

**COURSE ASSESSMENT in Consulting and Influencing
Skills (CIS)**

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1. Introduction

This paper develops a competency profile for describing and justifying the most appropriate skills needs to work as a consultant involved in arena of talent management and retention. The discussion sheds light on the personal competencies gaps and suggests appropriate developmental activities.

2. Arena of Consultancy: Talent Management and Retention

Talent management and retention consultancy is an expert area, which is demanded extensively across the global organizations in order to acknowledge the key elements valued by the organizational employees. Talent management consultants are equipped with greater insight to assess timely skills trends, management policies, recognition and rewards and ways to offer work life balance popular in an industry at any specific point of time. They are smart enough to influence, persuade and negotiate with their clients (Vile 2010). I have chosen this arena of consultancy because of the most challenging issues faced by the global organizations at present i.e. of high employee turnover. Telecommuting and technological advancements have offered increased opportunities to the talented and skilled workforce. Their criteria and demands have risen, which are resulting in high cost for the businesses. I as a talent management and retention consultant want to become a leading solution expert for the businesses.

3. Competency Profile based on Interview Findings of Practicing Consultant

Based on an interview conducted from a practicing consultant, Mrs. Diamond Desouza (fictitious name used), competency profile for a talent management and retention consultant has been developed. It is constituted of three major sections highlighting the key activities and responsibilities, consultancy domains and competencies required for the role.

3.1 Key Activities and Responsibilities

Mrs Diamond is a talent management consultant working as an internal consultant in a multinational organization for about five years. Her key activities in the role include:

- To help management identify critical roles and key talents within the organization
- To research the clear picture of competitors talent management policies
- To identify ways of treating talented employees through retention strategies and contingency plans
- To assess future talent needs and help organizational management line up recruitment, job policies, compensation with the identified challenges
- To help business develop their job rotational mechanism in order to go for future developments
- To persuade and motivate the talented staff towards expected and unexpected changes needed in organization through perceived support and fairness
- To carry on embodiment of a new culture through symbols, stories, language and rituals
- To build trust among the employees and employers using democracy and relationship leadership

3.2 Consultancy Domain

Organizational change and transformation is the consultancy domain with which Mrs Desouza has been performing her duties successfully and effectively. She is using appreciative inquiry approach in promoting the adaption of new changes in human resources management without sacrificing the talented employees. The change management for her is to help organization employ the strategies, which are capable of retaining the existing talent as well as in attracting new talent from the industry.

3.3 Competencies Required for Role

In order to act as change catalysts to help business management (client) in managing and retaining talents, Mrs Desouza is required to possess list of competencies as mentioned below:

- Team working excellence
- Strong knowledge expertise
- Comfortable
- Confident
- Challenger
- Active listening skills
- Openness and trust
- Effective communication
- Problem solving
- Emotional controls
- Kindness
- Unbiased and prejudiced approach of problem solving

Based on the findings gathered, I have assessed my own skills/attributes to assess whether I “fit” with this type of consulting or not.

4. Self Assessment

At first stance, the key challenge in the flawless consultancy can be derived from the person’s ability to help the client to be open to the discovery process. Block (2012) finds it in his discovery model for problem solving extremely important to deal with clients’ resistance in order to develop the clients’ commitment towards the proposed option. However, I am weaker in the

process of analyzing the problem. The approach required in the talent management and retention consultancy arena is related with the research approach.

However, I find myself meeting the criteria of action approach identified by Block (2012). I am unable to control my bias and prejudiced. Likewise, talent management consultancy is about discovery of all the related factors, which can place influence on the situation while I mainly prefer working on the issues highlighted by the client. I cannot work independently with the research and need client's to be part of the research team. My personal feelings often surpass the objectivity of hard data researched from the industry.

Additionally, to assess my personal competences and skills required to become a talent management consultant, seven C's model presented by Cope (2012) can be much helpful.

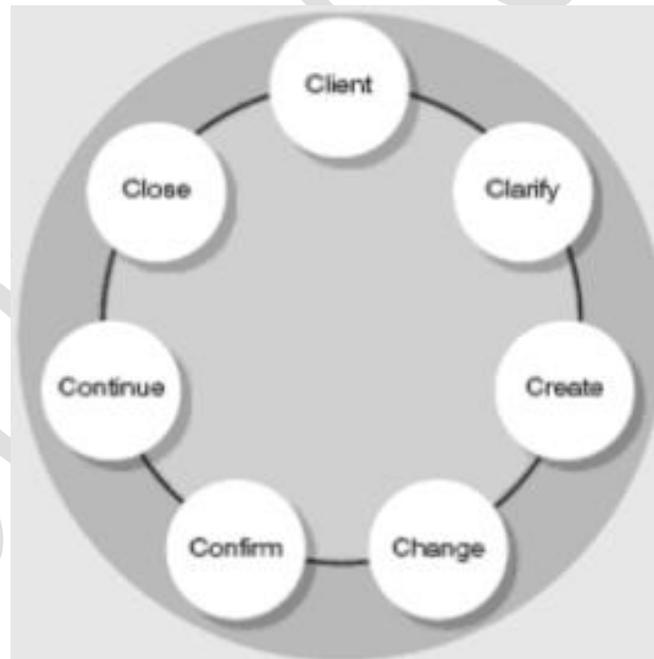


Figure 1: The Seven C's of Consulting (Cope 2012)

I am unable to define the client's orientation of the world because of my inability to understand and relate person and problems. Despite, I am capable of understanding what is going on in order to create creative techniques and implement change. Additionally, I do need to develop some of the change management skills specifically in sharing new skills and knowledge. However, I find myself as equipped with the effective professionalism skills needed to work with respect.

