



Thread Advisory



Phone: +6012 206 7758



Email: claudia@thread-advisory.com



Website: www.thread-advisory.com

My Consulting Playbook

For the past nine years I have worked for many clients in Malaysia and overseas, and as much as I have hopefully added value to them, I have also learnt many things about what works, what doesn't and how to maximize the value and impact I generate.

I think the lessons I have learnt are worth sharing, as I know many individuals want to venture into the consulting / advisory space. I hope that by sharing my learnings, I contribute to their ability to go through their own journey knowing that it is not how much they know at the beginning, but how much they can learn, adapt and adjust along the way.

I will split my learnings into three distinctive chapters, each of them dedicated to one of the consulting stages I apply to most of the projects I undertake.

The Consulting Stages

Diagnostic

Design

Deployment

Chapter 1 – The Diagnostic Stage

Question and validate your assumptions.

Once I have secured a project and after going through the formalities of agreeing timelines, ways of working, stakeholders I will need to interact with and expected deliverables / outcomes, I **secure at least 60 to 90 minutes with the project sponsor**. Why is this important to me? Because I want to ensure I am fully aware of:

- the challenges / obstacles the organization is facing;
- the aspirations / expectations of how the project will help address the identified challenges / obstacles;
- the current level of awareness / acceptance / resistance from employees around the deployment of the project;
- other strategic and operational priorities that need to be considered while the project is being deployed.

When I first started my consulting business, and in my eagerness to show results as soon as possible, I undertook the diagnostic activities making many assumptions around the above-mentioned questions. Very soon, I realized the setbacks these sometimes erroneous assumptions brought to the successful completion of the diagnostic stage. It is as if a doctor thought he/she could diagnose the illness of a patient by assuming he/she knows the ailment by just looking at the patient without a physical examination and asking the required probing questions.

I am not satisfied by knowing the answers to my questions through the assigned Project Manager. It is not to devalue or demerit their knowledge and understanding. It is plainly due to their organizational level, which most likely prevents them from having the organization-wide perspective at hand. I want to hear the answers to these questions from the highest organizational level, i.e. Board members, CEO or any suitable C-suite member.

And once I have gathered the inputs from the highest strategic organizational level, I undertake to seek the operational perspectives as well. Because after all, what is a strategy without execution? So, listening to what those responsible for operationalizing the strategy is equally important to have a balance view of the organizational reality, challenges and opportunities.



Thread Advisory



Phone: +6012 206 7758



Email: claudia@thread-advisory.com



Website: www.thread-advisory.com

If you are engaged on a project, give yourself the chance to understand the organization's strategy and its operations, and how the project you are leading fits within the strategy and the organization's operational realities. Don't make assumptions, and if you make them, validate them!

Your professional experience will only take you so far.

There is a sense of self-assurance when you get a project in an area of work for which you have lots of previous experience. You play in your head how it will unfold, the steps you will take, the challenges you will encounter, the amount of time and effort it will take, the type of questions people will ask. Everything looks promising. Until the organizational realities start playing out. Suddenly, your project plan is not working out, the things that before worked perfectly well, are not getting any traction, people don't really care for your experience because it is not relevant to their industry. And now, you wake up to the reality, that your experience is not that useful to deal with the issues you are facing at the start of the project.

At the early stage of every project, what matters the most is to **build trust**. Trust in your ability to empathize, understand and listen to diverse perspectives. Trust that you have their interest at heart. Trust that whatever you will do, is not a cut and paste solution, but a **fully customized** one that will fit **their requirements** and address **their challenges**.

So, don't just eagerly display and elaborate on your experience and credentials at every possible opportunity. Believe me, the client would have done the due diligence before they engaged you. They already know your credentials. They already know you are good at what you do. Now, show them how good you are by building a strong understanding of their reality, beyond what you know from publicly available data / information. Get into the details. Get into the intricacies. Listen intently. Stop yourself from giving an early diagnosis, because if you don't understand the situation from every angle, you most likely will end up giving a biased diagnosis, or at best a partial one. Don't rush the diagnostic phase. Use every opportunity available within the phase to build trust, understand what is going on from diverse perspectives and collect all the parts that will form the final diagnostic puzzle.

Timelines not Timecircles

I place a tremendous amount of importance on building an extremely detailed project plan every time I bid for a project. No matter how big or small the assignment may be. Because **time is money**! And it is through the project plan that I am able to ascertain the professional fees I will charge.

At the beginning of my consulting journey, I wasn't so good at estimating how long it will take me to undertake some activities. Sometimes I will allocate too much time. Sometimes, I will allocate too little time. And both extremes are dangerous. If I allocate too much time, the project fees inflate, and I may be perceived as less competitive. And if the potential client is fee sensitive, I will certainly lose the project to a cheaper consultant. If I allocate insufficient time, the project fees decrease making me more competitive, and giving me a higher chance to win the project. But I will need to spend additional time undertaking the activity without being able to charge for it. So, it is essential to learn how to **estimate the right amount of time** it will take to undertake every activity so that you can **estimate the right professional fee** to charge.



Thread Advisory



Phone: +6012 206 7758



Email: claudia@thread-advisory.com



Website: www.thread-advisory.com

I have also learnt that giving disproportionate discounts or undervaluing my work for the purpose of winning the project is not a good idea. Yes, I did this when I started, because I was eager to get my first few assignments. But I soon realized the associated costs. I was spending lots of time at the client site. I was undertaking many unbudgeted activities. I was asked to do things outside the scope of the project. The consequences? I was devoting disproportionate amounts of time to a single client. I was not being efficient in the way I performed the project activities. I was letting the client drive the process without the required rigor / discipline. **I was running in circles.**

So, for a **Diagnostic Phase** to succeed, I believe it is essential to gather 360-degree perspectives, build trust in your ability to learn and understand before you can recommend a solution, and allocate the right amount of time to everything that will be undertaken throughout the entire assignment.

In the next chapter I will cover my learnings around the **Design Phase** of the project.

If you or your organization is seeking to undertake a strategic or operational human capital management project, please reach out (claudia@thread-advisory.com) or visit our website (www.thread-advisory.com) to review the type of projects we have performed for our clients.

