

Participatory Design in Consulting

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ABSTRACT

Consultants are important actors in the shaping of organizational and technical change. Consultants could broaden the use of participatory design (PD).

Five case studies are given to identify specifics of PD in consulting. We explore how projects came to be discussed and how, if ever, they developed momentum. It turned out to be critical how these projects are embedded into the network of actors. It is still difficult to use PD in consulting because the area of application is not sharply defined, and the risks are high.

When using PD in consulting, one has to cope with two conflicting aims. Low involvement and little responsibility for outcomes are necessary for successful work with groups. On the other hand, high involvement is needed to procure contracts. Therefore, we propose that PD consulting be conducted in teams of two, and that facilitation be separated from design. This separation encourages the optimal deployment technical and group-facilitation expertise and eases group management.

Keywords

Participatory Design, Consulting, Systems Development

INTRODUCTION

Consultants and consulting companies are important actors in the diffusion and the shaping of organizational and technological change. Thousands of small consulting companies provide technical and organizational advice. Big consulting companies are even able to coin new terms and to set trends (e.g., Davenport [9]). Some consulting companies even invest in research and development, thereby contributing to the production of knowledge, in a manner different from that of 'classical' science (see Gibbons, et al. [13]).

Consulting plays an important role in systems development. A survey of a the European Federation of Management Consulting Associations shows that, in 1993, 17.2% of consulting dealt with information technology and

systems, and 7.0% dealt with project management (cited in Kubr [16]).

Although the term 'consultant' may evoke stereotypic images of the kinds of activities and persons involved, it actually encompasses a great deal of variety, including: training, coaching, technical expertise, managing for a limited period of time, organizational development, and several other activities (Exner, et al. [11], Nagel [17]). Consulting varies widely in both scope and technical expertise, as well as in the actual involvement and responsibility for the work to be done.

Often consultants involve employees in their activities. (For a detailed, critical discussion of 'social techniques', see [6].) Even 'hard' consultants, such as McKinsey, involve employees in consulting activities. These issues are not the focus point of this paper, even though it could be worthwhile to take a closer look.

Participatory Design (PD) in the narrower sense may occur in various forms in consulting. Obviously, it is seldom an aim in its own right. PD may, rather, be subsidiary, e.g., we concentrate on working-hours arrangements and use participatory techniques to get good schedules. However, PD can be very central, too, e.g., in systems design: 'Hey guys, whatever system you need - we can do it better with PD!').

In a retrospective analysis of PD projects, Clement and Van den Besselaar [8] show that all of the projects at hand adopted an 'action research' approach. This approach includes, as an essential goal, the practical or political improvements in the participants' lives. Given the broad range of consulting activities, the role of researchers in PD projects can also be understood as a type of consulting. Even though some researchers might not like to be called consultants, others are aware of the resemblance (e.g., the researchers Simonsen and Kensing [19] compare the number of weeks they themselves worked with an estimate for real life consulting).

It may seem odd at first glance to analyze PD in consulting. Profitability was never most central to the PD community. Work in PD projects was often strongly related to politics and democracy, e.g., Bjerkness and Bratteteig [4] discuss different orientations of PD in systems development, and their contribution to work-life democracy. Nevertheless, as Allen [1] proposed, it is necessary to address issues of

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organizational context and resources. Therefore, it is important to discuss PD in the context of consulting because consulting can be a way to get more momentum for PD. This approach has also political relevance because participatory ways of working might get more broadly accepted and professionally done.

Examining PD projects from the perspective of consulting, topics of interest have to be considered that go beyond PD techniques and methods. One has to tackle marketing, contracting, project implementation, etc., in a somehow different way from 'normal' PD projects, where funding came most of the time with the researchers (Clement and Van den Besselaar [8]). More basically, consultants have to define the way they want to work and how to position themselves with respect to (potential) customers.

Drawing upon material from five case studies, as consultants who use PD approaches in various fields, this paper attempts to identify specifics of using PD in consulting. Three of these case studies were in the field of system development, and two others dealt with the participatory design of new working-hours arrangements.

