



Con Tricks: The Shadowy World of Management Consultancy and How to Make It Work For You

By Martin Ashford

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Consultancy is big business, and the range of services business consultants offer can include advice on: funding for an emerging business; annual audits; tax planning; receivership; and winding up. In the author's opinion, most consultants spend their time trying to be the world's leading expert in whatever problems the client may have and end up merely selling an illusion. This text aims to show buyers of consultancy services how to get value for money from their consultants. There is advice on ensuring consultancy projects deliver real results, avoiding pitfalls and dealing with the tricks of the consultancy trade.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"Consultancy," Martin Ashford proclaims in the opening to *Con Tricks*, "is big business." And thanks to the broad range of services now offered by industry leaders, notes Ashford, the former blue-chip consultant turned *Financial Times* journalist, it affects business in bigger ways all the time. With an unrestrained skepticism that would be suspect if not for his background--comparing practitioners to prostitutes and the practice to "a gigantic confidence trick," for example, would not ring as true if done by an outsider--Ashford explains the best ways to find and work with so-called cons. After discussing the misguided rationales offered by managers who misunderstand their purpose ("we don't have a clue what to do"; "the Board can't agree"), he points out reasons that indicate the use of such external assistance may indeed be prudent (a need for additional resources, specific expertise, or help in "clearing internal obstacles and resistance" among them). Ashford then offers detailed advice on recognizing the types available, choosing one that fits comfortably with your organization, budgeting for what you need, structuring the relationship, deciphering consultancy-speak (through an alphabetized glossary covering *assets* to *zero-based budgets*), comprehending reports and presentations, and ensuring delivery of real results. --*Howard Rothman*

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"Love it or hate it, consulting is here to stay," says a former consultant with a large international consulting firm, who offers a deliberately negative view of the consulting field dominated by 30 major firms. His review of management consultancy is targeted at three audiences: first, the client, to show how to obtain real results, to understand the pitfalls in consulting engagements, and to learn consultants' tricks of the trade; next, consultants themselves, to reflect on what they should be doing; and finally for students considering a career in consulting. The author presents three viable reasons for hiring a consultant: to help improve the client's business model, to look for new trends and opportunities for the client, and to take it from where it currently is in its markets to where it should be. The book's research focuses totally on the U.K., and hence the findings may not have global application. Nonetheless, the author provides useful insight into this large and growing service industry. *Mary Whaley*

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