CONSULTING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE:
A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

FEBRUARY 2018
Introduction

The Centre for Management Consulting Excellence has recently been established by the Worshipful Company of Management Consultants, a modern-day livery company based in the City of London.

The Centre is being set up to collect and share ideas relevant to the management consulting community through a mixture of events and a specially designed web site, as well as leading a number of research projects. It will provide a forum for the exchange of thinking between practitioners sharing the fruits of their experience and academics sharing the results of their research. More information is available on the Centre’s temporary web site at www.cmce.org.uk

Over the course of 2018 we propose to conduct a programme of research to identify the consulting skills that the market will need to develop by 2030.

The research will examine the changing nature of demand for consultancy, and the skills that consultants will therefore need if they are to engage successfully with clients and deliver successful outcomes.

What major changes can we foresee, that are going to impact on organisations’ survival and success? In what areas will organisations need to look outside themselves to address those changes successfully, creating demand for consultancy? Will we see changes in the ways that organisations engage with consultants and in the way that they measure the performance of consultants?

Will the skills that consultants supply to engage with the market and to meet the market’s ever-changing needs be broadly the same as today, or will the increasing prevalence of new technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, radically impact the type of management challenges that businesses and governments will be facing by 2030? To what extent will these challenges demand new consulting skills, and what will consultants need to be doing in the next ten years in order to acquire these skills and use them to engage effectively and to create value?

In the world of Big Data, there is inevitably a lot of debate about what the future of consulting might look like. One of the Centre for Management Consulting Excellence’s objectives is to help clients and consultants alike to tune into important but low-volume signals that are offering us critical information.

This research will serve a fundamental need if it helps us all to hear and interpret signals which will inform us in planning the future of our profession, and to hire and train consultants with the skills that will enable us to engage effectively and to deliver value in a changing market.

We are actively seeking support from users and suppliers of management consultancy, training organisations, academics and other interested parties. This support is requested in three phases:

January – February 2018

Support in refining this proposal:

- Agreeing the themes to research, that are likely to stimulate interest and some provocative points of view
- Confirming the most effective way to undertake the research
• Identifying individuals and organisations who would be keen to be associated with this project, by providing inputs and/or resources in the research phase, and/or promotional support for the finished product.

April – July 2018

Support in undertaking the research:

• Conducting interviews, being an interviewee
• Publicising surveys, completing surveys
• Evaluating findings
• Drawing conclusions

September – December 2018

• Writing and publishing the report
• Gaining media and social media interest
• Hosting physical and virtual events to share the conclusions

How to get involved

There are opportunities to get involved both as an individual and also as an organisation. For example, an organisation such as a consultancy or a business school might wish to use this as a learning and development opportunity for selected staff or students.

This research project is of course just one of the many activities of the new Centre of Excellence, and we are keen for contributors to consider becoming part of a community which will support the Centre going forward.

If you would like to get involved in the research, please contact one of the team members below. We are all providing our time on a pro-bono basis. Although we are not offering payment, we are willing to discuss other forms of recognition.

Core team of practising consultants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Blackburn</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jcb1101@gmail.com">jcb1101@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvert Markham</td>
<td><a href="mailto:calvert@cmarkham.com">calvert@cmarkham.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline Spicer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:caroline.spicer49@gmail.com">caroline.spicer49@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Sutton</td>
<td><a href="mailto:chris@suttonimpact.net">chris@suttonimpact.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette Stone</td>
<td><a href="mailto:stone.collette1@gmail.com">stone.collette1@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic advisers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Muzio</td>
<td><a href="mailto:daniel.muzio@newcastle.ac.uk">daniel.muzio@newcastle.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Sturdy</td>
<td><a href="mailto:andrew.sturdy@bristol.ac.uk">andrew.sturdy@bristol.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karol Szlichcinski</td>
<td><a href="mailto:karol@ksassociates.co.uk">karol@ksassociates.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

