

## ABSTRACT

State Farm Consulting Project: Process & Outcome Analysis

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This thesis details the results and learnings garnered from my experience working on a consulting project for a local State Farm Insurance agency. Frameworks and processes discussed in *Flawless Consulting*, *Case and Point*, and other associated concepts addressed in the management consulting course and their application to the project are explored. The paper concludes with a self-reflection on my experience and its significance for my future consulting career.

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State Farm Consulting Project: Process & Outcome Analysis

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By

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Project Outcomes and Decision-Making Analysis

#### *Course Structure*

The Management Consulting course at Baylor University was designed to develop analytical skill sets utilized in the consulting industry and expose students to the career of management consulting. More broadly, this course requires students to integrate many different areas of business study to provide solutions to a specific client problem. Topics such as root cause analysis and effective change management frameworks are explored. Additionally, this course focuses heavily on the practical application of change management concepts and the consultant's role in enabling effective change in organizations. Students have the opportunity to engage in a real-world client engagement in which students take the role of an external consultant to a local company. Consulting executives from various consulting firms give lectures to share best practices and advise on executing some aspects of the consulting process to illuminate concepts fully. The clients with whom the students consult are local businesses in the greater Waco area. The projects are generally focused on solving marketing, operations, information technology, or other organizational issues. At the beginning of the semester, students organize into teams of four individuals to work together on a specific client project. These teams are encouraged to be as dynamic as possible to simulate a consulting team with varying skill sets and technical competencies. After team selection, each team

submits their preferred client project from one of the available projects to Professor Wright, the course instructor. The client selection process is based on student preference, and each team is selected to be on one project according to the level of interest in each project. After selection, each team begins the formal process of consulting on the project.

The coursework is constructed to be in lockstep with Block's five main segments of the consulting process – contracting, discovery, analysis, implementation, and termination. Each topic is discussed as the client project advances through each stage of the consulting process over the semester. The consulting project is completed in eight weeks. As the project progresses, teams prepare an initial presentation on key findings and the project approach. Afterward, each team is expected to execute their project and implement their recommendation. At the conclusion of the semester, teams are expected to produce a final written project deliverable and present their solutions to the client and a panel of consulting executives from the industry.

This chapter details the actions and decisions taken throughout every step of the consulting project with my client, Traci Plemons of State Farm Insurance. Each subsection throughout this chapter explores the analysis and rationale behind specific decision-making throughout the project. Outcomes of critical decisions are evaluated and discussed.

### *Team Selection*

An in-class simulation facilitated the project team selection at the beginning of the semester. The course instructor, Professor Mike Wright, informed the class that we would have two weeks to identify our consulting project team members. The simulation required extensive teamwork and information sharing to succeed. The simulation allowed me to identify a handful of potential team members I thought could bring substantial value to a client project. After concluding the simulation, I reached out to a few individuals to gauge their interest in specific projects. As I spoke with each of my classmates, I evaluated each individual on three key dimensions. Firstly, they had to have a good work ethic and be a team player. From my college experience, I've learned that these two attributes are one of the biggest determinates of having a positive result in any given teamwork scenario. Secondly, I wanted to have a diverse team of people with varying experiences in different industries, roles, and coursework. Thirdly, each team member must have a strong analytical skillset. With this framework, I identified three team members who displayed these qualities for the project. Jonathan Deleon, Kimmy Duong, and Madeline Carlson, and I all agreed that our variety of experiences and skillsets produced a formidable team.

### *Project Selection Rationale*

My team and I chose to pursue working with Traci Plemons of State Farm Insurance out of the eleven available projects. The initial project scope was to analyze the functionality of her current CRM system and then offer a potential replacement CRM

system within a selection matrix. I was excited to pursue this project for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, the team and I came to a mutual agreement of interest in the project, and we all agreed it would be a good work experience for our careers. Secondly, the team was interested in pursuing this project because of the strategic nature of the deliverable. We all thought it would be an enriching experience to help Traci make a massive decision for her business and that the decision would ultimately impact her business dramatically. On a personal note, I also wanted to work on an IT-related project due to my upcoming role at KPMG as a CIO Advisory associate. My thinking was that gaining any technical knowledge about CRM systems would help me get staffed early on in my career, specifically in the technology selection practice.

Furthermore, I thought the project was a perfect fit for my experiences and technical abilities. I've spent a considerable amount of time working and learning about the Salesforce CRM system from my time in the ProSales program. Although I didn't have in-depth technical experience, I was comfortable developing certain functions and migrating data across applications. Overall, the whole team was very interested in researching differing CRM systems and providing recommendations based on the client's needs and the selected system's capabilities.

### *Contracting & Scoping*

Contracting and scoping is perhaps one of the most critical phases of the consulting process. The entire consulting engagement is dictated by an initial agreement between both parties to be accomplished within a specific time frame. This verbal and written contract outlines the methods and processes undertaken to achieve an objective.



Although we did not formally do this in our project, we still made an effort to set out a written report of what we would accomplish within our project's timeframe and presented it to Traci Plemons (hereto and after referred to as the “client”).

Clear understanding and agreement of terms on behalf of every party involved are vital to any project's success. However, agreeing to terms does not guarantee a good outcome. Consulting is inherently interpersonal and requires practical verbal skills and emotional intelligence to be effective. For this reason, establishing a rapport with the client early on is vital to starting any working relationship. With this in mind, the team decided to hold a video conference before our first project meeting with the client so that everyone could get acquainted. We began our meeting by quickly introducing ourselves and sharing our previous work experience as a team. The client then gave us a quick background on herself and her business. After exchanging pleasantries and getting to know more about her, we then dived into our plans for our next meeting and set expectations for how we would operate going forward. We concluded the conversation by asking the client if there were any other items she'd like for us to cover at our first meeting. She replied that there wasn't and that she was eager to start the project with us. We then wrapped up the conversation and began researching background information on the company.

