion. Projects that fail do so because the expectation gap increases. That is why this book has the title "Managing Expectations".

Consultancies come in all sizes. The four largest management consultancies are Deloitte, PwC, EY and KPMG. With total revenues of around $50B these four consultancies account for 40% of the global market for management consulting. At the other end of the market there are countless single person consultancies, of which Intranet Focus Ltd is an example. The advice I offer in this book should be common to working with any consultant in any size of business, but there will be something of a bias towards working with individual consultants or small specialised consultancies. I'm using "consultant" as a placeholder for anyone external to your organisation that you have brought in under some form of contract to provide professional services. Much of the advice may be applicable to development teams but the approach to project management may well be different.

A consultancy skill set

When working with a consultant subject knowledge should be taken for granted. A consultant will inevitably wish to increase their range of expertise but asking someone with a UK public sector clientele to work on an intranet in the Gulf States might be a leap too far.

There are more general attributes that I would expect all consultants to exhibit and these include:

- Confidence
- Courtesy
- Discretion
- Empathy
- Focus
- Integrity
- Patience

I'm not going to comment in each in particular but the core question you need to be able to answer is whether you are confident from the outset that the consultant will be able to build effective relationships with everyone they meet and deliver outcomes that exceed expectations. You cannot do that from a proposal document.

Work-in-progress

There are two concepts that are core to understanding how consultants work and what their own priorities are. The first of these is "work-in-progress". It is the amount of work that has been undertaken but not billed, or can also be the amount of work that has been billed to date against an upfront fee. In either case consultancies do not like having too much work-in-progress as there are commercial risks involved. If the client challenges the time spent then there could be an issue about payment of the time billed.

The business model for consultancy, like most professional services, is based around maximising utilisation and minimising work-in-progress. In general the lower the seniority of a consultant the greater the percentage of their working day they are expected to bill to a client. So for a major consulting firm a junior consultant might be expected to bill around 85% of their working day, whereas a partner may only be billing 25% of their working day, though of course at a substantially higher day rate.

When it comes to smaller consultancies and single consultants achieving even 50% of time billed is quite an achievement, as the consultants not only have to do the work but also find it, write a proposal, execute and then deal with all the administration of the business. They also have to take vacations and undertake professional development. So when a consultant quotes a day rate do not assume that their earnings are 220 times (roughly the number of working days less vacation) the day rate. Even a multiplier of 100 might be overstating their annual revenue, which of course is much higher than net salary as personal and other taxes have to be paid.

Since there are few fixed costs in consulting the more days billed means a greater gross profit, and so it is very common for consultants to work on more than one project at the same time. This has implications for a specific engagement for two reasons. The first is that it may be difficult for a consultant to change the date of a meeting at short notice and the second is that they may well be working for a competitor.

Contract cover and payment management

Contract cover is the extent to which the work that the client is expecting to be carried out is met by the terms of the contract. In addition dates and amounts of the invoices for professional services and expenses are also scrutinised carefully. No matter what a consultant may say about how important it is for them to deliver there is an equally important interest in the organisation delivering payment on time. It will always be at the back of the consultant's mind every day they are working for you.

If they are working on their own account then the payments are going towards a mortgage, food on the table and other domestic expenses. If it is a larger consultancy then the consultant will be personally responsible for tracking work-in-progress and contract cover and will be held to account for any overrun or under-payment.

If this might seem an unrealistic concern then consider how committed you would be to your organisation if you did not get paid at the end of the month and indeed were not sure when you might get paid. Working for one large US professional services organisation the agreed 45 day payment term for a substantial invoice ended up being paid after 65 days because the new accounting system had failed. I upset the firm by pointing out that it would be equally concerned if a client that owned it 15% of its annual billings said that they were not sure when they would "cut the check", to use US parlance.

In many large consultancies department managers will have a short meeting at the beginning of the day at which everyone stands (literally!) ready to give a short progress report on the progress and plans for their projects. The meeting, often known as Morning Prayers, will probably only last 15 minutes but absence from it without a very good explanation would be unacceptable to everyone at the meeting. The meeting is an opportunity to exchange ideas as much as it is a way of tracking progress and to check on work-in-progress and contract cover.

Working for a competitor

One of the paradoxes of consulting is that an organisation wants to gain the expertise the consultant has gained from working for competitors (or at least organisations in the same sector) and yet is concerned about confidential information leaking out to the competitor. Consultants are also aware of the unease of many clients in this respect. There should always be a Non-Disclosure Agreement. Consultants will be extremely concerned to ensure there is no leakage as even a hint that they might have compromised the business of a client would have a terminal impact on their career.

A related issue is the extent to which the fact that a consultant has worked for a specific organisation can then be used in a sales pitch. This needs to be a subject of discussion at the outset of a project and not left to the final close-down. I have had clients who do not wish their names to appear on my client list because (I assume) they do not want their reputation to suffer because they have had to hire me to sort out their intranet. However that may then prejudice my ability to gain further work in a sector, so I like to agree an embargo of a year (and no more) during which time I will not disclose the name of a client. That's not the ideal situation from my perspective but at least I know that from the outset.

Building a partnership

One of the reasons for writing this book is that over the years I have come across many situations where a consultant has been treated with little respect by an organisation. This is often in situations where the consultant has been brought in by a senior manager in the organisation because they have concerns about the progress of a project. It is often difficult to know the extent to which the project team have been involved in the decision to bring in a consultant. This scenario also puts the consultant in a difficult position as the manager responsible for their appointment also wants an assessment, either implicit or explicit, on the performance of the team. The team rightly have concerns about the extent to which the consultant is helping them or assessing them.

Successful consulting engagements require that there is a partnership between the team and the consultant. There will inevitably been elements of stress because the consultant may well suggest different approaches to problems that have been encountered. This inherent stress can only be managed constructively when there is total transparency around their engagement and the project team has confidence in the capabilities, responsibilities and objectives of the consultant.

One of the most difficult elements of a consultant's work is understanding the politics of an organisation but as a profession we tend to be quite good at it. As a result any attempts to conceal the politics will be quickly found out. It is much better to put them on the table at the outset. One of my requirements on starting an engagement is that I have at least a short conversation with the senior manager with ultimate responsibility for the project. I often find that no one is quite sure who this would be, especially where there is a significant IT role in the project. This conversation, even if only for 15 minutes, gives me a sense of the ethos of the organisation, and a contact point that if I sense that the risks to project completion are not fully recognised then I have someone at a senior level with whom to discuss the situation.

Are all consultants perfect?

One of my colleagues read a draft of this book and felt that this chapter was being too sympathetic to consultants. "You may need to acknowledge that there are also bad consultants that soak up loads of time only to deliver superficial reports that cannot be implemented". There almost certainly are, but the aim of this book is to make sure that you never engage one. When organisations rely on a tick-the-box approach to select a consultant and fail to make any attempt to work in partnership with then then the results will certainly not meet expectations. Sometimes even very good consultants lose patience with the ineptitude of a client, do the minimum needed to fulfil the terms of the contract, and then depart very quickly indeed.

Taking a consultant's perspective

This book aims to give you the perspective on a consultant on the entire process of defining requirements through to the completion of a project. It covers all the main elements of the process but of course there will be many opportunities and challenges in the course of the project.

At all times you should try to assess how you would feel if you were the consultant. How would you feel if, just a day before a major project review meeting, you were told that a new project manager was taking over the project and they would get back to you with a revised project schedule?

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING REQUIREMENTS

At the outset it is important to be certain why there seems to be a requirement for a consultant. Quite often a decision is made at a meeting that "we need a second opinion" but no one is quite sure on what topic a second opinion is required. Another reason for being absolutely certain about the requirement is that there could well be more than one requirement and that a single consultant may not be able to address all the requirements. Consultants have a tendency to proclaim that they can solve any known problem but in reality they know exactly what their strengths, reference projects and weaknesses are.

These requirements might include:

- Having an independent assessment of the current status of the intranet, website, search and other applications in order to help make a business case for investment
- Helping to define the requirements for a major consulting project before going out to tender

- Accessing specialist or technical expertise and experience that is either not available inside the organisation, or is already dedicated to another project
- Gaining additional resources to undertake a task which might divert team members from their current work
- Undertaking an independent audit on the progress of a project, perhaps as a requirement of external funding
- Ensuring that current and planned developments are in line with good practice
- Offering training and mentoring to team members to meet emerging organisational requirements
- Supporting the selection of external products and services
- Having access to an experienced practitioner on an ad hoc basis
- Providing local support to a team some distance away from the head office team, perhaps in a different country and speaking a different language

A poor use of a consultant is to provide "a second opinion" on a contentious issue in a situation where stakeholders cannot agree on the best way forward. The "second opinion" will cause stakeholders to criticise the consultant and not solve the underlying problem which is that the person who should be making the decision does not have the experience and courage to do so.

A good initial discipline is to write down the primary objectives in no more than a couple of sentences.

"Our SharePoint 2013 technical team are based in Chicago. We need assistance in the London office to help us plan the migration strategy for our intranet from SharePoint 2010 in a way that makes the best use of knowledge of the technical and intranet teams."

If the objective reaches (say) five sentences then it is almost certain that there are two or more possibly unrelated objectives. That will never work out.

The Chartered Management Institute offers some excellent advice for the discussions at the outset of an engagement.

Buying in and using consultancy can be a valuable investment provided you:

- Allow enough time for the whole exercise
- Carefully define the area of need
- Know what you want the consultant to do
- Exercise care in selecting the right consultant
- Manage the relationship effectively
- Monitor progress towards desired outcomes
- Don't become over-dependent on the consultant
- Try to achieve knowledge transfer as part of the process.

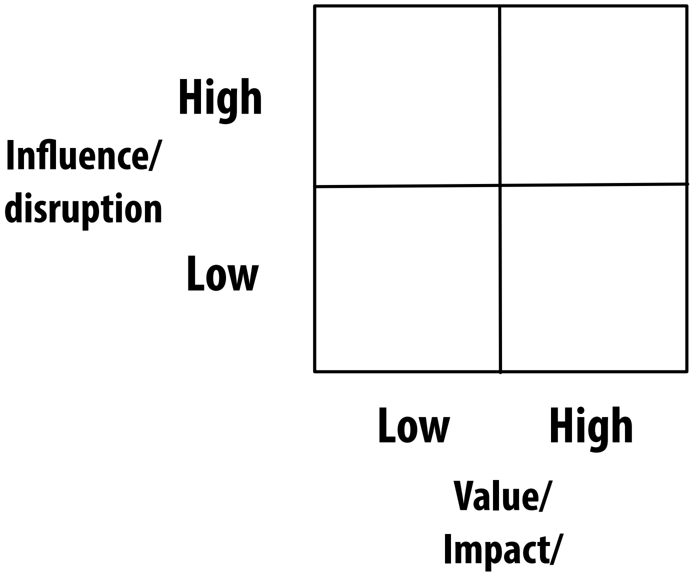
This is a very concise statement and should be used as a master checklist before sending out the Request for Proposal (RFP). All too often there is pressure to start the RFP process and only later in the project (sadly once the engagement has started) is any consideration given to the other elements in this list. That is the point where the chances of success can flip to negative in days, or even hours, or even as the outcome of a single email.

Project Boards, Sponsors and Stakeholders

Before considering engaging a consultant it is very important to ensure that the project governance is equal to the task. There are usually three levels of project governance. Members of the Project Board usually have a very direct involvement in the outcome of the project. A Project Sponsor is often a senior manager with budget responsibility for the project. Then we come to stakeholders.

The general advice given to intranet managers in particular is to make sure that they maintain good communications with stakeholders, but are rarely given any advice on how to identify who are (or should be) the stakeholders and what should be the nature of the communications. Stakeholders are individuals, not groups. Even if a change to the intranet is going to impact the work of all HR Managers then each manager needs to be treated as an individual stakeholder as it is very unlikely that there is sufficient commonality of interest and impact to treat them as a group. Stakeholders have influence over the outcome of the project and will be impacted in different levels. This is the basis for the initial consideration of potential stakeholders.

