

Book Review for 8/30/04 by Beverly Little

Title: "The Contemporary Consultant: Insights from the World Experts"

Editors: Larry Greiner and Flemming Poulfelt

Publisher: Thomson South-Western

Publication date: 2005

Length: 358 pages

Reading time: 15 hours

Reading rating: 3 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 2 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

"The Contemporary Consultant" is not a how-to book. It is, rather, a book about the "mindset" of the consulting industry. The editors proposed the book to several dozen leading consultants around the world and held a conference at which proposals for chapters were presented. Based on feedback from the conference, the chapters were written, revised and then grouped into this collection.

The chapters in the first section of the book trace the history of consulting and define the context of the current consulting industry. They address issues such as professionalism and ethics, globalization, technology shifts, and marketing of consulting services. I found it interesting that the questions raised here about the consulting services industry are the same ones being raised in almost every other industry – How to respond to increased regulatory scrutiny? How to keep up with change? How to reduce costs? How to accelerate product development?

The central part of the book addresses issues specific to major practice areas contexts. In this section, renowned consultants discuss the issues pertinent to specific areas. For example, Philip Kotler co-authored the chapter on Marketing Consulting and Edward Lawler co-authored the chapter on Human Resource Consulting. In addition, a chapter appears on each of the major practice areas of Information Technology, Strategy, Operations Management, Consulting to CEOs and Boards, Consulting on Globalization and Public Sector Consulting. The information in the chapter corresponding to one's areas of interest is probably the most useful part of the book.

Looking at the job of the consultant from another vantage point, Part 4 of the book contains chapters on implementing change. These chapters address the consultant's roles of intervention agent, of change agent and of facilitating mergers and acquisitions.

The final part of the book addresses how to manage and grow a consulting firm. This is where the book comes full circle from the first part, where the history/future of the consulting firm was discussed. It also seems to be the "physician, heal thyself" part of the book. How does a firm manage its own growth? How does it manage its own knowledge management? What practices differentiate the high-performance firms?

The Contemporary Consultant is not a beach book. In fact, very few people should read it from cover to cover. Its usefulness to anyone involved in consulting (or dealing with consultants) is to identify the issues within a specialty area.

It is also interesting to see that the issues that are confronting every organization in the discontinuity of the early 21st century economy are also confronting the organizations whose role it is to help other organizations deal with those issues!

Beverly Little is a Professor of Management in the College of Business at Western Carolina University, where she teaches Introduction to Management, Human Resource Management, Organizational Behavior and Leadership Development. For previously reviewed books, visit our Web site at www.wcu.edu/cob/bookreviews.