Before contracting and scoping can be undertaken, the consultant must first sell the work. Selling consultative work is a fascinating and detailed process. Selling the consulting project is the first and most crucial phase in the consulting process. The entire engagement hinges on the success of selling the work and coming to terms with the customer. The method of selling itself is complicated, and each engagement is not the

same. In reality, selling the work is an iterative process between the client and the consultant where selling, contracting, and scoping are not mutually exclusive. Each of these initial processes builds on one another and requires both parties to agree on a mutually beneficial agreement. Selling management consulting services is heavily buyer-driven and usually involves a high degree of relationship selling. These factors create a customer dynamic in which the consultant must purposefully build relationships to leverage their professional connections to sell a project. The sales process itself is usually relatively uniform with a request for proposal, oral presentations, and negotiations all key phases that must be completed to establish a formal business relationship. Like many things in consulting, selling is entirely dependent on the situation. Each customer situation is influenced by several complex factors, such as the overall business environment, the customer buying process, and organizational budget constraints. For this reason, consultants must alter their sales approach to tailor their services to the buyer's specific wants and needs. Much more could be discussed on this topic; however, since our team did not have to sell to the client, we will leave this topic here.

### *Contract Outcomes*

After our initial meeting with the client, we decided to regroup and analyze her specific situation. Our first meeting had three primary objectives:

- Agree on project parameters and confirm her concerns with her current system.
- Examine the client's existing CRM system to better understand her desires for a new system.

- Gain access to specific company resources and any information that would be beneficial for the discovery process.

When we arrived at the client's office and began our meeting, we quickly discovered that the project scope was not correctly communicated. The client explained that she had worked with a previous team to implement an automated marketing application called MailChimp. State Farm had recently migrated to a new Salesforce CRM, and she wanted to explore additional ways to reach her customers through the CRM. The original intent for utilizing MailChimp was to distribute surveys that the client and the previous consulting team had designed. The survey aimed to capture customers' satisfaction with the firm's services and relevant information about how they found the agency. The client expressed that she thought this was a great idea but that MailChimp was not integrated into her Salesforce CRM and could not be automated. Because of this, the past consulting teams' solutions were never implemented or utilized.

The client stated that her goal for the project was twofold: decrease her current marketing manual workload and drive customer retention and acquisition through a new marketing channel. The client manually wrote thank you and birthday cards to every client, which was a very laborious process. The client also mentioned that she was utilizing State Farm's subsidized marketing mailers to reach her customers. Additionally, the client used a State Farm-approved social media consultant that ran targeted ads on various social media platforms. After gaining all this information, we then quickly had to pivot to confirm what the goal was for the project since it would not be about selecting a new CRM system. The client communicated that she wanted us to integrate Mailchimp into Salesforce and automate its function for new client onboarding and account

management. The client explained that she was not a technology person and thought we would bring insight into utilizing her CRM best. Moreover, the client emphasized the need for the solution to be easy enough to do, or else it would not get done. The client indicated that the last project solutions were never really used because it was a separate process from what they were currently doing in Salesforce.

Once we clarified and confirmed our project objectives with the client, we reiterated our excitement for this project. I was incredibly excited about the opportunity to show the client the capabilities of her new salesforce system. The team concluded our conversation by asking for relevant information such as a CRM manual, login information for MailChimp, and access to her CRM systems. The client also informed us that we would need to work in the office on registered computers to access the CRM system due to privacy constraints from State Farm corporate. We would learn later on that these privacy constraints would affect several other areas of her business.

### *Discovery*

After our first initial meeting, we reconvened the following week at the client's office to begin discovery. We allotted roughly two weeks for discovery and dialogue with the client. After wrapping up the discovery, we were going to present our findings and the formal project plan. For this reason, we spent a great deal of time at the State Farm office to get as much time as we could with the client's systems. We discovered that they were utilizing Salesforce's Financial Services platform and had a license for Salesforce's AI tool, Einstein. The client hadn't customized her CRM much with any applications and was still running two different CRM's – the legacy system and the new Salesforce CRM.

These dual systems created disjointed workflows between both CRM's with specific actions only available in the original CRM. Additionally, State Farm had heavily integrated its employee website, called ABS, into certain functions within the Salesforce CRM. These functions were mostly marketing-related.

After spending a few hours within the system, we decided to go back to Traci and report our findings and research conclusions. We led the meeting by asking a few questions about how she currently onboards new clients and markets her services to potential new customers. She explained that she would select specific clients by running reports on a particular filtered list of customers in the CRM and then send promotional material facilitated by State Farm. The client explained that State Farm was very restrictive about the marketing materials sent to clients. For this reason, State Farm produced all of the content and messaging and put the agent's name and office information on each mailer. We also questioned the client regarding the services and support provided by corporate. She explained that State Farm had a full-fledged IT and marketing department explicitly made to support agents and the rollout of the new CRM. The company had a hotline for agents to speak to a representative from either department during regular work hours.

After doing extensive research, we concluded that we could integrate MailChimp and Salesforce through the salesforce app launcher in theory. This application store was similar to the mobile app stores we see on our cellphones. All you had to do was identify the application you wanted and download the file, and Salesforce would take care of the interfacing. Everything was fine until we went to download the MailChimp application, where we hit a login wall. Initially, we thought we just had to input the client's login

credentials; however, it wouldn't accept them. Confused, we decided to speak with the client about the issue. She wasn't entirely sure why the login credentials wouldn't work and recommended we talked to the IT department. We dialed the IT department and spoke with someone regarding the issue. They informed us that we could not make any changes to the system and that any downloaded application had to be approved with IT or be on an approved vendor list. Due to this, we submitted a request for the MailChimp application to be approved. The next day we were informed that our request was rejected because MailChimp did not meet the company's security requirements. The client had warned us that this might be the case as State Farm is extremely cautious about where and how its customer information is collected. At this point, we decided to sit down and meet with our client to discuss alternative methods for automating her marketing survey as the current project plan was now not achievable with MailChimp.