There is a well-established approach to managing stakeholder relationships and there is a list of links to guidance on the issue. The basis for stakeholder management is the following matrix.



Initially the more potential stakeholders that can be identified the better, but then the initial selection needs to be reduced to perhaps 10-15 individuals. Even in a large company there are probably no more than 20 stakeholders. Any more than this and the processes of managing them become more complex and time consuming than the intranet project itself.

A personal profile should then be prepared for each stakeholder. Many of them may not be known to every member of the project team. This profile might include:

- Career profile at the organisation
- Previous positions, especially if at an organisation with a good intranet
- Notable successes in the organisation, perhaps a major project completed inside schedule
- Other stakeholders they work with, or for, or are business colleagues
- Membership of internal committees, boards or major project teams
- Management and communications style

The reason for collecting this information is that you will be developing a communication strategy for each individual stakeholder. This information should be at the disposal of all members of the project team and the consultant. It is easy to assume that all the stakeholders are known to all the members of the team but in reality that is not likely to be the case. Every member of the team needs to be on-message with each stakeholder. The stakeholder may be next in line at the coffee machine and will be pleasantly surprised by being recognised, but not by then being given a synopsis of the project status that is at odds with a discussion they had with another member of the team just two days earlier. Managing the messages is very important.

Bringing groups of stakeholders together for a presentation is an effective way of getting a message across and making them feel that you are listening to them. However tempting it may seem to set up a meeting with High Influence – High Impact stakeholders and those in the Low Influence – Low Impact quadrant this is usually not productive as the messages will not be the same and each group will see themselves as being 'used' by the project team.

It is inevitable that stakeholders will change their position in the organisation, or even leave the organisation. Do not assume that the manager taking their place will be in the same quadrant and that communications will just be 'business as usual'. The incoming manager may have experienced a world-class intranet in their previous position and have all sorts of good (and not-so-good) ideas about what the project should be delivering.

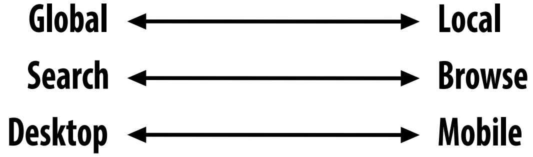
The biggest challenge is where a new stakeholder emerges. A change in organisational responsibilities could bring someone with perhaps a responsibility for HR into a corporate role. Every organisational appointment needs to be assessed to see if the people concerned need to be allocated to a different quadrant, or added to the list of stakeholders.

The reason for emphasising the management of stakeholders is that this is often where the expectation gaps are widest. As a result it is common for a consultant to have to paper over the gaps as well as undertake an interview.

Establishing requirements

It is important that all the stakeholders feel that they have been involved in the decisions to appoint a consultant and the scope of the work they will undertake. My experience suggests that even the most engaged of stakeholders is not going to find time to read a lot of documentation. It is usually much better to use schematic diagrams of the project and what it is going to achieve for stakeholders and the organisation.

Another type of diagram is a forced-pair trade-off diagram. This places various criteria at opposing ends of a line, and a set of these can be used in a discussion with individual stakeholders about what they see as important in the execution and delivery of the project being considered. Again the use of a diagram means that it is easy to talk about the elements without a lot of text which might even prejudice the views of the stakeholder.



In Chapter 3 the concept of the MoSCoW prioritization methodology is discussed at length. For the purposes of this chapter it is only necessary to know that this stands for Must Have/Should Have/Could Have/Will Not Have, and that the discussion with the stakeholders should focus on the Must Have requirements, and to a lesser extent the Will Not Have requirements. Bringing Should Have and Could Have into the discussions just makes for some complex discussions without any concrete outcomes.

Project Initiation Documents

The first step in engaging a consultant is to write what is often referred to as a Project Initiation Document (PID), the objectives of which are:

- Document and confirm that an acceptable business case exists for the project
- Ensure a firm and accepted foundation for the project
- Enable and encourage the Project Board to take ownership of the project
- Enable and encourage the Project Board to:
    - Make a decision on whether the project is viable
    - Agree to the commitment of resources for the first stage of the project
- Provide a benchmark for the decision-making processes required during the project's life
- Ensure that by carrying out initiation in an organised manner, the investment of time and effort required by the project is made wisely, taking into account the risks to the project

This does not have to be a long document, but it does need to set out the mandate from the organisation to the Project Board, and then on down to the Project Manager to embark on a consulting engagement. For the purposes of illustration the PID might be for the re-design and re-launch of an intranet that is currently on Microsoft SharePoint 2010 onto SharePoint 2013, taking into account the roadmap for SharePoint 2016 and beyond. In the process of developing the PID the Project Manager may realise that there is no expertise in the organisation in managing a content migration project as the person responsible for the SP2010 intranet left the organisation several years previously.

The decision is then taken to engage a consultant, and potentially contract staff, to write a migration strategy and plan, and a Project Initiation Document is written for the approval of the Project Board. Now there are two projects running concurrently.

The move from SharePoint 2010 to SharePoint 2013 is a decision that has been taken by the IT Director and the schedule for the upgrade has been agreed, taking into account other IT projects. The schedule of this upgrade, and the some of the implications on implementation and roll-out, will also impact the intranet content migration project. Now there are three projects which need to be synchronised. This is often when things start to fall apart because it is not clear who has the overall mandate for all the projects, and how much scope the Intranet Manager has to define the scope of the content migration project.

This is quite a common situation and can be the root cause of a difficult and potentially unsuccessful engagement with a consultant. Ideally the consultant wants to work with a project manager who has the authority over all aspects of the project for which they have been engaged. It is not unusual for the consultant, in order to meet their agreed objectives, to have to act as a go-between for the various projects. This comprises the extent to which they can deliver as agreed with the Intranet Manager, involves them in work for which they cannot claim a fee for and can often result in a serious level of conflict between the project teams.

The only approach that can be taken is that the Project Initiation Document for the content migration not only has to define what is in scope but explicitly (and certainly not implicitly) what is out of scope. This should at least give the Intranet Manager and the Migration Consultant the basis for agreeing a project schedule and deliverables.

Fitness to specification or purpose

The most important lesson I learned during several years at Logica running a very large project with around 20 in the team was the difference between 'fitness to specification' and 'fitness to purpose'. Ensuring that the engagement met the specification is (at least in principle) fairly easy. However as the engagement proceeds it usually becomes apparent that the PID is not totally aligned with what the organisation actually needs. That is when the skills of a consultant in helping the organisation to recognise this mis-match and realign the project are put to the test.

The reaction of the organisation is often that the consultant is just trying to expand the scope of the project and increase the fee. The easy approach for the consultant is to ignore the problem, deliver absolutely to specification and walk away with the money. The organisation cannot challenge this as the project specification has been met. However that is not the way that professional consultants work. They are willing to enter into what might be challenging discussions with the client to work through how they could address the purpose of the project, not just the specification.

The project manager may also feel challenged by the recommendations as they feel that a change in the project might extend the project schedule, leading to criticism of their ability to manage the project and potentially having an impact on other projects. This is where building an effective and transparent partnership between the consultant and the organisation is so important. All too often I come across a project plan that is incarcerated (I chose that word with care and experience!) in a Microsoft Project file that sets out project timelines and tasks for 6-9 month project (quite typical for a content migration project) on the basis of guesses from a project team that has never undertaken a project of this type or scale before.

Project plans, requirements and aspirations are almost always in error, and there will be a need to change the time scale, resources and scope at some time during the project. A mark of a good project plan is that there is a process for managing this change, with float time built in where it is already accepted that the outcomes of one phase of the project might require reconsideration of subsequent phases.

CHAPTER 3

WRITING THE 'REQUEST FOR A PROPOSAL'

There are a number of three-letter acronyms for pre-contract documents. As well as RFP there is ITT (Invitation to Tender) and RFQ (Request for a Quotation). There could also be an RFI (Request for Information) as a precursor document to identify potential consultants that might then be invited to tender for the project in due course.

Before starting work on any of these the first question to be asked is why an RFP is being written. In principle the purpose of an RFP is to select the best consultant from others with a capability to undertake the work required. Some organisations, especially in the public sector, require an RFP to be issued for any work to be undertaken by an external contractor above a specific invoice value. The reasons for taking this approach when public funds are involved is understandable. However there are some issues that need to be taken into consideration:

- The process of writing the RFP and selecting a consultant could easily take several months
- The process assumes that the organisation knows all the potential consultants who could undertake the work. It is not uncommon for consultants who have not been sent the RFP to become aware of its existence and asks to be included. The organisation then faces the issue of whether to extend the number of potential bidders and perhaps the schedule in order to include a consultant they were not aware of but who seems to meet all the RFP requirements
- The procurement process involves people being involved in the selection process who do not understand the skills and experience required to undertake the project
- Some consultants do not bid on RFPs as a matter of principle. Indeed the more successful the consultant as a result of their reputation and professional networks the less likely they are to respond to an RFP
- The rules set out by the organisation may result in the selection of a consultant who meets the rules but who at the final stage of a presentation to the selection team turns out to be a potentially poor fit with the ethos of the organisation
- A consultant may start out submitting a response to RFP and then at some point later in the process decide not to proceed because they have been offered a more enticing engagement

There are other options open to selecting a consultant and these are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Defining the RFP scope

The RFP sets out the requirements for two projects, not one. The first of these projects is the overall organisation project to specify, select, install and implement the new intranet. The second is the project that will be undertaken by an external consultant. Both these projects need to be described in sufficient detail to convince the consultant that it is worth their while writing a proposal. Indeed the quality of the RFP document itself in terms of clarity will be taken into account by potential consultants. With any project there are risks associated with it.

If the RFP suggests inadvertently that the originating organisation has little or no understanding of the risks and the work that will be required to deliver either the overarching project or the project that is the subject of the RFP then they may decide not to waste their time on a proposal. This is especially the case where it is obvious from the start that it has been written by someone in IT or Procurement that has little first-hand knowledge of either of the projects.

The most obvious sign of a Procurement-led RFP is the requirement to provide information on the trading performance of the company. In most countries small businesses and sole traders do not have to disclose a profit and loss account, usually just a balance sheet. Larger consultancies may well be partnerships and the reporting requirements will also not disclose revenues and profits. If there is no legal requirement to disclose then there is also no justification for the information to be requested as mandatory in the proposal.

Organisations often fail to realise that the RFP has to be sales pitch to consultants. If the RFP route is being chosen it usually means that there is no established consulting partners. Equally the potential consultants may never have heard of your organisation. Even if they do they may not appreciate all the nuances of the work of the organisation. Consultants tend to like interesting projects where they can work as partners, make a substantial difference to the organisation and gain knowledge that will gain them more business in the future. If the language of the RFP is too rigid and prescriptive and/or looks like it was written by a team then perhaps only those consultants with little forward work will bid.

It is important to understand that the RFP, the subsequent evaluation of proposals and then the contract document are all linked together. The RFP document must be formatted in a way that all the relevant information can be gathered from the proposal and then rigorously evaluated to arrive at the selection of a consultant with whom a contract can quickly be negotiated. It is not usual for the questions that come in from consultants who have read the RFP to raise a host of issues that the project team failed to address in the document. This can put the entire process at risk because either the RFP has to be rewritten (pushing the project schedule back) or an addendum has to be circulated which rarely integrates well with the original document.

MoSCoW Prioritisation

It is easy for an RFP to descend into Chinese menu style with every conceivable requirement set out in a standard format. Some years ago now I was asked to review an RFP for an enterprise search application which had 516 requirements. Although this was a software requirement and not a professional services RFP we ended up being able to reduce the requirements to just over 30. One approach to assist in working through the relative importance of the elements of an RFP is the MoSCoW methodology.

The MoSCoW acronym stands for

- Must Have
- Should Have
- Could Have
- Won't Have This Time

This prioritisation approach was developed by Dai Clegg working at Oracle UK in the early 1990s. It is simple and effective.

