Aston Business School
Birmingham

BNM817 EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY

Academic Year 2011/12

Number of Aston Credits: 15

Number of ECTS Credits: 7.5

Staff Member Responsible for the Module:

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Pre-requisites for the Module:

None

Mode of Attendance:

On campus

Module Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

The module aims to build understanding of the processes involved in providing bespoke advice and guidance in specific consulting contexts. Students should amass the skills necessary to use formal analytical methodologies to refine their (a client's) understanding of the problem and to put the ideas into practice. The module is concerned with identifying successful strategies for coping with difficult contexts, such as vague initial specifications or a rapidly changing environment.

Specific Learning Objectives include:

> Understand different approached to structure a consulting intervention.
> Understand and experience what is good and what is bad consulting practice.
> Be better prepared to carry out successful consulting projects within organisations, either as an external investigator or as a line manager given a one-off problem-solving task.

Module Learning Outcomes:

> Experience different approaches to consulting including those concerned with providing advice on strategic and tactical options, those concerning the design and development of systems and procedures, those concerning the resolution of practical operational difficulties and those on the selection between options.
> Experience how to make good use of their individual technical knowledge and skills while working within the constraints of organisational decision-making.

Module Content:

The module deals with complexity, but as a result puts students in very unusual situations where there is tremendous ambiguity in which they need to cope. This is a safe environment to address ambiguity as they will experience these in industry. We expect students to be able to work effectively despite the conditions e.g. a lack of clarity, uncertainty, absence of data. The module is designed to enable students to develop abilities that will enable them to make the most of their individual knowledge and skills and transfer their learning to other situations. These abilities are particularly important for people expecting to work in an advisory or development environment.

Week 1 **Introduction and scene setting**
This lecture will explore complexity and how complexity can be understood through OR modelling. It will link to management consulting in terms of the building of models to understand complexity. The following weeks introduce three consulting methods to understand complexity.

Week 2-6 **Soft Systems Methodology**
This series of lectures will take students through the theory and application of this form of modelling complex problems. It will begin with the stages of understanding the system (though building a rich picture) and defining key properties (CATWOE and Root definitions).It will teach the building of conceptual models and validating these for improving a situation.

Week 7-8 **Journey Making**
These lectures will teach the technique for joint understanding, reflecting and negotiating strategy. It will show the theory and use of cognitive mapping.

Week 9-10 **Decision Theory**
These lectures will explain the use of a modeling technique that bridges the qualitative/qualitative divide. The structuring of a model that allows for the prioritization of options will be taught.

Corporate Connections:

Practical examples are used throughout the module and embedded into all formats of teaching. Most of these examples are taken from the experience of using these techniques with corporations.

International Dimensions:

A key theme in the module is the applicability of methods which support management consulting and business thinking world-wide. The lecturer has used the methods in various countries to support senior policy making as well as working with numerous multi-national organisations in the UK. Examples of these applications will be discussed in the module.

Contribution of Research:

These methods are researched in Aston University and research experience/findings will inform the module content.

Method of Teaching:

The module will consist of an accelerated apprenticeship which will involve undertaking projects and learning from the experience of conducting each one. There will be supporting lectures and tutorials, initially focusing on the methodologies but turning as soon as possible to issues concerned with refining and polishing the acquired skills. Students will be encouraged to experiment or to extend the approaches taught as well as draw on knowledge gained elsewhere in their degree.

Method of Assessment and Feedback:

Assessment is via an examination (80%), and coursework assessment (20%).

The coursework assessment involves the development and implementation of a plan. Students will have to use the consulting methods taught during the course to answer questions which a company has. A reflective coursework will assess students' learning from this experience. (20%)

Learning Hours:

Contact Hours	27
Directed Learning	120
Assessment (Exam)	3
Total	**150**

The following essential and recommended readings are subject to change. Students should not therefore purchase textbooks prior to commencing their course. If students wish to undertake background reading before starting the course, many of the chapters/readings are available in electronic form via on-line library catalogues and other resources

Essential Reading:

There is no set text but students will be encouraged to read for suggestions and alternatives when confronted with individual difficulties. Students are encouraged to read widely, including non-textbooks in order to add to the range of perspectives that they may bring to a client request.

Background Reading:
The list of more technical books that may be useful includes:
On Soft Systems Methodology

[Soft Systems Methodology in Action](#) by Peter Checkland
Wilson B (1990), *Systems: Concepts, Methodologies and Applications*, 2nd Edition, Chichester: Wiley.

Checkland PB & Scholes J (1999), *Soft Systems Methodology in Action: A 30-Year Retrospective*, Chichester: Wiley.

Checkland PB & Holwell S (1998), *Information, Systems and Information Systems - Making Sense of the Field*, Chichester: Wiley

Checkland PB (2000), 'Soft Systems Methodology: A Thirty Year Retrospective', *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 17, pp 11–58.