### *Analysis & Decision to Act*

From the beginning, we knew we had to find a way to integrate the survey function into Salesforce effortlessly. We understood that whatever process we implemented would have to be simple and incorporated into their customer onboarding processes. After not implementing a third-party application, we decided to reach out to a State Farm regional agent manager and discuss our objectives with her. Cathy, the regional manager, was very interested in our project and was more than willing to help us identify what was and was not achievable. She informed us that State Farm, for the most part, would not allow the client to send out a survey without it first going through corporate. She explained that this process could take months and that they've moved away from approving new

marketing materials for the sake of brand consistency. Nonetheless, Cathy explained that if we could get the survey approved, we could incorporate the survey into the customer onboarding process via the task function. Tasks in Salesforce are essentially outstanding action items on a specific customer account. The customer onboarding process includes ten individual tasks that take place across a given year. These tasks could be as simple as writing a thank you note to the client or even inform the client of changes in insurance rates. We thought integrating the survey into the tasks was a decent idea considering the agents' familiarity with the task function. However, we did have a few concerns. The most immediate and pressing problem was that the survey itself would not be automated. We wanted to make the process simpler and not even more complicated by adding another manual function. In reality, agents would not always execute these tasks and potentially miss client responses as they send them directly through email. These challenges presented a dilemma in which we questioned if the survey would ever be sent, considering we could not provide any controls to keep the agents accountable. When we brought these concerns up, Cathy mentioned that we could make the survey task a requirement for agents to receive their paychecks associated with the account. This stop-gap process would provide the necessary reinforcement to make sure the surveys are completed.

We also had a few concerns about how the information would be collected, reported, and integrated within the CRM. Since the agent would have to engage in a manual process outside of the CRM, the results would also have to be manually entered to produce any actionable feedback. This was a cause of concern considering the additional

time it would take to accomplish each customer task and the volume of clients they have. For these reasons, we determined this solution was not the best fit for the client.

After concluding our conversation with Cathy, the team circled back and decided to brainstorm potential solutions. After analyzing the situation, we determined that the client could potentially gain value from hiring an intern to handle these marketing and survey processes. We thought this would be a good fit if the functions themselves could not automatically integrate within the CRM. The intern would handle all of the surveys' tracking and responses and would input these results in the CRM manually. The client could recruit someone from the Baylor marketing department to intern and receive course credit in exchange for the work. We weren't exactly thrilled with this solution, as the time it would take to hire and train the intern would take considerable time and resources. As a group, we decided to try and do more research over the weekend and come together next week to determine what direction we would go.

The following week, Cathy reached out to inform the team of a unique opportunity. We had asked Cathy to do some digging on her side to see if State Farm had any marketing projects that would align with our project's goals. Cathy shared that State Farm had begun a trial of a new customer experience platform called Medallia. The test was going to last approximately four months and would observe the level of engagement from customers. The survey itself was qualitative in nature with most questions geared towards the customer's experience with the agency. The trial survey was also limited to only customers who held an auto policy. Unfortunately, the survey had just closed to applicants. Cathy indicated that she would reach out to the project coordinator at corporate to see if we could still join the trial and get back to us. The potential to join this



trial project was extremely encouraging. After doing some research, we discovered that Medallia could achieve much more than automated surveys. The software manages and automates certain customer experience functions such as customer surveys, automated mail campaigns, and other digital services. Medallia would visualize results into a dashboard within Salesforce, where agents can analyze customer experience trends and get actionable insight for their business.

### *Implementation & Termination*

As we began to near the end of our project, the pressure was on to execute on a solution. The team was eager to hear back from Cathy to see if we could get our client in the Medallia trial. Just in case we weren't able to, we began testing the survey function in the customer onboarding tasks and preparing the survey materials for our request to State Farm. After a few days, we finally heard back from Cathy. She shared with us that she was able to convince the project manager to get us into the trial. Our team was thrilled to hear that our client was going to get on board with the trial. After getting the good news, we quickly communicated the message to our client. We explained that State Farm would implement the application and all of the technical support and training for the platform. The client was very excited to get the implementation process started. We were eager to help; however, the client indicated that State Farm would not allow us to sit in on project meetings due to company policy regarding data privacy. For this reason, we had to take a back seat in implementing the software initially. We were able to go live about a week ahead of our project deadline and distributed the State Farm survey to new auto clients the week of November second.

We concluded the project with the client by discussing the project's key takeaways and their implications on her business. Firstly, we noted the potential of Medallia's customer experience software for other areas of her business. Assuming the trial is successful and State Farm adopts Medallia, we recommended developing a holistic customer journey that integrated specific customer experience interactions across her entire client base. Additionally, we indicated that we would facilitate her locating an intern with the marketing department for initial support. The client thanked us for our efforts and reiterated how happy she was about getting involved in the trial. Afterward, the team concluded our project roll-off by sending the client a written deliverable outlining the research and process analysis we conducted during the project.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Application and Adaption of Consulting Processes

As previously mentioned in the past chapter, the overarching structure of this project was designed to implement the consulting process outlined in *Flawless Consulting*. Further case analysis techniques are utilized from Cosentino's *Case in Point*. This chapter examines the practical application of the tools and processes discussed in both works.

Before we begin to understand the complexities of being an effective consultant, we must first define what a consultant actually is. The term "consultant" typically produces the immediate comparison to an advisor; however, this definition is somewhat lacking considering the many roles a consultant can take on. Block defines a consultant as a "person in a position to have some influence over an individual, a group, or an organization but has no direct power to make changes or implement programs (Block 2011, 2)." At first glance, this definition seems extremely vague, yet when you consider the array of roles a consultant can be described as, it is difficult to pin down a more precise definition. Merriam-Webster defines a consultant as simply someone "who gives professional advice and services (Merriam-Webster 2020)." For the purposes of this paper, Block's slightly broader definition will be utilized. Block's definition reveals the tension involved in the client-consultant relationship. How can a consultant implement a solution when they have no power to do so? This idea illuminates the reality of consultants having to manage ambiguity with key decision makers to influence outcomes. Moreover, consultants must also build trust within the client organization and influence

others involved in the process to gain widespread adoption and acceptance. Block attempts to outline how to manage the ambiguity between whether or not to adopt certain roles, i.e., a manager or consultant, in response to situational demands. The result, as Block defines it, is flawless consulting – or consulting “without error (Block 2011, 9).”