Must Have

Must Have requirements represent the Minimum Usable Subset of requirements that have to be delivered by the project. It should not be confused with the Minimum Viable Product approach developed by Eric Reis in which a new product or website is developed with sufficient features to satisfy early adopters and to which additional features can then be added in due course. The touchstone question is whether it is worth continuing with the project if a proposed Must Have is not met. If the answer is no then the requirement is a Must Have. A fixed point has to be the delivery date. If the date is not fixed then the prioritisation process is a waste of time. Given time any very complex project can be delivered, with Concorde being a notable example. This is why the Won't Have priority has a clear Time limit on the definition.

This also means that a Must Have for an initial phase of a project may not be a Must Have for a subsequent phase of a project. However care needs to be taken that a Must Have is removed from the initial phase without a full recognition of the dependency on the Must Have in the second or subsequent phases. It can also lead to confusion about what has been agreed, especially if the phases are running concurrently at any time and not in sequence.

Complications can arise when there are, in effect, two sets of Must Haves. One set comes from the stakeholders and the project team and the other set comes from IT and/or Procurement. These may be (to them) very important Must Haves, such as the contractor having a Microsoft Most Valued Professional Award. There is no point in a two-step process, with the project team assessing the proposal on the basis of the project deliverable Must Haves and then IT/Procurement applying the second set. All the MoSCoW priorities have to be brought together, with the owner of the Must Haves being present at the discussion of the proposals. They have to be able to make their case for their Must Haves, taking into account the potential impact on the number of proposals still being on the table at the end of the case being made.

However the IT/Procurement Must Haves should be relevant to the project. In the course of writing this chapter I was invited to respond to an intranet audit RFP which had a table which asked for the number of products I had sold over the last three years by sales territory in the USA. I did not bother to read further, let alone respond.

Must Haves are not negotiable. The most telling test of this is to ask the project owner that if the day before launch a Must Have cannot be achieved will they agree to the launch being deferred. If the answer is that the project can be deferred then the Must Have is at best a Should Have.

Should Have

Should Have requirements have a pain associated with them. If they are not met then at least one of the business stakeholders is going to be put in a difficult, if not embarrassing, position. It may be that there is a work-around, with someone staying in post longer than was anticipated, but that means that the increase in budget is going to have to be picked up by someone, and that is always a painful discussion.

Could Have

Could Haves are relative. They fall between the Should Haves and the Won't Have This Time. They are less important and crucially the users of the application are not going to notice the absence of the Could Haves. The application will still deliver a substantial amount of benefit.

Won't Have This Time

Won't Have This Time is not relative to the other requirements. It is a clear statement that the requirement will not be delivered within the agreed time period. The objective in setting out Won't Have This Time priorities is that it helps to avoid scope creep. Sometimes a project goes well enough to have some time and resources in hand, and someone suggests that the intranet can have a rotating carousel on the home page after all. The answer is that it will not as it is out of scope, and the resource now available will be better placed in reserve for a contingency or used to enhance the quality of one of the other requirements.

As a rough guide to resources requirements 60% of the resource should be allocated to meeting the Must Have Requirements and 20% each to the Should Have and Could Have. That gives a 20% contingency from not proceeding with the Could Haves.

There is much to be said for starting with the all the requirements at the Won't Have This Time level and then working up. This is because it means that a conscious decision is taken on what is out of scope and reduces the number of requirements in the other categories. The discussion around the exclusions can also help define exactly what the other categories should be.

Making MoSCoW work

There are a number of good practice processes that can be of assistance in working through the prioritisation:

- Is a Must Have linked directly to a business objective? If not then either the business requirements are not correct or the Must Have requirement is not appropriate
- Is there more than one requirement expressed in any of the statements?
- Are the IT/Procurement Must Haves applicable to the project?
- Is a Must Have dependent on a Should Have or even a Could Have? That should never be the case
- Keep the number of Must Haves to the absolute minimum. Each should be justified by the its absence bringing the project to a halt

All Must Haves have to be defined in absolute (quantified) terms. "Easy to use" is not a Must Have because Easy is a value judgement. "Capable of indexing 100Gb of content an hour" can be a Must Have.

The four column approach to an RFP

At the outset of the RFP development process it can be helpful to construct a four-column table that sets out:

- The objectives of the projects
- How these will be presented in the RFP
- How they will be evaluated from the proposals
- How the contract will then be constructed

This does not need to be an elegant spreadsheet. Using a whiteboard to capture the core elements and then taking a photograph is often good enough. The reason for including the objectives is to include the stakeholders in the process. As the discussion of the content of the four columns progresses one or more of the stakeholders may have a Eureka moment and perhaps suggest that there are two projects that need to go out to tender, rather than one. Using a whiteboard enables changes of mind to be erased without future embarrassment.

The structure of the RFP

A search through Google or Bing will reveal a plethora of RFP templates, and almost certainly the organisation will have RFP templates of its own. Often these templates are unsuitable for a professional services contract. The danger of using a template is that the resulting document fails to communicate the requirements of the project.

Rather than take the template ask to see an RFP that the organisation has written for another professional services engagement. The usual requirement for imposing a template for an RFP is that it helps to compare the differences in the proposals from a number of different consultants. In reality it doesn't because the template, usually complete with a maximum word length for each section, constrains bidders to write virtually identical documents.

As the consultant reads through the RFP there will be a fairly standard set of questions for which they will be seeking answers. The questions are set out below.

What are the objectives of the projects and the success criteria?

The more clearly the overall project objectives and the work package specific to the RFP are set out the more interested the consultant will be in responding. A consultant will be looking for a good summary of the requirements that provides a context for the rest of the document. If there is no summary, or it is of poor quality, the consultant is immediately concerned that the organisation has not really thought about the project and the requirements.

Why is this RFP now being *issued?*

The subsidiary question is "Why now?" A consultant dislikes being brought in when it is too late to make a difference to the outcome of the project. There is always the risk that they get the blame for not being able to work miracles with a project that started to fail some time before. Often the catalyst is a new manager, either for the application or for the department responsible for it. That is useful to know as the consultant may have to tread carefully as the new manager may not yet have the full support of all the stakeholders.

Who are the stakeholders and project team?

It is always good to see the names of the core stakeholders and of the project team. It enables the consultant to look them up in LinkedIn and other social media sites. If there is a project team then it is helpful to define the roles that they will play in the project.

How it is envisaged that the work will be undertaken?

Some indication of the number of interviews that might need to be undertaken, and the work that might already have been carried out (perhaps a survey of users) are both helpful. The consultant may propose a different approach but at least they have a sense of the scale of the project. If the methodology is too prescriptive ("The consultant will undertake 20 interviews in the first two weeks of the project") then right at the outset there is a strong suggestion that the organisation is looking for a contractor, not a consultant. The unreality of completing 20 interviews in the first two weeks also makes alarm bells ring.

By when will the work need to be undertaken, and why?

What the consultant is looking for is any "hard" dates, such as the end of specific month, which give little scope for shifting the delivery date to achieve a better match to requirements. There might be a good reason for the deadline, but often it was set several months before the RFP was written and already time is starting to run out. Another issue is that good consultants are busy people and it may not prove possible or desirable for them to change the schedule of a current project to meet the required deadlines.

How will it be delivered?

This book is about professional services engagements and not software development. The only delivery options are presentations, discussions and reports, and the balance of these, and their timing, should be indicated in the RFP.

Where will the work be undertaken? The issue here is the amount of time that will need to be spent on site, and the location of the sites. With good remote access and Skype or Lync a consultant can often undertake a substantial amount of work from their own office, or there might be an office local to the consultant where a desk could be made available as required.

What remote access will there be to corporate networks and applications?

The challenge here is less access to an intranet or search application than access to a shared collaboration project spaces. Often access to these spaces is for read-only access and that makes it very difficult to comment on documents

What are the risk factors that will need to be managed?

Few RFPs list out the risks for the project as seen by the team which can be very helpful to the consultant in planning the approach. It also indicates that the team has thought carefully about the project.

What is the budget?

This is very rarely disclosed, which from a consultant viewpoint is unhelpful. An indication of the budget being in the region of €20k to €35k is helpful. It means that the organisation does not get responses from consultants who are going to be way beyond the budget and consultants don't waste their time bidding on a project that they are never going to be considered for once their financial bid is noted in the proposal. The view is often taken that if a budget is set then the consultant will bid up to that budget. That may well be true but in the end the consultant making the bid has to justify the price, so what is there for the organisation to worry about in disclosing the budget? Unless of course everyone on the project team knows that it is totally inadequate and wants the evidence from the RFP responses to make a new business case!

What is the financial basis of the contract?

The options for the financial basis for a consulting contract are discussed in detail in Chapter 5. The main concern of small consulting companies and sole consultants is cash flow. From a consultant perspective any vagueness about payments will stand out in large red letters. They do not what to see "A phased payment approach will be discussed with the consultant as the project proceeds" or anything along those lines. Either the project is fixed price or is time-taken based.

What references are being asked for?

Consultants specialising in website development are in an excellent position to be able to provide visible references. In the case of intranets, enterprise social networks and search it is extremely unlikely that permission will be given to describe the project and include screen shots. The moment this requirement emerges from the RFP consultants will know that the RFP was written either by IT or Procurement and all interest in bidding ceases.

How will questions about the RFP be handled?

Ideally a consultant will wish to have a meeting with the project team to discuss and clarify the RFP. It is common practice for the organisation issuing the RFP to invite questions from potential bidders that are then collated and anonymised and circulated to everyone. A downside of the integrated Q&A response is that consultants who do not appreciate some of the challenges involved have their eyes opened by consultants that do appreciate them, thereby perhaps gaining a competitive advantage.

If there is no opportunity for clarification then that will probably be taken as an indication that the RFP is being issued just to satisfy the procurement policies of the organisation that stipulate that there have to be three responses to a tender.

You should also be aware that consultants are able to spot RFPs where the requirements hint strongly that a consultant has already been selected but the organisation is going through a ritual RFP process to satisfy the procurement policies.

What is the evaluation schedule?

A clear schedule for the circulation of questions, the receipt of the proposal and the date for a presentation for short-listed consultants should be clearly stated.

An RFP is not a legal document

When the responses arrive almost certainly the project team will wish that they had taken more time over sections of the document as the responses are 'correct' but unhelpful in assessing the potential benefits of engaging a consultant. An RFP is only a way of gaining proposals that will eventually lead to a contract being placed, and it is better to cope with the pain of revising the RFP or the selection criteria at the outset than when a legally enforceable (by both sides) contract has been signed.

Options to avoid the RFP process

The list of consultants working in the information management, intranet, search and related areas is not a very long one. Many of them tweet and blog, which will give you a good indication of their interests and their ability to dig down into issues. In Europe there are a number of intranet communities, notably IntraTeam, JBoye and the Digital Workplace Group. JBoye and the Digital Workplace Group also have communities in North America. Membership of these communities will usually provide a short list of consultants that have completed successful engagements even if details of the engagement may have to remain confidential. The chances of a successful engagement are increased by several orders of magnitude if you know someone who knows someone who knows the consultant. If the chain is much longer than then you are venturing into dangerous waters.

My ideal situation is when someone calls me up and explains what their requirements are. If it ticks my own set of initial criteria (clear statement of requirements, interesting project, industry area I am reasonably familiar with) then I suggest a meeting with the prospect without any obligation to engage me.

To me that initial meeting is a touchstone. It gives me a chance to meet the person I may end up working for, and likewise they get to meet me. The partnership chemistry is everything. How the process proceeds from there varies from prospect to prospect. I am never prescriptive. I must be doing something right as in 15 years of business I have only once made a trading loss.

If I am told in that initial discussion that they are just building a short list to send RFP to then only in special cases will I let my name be put forward. The project has to be well-defined, interesting and offer me opportunities to increase my sector and technical knowledge.

The message is that if you can avoid sending out an RFP you will save a substantial amount of time and effort without decreasing the chances of finding the consultant you need and deserve. However I do respect that there are situations where an RFP has to be issued.