We explore how projects came to be discussed, how their foci emerged, and how, if ever, they gathered momentum. This exploration pushes to the fore the evolving network of actors and intermediaries, and the definition and changes of their relationships. Whereas technical and methodological issues played a minor role, the embedding of these projects in the network of actors, the degree of involvement, and the scope of consulting turned out to be the critical issues for PD in consulting.

Our goal is to develop a more in-depth understanding of PD in consulting as well as how PD consulting is different from other types of consulting. A better understanding of PD in consulting seems indispensable to spread its use.

THE ACTOR NETWORK OF CONSULTING

Callon [7] introduces the term 'techno-economic networks' (TEN) to account for the web of connections of heterogeneous actors who participate collectively in the development of technologies. These techno-economic networks are made of human beings (and the skills they incorporate) as well as of texts, technical artefacts, and money, etc.. Callon stresses the dynamic aspects of technology development, whereby 'the technical object is continually being reinserted into various socio-economic contexts, which constitute different possible network configurations' (p.77).

Based on this concept of techno-economic networks, Gärtner and Wagner [12] distinguish three different arenas for participation within such networks. 'Arenas' denote locations - the geographical and cultural terrain that actors occupy, use, and shape. It refers simultaneously to the physically-distributed locus of an actor's or community's actions, and to what these actors do in it, what it is a space for, at which times it is available and used, and how it is furnished [3]. Gärtner and Wagner distinguish three arenas for participation:

Arena A: Designing work - designing systems

Arena B: Designing organizational frameworks for action

Arena C: Designing the context of industrial relations.

Arena A is the arena in which systems are actually designed and new organizational forms are created. Arena B is the location in which arenas of type A are designed, 'breakdowns' or violations of agreements are diagnosed, and hitherto stable patterns of organizational functioning are questioned and redesigned. In Arena C, the general legal and political frameworks are negotiated, both of which define the relations between the various industrial partners and set norms for a whole range of work-related issues.

Bansler and Kraft [2] proposed a fourth arena, namely the global arena, in which there is a global division of labor. They draw a dark picture for the future of democratization and user participation in systems development. Nevertheless, we do suppose that there are relevant opportunities. Negt and Kluge [18] indicate that there is still room and need for participation. Their concept of 'Eigensinn' (literally stubbornness but better translated with: having one owns set of traditions, priorities, etc.), as visible also in our own projects, and in the difficulties of companies putting globalization into practice (Economist [10]), are the bases of this view.

It is within this concept of different arenas of actor networks as the conceptual framework that this paper discusses PD in consulting.

Doing Consulting

The consulting itself occurs in Arena A when systems are designed by project groups. However, the temporally limited relationship between the consultant and an organization has to be shaped in an earlier stage. Before the actual work starts, consultants have to deal with Arena B, i.e., they have to establish contact with a company and start to define the arena for their work.

Contacting companies in order to start projects is burdensome. The consultant has to identify possible customers or has to be identified by them. Simple as this is to describe, it is difficult to solve. Which companies might be interested in PD consultants? Or conversely, if they are interested, how do they find a fitting consultant?

Leaving aside personal or science networks (e.g., to unions or research grants), it is difficult to identify potential customers and it is difficult for potential customers to identify the advantage of using consultants in the give PD network.

If customers and consultants do ultimately get in contact and are interested in working together, the definition of the project at Arena A level starts. A new network element, e.g., a project group, and its relationship to already existing ones have to be defined. This includes specifying the scope of activities, the members of the project team, temporal and resource restrictions, and the involvement and responsibility of the consultant.

What makes things difficult at this level is that those persons that decide whether a project will start or not, that is, the customers, are most of the time different from the project members, namely the clients.

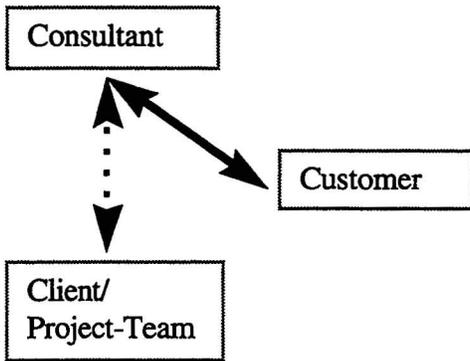


Figure 1: The basic network elements of consulting

For each project, the consultant has to define, together with the customer, the future Arena A setting (called the client or project-team). In general, customers will support (and pay for) consulting only if they have strong reasons for doing so. Therefore, customers will try to influence the arrangements and definitions of Arena A according to their needs. This might raise problems for the consultant, e.g., if the scope of activities or the way of work are limited, outcomes prescribed, etc., or if interests of clients conflict with interests of the customer. That PD cares about the results and is open to a broad range of outcomes (including organizational change), may impose risk and uncertainty for the customer as well as for the consultant.