A consultant must also manage their own goals and objectives when consulting for a client. Block identifies three main goals a consultant would like to achieve. Firstly, a consultant ideally would like to establish a collaborative relationship with the client. Block argues that this relationship “maximizes (the) use of people resources... (and) spreads the responsibility for success or failure and for implementation (Block 2011, 19).” Secondly, a consultant wants to make sure that the problem they tackle stays solved. In other words, a consultant wants to implement a solution that will fundamentally alter the outcome of a specific process. Without careful planning and client involvement, most clients will revert back to old processes and behaviors. To combat this, a consultant should create and distribute learning documents like slide decks, research papers, video tutorials, or any other documentation that capture what was done in the project so that the client may reference them after the engagement is complete. Moreover, a consultant needs to design solutions that are tailored for the client’s situation and addresses the root cause of the problem and not just surface-level issues. Simply solving self-presenting issues without consideration of other factors, such as the client’s workplace dynamics, is a recipe for disaster. Thirdly, a consultant will want to pay close attention to analyzing both the technical/ business problems and the relationships people have with that problem. Consultants are uniquely positioned to provide objective analysis on how a problem is being handled and how it can be solved. Clients typically perceive

the consultant's advice differently than others involved in the decision-making process due to their third-party objectivity (Block 2011, 20). Leveraging this fact is important for the consultant to provide the most value during the client engagement. Block also recognizes a secondary goal to each consulting act: gaining client commitment. If each phase of the consulting process is flawless, then Block argues that this goal is achieved in tandem with the successful continuation of each phase. In other words, client commitment is a gradual process that increases as the consultant removes "obstacles that block the client from acting on our advice (Block 2011, 21)."

### *The Five Phases of Consulting: Mechanics and Methodologies*

Before exploring the processes of each consulting phase, it is important to recognize that each client situation does not demand exactly the same approach or methodologies. Each client engagement demands a tailored approach according to the situational demands. Therefore, this chapter will focus on which processes and methods were applicable to our client.

#### *Contracting & Scoping*

In practice, the contracting phase was extremely similar to Block's general construction. The relationship began with a clear understanding of our role as a third-party consultant. There was hardly any initial resistance as the project was previously planned as a continuation of the previous semester's project. Additionally, we did not have to negotiate any price considerations as our services were provided free of charge.

The lack of consideration of these critical factors in contracting facilitated a collaborative discussion of possibilities from the onset. Furthermore, there was no real necessity for a formal contract as most of the pertinent details, such as the project timeframe, were all communicated verbally. Of more critical importance was the first meeting in which we discussed the initial parameters of the project.

The first meeting with the client details how the engagement will operate going forward. This first meeting between both parties is typically referred to as the contract meeting. In essence, the contract sets the boundaries of the project and reveals the relationships of each party involved. Much can be gained or lost from the contracting phase. Block provides an eleven-step process to ensure that the contract with the client is productive and representative of both party's interests. This process is detailed in figure one. In the first meeting, our team focused our efforts on getting a good idea of what the client wanted from the project and from our team. In doing so, we realized that the initial scope of the project was incorrectly communicated. Details surrounding this conversation can be found in the previous chapter. We did not encounter any tell-tale resistance behaviors during this meeting, so we proceeded through the typical eight-step process. The contracting phase itself requires simple yet necessary actions, such as gaining commitment, that predict the trajectory of the project itself.

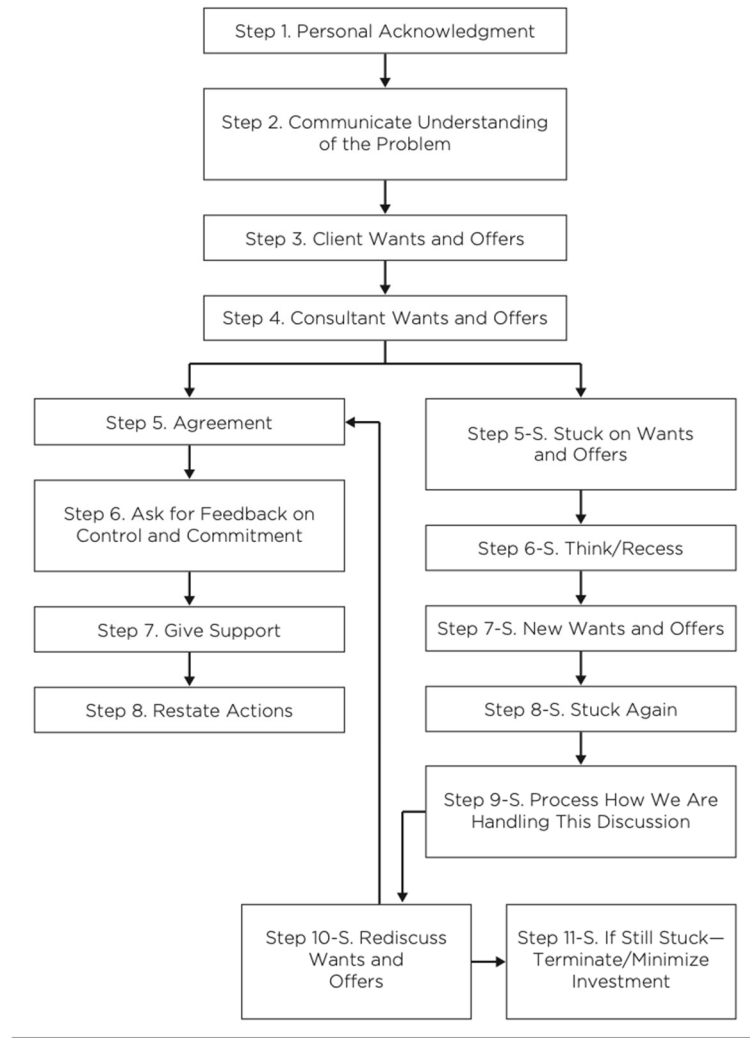


Figure 1. Navigating the Contract Meeting (Block 2011, 71)

The details surrounding the actions necessary to accomplish each step in the contracting process are somewhat fungible in that the actual language utilized in each phase is not the same. However, the general action of each step maintains the same form from client to client. So, for the purposes of this paper, I will attempt to briefly provide an overview of the main actions necessary in each step.