CHAPTER 4

ASSESSING THE PROPOSALS

Despite my advice at the end of the previous chapter I accept that the organisation may have had to issue an RFP and is now faced with assessing the proposals and choosing a preferred bidder. Writing the RFP, assessing the proposals and then agreeing a contract are three processes that have to be linked very closely together. Assessing a proposal where the RFP has omitted an important requirement or has not been explicit in the scope of a requirement is always going to cause problems. Some of the responses may have recognised the problem and suggested work that was not specifically included in the RFP. Should they be regarded as "better" proposals because of this at the risk of excluding a bidder that met all the stated requirements of the RFP?

This can be a particular problem with public sector projects where there might be a Freedom of Information request on how the contract was awarded. A common example with intranet projects is the requirement for the contractor to develop a design or an architecture for the new intranet. Could this requirement be met by a few PowerPoint schematics or is a full set of wireframes for the first two levels of the site required?

Proposal scoring

Some organisations score the elements of a proposal and then award the project to the proposal with the most points. This is an approach that IT departments use to evaluate software products but is not appropriate in the case of a professional services engagement. It is a seriously poor way to select a contractor. The person who suggests this approach would not have chosen their doctor or their lawyer in this way. The fundamental problem is that every member of the selection team will assess the match between the requirement and the proposal in a different way. It is just the same as two or more people assessing the relevance of items in a list of search results. Another negative is that it assumes that either all elements are important of there is a complex allocation of scores in an attempt to come up with a balanced assessment. The best advice I can offer is not to consider scoring proposals. No one benefits.

Value for money

Another way that is guaranteed to result in the wrong consultant being appointed is to declare that the over-riding criteria is Value for Money. Invariably no definition is given in the RFP of what the elements are and so the award becomes totally arbitrary on the basis of a HIPPO decision – a decision made by the Highest Paid Person's Opinion. Many consultants I know make the decision not to bother to tender when this is the evaluation basis because almost certainly the project will go to the lowest tender price no matter how much better the proposals bid at a higher price may be.

In Chapter 1 I wrote about the multiplier between the day rate and the gross income of the consultant. When looking at low day rates multiple by 100 and then look at the position that would have this salary in your organisation. If that equates to a reasonably senior manager then the consultant may have the experience to deliver a quality outcome. If it equates to a new graduate entrant then the organisation needs to feel very comfortable that they could be engaging someone with a broadly similar earning power for a project that is business-critical.

Consultant fit

No proposal should ever be awarded on the basis of a review of the proposals alone, and without asking the prospective contractors on the short list to make a presentation to the evaluation team. It takes a substantial amount of effort to write a good proposal and the best consultants will not waste their time if there is no opportunity to meet the team.

The team also needs to meet the consultant because of the importance of assessing the likely fit with the team. In addition at some time during the project there is going to be a requirement for the consultant to make a presentation to stakeholders about the interim or final outcomes of the project. A good question to have an answer to at the outset is whether the consultant is not only going to be able to give a high quality presentation to senior members of the organisation but also be able to respond effectively to their questions.

A presentation also gives both the team and the consultants a chance to address issues which did (for some unaccountable reasons!) escape the RFP or only emerged as the proposals were being reviewed. The care with which a presentation is prepared and given is probably a more accurate assessment of professional skills than a written proposal because if any of the consultants seems not to be able to communicate in a pressurised face-to-face situation then their ability to do so during the project has to be questioned.

The presentation should not be a way of gaining free advice ("So what options do you think we have?") or asking for definitive statements on methodology and schedules before the contract has been awarded. I never let prospects have a copy of my presentation and take it on my own machine so that it does not get accidentally copied. The consultant will have to put a lot of effort into the presentation and that takes time that could be billed to other clients. It rarely happens but I think it is good practice to pay the expenses of the consultant. It also levels the playing field between a consultant who lives locally and one that lives some distance away, perhaps in a different country.

At the interview

A consultant will expect to be asked the following questions as it gives them a chance to illustrate their strengths:

- What strengths do you possess that will prove particularly helpful in connection with this project?
- Can you briefly describe similar projects that you have undertaken?
- What did you learn from these that we should take on board?
- How would you describe the challenges we face from the limited amount you now know about us?
- What problems do you anticipate as we begin to work together?
- What would you expect from us to make sure that we build a good working relationship with you?

There is nothing more frustrating when a prospective client focused in incidental details. On several occasions I have been asked "So what is an information scientist?" Remember that the consultant is assessing whether they want to work with you at the same time that you are assessing them. That includes considering the level of attention and quality of the interviewing by other members of the panel. A few years ago one of these panel members was dealing with their emails during the presentation. I suggested to the chairperson that perhaps we should take a break so that Mr. Jones could take care of his obviously urgent business. I was still awarded the project.

References

The nature of consulting work, and the confidentiality of most projects, is that it may be difficult to get references for a consultant. A good consultant should be able to provide at least three contacts who would be able to provide an assessment of their work without getting into the details of the project. You should then be able to have a brief conversation covering the nature of consultant's duties, their strengths, any problems that may have arisen during the collaboration, and whether overall the consultant delivered to expectations.

When asking reference questions it is worth considering what information you would disclose if someone called you for a reference for the consultant in due course. That should give you a sense of what might be difficult for the person you are talking to to disclose.

The assessment schedule

Any consultant bidding on a RFP knows that the minute it has been emailed they have lost all control over the assessment process. For the period of time until they know the outcome of their bid they are in a state of suspended animation, especially for small consultancies or individual consultants. It should take no more than a week to review the proposals and a date for the presentations should have been included in the RFP so that the consultant can keep that date open in their diary. The final decision should be made in days, not weeks. It is courteous to keep all the bidders informed of the progress of the assessment.

The final decision

At the end of the evaluation process someone will have to take the responsibility for moving ahead with discussions with a preferred contractor. This expression is important. There is still a contract to be negotiated and a schedule of work to be agreed. It could well be that between submitting the proposal and being invited to give a presentation the consultant has acquired another engagement which makes it difficult for them to commit to the original schedules. Having a Plan B is important, and indeed not having a strong second-place candidate should be seen as a risk to the project. It exposes the organisation to a risk if something unexpected happens that prevents the selected consultant from continuing with the engagement.

To be fair to the Plan B consultant there should be a defined time period in which it is anticipated the contract terms will be agreed. Two weeks is probably acceptable. The Plan B consultant can then at least know that on a specific date they will either be told that their proposal has not been accepted or will be told that, subject to contract they will be offered the engagement.

CHAPTER 5

AGREEING THE CONTRACT

Agreeing the terms of the contract with a consultant shifts the ownership of the process from the project manager to someone who is able to take the legal responsibility for the engagement. This responsibility is never taken lightly and as a result there is often frustration from the project manager and the consultant on the length of time it seems to be taking to finalise the paperwork.

The process of agreeing the contract has a number of steps, each of which may require sign-off from different managers in the organisation.

- Is the contract value within the budget that had been agreed for the project?
- Given the contract value who in the organisation has the authority to commit the organisation to the expenditure?
- Is it clear what is going to be delivered by the consultant, both on an interim and final basis?

- What will be the terms of payment (e.g. 30 days after presentation of the invoice)?
- How will the progress of the work being undertaken by the consultant be monitored?
- What precautions are being taken if the work is not of an acceptable quality or the consultant is not able to complete some of the work?
- What access will the consultant have to internal information and applications?
- What insurance cover will the consultant be expected to have for the project?

On their own none of these are difficult decisions to make, but the sequence in which these need to be addressed may be prolonged because the manager concerned is not available or needs further information before sign-off. Professional services contracts are always more of a problem to agree because of the difficulties in deciding whether the advice given represents a full delivery in the terms of the contract.

Starting early

The time to start considering the contract terms is before the Request for a Proposal has been written. This is because these terms should to be written into the RFP so that there is no confusion from anyone about what has been agreed. This is especially the case over the payment procedures. If the organisation will only accept a fixed-price offer then this has to be made clear in the RFP. For an intranet or search manager this may be the first time they have had to work through a contract process and it is very valuable to have walked down the corridors of the finance department, identified all the people who may be involved in the contract preparation and authorisation and then briefed them about the nature of the project.

Usually they will appreciate being in the loop at the earliest possible stage because they will be dealing with a lot of other contract documents. Timing can be crucial. Most organisations have a quarterly management reporting and budget cycle and having a draft contract arrive on the day before the books are closed for the quarter may result in it being moved into the next quarter for processing. A peak period for work in any finance department will be the annual audit, and an appreciation of the timing of the preparatory work for the audit will ensure that the draft contract does not spend several weeks in a pending tray because of the work that has to be carried out to meet financial compliance requirements.

Build on a template

It can be immensely helpful to see if the finance department have a similar contract that has been used in the past. Even if it is for a totally different type of consulting engagement (perhaps providing training or recruitment services) it will provide a precedent that will help both the finance and project teams identify areas that will be of concern and equally examples of text for perhaps indemnity cover that can be cut and pasted into the contract under discussion. Of course the financial terms may need to be redacted but they will only be a small element of the contract. The consultant may also have examples of contracts that they have agreed with other clients, and they too may be helpful in moving the process forward.

Fixed and time-based fees

There are two approaches to fixing the fee for the engagement. The first is a fixed fee for defined deliverables. Here the risk is shared between the consultant and the client. The consultant knows what their income is going to be and the client can be confident that it is within the budget. However the consultant also has to take into account the potential risks of the engagement. If they do not have confidence that the project has been clearly scoped out, and the deliverables agreed then they will build a risk factor into the contract so that they are not out of pocket if things change a little. Making changes to a fixed-price contract, even when both the consultant and the project manager accept the need to do so, can be quite challenging.

The second option is for the consultant to charge on a time-worked basis. This can either be billed on a monthly basis or the time set against an upfront payment. The main problem here is that clients rarely understand how long it takes to set up interviews, write up notes and prepare reports. As a result there is a lot of pressure to write a 50,000 word report in a couple of days to keep the fees inside the budget, and this will inevitably compromise the quality of the report.

There has to be a discussion with the consultant about a mutually effective fee payment approach. This approach may be different for a further phase of work. Of course there may be an edict from Finance or Procurement about which option will be imposed on the consultant. This may cause a consultant to back out from a project. Remember always that the best consultants are busy people and they will almost certainly have a pipeline of work that enables them to walk away if the going gets difficult. So often when talking to fellow consultants, and indeed in my own experience, organisations fail to be upfront about budgets and payment schedules. They seem intent on turning it into a game where they hold all the aces. Even if a compromise is found the relationship between client and consultant will never be a true partnership.

A particular problem arises when the organisation is a charity and feels unable to offer a contract at what might be seen as a very high corporate-sector rate. Consultants respect the work that charities (and similar organisations) undertake and may be prepared to accept a lower rate if there is an open discussion about the rate and scope of work.

Room for manoeuvre

At the outset it is advisable to understand from the consultant what latitude they may be able to offer that will expedite the contract process. An example of this is where the organisation is only able to offer 45 days payment terms rather than the 30 days that the consultant has specified. However if the consultant is able to invoice for a percentage of the total fee on the date of the signing of the contract then this may overcome the impact on cash flow of the 45 day payment term. I can still remember the impact on my cash flow when a contract with a Swedish company was moved from one division to another and the payment terms moved from 30 days to 90 days. This is not uncommon in larger organisations.

Heads of Agreement

The concept of a Heads of Agreement document is that it sets out the key elements of a contract on a non-binding basis (at least in English law) and is an effective way of summarising an agreed position of the outcomes of any discussions about project scope, start and end dates and deliverables. This can easily be cut and pasted from the bid document and edited to take account of discussions post the agreement in principle to proceed. It therefore provides a basis for the manoeuvre discussions that have been outlined in the previous section.

I have set out my Heads of Agreement on my website and reference them in any initial proposals and discussions so that they are on the table from the outset.