Furthermore, project costs and responsibilities have to be defined at this level. Project costs are difficult to estimate in general and it is not less difficult when one uses PD. Similarly, it is difficult to take responsibility for outcomes of a PD project. This again raises uncertainties for both sides, the consultant and the customer.

The definition of a possible future Arena A setting, its focus point, etc. are already influenced by the relationship between customer and consultant. Each one will try to shape the definition of their relationship from the very beginning in order to be able to shape the future Arena A to their respective advantage.

Their relationship is also influenced by Arena C settings, e.g., how well established is that type of consulting, is there financial pressure involved, is there legal or political pressure that forces the customer to accept an external consultant (e.g., by unions)? The relationship also may be shaped by global technologies (e.g., CASE) and consulting fashions (e.g., Reengineering).

Types of Consulting

Even though consulting may evoke images of 'Samsonites', dark suits and first-class frequent flyers, there are important differences that have to be considered.

There are many typologies of consulting (e.g., Kubr [16]). For the analysis at hand we may omit forms of consulting

that do not deal with groups, but deal with individual support (from coaching to therapy). With respect to the actor network analysis and the focus on working with groups, the typology given by Titscher [20] seems to be very useful. He distinguishes two dimensions of consulting:

- 1) Involvement of the consultant
- 2) Scope of the consulting field.

Involvement of the consultant

On the one pole of this dimension the consultant has very little involvement, but at the same time very little direction, competent authority, and responsibility. Typically, consultant activity on this end would involve tasks like training, adjusting, facilitation, etc.. At the other pole is high responsibility and competent authority. Consultants in this area might be 'Manager auf Zeit', i.e., a manager for a very limited period of time or a crisis manager.

In systems design, the definition of responsibility for outcomes is critical. Taking responsibility necessitates direct involvement into the organizational actor network. This immediately raises the question of how to deal with existing and potential conflicts within that network.

If we could assume harmony in project teams, this would not be relevant, but this assumption seems to be rather unrealistic (compare Bjerkness and Bratteteig [4] p. 7). Therefore, the consultant has to position himself/herself with respect to the actor network: either by being involved in conflicts by supporting one group, or by trying to be outside conflicts and being accepted by all parties involved.

Scope of the consulting field

The scope of the consulting field is the second dimension. One may distinguish rather narrow fields of expertise with in-depth knowledge (e.g., technical support in a specific field) from more general expertise, such as organizational development.

Examples for different types of consulting, with respect to the two dimensions described above, are given in Figure 2:

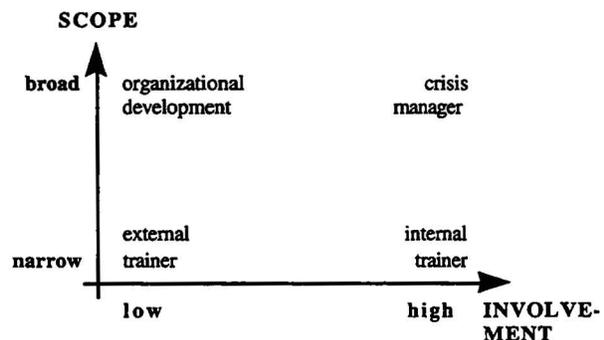


Figure 2: Examples of different types of consulting with respect to dimensions scope and involvement (following Titscher [20]).