1. Personal Acknowledgment
  - a. The first step requires you to engage your client as a human. The point of this step is to build rapport and facilitate discussion.
2. Communicate Understanding of Problem
  - a. Recognize that the client's situation is unique and give your initial ideas about the problem. Reassure the client that you can be of help. This step should be concise and to the point.
3. Clients Wants and Offers
  - a. Simply ask the question – “What do you want from me (Block 2011, 75)?” Answering this question is critical to understanding the main objective.
  - b. Ask if there are any constraints that would change how the project would go about. i.e., who should be involved with this project?
  - c. Identify how the customer will pay for the services.
4. Consultants Wants and Offers
  - a. In simple and concise language, express to the client your requirements to consult. For example, you should ask for access to information, people, or even a specific timeframe to complete the project. The bounds of what you can ask for are limited only by the client's willingness to provide it.
  - b. It's also important to give the customer an idea of what you or your company brings to the table in terms of services and expectations.
5. Reach Agreement



- a. Acknowledge agreement on terms by restating the main objectives to be achieved and in what manner. Then ask the client directly if they agree to those terms.

6. Ask for Feedback on Control and Commitment

- a. Ask the client what they think of the proposed project. This step is intended to see if there are any client commitment issues. Special attention should be paid to the client's reaction, and any hesitation needs to be addressed.
- b. Ask the client if they are comfortable with the level of control they have over the project. Control should always be given to whatever degree the client requires.

7. Give Support

- a. Make statements that show your excitement to begin the project with the client. Also, acknowledge the client's help in facilitating the new relationship.

8. Restate Actions

- a. This can be the scheduling of the next meeting or an acknowledgment of when and how the next steps will take place.

Our team followed this step-by-step method as well as a contract meeting rubric discussed in class to help formulate the project scope and the original contracting presentation. The rubric included four main action items that we would include in our contracting presentation. These actions were restating the customer needs, identify objectives, apply an analytical structure, define the approach of the project, and

determine the project schedule. Both the rubric and Block's step-by-step process helped our team to solidify our understanding of the relevant aspects of the contract meeting, such as the scope and project schedule, and conduct it effectively with our client.

Our team found value in utilizing Block's framework to generate our initial strategy surrounding the contracting meeting. In practice, we found that the meeting did not follow the eight-step process in such a linear fashion. This was the case for our meeting as we had to adapt to changes in the scope on the fly. Despite this, we made sure to gain client commitment by verbally asking the client their opinion on how the project would be done. Our team choose not to utilize the language Block encourages surrounding control and commitment. We found that the natural course of the conversation facilitated the discovery of this information without having to ask directly for it. For example, the client indicated to us that she would not be actively participating in the project and she would help us with anything we needed. Obviously, this remark showed us that the client was comfortable relinquishing day-to-day control of project activities. There is most definitely value in asking these direct control questions; however, it just wasn't necessary for our conversation with the client. Block's model of contracting encapsulates the important activities necessary to gain client commitment and facilitating progress through the consulting process.

### *Discovery & The Ivy Case System*

The overarching goal of the discovery process is to reveal further information that could influence the outcome of the project and incorporate that information for analysis and decision-making. Block's offers two different approaches to the discovery process:

problem and asset-based thinking. The problem-focused approach is historically how consultants and clients have approached issues as problems that require a specific solution. The asset-based approach focuses “more on the possibilities than (the) problem” and seeks to “take advantage” of the processes and systems that are working (Block 2011, 159). Ultimately adopting either approach boils down to your interpretation of the situation. Our team originally approached the project with problem-based thinking. We decided on this approach because of the technical nature of the problem being solved. As we progressed through the project, our team pivoted to asset-based thinking as we encountered obstacles that prevented us from executing on the original solution to the problem.

Block outlines two different approaches to conducting the consulting process as a whole. There are two main approaches a consultant can take, either a third-party or a whole system approach. The third-party approach is what you would typically associate the function of a consultant with. This approach maximizes the value of a consultant as a “neutral observer... (that) has no stake in the answer” but rather focuses on evaluating systems and processes according to their past experience and providing a recommendation (Block 2011, 179). The other alternative is a whole system approach which allows each party to be a part of the change process. This approach allows everyone “acting on the recommendation... to play a major part in creating them” (Block 2011, 176). The benefits of either situation differ depending on the client scenario. With our project, we choose to adopt the third-party consultant approach. In retrospect, we could have gained more value in getting other end-users’ perspectives on their daily activities and how we could integrate this new survey function into client onboarding. We

choose not to pursue this approach as we thought that the client's perspective was sufficient as she was a practicing agent and conducted many of the same actions other agents did in regard to customer care and marketing.

The main value a consultant brings to the table during the discovery phase is a fresh perspective. The consultant brings a new way of thinking and thus a new way of doing things. In this way, the purpose of discovery "is to mobilize action that will improve the organization's functioning (Block 2011, 164)." Being able to effectively analyze organizational functionality requires evaluating both the technical problem and the way it's being managed. Block offers a model for interpreting these problems and bringing out the true problem behind the presenting problem. This model is represented by figure two. Our team adopted this model to conduct our analysis on the initial client problem. The technical problem was fairly clear-cut. There were no systems in place to facilitate a digital marketing interaction outside of social media advertisements. When examining the client's organization, the underlying problem was less clear. After further discussion with our client, we realized that the crux of the issue was the ease of doing the marketing function. Neither the client nor her agents wanted to incorporate a solution that was tedious and complex. This was obvious in that the previous consulting project's solution was never adopted. Understanding these limiting factors helped us to choose a solution that would be easy to use and highly efficient for reaching a variety of customer groups. We were able to redefine the problem as both a lack of technical capability and reporting. Without the proper recognition and weight to these non-technical factors, we could not have produced a solution that would have worked for the client's entire business.