Managing travel and expenses

An area that is often more grey than it should be is the way that travel expenses are agreed and reimbursed. For multi-national projects the consultant could be faced with a significant up-front cost in air fares before they are reimbursed by the organisation. One of the issues that needs to be confirmed is the class of travel in trains and planes (especially for trans-oceanic flights) and the star level of hotels. I always try to obtain a copy of the organisation's travel policy and use this as the precedent in the negotiations. This may require a decision about what level of seniority in the organisation I am equivalent to. Many of my projects have involved a significant amount of travel and being able to have a comfortable flight and a good hotel make such a difference to my ability to work at maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

My personal flight record is leaving London on Monday, stopping long enough at JKF Airport, New York to pick up a colleague before flying on to San Francisco for the night. On Tuesday we drove down to Mountain View for a meeting and lunch. We drove back to San Francisco Airport on Tuesday afternoon, arriving back in London to report to a Project Board Meeting on Wednesday afternoon.

Another travel-related issue is that when there is a substantial amount of travel involved the consultant may well be losing out on the ability to earn fee income because of the down-time in travel for another client. When working for the IMF in 2001 I ended up taking eight return flights to Washington in the space of three months. The IMF were very amenable to recognising not just the air fare but also the time spent in the air in the billed fee A typical approach might be that for any period of travel longer than six hours away from the office the client is charged at a 50% fee rate.

It may come as a surprise to find that this apparently small issue can be a sticking point in contract negotiations, especially for solo consultants. Setting out what the organisation's policies are in the RFP along with the fee basis at least puts them on the table at the outset.

Cross-jurisdiction billing

Another issue that comes up is when work is being carried out in Europe for a US company as an illustration. Here the tax laws in the USA need to be taken into account as does the VAT element of billing in Europe. This is not something that the project manager can agree but is certainly something that may take many emails and telephone calls to resolve. It may seem very straightforward in practice for a French consultant to bill the French office for work an organisation with headquarters in the USA and just have the amount transferred internally between the two offices. However there are almost always compliance reporting reasons for this not to be able to take place. I am still owed money from 2007 by a US-based professional services firm who thought it would be easy for me to bill the UK office for work undertaken in the UK for the US HQ organisation. I long ago gave up on the task of being paid.

Contract extensions

It is quite common for a consultant to work on a phased basis. Perhaps it is not possible for Phase 2 to be confirmed until Phase 1 is partially or fully completed, or Phase 2 is well defined but cannot start for several weeks, or even months, after Phase 1. Considerable care needs to be taken in either confirming a subsequent Phase or asking the consultant for a revised proposal of work that takes into account a redefinition of the Phase. It may well be that the contract for subsequent work has to be with a different department, or signed off by a different budget holder who is unaware (sadly often uninterested!) in what the initial Phase was all about. Another problem that I have come across is when the organisation decides to freeze expenditure on external consultants. There is no easy fix!

Scalability management

It is often difficult at the outset of an engagement to know how many people will be interviewed, how many reports will have to be prepared and how many meetings will need to be attended. The challenge for the organisation and the consultant is to find a mutually acceptable way of accommodating extensions to the scope of work within the terms of the contract. My own experience is that I usually seem to need to interview around 20 stakeholders and senior managers at the start of a major intranet strategy project, just as a factor of how many departments organisations tend to have. Rather than define 20 interviews I usually state that I will undertake 20 interview sessions, each of which may have up to three participants.

Now I would be the first to admit that interviewing three people at the same time is not ideal but it can be done. The point is that it enables me to go firm on 20 hours of interview time which gives me and the client flexibility to change the number of interviewees. This also overcomes the situation where an interviewee brings along a colleague. Would you charge for two interviews? I would suggest not.

Insurance

It is not uncommon for organisations to require consultants to have professional indemnity insurance. It is probably equally uncommon for smaller consultancies and single consultants to have this insurance, and I am in that category. I do carry public indemnity insurance as required by UK law for registered companies but that is not a requirement for partnerships and sole traders. I have highlighted the insurance aspect as it might turn out to be a deal breaker, especially if Procurement have a checklist and insurance is on the list.

Postponement and cancellation

There is a range of reasons why a project may need to be put on hold for a while, or even cancelled. These could be reasons that could not be foreseen. My experience includes a senior project manager walking out of the office without giving notice, the acquisition of the organisation I was working for and an incoming CEO taking a decision to put all consulting projects over a certain fee level on hold until he had reviewed them.

Access to sites and locations

When I was working for the IMF the team were all made employees of the IMF with a zero salary and zero benefits. This enabled us to have passes which gave us access to both the IMF buildings without an escort. We could then set up a meeting with someone at short notice with a telephone call and go down to their office to meet them. It had the additional benefit of the four of us (one an ex-IMF senior manager) being regarded as trusted individuals and the quality of the conversations was that much higher.

Nowadays building security is much more rigorous, and rightly so, but the extent to which a consultant may be able to move around a building without being accompanied by a member of staff needs to be agreed at the outset as it will almost certainly need to be signed off by someone with the appropriate authority.

Confidentiality

A Non-Disclosure Agreement is essential. I usually add a clause that forbids the client passing on any document I have created to a third party without my written permission as some years ago I found that an RFP I was responding to quoted some definitions from a report I had written for another organisation.

Change control

I would say that the better the outcome of the engagement the more likely it is that there will have been some small, or even major, changes to the scope of the project. It is important that the person who has the authority to change the scope is clearly defined. It has to be a single person, and it is this person's responsibility to negotiate any change to the fee for the engagement. I see no reason why the consultant should have to act as a facilitator between the Head of Communications and the Finance Department, which is what happened early in my career before I changed my own rules of engagement.

Subcontracting

As the project proceeds it may start to become obvious that additional resources and skills are needed. There are a number of options that could be considered:

- Ask the consultant to locate and hire these skills, taking responsibility for the work delivered, and paying the additional consultants or contractors from their fee (obviously re-negotiated)
- Ask the consultant to locate these skills and make recommendations on who should be hired, but with the organisation then negotiating a contract with each of the additional consultants or contractors

Bypass the consultant and recruit additional consultants and contractors directly Depending on an individual situation any of these three approaches may be appropriate. At the start of an engagement this requirement may only be theoretical but as the requirement can emerge with little notice some consideration of the approaches at the outset is advisable.

CHAPTER 6

DEFINING DELIVERABLES

When it comes to defining the outcomes of a project the devil is in the detail. All too often the RFP will make vague references to the requirement for an "Interim Report" and a "Final Report" or to an "Outline Information Architecture for the Intranet". It is also not uncommon to see a requirement for a presentation to stakeholders, but it could make a substantial difference to a project if the presentation needs to be given before the final report is delivered as a way of the stakeholders providing input into the report.

This is because getting all the stakeholders together, even virtually, at a mutually convenient time can make herding cats and sheep seem quite easy, and doing so can delay the closure of the project. This could be a serious problem for the consultant who may already have agreed a start date for another project.

It is understandable that organisations may not be able to define exactly what they need until perhaps a couple of weeks into a project when the consultant has undertaken some initial work. However this is not an excuse for failing to discuss the deliverables at the stage of writing the RFP. (In passing I would like to note that I dislike the prevalent use of the word "deliverable" as a generic term.)

The Final Report

Most projects will involve the delivery of a Final Report, even if along the way there are other deliverables, such as an information architecture or a taxonomy. As the consultant will have carried out many similar projects (or they would not have been awarded the contract!) they will have written many reports similar to the one the organisation is expecting from them for the current project. The RFP should therefore include a requirement for the consultant to include a suggested structure for the report in their proposal, along with an indication of the number of pages.

Below is a possible structure for a report that sets out an intranet strategy for a company.

Executive summary	1
Corporate profile	1
The intranet and digital workplace landscape	1
The corporate intranet vision and mission	1
Summary of user survey outcomes	3
Project background, scope and objectives	1
Methodology	1
Intranet audit outcomes	3
Content governance and content life-cycle management	1
Collaboration support	1
Enterprise social networks	1
Search	1
Integration with business applications	1
Mobile and remote access requirements	1
Identifying expertise and knowledge	1
Engagement with clients	1
Summary of requirements	2
Company objectives 2015-2017	1

Intranet set against market and technology changes	2
Information management strategy	1
Intranet development strategy 2015-2017	3
Search strategy 2015-2017	1
Mobile content strategy 2015-2017	1
Development Plan 2015-2017	3
Implementation 2015-2017	1
Metrics	1
Key Performance Indicators	1
Roles and resources	1
Training, support and communications	1
Governance	1
Risks and issues	2
Recommendations	2
Total pages	**44**

This is for illustration only! A report of more than perhaps 50 pages is never going to be read through in detail by any stakeholder, and in the example above there would almost certainly be more detailed reports on some of the individual topics.

Asking for an outline along these lines has three benefits:

- it helps the organisation to assess the level of competence of the consultant
- it highlights areas that may need to be clarified in the contract discussions
- by setting out the approximate length of the report it gives both the organisation and the consultant a reference point on the time needed to write the report

If need for additional reports or a more detailed final report emerge as the project proceeds then a discussion can be held about whether there needs to be an adjustment to the contract to take account of the work that is now going to be required.

Stakeholder presentations

As already mentioned above there are usually two opportunities to give a presentation to stakeholders. The first of these is when the project is starting to come to a conclusion and there are some outcomes and preliminary recommendations where comments from the stakeholders would be of benefit. The advantage of this approach is that it means that there are no surprises (at least not major ones!) in the final report, and indeed the final shape of the report can be adjusted to address issues and requests made in the presentation. The downside is that this may be the first time the stakeholders have focused on the project (sadly) and it can be difficult presenting what is still work-in-progress in a way that encourages discussion but does not commit the consultant or the project team to definitive recommendations, or to a last minute change in project scope.

If there are major changes in scope the consultant would have every right to be more than annoyed, as it should be the role of the organisation's project manager to maintain a close relationship with the stakeholders so there is nothing but acclaim for the work that has been undertaken and the comments are on points of detail and not substance.

The second approach is to send out the Final Report to stakeholders and then set up a presentation where the consultant can present highlights from the report and answer any questions about the outcomes. To get the best from the presentation the project manager needs to have conversations with the stakeholders about their reactions to the Final Report and what issues they would like to raise at the presentation. This will enable the consultant to prepare their presentation around these issues and not spend time on what has been agreed as common ground.

Of course it is also possible to give both types of presentation.

It takes time to prepare high quality presentations, and this needs to be reflected in allowing time for the consultant to do so, and perhaps even have a run-through with the project team ahead of the presentation. The benefits of bringing the stakeholders together are considerable, as it does allow them to discover that even amongst a group of stakeholders with a common objective there can be variations in their reaction to the outcomes of the project. It is all about managing expectations.

In summary the timing, scope, content and audience for project presentations should be on the project plan from the outset, with ideally dates already agreed with inevitably busy stakeholders as these will be milestones in the project plan. A shift of even a day might result in several of the stakeholders, invariably the most important and busiest, not being able to be present.

Information architecture projects

A fairly common category of project is to develop a new information architecture or taxonomy for an intranet. The challenge here is in defining the end-point. The RFP is often written in terms of "an information architecture for the first two levels of the new intranet" or "revise our existing corporate taxonomy to reflect changes in business objectives". The first of these seems quite straightforward but is in fact very dependent on the CMS technology being used. SharePoint 2013 is a good example. The work involved in developing a corporate taxonomy depends significantly on the quality of the existing taxonomy.

In both cases, and there are many others (e.g. migration strategies) there may not be the knowledge on the part of the stakeholders or the project team to be definitive in what is required. That makes life very difficult for a consultant. If they are working on a fixed-price contract then they can find that there are not enough days to complete the work to everyone's satisfaction. If the contract is being carried out on a days-worked basis more days than anticipated end up being used on preliminary work. In both situations the relationship between the consultant and the organisation can be strained, and that is being polite.

Where there are likely to be problems in defining deliverables there are two approaches. The first is to give the consultant an opportunity to delve into the current situation in more detail before finalising the contract. Ideally the time spent on this work should be built back in to the contract price, but a consultant may also be willing to put some of their own time into the definition stage in order to reduce the risks of project scope creep.