Positioning PD in Consulting

Given that PD may be used in different ways, one can identify a number of corresponding consulting activities. Three examples of positioning PD in consulting are given in Figure 3:

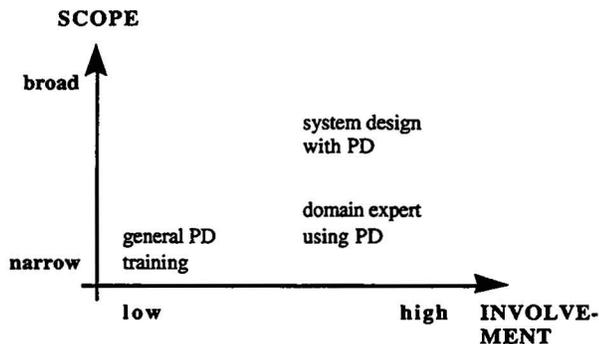


Figure 3: Three examples of PD in consulting with respect to dimensions scope and involvement.

General PD training, somewhat similar to general facilitation training, has a very narrow scope and has very little involvement, i.e., the consultant has no need to be concerned about internal consequences, etc.

If a domain expert uses PD (e.g., we use PD techniques in the design of new working hours arrangements), it causes more involvement. The consultant is at least to some degree responsible for the outcome.

The same responsibility holds for system design. But here the scope of issues with which one may be confronted is, at least potentially, much broader.

The positioning of PD in consulting and the definition and shaping of relationships make a big difference for the actor network and the possible outcomes. This is illustrated and discussed in the next two chapters.

SITUATING THE CASES

The following cases were selected to illustrate some possible approaches and their outcomes for PD in consulting. The role of PD varies from being a core aim to being a side issue. The case descriptions focus on

- the different approaches to consulting and the shaping of the relationship between customer and consultant in the different arenas; and
- the role of PD within the consulting process with respect to involvement and scope of consulting.

The author was involved in all of these cases. The case descriptions are based on personal experience and a careful documentation of the processes. There is probably a bias towards the description of successful cases, even though (series of) failures might even better help to understand crucial issues.

The first two cases (A1, A2) deal with software development projects where PD was used during the design process. The third case (B) deals with consulting to facilitate the participation of a shop-steward. The two final

cases (C1, C2) deal with attempts to develop new working hours arrangements in a participatory way.

The description of each case concentrates on the development of relationships. The PD techniques used were practically the same in all cases. We used common facilitation techniques (compare Klebert et al. [15]) in a very flexible way, and spent quite a lot of time at the beginning of each meeting refreshing the general ideas and results of earlier meetings. In systems development we additionally devoted meetings to the clarification of notions, worked a lot with scenarios, and used mock-ups, prototyping, etc.

A. Systems Development

Case A1: Software for Participatory Shift-Scheduling

The first of these two cases aimed at the participatory development of software to support participatory scheduling of working hours. It was the consultants' [sic] intention to find companies to collaboratively develop such a system, and it was a long search.

Trade unionists stressed the importance of the topic but did not want to spend money. Several smaller companies had severe scheduling problems but their time pressure was too high to wait for systems development. Realizing these difficulties, we contacted big companies which develop new working-hours schedules several times a year. Approaching a group of paper mills (i.e., their personnel managers) brought no success either. Most of them focused on straight cost-saving options and realized that our focus was different. Meetings with production scheduling system producers brought no breakthrough either. They were interested only in short-term staff scheduling.

The breakthrough came with the contact with a big steel mill. The members of a department which improves workflow and working conditions did a large amount of shift-scheduling. They became interested in the idea of developing tools for shift scheduling because they were interested in improving their work and their position within the company by means of tools that depended on and exploited their experience and their tacit skills.

After short, but intense, talks they also accepted the idea of participatory systems design for the development of the tools and accepted spending the resources needed to get the system (their time was the most difficult part).

We were responsible for the system development, the other project members for the content. Since they were rather wary, they proposed that payment depend on success. We accepted this, because we did not want to be out of the game once again.

Most of the system development was done by my partner, Sabine Wahl, whereas my role was to organize the process (facilitation, resources, etc.). The project ended on schedule (!). An internal evaluation by the department showed substantial time savings by using the system. Users stressed their high satisfaction in interviews after half a year of use and use it heavily: nearly all new schedules are designed with the system.

Case A2: Analysis of Reward Systems

This case is about the development of tools to support shop stewards and unionists in the analysis and design of reward systems. The unions in Austria, especially the white collar union we worked with, are under high pressure to change the existing reward systems.