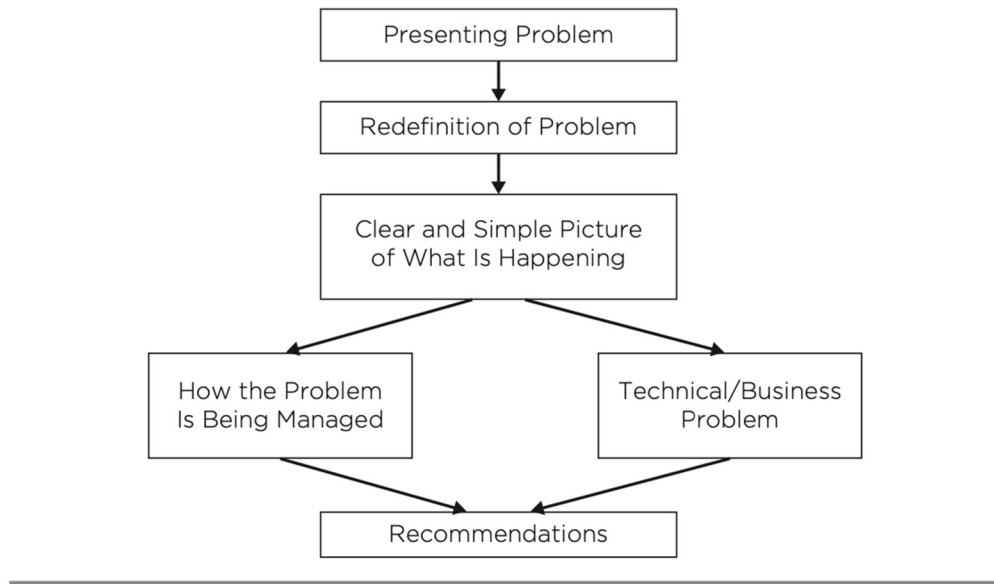


Figure 2. The Discovery Model for Problem Solving (Block 2011, 166)

In addition to the two models previously mentioned, we also utilized Cosentino's Ivy Case System to analyze our client's project. The Ivy Case System is a simple model that aims to help simplify complex and ambiguous problems. There are five key steps that make up the Ivy Case System. They are:

1. Summarize the Question
2. Verify the Objective
3. Ask Clarifying Questions
4. Label the Case and Lay Out Your Structure
5. State Your Hypothesis

These steps are fairly self-explanatory and straightforward in thinking. The beauty of this system is that it does not require anything other than common sense to be used

effectively. The benefit of shaping our thought process through this system is the easy application and interpretation of several frameworks, which help expedite thinking and mental understanding (Cosentino 2018, 31). There are four main case scenarios that are utilized for the basis of the Ivy System. They are profit and loss, entering new markets, pricing, and growth and increasing sales (Cosentino 2018, 36). Each of these cases has a similar structure with specific variables that follow the typical profit and loss identity. The main value we derived from adopting this structure in our analysis was the stimulation of differing alternatives for the client. For example, we utilized the growing sales structure to dig into which variables were the main value drivers for the project. This helped to shape our thinking about what solutions would best fit what the client was attempting to achieve. Ultimately the goal of implementing a survey was new customer acquisition as well as customer retention. Focusing on this objective helped us to narrow our solutions and determine which processes would have the highest level of success in regard to marketing to the client's customers most efficiently and effectively.

### *Analysis & Decision to Act*

After concluding the discovery process, the client must be presented with an accurate picture of what was discovered. The formal discussion of findings is typically conducted in a meeting where the consultant is able to express their key findings and potential action items resulting from those findings. It's important to remember that the main job of a consultant is to be an agent of change. Therefore, the main objective of the meeting is the "commitment to action. Even if most of the meeting is spent in understanding the problem or the possibility, the heart of the meeting is the discussion of

what to do (Block 2011, 229).” Block offers a ten-step process to manage this crucial meeting. Figure three illustrates this model. In many ways, this model is fairly similar to the model proposed for navigating the initial client meeting, at least in structure. The main differentiator between the two meetings, of course, is the delivery and objective of the meeting. This meeting is driven by managing customers’ feelings and reactions to the recommendation. For this reason, Block reserves 60% of the conversation to determine the client’s reaction and to decide on what to do (Block 2011, 236-238). This demonstrates the importance of getting feedback, managing concerns, and gaining client commitment. The climax of the meeting revolves around the decision on whether to adopt the change, continue discovery, or terminate the engagement. It’s important that the client come to the conclusion of whether to decide whether to adopt the consultant’s solution on their own. Otherwise, the solution will never truly be integrated into the client’s workplace.

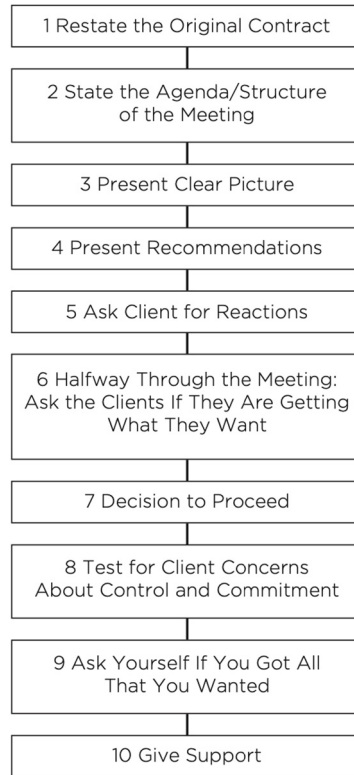


Figure 3. Steps in Managing the Meeting for Action (Block 2011, 232)

Our experience with our client during our decision meeting was wholly positive. Because we had worked virtually side by side with our client throughout the discovery process, the final meeting did not have many surprises. We made sure to talk through each alternative and get the client's input on our analysis before coming to a conclusion on what decision should be made. Overall, the client was happy with our recommendation and was eager to implement the new survey. The feedback we received during this meeting was that there were no outstanding areas of concerns from the client. Although our client didn't think so, our team felt like we could have done a better job in supporting the client in the next action, implementation.