The second approach is to set up the project in phases, with the understanding that the fee for the work after the initial phase is open to discussion and ratification.

Lessons learned

No matter how much care is taken in developing a report structure or a presentation inevitably many of the lessons learned will not appear in print. There should always be an open debrief with the consultant to learn about both items of detail that worked well or were a nightmare, and also to gain a wider picture on how the organisation performed in managing both the project and the partnership.

There are many ways in which the lessons can be listed out and discussed, and then actions taken. Good consultants also want to learn from the engagements they have been working on. Perhaps interviewees felt that the interviews were not well structured, or an interim report was too wide in scope. This requires the project manager to talk to all the stakeholders and not just provide their view of an engagement.

References

Consultants always want every project to be a reference for further work. That is part of 'profit' calculation. I like to agree with a client what I can say about a project, and whether I can include their name on my client list. In my career three projects have been so sensitive in one way or another that I have never disclosed the client or the details. Ideally it is valuable to agreed what the client will say about the project, remembering that the person managing the project may have moved on, leaving someone else in the organisation to provide a reference. The ideal situation is when a client is willing to go public on the work I have done. This happened with a project that Sam Marshall (Clearbox Consulting) and I worked on in 2015.

CHAPTER 7

BEING A PROJECT MANAGER

It is not the objective of this book to teach you how to be a project manager. There are many books and courses on the subject. You will face two problems in managing a project. The first is that the consultant that you engage will know more about how to manage projects than you do. After all that is what they do as a living, whether working as an individual or working for a large consulting company. The second is that almost certainly there will be someone from IT with a project management responsibility because that is how IT departments work. So you may well end up running a project with advice from two difference sources working in two different ways for different objectives. Welcome to the world of consultancy projects.

A model for project management

There is a fairly widely accepted model for project management, though the labels may differ from organisation to organisation.

1. Define
   The project objectives need to be clearly established and the financial and other resources required to complete the project should be quantified
2. Plan
   From the overall view of the project individual tasks are derived and the impact of any delay in completing these tasks to plan are considered
3. Implement
   At this stage the project moves from paper to people, who have to be effectively managed and motivated. Delegation of tasks needs to be carefully considered
4. Control
   At all times the progress of the project needs to be monitored against the original plan, and this is only possible if the plan itself has been set out in a way that enables milestones to be identified and measured
5. Adjust
   Inevitably things will not go to plan, and skill will be needed to take the appropriate actions and maintain a good relationship with the stakeholders
6. Deliver
   The project has now come full circle, and it is possible to judge how well the objectives have been met, and ideally exceeded, whilst working within the financial objectives
7. Learn
   Every project will give the opportunity for everyone involved the opportunity to learn new skills and identify what training might usefully be given

This of course is a very high level plan but still useful in maintaining an overall perspective on a project.

Agile, Waterfall, PRINCE2 and ISO9001:2015

There are essentially two approaches to software development. The waterfall approach is linear, easy to understand and inflexible. The agile approach is non-linear, difficult to understand and probably too flexible. That is my somewhat cynical view! The point is that these are software development methodologies, where there is something tangible and testable at the end. That is not the case with professional services projects where the knowledge of the consultant is being used seamlessly, almost certainly continuously and on a very integrated basis with the project team. Both approaches will tend to be promoted by IT departments. There is no right way or wrong way to manage a project, only the best way. That is the role of the Plan step above.

The PRINCE project methodology has gained almost mystic status. PRINCE is an acronym for **PR**ojects **IN C**ontrolled **E**nvironments and was established in 1989 by the UK Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. PRINCE2 was launched in 1996. It is very widely used in the UK for IT-related projects. In the USA the Project Management Institute (PMI) has evolved methodologies along similar lines. In both cases there are certification schemes for project managers. HPRINCE2 is well documented in a 410 page document published by the UK Government, and the size of this document is one of the reasons why PRINCE2 certification is not easy to achieve. I know because for a while I had to be certified to PRINCE2 in order to run a large project for Logica and I failed my initial examination. Which was embarrassing!

I have lost track of the number of clients who are under the assumption that because a project is being run to PRINCE2 it will be successful. That is not the case. Using PRINCE2 for projects where it is appropriate (large waterfall projects) may increase the chances of success if it is used correctly.

ISO9001:2015 is a quality management procedure that is used by organisations around the world. Note that it is not a quality standard, only a means of defining how an organisation should manage its quality management system. It could be that your organisation does use ISO9001:2015 and it may require you to adopt the principles and processes that have been externally certified.

The reason for this section on project management is that it is not uncommon for departments who have never run a project before (i.e. before their current manager was in post) to find that they are not aware of how the organisation runs projects until after the plan is agreed and the consultant is engaged. This is when the IT project manager, who will certainly be aware of PRINCE2, attends the meeting and wants to see the relevant documents.

The consultant expects!

There is a set of minimum requirements that a consultant expects a project manager to be able to deliver so that they can work effectively and professionally.

To be paid on time

Whether you are working with a one-person consultancy or a major consulting company there will be an expectation that they will be paid on an agreed reasonable schedule. For any consultancy cash flow is very important. Most consultants will accept a 30 day (and those are calendar days) payment term but will be very reluctant to consider 45 days or even a longer period of time. I was once in a situation where a 30 day payment term was agreed but when the contract was extended a different department took responsibility and the terms were then 90 days. It took a letter to the Chief Financial Officer to sort that out.

It may come as a surprise to find out the processes involved in adding a new supplier to the Supplier Database in an organisation. Budget codes have to be established and bank details added to the database. The payments could be quite small in terms of the overall organisation and Accounts department may well put it to the bottom of the pile.

The consultant will expect you to have sorted out these details by the time they step through the door, and may well ask for a contact name in Accounts Payable (the term in the UK for the person or department that runs the payments through the corporate bank account) so that they can also check on progress. Once the first payment has been processed subsequent invoices should then be paid on time.

I owe it to my fellow consultants to highlight that it is the responsibility of the organisation to pay the due amount on the due day, and not the responsibility of the consultant to either verify the date it will be paid or chase if it is not. Technically a failure to pay is a breach of contract and the consultant would have the right to renegotiate the contract. I've done it twice.

Internal communications

It should not be the responsibility of the consultant to have to explain to an interviewee what the objectives are for the project and what their role is in achieving them. They will expect the project manager to have circulated a document (ideally the Project Initiation Document) to all stakeholders, interviewees and members of the project team so that there is a consistent message about the work that the consultant is going to undertake.

There is another aspect of communications that is important, and that is informing the project team of changes that have been agreed with the consultant about the schedule and scope of the project.

Change management

It is in the nature of consulting engagements that there may be a requirement to change the project schedule or the scope of the project even though this will inevitably have an impact on the project schedule and deliverables. The consultant will expect to be involved in the discussions about any changes to the project plan. They may not agree with them but at least they will have the context for the changes being proposed and will be able to consider the impact on their own work and on the contract fee.

What may seem a small change to the organisation could have major implications for a consultant as they are invariably either running more than one project at the same time or preparing a bid for another project. Shifting a meeting by a week could be a significant challenge for a consultant who already has a firm commitment with another client.

Single point of contact

It is not uncommon for both the project manager for the department and the project manager for IT to assume that they are running the project. This is a very unsatisfactory situation and will only lead to problems later in the project, and almost certainly demotivate a consultant from giving their full commitment to the project. There has to be a single point of contact and responsibility.

Access to internal systems

It should be in the initial contract which internal systems a consultant will have access to. The problem is that IT may need to set up access through the corporate firewall and despite being in the age of the digital workplace this may not be easy especially if anything more than read-only access is required. This has been such a problem in the past that I now write into my contract with a client that my work for them will not start until I have the access that has been agreed to internal systems.

Advice

This may seem to be an unexpected requirement but a consultant will often need advice on everything from how to find a particular office to whether they can address a senior manager by their given name or their family name. They may also like to check on the required format for a report or whether a meeting room has the facility for a video conference. This will all take time and as a project manager you have to be able to find the time. The alternative is to prejudice the successful outcome of the project.

Managing conflicts of interest

Even a small project may require considerable diplomacy in managing seemingly conflicting requirements.

As a project manager you may have to balance the requirements of:

- The consultant
- The consultant's manager if they are working for a consulting business
- The manager responsible for the project
- Other internal project managers whose projects overlap with yours
- Other consultants working on your project or related projects
- Internal departments (legal, compliance, finance, personnel) who may have indirect interests in the way the project is being run
- Senior managers who have suddenly become aware of the project through the internal communications or being asked to take part in an interview
- External contractors whose project plans may depend on the outcome of the work of the consultant

All these activities will take time to undertake and yet you, as the project manager, may still be expected to undertake all your on-going roles as well.

CHAPTER 8

DISCOVERY

It is difficult to conceive of a consulting engagement when there was no requirement for the consultant to conduct interviews or documents about the project and the organisation. This is the "discovery" phase of a project, and is far more important than many clients recognise. The aim is to establish the current position so that it can be agreed what needs to be addressed in achieving the outcomes of the project. If in the discovery phase the client fails to ensure that all the important information.

To start with reports, these should be listed in the contract so that there is a clear understanding of what will be made available. There is nothing more disconcerting to a consultant to learn either through an interview or at the time of preparing an interim report that certain documents have not been made available. This has happened to me often enough that I list out the documents I have received and attach them to my weekly report. In one case I was put in the position of having to go back an interview some managers for a second time because a document was not tabled at the outset of the project.

Interviews are an essential element of the initial period of discovery, developing initial recommendations and then testing these out. Inevitably there will be a requirement for an initial round of interviews before the client-consultant relationship has had a chance to settle and as a result the discovery interview phase can be a difficult period. It may also be the first time that the project manager has had to move outside their own comfort zone and set up meetings with people that they have not met, or do not know well. No matter how many "briefing" reports are available to the consultant and how much experience they have gained in similar projects in other clients the interview phase is always a challenge as it can either consolidate the client-consultant relationship or create problems that are very difficult to resolve.

Fortunately there is an excellent book on the subject of conducting interviews by Steve Portigal which has to be essential reading for any organization that is seeking to understand user requirements. The only downside of the book is that the author has assumed that all interviews will take place face-to-face. It is now quite likely that some, maybe the majority, will be undertaken over a telephone link or a videoconference, Skype, Lync or otherwise.

Planning the interviews

The interview programme should be agreed in principle before the RFP is written. This is because without some sense of the number, and location, of the interviewees it is not possible to estimate the time that will be taken to undertake the interviews (in terms of hours) and the end-to-end duration of the interviews. The process of agreeing the interviewees is also a useful check on the overall objectives of the project.

It can be very helpful to compile a short profile of each interviewee during the drafting of the RFP.

For each interviewee the profile should include as a minimum:

- Name and full contact details
- Reporting line, esp to other interviewees
- Location
- Role and responsibility in the organization
- The potential impact of the consulting engagement on their business operations
- Their previous involvement in the project, or related projects
- The scope of the interview
- What might three main outcomes of the interview be?
- If possible a photograph

From a scheduling perspective the sequence of the interviews should be considered. Working down the corporate hierarchy might not be the best approach. Sometimes there could be a relatively junior member of staff who has a very good grasp of the issues, perhaps because they have recently joined from another organization and so have a different perspective on the opportunities and challenges. Almost inevitably the sequence will change as the interviews proceed because of the challenges of fitting in people as they are available. Nevertheless attention still has to be paid to the sequence. If the interview for Person A has to be postponed then the interview with Person B may need to be rescheduled as well so that the context that will be provided by Person A helps to understand the comments that will be made by Person B.

In addition every interviewee should know the identity of every other interviewee. This enables an interviewee to give guidance to the consultant about:

- The interests of people they are due to meet
- Check on what others have raised
- Identify people who should be on the list

Briefing the interviewees

The effort that is put into ensuring that the right people are interviewed and that they are fully briefed about the project, the interview process and the interviewer(s) will pay dividends in the course of the project. From a consultant viewpoint they have not been put in the situation of undertaking interviews (and spending project time) on interviews which contribute little, if anything to the project. They also get a sense that the project manager knows what they are doing and that the project is important enough for the time to be taken on meeting planning.

