The functional combination of the disciplines, skills, tools, and techniques of Consulting and Coaching can significantly enhance the success of both processes, especially in cases where organizational changes occur, which so often happens as the result of the strategic planning process.

All organizations are composed of three principle elements;

* People
* Processes
* Tools.

Consultants are traditionally trained to master the process and tool type functions while Coaches focus on the people aspects. Since all organizations are in fact a collection of people, successful development and implementation of organizational change requires a thorough knowledge and expertise of how the people really work and how they will react to the required changes. The more willingly the people execute the strategic plan the higher the probability of success. Which is why we pair Consulting with Coaching – to better serve our clients with solutions that really work.

Consulting and Coaching are very different disciplines, with different goals, approaches, tools, and techniques.

Consultants act in an advisory capacity on professional and technical matters. They are usually subject matter experts who are hired to fix or remediate some specific issue or set of issues. Consultants are presented with a problem by the client; they gather facts; analyze the facts; they analyze the problems; then they develop and recommend remedies. Consultants are specialists in ‘industry best practices’ and focus on predominantly improving the organization’s performance through modification of the organization’s processes and/or the improvement/updating of the organization’s tools.

Coaches, like Consultants, are hired to help fix something that is not working up to standard, but the primary difference is that the Coach will not directly provide the answer to the problem. The Coach will assist the client in finding the answer that is right for the client. The Coaching methodology is Socratic in nature. A Coach listens and ask questions to help the client find the answer that is right for the client. The Coach does not directly provide the answer.

So how does the combination of these two distinctly different disciplines work to the advantage of the client?

We see Coaching skills as a success multiplier in any Consulting assignment and we see Consulting skills as an equally valuable tool in Coaching work. The Coach will take more of a ‘people approach’ in the environmental scan process and the analysis of the facts and issues as opposed to the Consultant who most often focuses on the objectivity of the processes and tools. The skills and philosophy that the Coach brings to the task yields their greatest returns in the development and implementation of the strategic plan, the change management plan, and the implementation.

A Coach can use Consulting tools to better assist the client in finding an answer. But the Coach must be careful not to just present an answer to the client’s problems. The Coach should always use a more indirect method and help the client find his/her own answer. The solution must always come from the client; it must come from the client with the help of the Coach. The Coach must realize that the Coach’s answer might not be the right one for the client, but by employing some Consulting techniques the Coach can introduce possible solutions to assist the client in his/her thought process. Using this approach can cut down on the length of a Coaching engagement and make it both more efficient and effective. The solutions will always be the client’s solutions and therefore will have a higher probability of successful implementation.

Most strategic plans call for some sort of organizational change. And ‘organizational change’ translates directly into changes for the people who make up the organization and often its customers and stakeholders as well. Having a qualified Coach as part of the strategic plan development team will ensure that the human aspects of the required changes are developed and dealt with in a manner that will best take into account the people part of the equation.

Conclusion: While Consultants and Coaches are fundamentally different in their approaches and their goals, when combined thoughtfully they can be genuinely synergistic and provide a higher probability of success in the strategic planning process.

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