### *Implementation & Termination*

After gaining commitment from the client to change the solution must then be implemented. The implementation phase is perhaps the most complex of all of the phases in the consulting process. Despite the clear direction of change, actually integrating new processes, tools, or procedures is harder than it seems. Of course, this is due to the people dimension of change. People generally tend to resist change and be stuck in their ways. To combat resistance to change, Block argues that implementation requires engagement, or the “the art of bringing people together,” and not simply installation of the solution (Block 2011, 250). Change is a difficult process that requires giving attention to the people as much as the process. Block argues that effective and lasting change requires a specific focus on getting everyone involved and onboard with the change. For this reason, this phase is highly relationship driven. Block offers several practical solutions such as rearranging rooms, creating a space for dialogue and establishing peer accountability as successful methods for implementation.

As I mentioned previously, our ability to help implement our solution was severely limited. Once our client was able to enter the survey, State Farm took charge of the entire implementation and training process. We attempted to help the learning and set up of the new processes; however, we were not allowed to attend any training meetings or interact with any customer data. Nonetheless, we continued to communicate with our client in the final weeks of the project to make sure that the implementation process went smoothly. We concluded our engagement with the client with a final meeting to recapture the major outcomes and turn over documents to ensure future learning and adoption.

Block doesn't have much guidance in regard to successfully extending or ending a client engagement. Further analysis in this area is warranted as the extension of work is vital for the consulting business.

In conclusion, Block and Cosentino offer several frameworks and practical methods for managing projects. Block's expansive multi-phased consulting process provides an extremely valuable set of systems in which to operate. Consulting is a uniquely dynamic process that evolves according to the demands of the client and situation. Both authors recognize the importance of the human element in any case or project. No framework, method, or system can replicate the power of having a trusting consultant-client relationship. Being able to consult flawlessly requires an elevated perception of the client's thoughts and feelings and acting in a way that is authentic.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Learning Outcomes and Career Applications

While reflecting on my experience in the management consulting course and my overall time at Baylor, I can't help but feel how extremely fortunate I am. Having the ability to work with real clients to solve their very real problems was an outstanding experience. I have learned so much about consulting in such a short span of time. Perhaps the most rewarding realization was that my team and I were capable of delivering a successful consulting project. Moreover, being able to see the impact of our research and hard work come to fruition and result in meaningful change for our client was spectacular. The consultant typically never gets to enjoy the fruits of their labor so being able to see our recommendation implemented was extremely rewarding.

This chapter details the conclusions and learnings garnered from this project. Specific attention is paid to the future application of skills learned to my future career as a consultant. The chapter concludes with a reflection on my business education and how Baylor has influenced my career and life.

Throughout my life I've found that God has a way of revealing my path in somewhat unexpected ways. That's exactly what happened with this project. Initially, I was planning on writing a thesis on the evolving U.S.-Chinese trade war. Unfortunately, the world was forced to hit pause for several months due to the pandemic. This catastrophic global event had a similar impact on my life. Due to the pandemic, my internship with KPMG was abruptly moved to a virtual experience. To make matters

direr, KPMG had to cancel all intern client work due to security concerns related to working virtually. Luckily, I had decided to register for the consulting practicum as a way to further the skills I thought I would develop during my internship. Therefore, the consulting practicum was my first actual experience working in the role of a consultant. In many ways, this made my experience all the richer. Being able to understand the mechanics behind consulting and the practical execution of projects was fascinating. I decided to change my thesis project to focus on the practicum as I saw the immeasurable value the course would bring to my professional and career development.

### *Key Takeaways*

Perhaps the most impactful takeaway for my career was the realization that there really is no perfect answer to any particular problem. Each client engagement may share some similarities, but one project is never exactly the same as another. Recognizing this fact early on in the engagement allows you to approach problems with an inquisitive, non-assuming mind. Initially, my team did not approach the client's problem in this manner. This realization hit me halfway through the project whenever we realized that State Farm wouldn't allow our initial recommendation to be done due to stringent data privacy policies. We had failed to consider the context surrounding the solution. As a consultant, you must always take into account the environment in which you are operating to make an educated decision. If we had fully comprehended the degree to which State Farm corporate-controlled office policies and procedures, we most likely would not have pursued the initial scope. Hindsight, of course, is always 20/20. Keeping an open mind and limiting your bias is an important part of truly comprehending the

client's situation. It is essential to realize that despite your expertise, your client understands the holistic context of the project better than you do. Leveraging your client's knowledge about their organization and processes and then incorporating that into the analysis is key for the solution to be effective. Adopting this mindset will allow you to reach a near-perfect solution to the client's given situation.

Some of the most rewarding experiences I have experienced at Baylor are the interactions I had working in small teams. With this project, I was blessed to have a project team that worked well together in almost every aspect. I would credit our success to our clear delegation of work amongst members. Every week we would all come together in brief team meetings to agree on the work to be done in order to establish responsibility for certain objectives. That way everyone was held accountable for some of the work. This model helped our team manage expectations effortlessly amongst team members and fostered necessary team communication. More importantly, we also recognized each other's strengths and attempted to incorporate that knowledge into our team strategy. Our collaborative approach was a vital part of our team cohesion and overall effectiveness. Of course, this shared governance model would not necessarily work exactly the same in the industry as there is a hierarchy of management roles. Nonetheless, I've found that clear communication amongst all project participants is critical for effective teamwork. Otherwise, work is siloed, and inefficiencies creep into team workflows.

The largest obstacle in our project was having to manage organizational pushback from our ideas. Our project was unique from other projects in that the client was a part of a larger national corporation rather than a local business. Working for a large national

client produced its own challenges, such as having to navigate complex systems and gaining necessary approvals. These issues could have been mitigated if we had dug deeper into the level of restrictions State Farm had in place during the discovery period. Nonetheless, we had to deal with the organizational resistance, in this case, data policies, to have a successful implementation of our proposal. The issue was somewhat harder to resolve due to the fact we could not advocate for our solution directly to decision-makers. Therefore, Block's method of handling resistance through clear and direct communication didn't exactly apply as the client's feelings were not the issue. Because we could not break policy, we decided to leverage our client to utilize her knowledge about the organization to reveal other possible alternatives. Utilizing an asset-based approach was highly productive, and we were able to gain crucial knowledge regarding what was and not achievable under State Farm policies. From that point forward, we had frequent communication between all parties regarding different alternatives for integrating marketing functions into Salesforce. Our close collaboration allowed our team to leverage State Farm resources to discover what was possible. Ultimately, by working together and sharing information and ideas freely, we were able to come to a consensus on two alternatives that were achievable within the CRM system. This example displays the value of leveraging the client relationship to uncover solutions and find champions within an organization. Sometimes asking for help is the only way to productively remove project obstacles. Having the courage to seek help and be honest about the problem will be critical for dealing with challenges that will undoubtedly arise in future consulting projects.