At this stage of the project there is nothing a consultant can do in selecting the interviews. Working through the organizational structure with the project manager can provide context but the consultant will not have the knowledge of the organization to suggest "outliner" interviewees who, for a range of reasons, would be able to provide a rich vein of insight. It is the insight that is so important. For one law firm I interviewed around 20 partners, all of whom undertake matters (legal jargon for a case) in very much the same way because that is the way that all lawyers work. It is only when I got beneath the basic story that I found a wealth of insights into how the firm worked that went far beyond hearing them talk about the day job.

Baby-sitting

There can often be a reluctance by an organization to allow a consultant to conduct an interview without a member of the project team being present. If that is the case then the project is doomed to failure because the team (and/or the organization) has no confidence in the way in which the consultant will conduct the interview. The only exception might be with the Chief Executive where the interview time is a chance for the consultant and the CEO to size each other up! This is actually very important.

One of my own rules of engagement is to have an interview with the CEO at the outset of the project as it gives me a vital context on what they see as the overall business opportunities and issues and also on what they see as the outcomes of the engagement. I also make sure I have their agreement that I can come back to them in the course of the project if needed, ostensibly to check on any gap between what the CEO has told me and what I have learned from other interviewees.I say "ostensibly" because on rare occasions I have gone back to the CEO with something that I need to discuss with them on a confidential basis about the progress of a project.

Meeting notes

One of the common challenges of interview management is when the project manager asks me to give them notes of the meeting. I always refuse to do so.

The reasons for this are:

- It is very difficult to take detailed notes and conduct a high-quality interview, especially over a telephone or video link
- The information given may be confidential and/or related to one or more members of staff
- It is time consuming and the client will have to pay for the time
- The interviewee will always be concerned about who might see the notes of the meeting. Indeed there is potentially a data privacy issue with the information gained

- There may be follow-up conversations that are not in the minutes of a specific meeting which may invalidate sections of the minutes
- I expect to have the trust of the project team to conduct myself with the highest level of professional competence and integrity

It is always open to the project team to call any interviewee to ask how the interview went and were they confident that all the information they had that would be of value to the project had been covered.

Confidentiality

I am often given information on a Chatham House Rule basis. This rule is that the information and/or opinion can be disclosed to others only if there is no indication of who provided the information. I was once told some highly sensitive information about how a certain country office went about its business. It enabled me to drill just that little bit deeper into these issues when I went to the country concerned and I came away with information that the country office was happy to share with me. Had I used the original source to present the same information to the project team it could have made for a very difficult situation.

The point I am making here is that the organisation has to trust the consultant in what they disclose to the project team.

Feedback

During the course of the initial interview programme it is very useful to set up progress meetings with the consultant. At this stage there is no point in asking for a detailed account of each meeting. The purpose of the progress meetings is primarily to see if the consultant senses that issues are being identified which might change the focus of the remaining meetings or even require additional meetings with people who have already been interviewed. This is not the time for the project manager to feel that, with 20 meetings set up, they can get on with the day job and await the initial report back from the consultant. If the meetings are not of value, and if the interviewees feel that their time and knowledge has been wasted then the impact on the schedule and the outcome of the project could be disastrous.

Virtual interviews

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned that virtual interviews came with both advantages and challenges. The advantages are of course that no travel is involved and that scheduling the meeting is easier. The challenges are very significant. There is no human moment, the pouring of a coffee that gives a chance for small talk. Often only a face can be seen, so the amount of body language is significantly less. Then there are all the technical challenges of getting the camera in the right position, of finding that the person is in the wrong conference room and above all coping with the latency of even a high-quality ISDN line when it comes to a fast interchange of views.

I have no means of quantifying this but I would suspect that I only get 50-60% of the information and the quality of discussion than I would with a face-to-face meeting, and that often I need to go back and ask more questions of a virtual interviewee.

CHAPTER 9

RISK AND RESCUE

There is a belief that if a project is run according to an established set of project management principles then the project itself will be a success. However all projects carry with them risks and setting up and managing a risk register is so important that I have given it a chapter on its own. Acknowledging risks is not a sign of weakness. Every time we cross a road we go through a risk assessment of the traffic, the width of the road, the state of the weather, our ability to run and what action we could take if the car we can see in the distance speeds up because the driver has not seen us. That is just one of the myriad of times in the course of a day when we have to carry out a risk assessment.

When it comes to managing a project suggesting that a risk register will need to be drawn up may seem like an early admission of failure. On the contrary failing to set up a risk register will be seen by others as an admission that the project manager has a false sense of their own abilities. The organisation may have its own view of the risks. Some may be similar to the list the consultant will have developed before they walk through the door. Others may be very different. Bringing these risk lists together and reviewing them through the course of the project will have a very significant positive impact on outcomes.

Quantifying risk

At the core of risk management is a means of quantifying the risk. A risk (e.g. the intranet manager leaving) is scored on Impact x Probability.

Of these two parameters Probability is much more difficult to assess objectively, so concern should be focused on risks that have a high impact, as whenever they occur the organisation will be put at risk. Normally risk is scored on a scale of 1 – 5 and the scores are plotted on a 5 by 5 matrix. Some organisations feel that only using a scale of 1 – 3 is adequate. It is not.

Some possible impact parameters are:

- Restricted to a single department for a short period of time
- Affects more than one department/business unit
- Significant impact on the operations of more than one department/ business unit
- Affects the operations throughout the organisation
- Could bring the organisation into disrepute through a failure to meet stakeholder obligations

Probability parameters might be:

- Likely to occur within the next two years
- Likely to occur within the next twelve months
- Likely to occur within the next six months
- Likely to occur at any time with one month or less advance warning
- Likely to occur with no advance warning

This is where the problems of quantifying risk emerge. If the project is a novel one to the organisation, perhaps a major content migration, then there will be no basis for judging the probability of a risk arising. Another approach might then be to move from Probability to Predictability, which is a measure of how much forewarning the project manager will have of the risk arising. A delay in implementing a new server farm for a SharePoint 2013 upgrade may be visible a couple of months before hand but the consultant being involved in some accident or illness which means that they cannot continue with the project in the short term at least will be very unpredictable.

As with the risk scales there are different approaches to the elements of the risk register itself, and the following elements are illustrative of the approach. Many organisations will have corporate formats for risk registers and where possible these should be adopted, but only when the applicability of the scoring and register format for the project you are managing have been considered. Risk registers for software development projects, especially when run on an Agile basis, are highly unlikely to be good templates for a professional services project.

If this happens	The intranet sponsor changes corporate roles or leaves the company, so there is no corporate sponsor for the intranet
Then the impact would be	Plans to enhance the intranet might either be delayed, pending a new sponsor being agreed, or could be changed if the new sponsor had a different perspective
Impact	4
Probability	3
We will track this by	Writing into the project plan that the sponsor will inform the project board at the earliest opportunity

This risk will be managed by	Identifying potential sponsors from among current senior managers and/or appointing a deputy sponsor
If we can achieve this then the scores would be	
Impact	2
Probability	1

Schedule, scope and staff

When deciding on the risks to the project one way to start is to consider the three variables of any project, namely the schedule, the scope and the staff (resources). These are the 3S's of risk management in a professional services project where staff costs (direct or indirect) are a significant element of the project budget. Risks associated with these will have the greatest impact on the project. Although a round-table discussion might seem the best way to proceed individual members of the team or of the steering group may prefer to talk about the risks on an individual basis. The consultant themselves may well have some examples of risk registers they have used within other organisations.

A risk register is dynamic, in that in the course of a day a risk may be able to be removed and two new risks become visible. Somewhat paradoxically the greatest risk to the risk management process may be a failure to update the risk register to take account of these new risks, even if at first they cannot be quantified.

On balance there will be more problems with the schedule for the project than the resources or the scope. This is because the delivery date was set before anyone started to think about the project in detail and has already been promised up the management line. In comparison finding more resources or restricting the scope of the project are less visible to senior management. They just want to see the new intranet demonstrated at the Partners Meeting in eight months' time. If you have chosen a capable consultant they will have the experience to be a reliable judge of how long their element of the project will take, and how long the overall project will take. You should listen to them very carefully, because they will have a very good grasp of the factors that will affect the time to completion. The more detail there is in the project plan at the outset the more likely the project will fail to meet the deadline. Call it White's Law of Project Completion.

Failure to deliver on time is usually endemic in an organisation. Once one project (usually owned by the Chief Executive) is allowed to over-run that creates a precedent for all other projects. Many of the potential risks can be avoided by tabling the plan as soon as a Non-Disclosure Agreement is in place and asking the consultant for their initial views. Other risks may surface.

Sharing the risk management responsibility

At the end of the development process you will end up with a matrix of scores that looks like:

Impact					
5			15	20	25
4			12	16	20
3				12	15
2					
1					
	1	2	3	4	5
					Probability

For any risks that have a score of 12 or greater the responsibility of taking remedial action should probably be that of the Project Board, especially if the project manager does not have a significant amount of managerial influence across the organisation. So there should be a reporting process that informs the Project Board about any changes to the score for a risk where the score then becomes 12 or greater. It may be decided that the Project Board only wishes to be informed and take action on risk scores of 16 or higher. The risk score break point for this does not matter so long as the responsibilities for monitoring, reporting and taking action are very clearly defined in the project plan.

Core risks

As a starting point for a risk register the following risks are ones that seem to arise on a fairly frequent basis. However it is not uncommon to find that in projects where there is an important IT element that IT have a different project plan and a different set of risks.

- The project sponsor changes and as a result the basis for the project is questioned
- Key stakeholders (High/High) emerge during the project, or an existing stakeholder is replaced but someone with a different perspective on the project
- People selected for interview become unavailable and rescheduling the meeting compromises the quality of the discovery phase
- The consultant is not able to continue to work on the project, perhaps because of illness
- The quality of the work of the consultant is not in line with organisational expectations
- The objectives of the project are changed beyond the scope and budget for the project
- At an interim reporting stage one or more of the stakeholders, having now seen the initial outcomes, questions the project plan

- Slippage in the project plan means that the consultant is not able to meet the timetable agreed in the contract
- Project-critical information is not disclosed to the consultant at the agreed points in the project
- The project budget is cut, or an increase cannot be authorised, as a result of a wider organisational view on managing expenditure
- Contracts with external consultants are terminated as a matter of policy
- The project manager does not have the time to manage the project and on-going organisational commitments
- The project manager finds that they do not have the authority over the project that had been agreed at the outset

That is quite a lot of risks, and the length of this list is why risk management is the subject of a chapter all on its own.

Virtual projects

A virtual project is where one or more of the members of the project team consistently work in a different location. Managing virtual teams is very much more challenging for project managers and for the consultant working on the project. Some of the problems that have to be faced are

Time zones

When one or more of the team work in a different time zone and they ask for a meeting at 15.00 it is difficult to work out whether this is "their time", or the time where the consultant is located. It is also important to remember that people in the USA and Canada will not be familiar with a 24 hour clock.

Dates

Date formats in the USA are not the same as in the UK or most of Europe. 5/4/2016 is 5th April 2016 in the UK and 4th May in the USA. As for 2016-5-4..!

Language

When I am interviewing people to whom English is not their first language then the interviews end up covering less ground. The person concerned may speak very good English in conversation with native English speakers. Under the pressure of an interview in which I want to dig fairly deeply into work processes and personal ambitions then both I and the interviewee may have to take just a little bit longer than might be the case in the UK. Reviewing reports may also take longer.

Small talk

Physical project meetings start with "small talk" about the weather (unless in Kuwait), the chocolate cookies and the new receptionist. Teleconference and video conferences do not, nor is it possible to have a 'quick word' with a participant at the end of a meeting without making it very obvious.

Meeting notes

The effort required to take part in any virtual meeting means that it is difficult to take notes even though it is perhaps even more important to have an agreed record of the meeting.