The consultants, in addition, already had a strong, pre-existing working relationship with the unionists in charge. Several smaller projects had been accomplished rather successfully in the years before. We had the position of domain experts regarding the mathematical analysis and design of reward systems, e.g., what are the long term consequences of a specific reward system.

The idea of building tools for shop-stewards in this area grew in mutual discussions. We proposed to do systems development in a participatory way, and to involve shop stewards and unionists. As in the previous case, there was some resistance to our approach, mainly due to the time we wanted them to spend on the project.

Finally, they accepted our way of doing things. We were responsible for the system development, the other project members for the content. Again we were two persons with a division of labor between actual development (Martin Brunner) and facilitation. The project will finish (successfully) soon.

B. Shop-steward Consulting

The case of shop-steward consulting is described in Gärtner and Wagner [12] in more detail. In the present paper the focus is on the development of relationships between the consultants, customer, and clients.

The management of a huge Austrian service company with 4000 employees planned to change a large number of personnel-related software modules. At this point, shop-stewards felt that it was necessary to bring to the table data protection and participation issues. The shop stewards looked for legal support at first, i.e., they asked for legal advice from two possible consultants.

The consultants realized by accident that both were involved in the same case, so they decided to cooperate. They were able to push this through as they were the only consultants for this kind of work.

The consultants' relationship to the shop stewards changed from being legal advisors to actual participants. The consultants were strongly involved in strategy development and played an important part in the negotiations. Sometimes they acted as catalysts, sometimes as active promoters.

During the first part of consulting, agreements were successfully negotiated concerning smaller, but highly sensitive system applications. In this phase the shop steward gave a lot of responsibility to the consultants.

The second part of the consulting project dealt with the big personnel system. Several hundred subprograms were examined. The idea was to translate social norms into technical features, both in order to show that privacy was

technically feasible and to guarantee that the technical design of the systems would support the political aim of protecting privacy. This was highly successful. Difficult technical questions could be solved in cooperation with the EDP department. During this phase the consultants had the role of facilitators and promoters but were less actively involved in the outcomes.

A general agreement was drafted to which management finally consented (under high time pressure and a publicity campaign by the council of shop stewards). Also, an additional actor in the network was created: a data safety commissioner. He or she was to perform services such as watching over the data protection aspects of systems in use, forwarding information, and coordinating activities. This was intended to make the consultants superfluous.

The last stage was triggered by external events: Serious economic difficulties and new management. The shop stewards had to concentrate on preventing layoffs. At the same time new political coalitions in the council itself developed. Privacy issues diminished in relative importance and consulting was finished.

C. Participatory Shift-Scheduling

Case C1: Success

A small company had substantial problems with the working-hours schedule at hand. The company had to pay a great deal of overtime. People were upset over the large number of changes with little notice and the problems of actually being able to take vacation time (5 to 6 weeks per year in Austria).

A highly-qualified shop-steward built up the contact with us and we wrote a proposal for a project for the company(!). The project team in the company included the managers as well as the shop stewards.

It was the consultants' duty to develop sketches of new schedules and to give support in drawing their benefits and drawbacks. It was up to the project team to decide which schedule to adopt. Both sides accepted us as being disinterested, that is, not involved in the interest of either group, and both sides accepted the interests of the other group as legitimate. This allowed us to build up a good working climate.

In the first meeting the project team evaluated the consequences of core decisions. Based on preliminary decisions a few proposals were developed until the members of the team consented in the third meeting. The new schedule is in use and preliminary reports by the shop steward are positive. An evaluation is scheduled for fall 1996.

Case C2: Difficulties

A consulting company invited us to support them in developing a new schedule as part of a bigger consulting project, involving a change of production lines and extension of production. They consulted the managers (!) of that company. We were invited to the company.

Already in the first meeting with the personnel manager, shop stewards, production manager, and trade unionists, things got difficult. Even though we intended to build up a project group, and even though all the persons who were necessary to build up such a group were in the room, it never became a project team. The shop-steward did not accept us as being neutral, but considered us as primarily pursuing the interests of the management. Therefore, the meetings were only confrontational.

The number of proposals developed was very high, but still there is no solution in sight.

PD IN CONSULTING

Given these cases, three issues stand out.

- The question of involvement in the actual design process.
- The scope and depth of the field that is covered.
- The definition of the relationship between consultant, customer, and client, including contracting and the coping strategies regarding risk.