Academic literature has also emphasized on the need to overcome the personal challenges related with the self-interest, short termism, sentiment, stuck and sociability (Cope 2012). Without dealing with these challenges, I will not be able to become a successful talent management and retention consultant because in this role I would be required to pursue effective communication with both the management as well as the workforce. Influencing management and their workforce is not an easy task as will require me to modify my behaviours accordingly.

Moreover, Thomas (2013, p.44) recognizes patience as a key factor in consultancy. According to author, *"Patience will be needed in order to build up a range of positive successes to shift peoples' attitudes. This process of influencing your clients' perceptions and attitudes begins at the initial meeting stage"*. Talent management is all about patience as the staff and client both might resist to the proposed solution. There is a possibility that others may criticize me for being too analytical and insufficiently intuitive (Markham 1998).

Likewise, theories and models of consultancy shed light on the time management skills and interpersonal consulting skills as extremely important factors in becoming effective consultant. For many of the consultants, it is difficult to manage their time because of their inability to gather, assess and understand the data. Designing an effective work plan needs sufficient technical information and support from client. I would be needed to place strong consideration

on this area as outputs can be against the time available and commitments towards planning might not lead to fruitful results.

I also find myself as weak in terms of using and controlling my emotions. According to The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development, *“Change is an emotional rollercoaster engendering both strong positive and negative responses. Transformational change is also a long march rather than a short sprint, requiring those leading change to maintain energy and momentum for change in the organization if they are not to lose individuals as they drop out from weariness and overload”* (p.20). Based on this theoretical perspective, I would be required to act as change agent employing perceived support and fairness (CIPD 2014).

Thus, with the deeper self-appraisal based on the theories and models discussed, I lack several competencies required to develop influencing and persuasion skills.

Skills and Competencies	Self-Appraisal Results
• Team working excellence	Needs improvement
• Strong knowledge expertise	Present
• Comfortable	Needs improvement
• Confident	Needs improvement
• Challenger	Needs improvement
• Active listening skills	Needs improvement
• Openness and trust	Present
• Effective communication	Present
• Problem solving	Present
• Emotional controls	Needs improvement
• Unbiased and prejudiced approach of problem solving	Needs improvement

5. Proposed Development Plan

The current ranking of my consultancy skills in the arena of talent management and retention consultancy, I would be required to develop a plan for improvement. Influencing and persuasion are indispensable to successful consultant. Management and staff of the company are equipped with limited information about the marketplace. Therefore, I would propose myself to go for training with an internal talent management consultant. Practical exposure to the issues will help me in learning the decision model for problem solving and exercising it for the benefits of the clients as well as their talented staff (Schein 1999).

Additionally, a short term workshop can also help me in achieving the benefits. The formal workshop with 3 to 4 months guidance can help me in developing skills needed for developing client commitment, which is identified as the most important goal in consultancy. Consultants do not have direct control over the implementation of the activities and therefore their connectivity with the line managers responsible for producing effective outcomes is very necessary (Block 2012). On the other side, when the consultant does not have control over client or the events of organizations, they need to utilize their influence. I expect the workshop to help me in learning and developing consultancy skills related with each phase of consultancy including contracting, discovery, feedback and decision making. These will help me in bringing in the two most critical skills of consultancy in the process i.e. responsibility and accountability (Johnson 2005).

Additionally for developing my knowledge management skills to stay up-to-date about the relevant market and industry information on talent management and retention strategies, I would dedicate two to three hours daily to the individual research competencies by linking with the online consultancy assignments, training seminars and learning experiences. Online conferences and seminars would help me in enhancing competences associated with current and foreseeable level of knowledge (Mentzas 2003).

In terms of interpersonal skills development, I will initiate formal and informal meetings with my colleague consultants and peers working in the same field. With the constant meetings and get-to-gather, I will be able to polish my interpersonal skills including assertiveness, supportiveness, confrontation, listening, and management style and group process (Block 2012).

6. Exploitation of Other Key Issues

In the process of developing and improving expert consultancy and influencing skills to persuade the organizations about the changes needed in their talent management and retention strategies, powerful presentation skills cannot be undermined. As an internal consultant, I will need to learn creation of 'short, snappy, meaningful pick-me-up presentations in front of the management. For this purpose, I would need to practice effective presentation skills like planning, creating impactful slides, influencing key ideas repetitions, using stories and maintaining powerful physical gestures (Vile 2010).

7. Tactics and Strategies for Influencing and Persuasion from a Consultancy

Perspective

Thus, working in capacity of an internal talent management and retention consultant, I will use appreciative inquiry, negotiation and participative communication. With the help of these tactics, I will be able to persuade my clients effectively. Negotiation and agreement come out as vital strategies for helping a consultant in securing the commitment of his stakeholders. By employing tactics from the Cialdini's principles of influence, I will focus on reciprocity (act of kindness, trust, confidence and rapport), consistency, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity. I will devise staff retention solutions which are creative, unique and rare and are not available for longer. This will help me in making my client feel the deals as solid for decreasing staff turnover and increasing talent competitiveness relative to the market competitors (Vile 2010). There should be clarity in what the client should adopt the solution you have proposed for him.

8. Conclusion

Hence, it can be concluded from the self-evaluation of the consultancy competencies needed to work as a talent management and retention consultant that I need to improve my personal skills profile much more in order to compete in the internal consultancy market. The organization who is already facing challenges of high staff turnover cost would surely not like to employ a consultant with no knowledge assets and no key competencies required to work on the assigned position of internal consultant.

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