In every consulting project there comes a time when the client relationship moves from feelings of skepticism and doubt to commitment. Facilitating this evolution requires careful consideration of the client's feelings and needs during every step of the consulting process. It was fascinating to see how our relationship with our client progressed to the point of full commitment and trust in our recommendations. There was a noticeable shift in the client's behavior as she began to realize that our solution could really work for her business. What really spurred this shift was when we presented our observations to the client and simply asked her opinion on the possible solutions. Asking this simple question allowed the client to provide her input and make the solution her own. Getting the client to buy into the solution and even facilitate achieving it was exciting. Feeling that click with the client is ultimately what every consultant aims for as it demonstrates mutual understanding and respect between both parties. Having a strong degree of trust in client relationships will be crucial to operating collaboratively on future projects.

### *Naked Consulting*

During my summer internship, I read a book that set the stage for my understanding of how a consultant should operate. In many respects, this book was unlike any other business book I had read, both in name and content. *Getting Naked*, by Patrick Lencioni, is a business fable that follows a young consulting executive who is tasked with integrating a small consulting firm into his much larger firm. Along the way, he discovers that this small firm operated entirely differently from his employer. Lencioni utilizes a narrative format to reveal the differences between typical consulting behaviors and his own methodology of "naked" consulting. The naked service, as Lencioni describes it, is

the “ability of a service provider to be vulnerable—to embrace uncommon levels of humility, selflessness, and transparency for the good of a client (Lencioni 2010, 214).” Lencioni’s thoughts on the role of a consultant helped formulate my own understanding of what a consultant can be for their clients.

Being vulnerable is a somewhat elusive trait to find in American business. It’s definitely not a word you would like to hear in a board room. In general, our business culture rejects any attempt to show weakness and or uncertainty. Lencioni argues that this is a fatal flaw in our business culture and consulting processes, more specifically, that is driven by three fears: the fear of losing the business, fear of being embarrassed, or fear of feeling inferior. Naked consulting essentially means that you operate free from these psychological constraints and provide a completely objective viewpoint on the situation.

Lencioni offers several principles which a consultant can adopt to combat the three fears mentioned previously to consult nakedly. In practice, there are four principles that combat each fear. Most of these principles fall in line with the key characteristics of naked consulting. Essentially this an application of authentic behavior in differing scenarios. We will focus on Lencioni’s advice for losing the business fear. Lencioni offers four main actions to combat these fears that impinge on building trusting client relationships. Firstly, instead of trying to sell what you would do, begin consulting on the project as soon as you engage the client, even if it means you are providing your services on the project for free initially. This establishes with the client the quality of the work to be done and encourages goodwill from the beginning of the relationship (Lencioni 2010, 219). The client should always be consulted, not sold. Secondly, if the client has concerns regarding the cost of the consultation, it’s better to sacrifice the short-term financial gain



for a potentially long-term profitable relationship. Thirdly, “tell the kind truth” by confronting clients with difficult facts in an empathetic yet clear manner (Lencioni 2010, 220). Telling the truth of the matter almost always escapes needless delay in decision making and spurs action to change. Fourthly, when dealing with uncomfortable situations, don’t be afraid to address “the elephant in the room” in group settings (Lencioni 2010, 222). Doing so usually results in a critical discussion amongst colleagues that stimulates positive change and paints the consultant as the hero.

Lencioni’s careful consideration of what it means to be a servant for the client through naked consulting really helped me to understand the value of authenticity in business relationships. Under his framework, authenticity takes many forms within the client consultant relationship. Overall, authenticity is a perceived feeling of the client about you and your actions. The feeling itself stems from whether or not the consultant is perceived as humble and transparent in how they communicate. These feelings, if perceived as genuine, hopefully result in trust and loyalty between the consultant and client. Block would tend to agree; however, his interpretation of authenticity is more a factor of leverage in the relationship. For Block, “authentic behavior with a client means you put into words what you are experiencing with the client as you work (Block 2011, 37-38).” Acting authentically is more about speaking plainly and directly to engender trust, leverage, and client commitment. Both interpretations acknowledge the relationship between perceived authenticity and higher levels of trust. I prefer to adopt Lencioni’s model of authenticity as it approaches the idea from a servant perspective rather than a control perspective. Authenticity should not be a means to an end. Instead, it should be the byproduct of fiduciary actions made in the best interest of the client.

Being authentic extends past just one's business career. Aligning your personal brand to reflect your value systems is of utmost importance for living in a way that is authentic. Consulting is a huge field with hundreds of consultants that all look and sound the same. Allowing my personality and thinking to breakthrough my business suit would differentiate me from other professionals. There have been many times throughout my college career where I've felt that I've sacrificed being my completely authentic self to project a professional image. Most of this behavior was driven by the insecurity of not believing that I was good enough. Now I understand that this belief is self-fulfilling. Feigning confidence only degrades people's perception of you. It's better to adopt a style that is uniquely me. Trying to be something I'm not only exacerbates the rift between a client and myself. Breaking down these psychological barriers will be important for developing strong customer relationships in the future.

Consulting on this project was an enlightening experience. Learning how to manage the client relationship, perform an effective discovery process, adapt to challenges, and implement a lasting solution are all necessary skills that I will undoubtedly utilize throughout my consulting career. This course has given me the tools and frameworks in which to apply my education and understanding of businesses. I wouldn't have been able to have such a successful project without the guidance and direction of my professors and classmates. I leave my college career with a sense of enthusiasm and humility for my consulting career and am excited to continue to refine my craft.

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