Involvement - Two Colliding Aims

Using PD in consulting, one often has to cover two aims at the same time.

- 1) The organization of the design process in groups.
- 2) The actual technical development.

These two aims do not fit well together. Neutrality is needed for the group process and responsibility is needed for the development process.

To organize efficient group processes and to be accepted by all persons involved, one has to be neutral with respect to group interests and with respect to conflicting aims. Furthermore, one should not be responsible for the outcome, because, in order to be neutral, one can not have competent authority (which is - at least for risk averse persons - necessary to take responsibility).

Neutrality was achieved in the first case of shift-scheduling (C1). In the second case (C2), as I was not accepted by the shop-steward, the task of scheduling could not be done. Meetings were extremely inefficient, etc., and there was no interest in collaborative work. Being just a representative or supporter of one group may help in some areas, but it may also hinder at the same time (see also the case B).

At the same time one has to take some responsibility in order to procure the contract. This responsibility may be restricted in some domains, such as participatory shift-scheduling, because everybody accepts there that the final design decisions have to be made by the persons involved. But it is difficult to limit responsibility in systems development. One hardly will get a contract without some responsibility for success.

It is tricky how to deal with this issue. We do not see so far whether there is single best way. One way to deal with this dilemma might be to separate the two functions completely, i.e., two persons take these two positions.

This surely eases the group and the development process but includes high risks of conflicts.

Maybe the structures we chose for the system design cases (A1, A2) were more lucky than well designed. Since we worked with a well-defined division of labor with respect to the group, it was relatively easy to manage the processes. At the same time, the good personal relations and the shared background between the consultants (in technical and facilitation issues) allowed us to bridge the gap.

Consulting in teams of two is surely more expensive and not that usual (which makes contracting more difficult). But given that organizational developers already work in such teams very often, this seems a more than reasonable approach to dealing with the issue of involvement.

Scope and depth of consulting

Using PD in system development raises problems for consultants with respect to the **content** too. Two areas have to be addressed.

- 1) The technical field.
- 2) Facilitation and participation.

Both areas are very complex on their own. Just take the typical length of education and training: one has to spend quite a number of years in each area to be competent.

This gets even worse for using PD in systems development. Not only does the complexity of each area on its own have to be covered, but also bridges have to be built. The expertise of the systems developers has to be very high in order to be flexible enough to change design, techniques, and platforms depending on the needs at hand, and to understand what is going on in the group. The same holds for the other side as 'normal techniques' and skills of facilitation have to be adapted to the mixture of technological and social issues.

To make things worse, in actual group settings one has to switch between both sides all the time. This is not only burdensome for the consultant, but members of the project team also will run into troubles distinguishing the contributions.

Again the question arises whether this is too much for a single person. A possible solution is to separate the task and cover it by a team with a well-established personal relationship and well-defined division of labor, similar to the idea described above.

Defining the Relationships (Consultant/Customer, Consultant/Client)

Risks for the Customer

Considering that PD admits its risks (timelines, outcomes, organizational changes) more openly than classical techniques, that short-term cost-saving is not the prime goal, and that participation may arouse uncertainty, one has to have good reasons to use PD (see A1). One reason might be personal confidence in the ability and integrity of the consultant (this happened in A2), another reason might be the technical or social expertise (and a lack of competition) of

the consultant that makes the risk worthwhile (see A2, B). As long as PD is not able to build up outstanding confidence in the technique and to develop a somewhat sharper profile, one would hardly expect customers to go into it.

Additionally, customers hesitate to spend their time, or the time of their subordinates), in development projects. One reason surely is time and costs, as they especially hesitate to take the time of their most-qualified subordinates. The other reason, we assume, is that they compromise between two aims. On the one hand, they try to be involved in order to be able to influence outcomes. On the other hand, they shy from the risks that come with being involved in the project team, and thereby being linked to possible failures or undesired outcomes.

Risks for the Clients

PD carries risks for the client too. It is difficult to assess possible outcomes and even more difficult to guarantee positive outcomes for all involved. Therefore it can't be taken for granted that people do buy into the project. Surely the relationship between the client and the consultants (that was at least partially shaped by the customer) plays a crucial role. But also more general issues, such as job security, career opportunities, income, conflicts, etc., and the conditions of participation (time, resources, etc.) have to be considered.