Checkland PB (2002), *Systems Thinking, Systems Practice*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Checkland P & Holwell S (1998), *Information, Systems, and Information Systems: Making Sense of the Field*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Chapters 4 & 5 of Rosenhead J and Mingers J (2001), *Rational Analysis for a Problematic World Revisited*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

General on Organization Development

Weiss, A (2002). *Process Consulting: How to Launch, Implement, and Conclude Successful Consulting Projects*. New York: Jossey-Bass.

Wendell L French; Cecil Bell (1973). Organization development: behavioral science interventions for organization improvement. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Beckhard, R. and Harris, R.T. (1987) Organisational Transitions: Managing Complex Change, 2nd. Ed. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. Schein, E.H.(1988) Process Consultation, Vol.1. Reading, MA: Addison – Wesley.

General on Problem Structuring

Rosenhead J & Mingers J (2001), *Rational Analysis for a Problematic World Revisited: Problem Structuring Methods for Complexity, Uncertainty and Conflict*, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Rosenhead J (1989), *Rational Analysis for a Problematic World: Problem Structuring Methods for Complexity, Uncertainty and Conflict*, Chichester: John Wiley.

Pidd M (1996), *Tools for Thinking*, Chichester: Wiley.

Vidal R (2006), *Creative and Participative Problem Solving - The Art and the Science*, e-book available at: http://www2.imm.dtu.dk/~vvv/CPPS/

Pragmatic Business Background

Andrew Bass (2011). *The Performance Papers: Incisive Briefings for Busy Leaders*, Bookshaker.

Peter F. Drucker (2006). *The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done.* New York: Collins.

Charan, R. (2001). *What the CEO Wants You to Know: How Your Company Really Works,* New York: Crown Business.

Koch, R. (1998). *The 80/20 Principle.* Doubleday 1998.

Sceptical Approaches to Consulting and Management

Ashford, M., 1998, Con Tricks: The World of Management Consultancy and How to Make it Work for You, London: Simon & Schuster.

O'Shea, J. and C. Madigan, 1997, Dangerous Company: The Consulting Powerhouses and the Businesses They Save and Ruin, New York: Times Business.

Freek Vermeulen (2010). Business Exposed: The Naked Truth About What Really Goes on in the World of Business, London: FT Prentice-Hall

Huczynski, A., 1993, 'Explaining the Succession of Management Fads', International Journal of Human Resource Management, Vol.4, No.2, pp.443–63.

Value Focused Thinking

Keeney RL (1996), *Value-Focused Thinking*, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

Cybernetics and related approaches

Bateson, G (1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, London: Intertext.

Watzlawick, P, Weakland, J & Fisch, R (1974). *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution.* New York: Norton.

Beer, S. (1975). *Platform for Change*, London: Wiley.

O'Hanlon, B. & Wilk, J. (1987). *Shifting Contexts: The Generation of Effective Psychotherapy,* London: Guildford.

Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.* London: Century Business.

Thinking and Meeting Skills

de Bono E (1971) *Lateral thinking for management*, London: HarperCollins.
Flood RL (1995), *Solving Problem Solving*, New York: Wiley.

Haynes M (1988), *Effective Meeting Skills*, California: Crisp Publications.

Margerison C (1987), *Conversation Control Skills for Managers*, Cirencester: Mercury.

Rhodes J (1991), *Conceptual Toolmaking - Expert Systems of the Mind*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Project Management

Wickham PA and Wickham L (2008) *Management Consulting: Delivering an Effective Project*, Prentice Hall.

Fombrun & Nevins (2003) Advice Business, The: Essential Tools and Models for Management Consulting, Prentice Hall.

Anderson ES et al (1992), *Goal Directed Project Management*, London: Kogan Page.
Lovejoy S (1993), *A Systematic Approach to Getting Results*, Aldershot: Gower Publishing.

On Strategic Options Development and Analysis/Journey Making

Eden C & Ackermann F (2004), *The Practice of Making Strategy*, London: Sage Publications.

Part III: Chapters 1, 6 & 10 of Bryson J, Ackermann F, Eden C & Finn C (2004), *Visible Thinking: Unlocking Causal Mapping for Practical Business Results*, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Chapter 'P2', 'P3' & 'P5' of Eden C & Ackermann F (1998), *Making Strategy: The Journey of Strategic Management*, London: Sage Publications.

Chapter 3 of Rosenhead J (1989), *Rational Analysis for a Problematic World*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. (only available in the 1989 edition, not later editions).

Chapter 3 of Rosenhead J & Mingers J (2001), *Rational Analysis for a Problematic World Revisited*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Getting Hired as a consultant – Conventional big firms

Sugata Biswas and Daryl Twitchell (2002). Management Consulting: A Complete Guide to the Industry, Wiley

Getting Hired as a consultant – as an independent (the bible)

Alan Weiss (2002) Million Dollar Consulting, New York: McGraw-Hill.
Useful Online Sources:

ABI-Inform Full Text (Proquest), Emerald, Web of Science

Web sites

http://www.orsoc.org.uk/about/teaching/StrategicProblems/index.htm
http://members.tripod.com/SSM_Delphi/ssm4.html
http://www.bassclusker.com
Web searches for all terms returns a mass of information – some reliable, some not.