



ANCHORING A SUCCESSFUL CONSULTING COLLABORATION

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Consulting is a growing industry, not to mention the wider professional services industry. In addition to traditional consulting firms many companies previously focused on product-based offerings are now aggressively building consultative capabilities and bringing them to market within their own specific areas of expertise.

This growth brings with it a greater-than-ever diversity in both consulting offerings and the working approaches of the companies providing them. The client experience can be equally varied with some clients expressing higher levels of satisfaction than others. This was echoed by a senior executive working in the automotive industry:

"We have had differing experiences working with consultants: Some position themselves as pragmatic problem-solvers, whereas others adopt a more sales-oriented culture; some provide a team with deep and specific expertise,

whereas others are more generalists; and some work in close proximity with us during a project whereas others perform their work from remote centers."

This viewpoint is not unique and highlights clear differences in consulting approaches as well as the perceptions of value that result. As much as consultants must understand the impacts of their chosen approaches, so must clients feel confident that the elected working models will be appropriate for their organizations.

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With this in mind what should one look for when anchoring a successful consulting collaboration? Experience suggests that the following points are worthy of consideration.

Engaging a Consulting Provider

A successful collaboration will need a strong starting point. Whether engaging a firm based upon reputation, referrals or personal experience pay attention to the way in which the initial dialogue is conducted. A consulting team shouldn't give you the hard sell when presenting their capabilities but rather ask logical questions to frame the problem to be solved or the objective to be achieved. They should highlight the pros and cons of different approaches, respecting that every business situation is unique, and back this up with proof points of relevant capabilities and references of what has been achieved elsewhere.

The Consulting Delivery Team

The team assigned to the delivery of any consulting project will have a profound impact on its outcome. People with impressive skills may participate in proposal discussions, but make sure that you know the profiles of the staff who will be responsible for the delivery.

Look for evidence that the delivery team will be suitably skilled, bring relevant experience to bear and be well-assimilated regarding your industry and organization before the project begins.

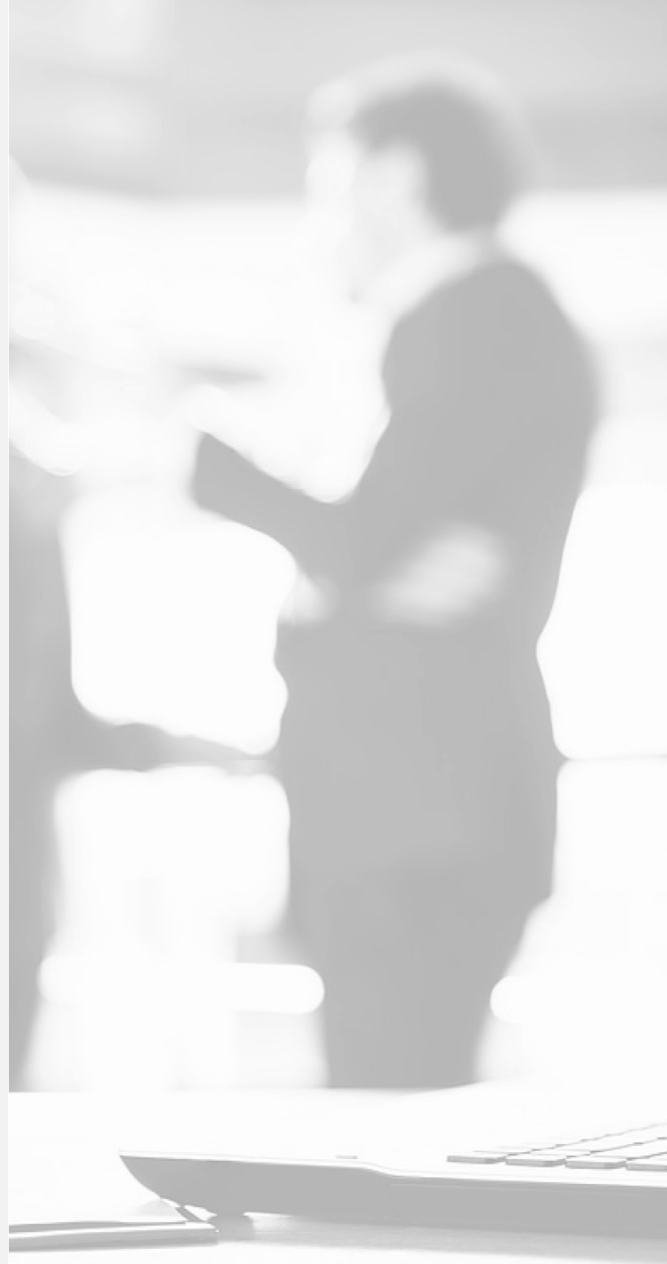
The Delivery Approach

Consulting firms often employ project methodologies enabling them to deliver consistently and with high quality. Some types of work require a close on-site collaboration, others can be performed remotely and in many cases a mix of these approaches is required. Whilst detailed knowledge of such methodologies is usually not required by clients, ensure that you understand the overall approach that will be used to structure the assignment. This is in the interest of both parties as it will make project discussions more meaningful and issues easier to foresee. When a consulting project is conducted as a 'black box' this often invites misunderstandings and poorly managed expectations which tend to surface towards its conclusion.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Samir Parikh is a principal business consultant, practice manager, and consultancy CEO with over 25 years of industry experience. In 2000, Samir founded *SPConsulting* a global management consulting firm specializing in organizational strategy and change management.

With a track record of projects conducted in more than 50 countries the firm works closely with companies that are transforming into consulting-based organizations, delivering solutions and professional services in highly competitive environments.



FURTHER READING

Samir is the author of *The Consultant's Handbook*, published by John Wiley & Sons. This book provides a comprehensive guide for the practical implementation of consulting skills by professionals working in consulting and professional-services-related disciplines.

The book contains additional guidelines, examples and use-cases to support readers in implementation of consulting techniques, as well as practical tips and lessons-learned from real consulting engagements.