Great effort should be spent by the consultant to get a good working relationship and shape the environment required. The basis for these is defined between customer and consultant; therefore, the consultant has to look out for possible future pitfalls there.

Risks for the Consultants

Leaving profitability aside, it is quite safe to do, e.g., simple PD training, but systems design with PD is a high-risk area. First, it is difficult to define the relationships. Second, it is difficult to apportion responsibility.

The proposed team approach, involving a developer and a facilitator with a sharp definition of their respective focus points but working closely together, might be a good way to cope with these risks. Surely it is not easy and not a question of mere days to build up such teams. Still - given the considerations above - it seems appropriate.

Contracting with the customer

The contract between the customer and the consultant is another tricky issue. As outcomes should not be prescribed (at least not in detail), mostly structural issues are to be fixed. In the cases described above, contracts were extremely short and concentrated on time and responsibilities. The actual definitions of the aims of systems development were about one page long in each contract.

It is our impression that this kind of contracting was possible only because of either already-established relationships of trust or a stepwise procedure (conducting a first workshop - then establishing another two, etc.) and other risk reductions for the customer to build up trust and

security. In the first development case (A1), the company even forced us into the success-dependent reward scheme.

A good personal relationship can't be taken for granted. The stepwise approach to systems design with PD seems to be appropriate. This approach may incorporate some elements of early delivery (see Gilb [14]). Still, a good judgment is needed of how much time is necessary for each phase of the development process, even though such judgments are even more difficult to make than in classical development projects. Temporal planning and resource planning seem to be the most important - and the most difficult - responsibilities for PD consultants (similar to organizational development consultants).

Given this kind of contracting, it will work out well only in areas which embody little conflict potential. However, things might get easier if PD becomes more established. Still, hard contracting will remain difficult and legal conflicts may be difficult to handle.

'Contracting' with the client

There is much concern in the consulting literature about the involvement of customers in the definition of projects as part of the contracting (e.g., Block X (p. 21ff) - confusingly, they are often called clients in these books). But this concern seldom includes the involvement of clients.

Involvement of clients during the contracting phase turned out to be useful in some of the cases above. It partially happened in cases A1 and C1, and helped to get the contract with the customer(!) and to build up good working relationships.

A formal, additional contract with the clients is probably difficult to achieve due to time restrictions, resistance from management etc. The same holds for the involvement of clients in all phases of contracting.

But at least partial involvement in the contracting phase, and an informal/partially-formal contracting at the first project meeting, seem achievable. We used broader presentations, discussions and walk-throughs to involve clients in the contracting phase. Extensive recapitulation, discussion of dangers and opportunities, and a commitment decision on the part of the clients - usual elements of working with groups - at the beginning of the systems design projects (A1, A2) helped to build common ground.

RESUME

In this paper we looked at PD from the perspective of consulting. This brings the relationship of the three categories of actors (consultant, customer, client) to the fore. We briefly discussed three examples of PD in consulting: first, training which is not very risky; second, domain experts that use some PD techniques; and third, systems design using PD. The latter two were discussed in more detail based on five cases.

PD in consulting has to be considered as very difficult right now. Both from the consulting process as well as from a marketing point of view:

- the trust in its success is not widespread;
- where and when it should be used it is somewhat fuzzy,;
- there do exist high risks for those involved.

We found the relationships between the actors (consultant, customer, client) to be critical in consulting. Success and failure are substantially determined by these relationships. Especially the relationship between consultant and customer predetermines future work and outcomes. Involvement of clients in the contracting phase is difficult, but it helped in those cases where it was accomplished to get the contract.

Using PD in consulting, one has to cope with two conflicting aims. Low involvement into the organization and little responsibility for possible outcomes is necessary to be able to work with the group, but high involvement, especially in systems design, is needed to get the contract.

Therefore we propose to do consulting in high-risk areas (like systems design) in teams of two persons in order to separate facilitation from design. This separation encourages the optimal deployment technical and group-facilitation expertise and eases group management.

Furthermore, we consider it to be critical that contracts be designed, not on the basis of outcome, but on the basis of (stepwise) procedure.

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