Reporting lines

The reporting lines of team members and others involved in the project may not be as obvious as they would be when everyone is in the same office building. This may colour their response to questions and comments.

There are many books available on managing virtual teams. This section is just to highlight to you that if the team is virtual your workload managing it will be substantially increased.

Rescue

Finding solutions to emerging risks is where an experienced consultant should excel. On a day to day basis I am in a position to look at the progress of a project with a reasonably disinterested position and will be thinking about the "what ifs" all the time. I feel it is important that I am ahead of the project manager in this regard, so can either warn or be ready with a solution at a meeting. After all a consultant worth their fee will have a number of similar projects they can use as a source of ideas.

CHAPTER 10

FROM BEGINNING TO END

There are two elements of progress reporting that need to be managed. These are the overall project and the extent to which the consultant is meeting the plan that has been agreed. The way in which overall project progress is reported to the Project Board will no doubt be set by the Board itself. This chapter is concerned primarily about managing the relationship with the consultant. They may need to be report internally to their manager (and bank manager!) and therefore may ask for information from you to do so.

Weekly project report

Over the years I have developed a weekly project report which seems to meet the requirements of most of my clients. This is set out below in sections with some explanatory comments. This report will usually fit on to one side of a sheet of paper, so that it can be easily scanned and actioned by the project manager.

Intranet Focus Ltd Weekly Project Report

Client	Intranätverk
Client contact	Kristian Norling
Contract	Intranet assessment
Period covered	11-15 January 2016
Date of report	18 January 2016
Date of previous report	8 January 2o16

1. Report on activities for the period
An initial review of the Intranatverk intranet has been undertaken using the three personas and twelve use cases agreed at the project meeting on 18 December. Interviews were undertaken with KN, KS and JW during the meeting in Copenhagen on 7 January. I was given copies of the Annual Report, the Risk Register and the business strategy for 2015-2017. It was agreed that a copy of the 2014 employee engagement survey would be made available by 21 January.

This is a short narrative on the main activities that have been undertaken in the previous week.

2. Report on proposed activities for the week ahead
Interviews are scheduled with TB on 19 January (via a Skype call), ST on 20 January during their visit to London and JM on 21 January. This will then complete the interview programme. I will submit an interim report on 25 January provided that the engagement survey is available by 21 January

This is to make sure that there is visibility on the actions that are going to be taken imminently, and in this case highlights a potential problem if the survey is not delivered on time.

3. Ongoing activities	**Plan date**	**Due date**
Drafting of the interim report	25 January	
Initial assessment of potential contractors to develop an open source search application for the intranet	14 January	29 January

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Development of a job description for a search manager for the intranet	29 January	

This is to highlight the progress of activities against plan.

4. Open issues for discussion and resolution	**Owner**
There has been a delay in gaining a response from several potential open source development firms because of the Christmas and New Year vacations. The project plan failed to take the Swedish Epiphany public holiday into account.	MW
I have to be in Copenhagen for a conference on 1 March and so it might be appropriate to bring forward the final project meeting to this week rather than the W/B 7 March	KN

This is an important section as it enables me to highlight issues which need to be considered by the client project team. These issues will continue to be reported each week, not on a one-off basis, until they have been resolved by the person designated as the owner.

5. Time reporting	**Activity**	**Day**
7 January	Interviews with KN, KS and JW	0.375
5-7 January	Discussions with potential open source contractors	0.250
6 January	Initial assessment of intranet functionality and content	0.5
	Total for period	1.25
	Total for project to date	**4.75**
	Balance remaining	**5.25**

Client feedback

When I send this report through to the client I also ask for an email ping to acknowledge receipt, so that there can be no subsequent issue about whether the report was received. Of course whether it was read and actioned is a different issue. I make a point of presenting this format in my proposal so that any changes or additions are considered as part of the contract process. This is the result of a project some years ago for a major telecommunications company where the project reporting format was an Excel file with six worksheets and around 30 lines for each worksheet as it was designed for the installation of digital telephone exchanges. Only a few lines were relevant to the project I was working on but I had place a NA in every single box for the week or the report would be rejected by the project management application.

Making things happen

In the course of a project the consultant will almost certainly send drafts of reports and presentations to a number of people in the organisation. Ideally it should be you as the project manager that makes sure that responses are provided to the consultant by the agreed date. It is very difficult for someone external to the organisation to pick up the telephone or send an email to someone they may not have met and remind them that they are due to respond by a given date. Deadline dates like these should be in the weekly report from the consultant and in my view it is not my role to chase responses.

It is sadly not unusual for the project manager to fail to read, let alone respond, to a weekly report. The excuse is invariably that they have been very busy. From this response the consultant learns that the project is of such low importance to the organisation that the project manager has not been given enough time to support the project.

Internal project progress reports

The way in which the internal project progress reports are prepared is outside the scope of the project. However it is good practice to ensure that the consultant sees these reports as there may be a comment, commitment or date that they might need to discuss with the project manager.

Working backwards

It can be very useful for everyone concerned with the project to take the time to work backwards from the end date and the deliverables. Organisations have a strong belief in their ability to achieve progress towards the end of a project that is several times the progress achieved to date. This is when consultants can really helpful as they have experience from running many similar projects and have a sixth sense of when things are not working to plan. Even if the organisation has deputed an internal project manager to oversee the schedule, unless they have previous experience of (for example) a SharePoint migration project, they will not have the inside track on how the project is actually proceeding.

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CHAPTER 11

CRITICAL SUCCESS AND FAILURE FACTORS

The final chapter! I've not regretted for one moment either being an information scientist or spending most of my career involved in consulting and project management. Along the way I've learned a lot of lessons the hard way. It might be quite close to the truth to say that every piece of advice in this book has its basis in a situation that I probably failed to manage as well as I might have done. As I emphasised at the beginning of this book, this is my personal approach to consulting projects. It should be seen only as a starting point to building a partnership with a consultant and not as the definitive approach.

In an attempt to summarise the main themes in the book, in this brief chapter I have set out both critical success factors and critical failure factors.

Critical success factors

Although lists of critical success factors can be rather generic they can still be a useful item for discussion at the very early stages of planning to work with a consultant. My top ten, not in any particular order of importance set out below.

- Be transparent in the partnership with the consultant. A consulting engagement should not be a game of power politics
- Integrate the consultant into the project team and into the organisation
- Respect the fact that the consultant will have responsibilities outside of the engagement with other clients and with their colleagues which may restrict their ability to respond to arbitrary changes in the project plan
- Take steps to ensure that payments are made on schedule
- Pay especial attention to the initial period of discovery so that all relevant information is disclosed to the consultant as soon as is practicable
- Actively manage project conflicts, both between team members and with others in the organisation
- Recognise that managing a project and the relationship with one or more consultants will take a very significant amount of your time
- Define the deliverables at the outset and then re-assess as the project proceeds so that the consultant remains clear about what they are expected to deliver
- Provide feedback to the consultant throughout the project. However praise in public and critique in private
- Do everything you can to make sure that at the end of the project the project team, the organisation and the consultant all gain tangible benefits from working together

Critical failure factors

As a counter balance this is a list of critical failure factors. Any one of these could have very significant outcomes.

- Making critical comments about a consultant to the project team or to your manager
- Committing the consultant to do something without checking with them first
- Telling the consultant that a decision has not yet been made when you know that it has but you don't know how to pass the message on to them
- Taking the credit for the recommendations they make on the basis that you were going to take these actions in any case
- Passing material given to you by the consultant to assist with the project onto others outside the organisation without the permission of the consultant.
- Failing to chair meetings in a way that ensures the objective of the consultant are achieved
- Not responding to communications from a consultant "because you've been rather busy recently"
- Assuming that a consultant will work in the evenings and at weekends so that they can sort out your problems without charging time to the project
- Ignoring warnings from the consultant about the strong possibility of the project not being delivered on time on the basis that miracles do happen
- Not being transparent to the consultant about commitments that you have made to your manager about the project outcomes

In conclusion

It can be helpful to see the role of a consultant in the Known/Unknown matrix made famous (or possibly infamous) by Donald Rumsfeld, the US Secretary of State for Defense.

Known Knowns

A consultant can build on these in the engagement.

Unknown Knowns

This is why the Discovery phase is so valuable, as well as the information that the consultant themselves brings to the project.

Known Unknowns

These are the primary requirement for the consultant to be able to address.

Unknown Unknowns

When the consultant identifies that these exist it is wise to listen to what they have to say and what solutions they can offer.

I'll end with a quotation from President Lyndon Johnson, who remarked that the fire of progress is lit by inspiration, fuelled with information and sustained by hope and hard work. I hope that this book has provided you with some information fuel. But successful projects also need inspiration, hope and hard work from you as the project manager for your organisation.

LIST OF BOOKS AND LINKS

These links provide additional information on the topics covered in the book. They are not listed in any particular sequence as many are relevant to more than one chapter.

Comparison of project management methodologies
http://manifesto.co.uk/agile-vs-waterfall-comparing-project-management-methodologies/

Working with consultants. Peter Wuensche Zero Books, 2013
http://www.amazon.co.uk/Working-Consultants-Peter-Wuensche/dp/0957284500

Eight tips for working with a consultant
http://www.arma.org/bookstore/files/Gabel2.pdf

How to work with consultants successfully
http://mrdanadams.com/2013/how-to-work-with-consultants-successfully/#.Vq5fUjYrGUk

Working with consultants
http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=13105

Ten top tips for working with consultants
http://www.strategyexpert.com/articles/20140910_3

The do's and don'ts of working with consultants
https://blog.workinghardinit.work/2010/02/08/the-dos-and-donts-when-engaging-consultants-part-i/
https://blog.workinghardinit.work/2010/02/11/the-dos-and-donts-when-engaging-consultants-part-ii/

Collaboration killers: the most common pitfalls for client teams working with consultants
http://www.cruxcollaborative.com/collaboration-killers/

Stakeholder Analysis, Project Management, templates and advice
http://stakeholdermap.com/stakeholder-analysis.html

Risk management – a critical capability for project managers
https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/risk-management.php

Risk management – a step-by-step practical guide
https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/risk-management

Interviewing Users: How to Uncover Compelling Insights Steve Portigal. 2013. Rosenfeld Media
http://rosenfeldmedia.com/books/interviewing-users/

21 ways of excelling at project management
http://www.projectsmart.com/project-management/introduction.php

Project initiation document (an example from the University of Birmingham)
https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/it/projects/documents/public/Toolkit---Project-Initiation-v1-August-2012.pdf

MoSCoW prioritisation
http://www.dsdm.org/content/10-moscow-prioritisation

A different way to acquire lessons learned
https://www.apqc.org/blog/different-way-acquire-lessons-learned-knowledge-management

Institutional memory (making) and learning across project silos
https://km4meu.wordpress.com/2013/03/17/institutional-memory-making-and-learning-across-project-silos/

There's no doubt about it. Regardless of what challenge you are up to, you have greater chances to succeed if you bring in external knowledge, expertise and fresh pair of eyes. Often this expertise comes in the form of consultants.

In knowledge work and information management projects, hiring a consultant can be vital to achieve business objectives. Therefore it is important to establish the best possible working relationships with the best possible consultants. They might seem expensive at first, but if you consider the hundreds or thousands of hours they can save by helping you avoid doing the wrong thing or doing things in the wrong way, the investment in choosing and working with the best consultants will pay itself off many times over.

When an organisation hires a consultant, what can be expected of the consultant and what does the consultant expect from the organisation? This book will help you to close the gap between the two expectations. Based on his extensive consulting experience within information management projects, Martin White explains; How to define requirements. How to assess proposals. How to write a contract. What to expect in form of deliverables and reports. How consultants work with discovery. Managing risks. And last but not least, critical success and failure factors.

As most managers have only limited experience of working with consultants and yet consultants have a great deal of experience working with managers, this is a book that managers should read before hiring consultants!

Oscar Berg
Consultant and author of "Collaborating in a Social Era".

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