Introduction 2
How to get involved 3
Part 1 – Selecting the themes 5
  Consulting in the world of Self-employment and Globalisation 5
  Artificial Intelligence 6
  Big Data 6
  Robotics and the Internet of Things 7
  Cybersecurity 7
  Timeless Skills? 8
Part 2 – Conducting the research 9
Part 3 – Resourcing 10
Part 4 – The structure and title of the published report 12
Part 1 – Selecting the themes

Below are five suggested themes that we believe have the potential to drive change in the Consulting market by 2030, and which may also generate some provocative opinions. In the sixth theme we will look at whether there are also some timeless management consulting skills that will continue to be in high demand.

At this stage we are still in the process of finalising the list of themes that we wish to research. We are providing the themes below in order to stimulate discussion and we aim to reach an agreed list by the end of February 2018.

A key aspect of themes that appear in the final list should be an expectation that there will be an impact on the skills that consultants will need. There may also be an impact on the way that consulting is delivered.

We recognise that the list is for the most part focused on emerging technologies of which we are already aware. What about new technologies which are just around the corner? In our interviews, we will also ask about potential new technologies that could impact consultants by 2030.

The themes below, and the comments therein, are not definitive, but are designed to prompt reaction. We invite people to add, delete and modify.

Consulting in the world of Self-employment and Globalisation

In a gig economy where so many people are consultants, how will management consultancy distinguish itself as a profession? Will there be any need for a profession by 2030? A consultant or team of consultants is typically engaged by a client to give advice, and / or to fill skills gaps. Will democratisation of knowledge reduce the scope for consulting advice? Will there be more skills in-house, and fewer gaps for consultants to fill?

Driven by a range of supply factors including a healthy aging population, many of whose members wish to remain economically active, and the perceived end of “job for life” career expectations, there is likely to be an increasing supply of independent experienced consultants in the market who will price themselves below the current rates of major firms. A large number of ex-consultants in line management roles could further reduce the external opportunities.

On the demand side, the pace of change – with “fail fast” and “throw away” being familiar themes in Agile / DevOps projects today – may continue to favour flexibility as contrasted with long-term consulting projects.

How will the market evolve in this regard? Will large consultancies adapt? What are the prospects for boutique consultancies? Will mature solo consultants be able to acquire new skills and resources, and manage the risks and liabilities, that the market might come to expect?

In a business world of rapid globalisation, what will the 2030 landscape look like in terms of the global reach of large consultancies and solo consultants? How important will transnational and multi-firm collaboration be in 2030, and what will be the tools and skills that will make this
collaboration across complex group dynamics effective? Which consultant will be accountable for the overall solution?

Conversely, will there be a retreat in the globalisation of economies, which might reduce consultancy opportunities at this level? Or might this in turn generate new consulting opportunities at a local level?

Will there still be career consulting opportunities in the market, and if so what types of new graduate or school-leaver entrants will be in highest demand for firms that will provide these careers? What will be the most in-demand training that will be provided in-house or by universities, business schools, professional associations and external training providers? What sharing of knowledge will take place with other professions (accountants, lawyers, etc) who are facing similar challenges?

**Artificial Intelligence**

AI could change the nature of consulting research. It could also have the potential to provide better answers to management problems than the traditional combination of personal insight and experience. Michael Lewis’ book “The Undoing Project” provides useful context.

But how far will businesses and governments rely on AI by 2030? Will it move from single-point solutions such as the design of sales campaigns, or the targeted provision of energy supplies, to enterprise-wide services such as strategy development or human resource management? Where will AI sit with traditional approaches such as “Management by Walking Around”.

For consultants, skills might need to be developed in framing questions, interpreting results, testing recommendations, and also in advising on ethical and risk management implications.

Who will invest in and provide the AI “engines” and how will consultants gain access to these? To what extent will “scale” effects come into play?

In addition to questions around the use of AI, there is the question of the change that will come in its wake. As businesses move more and more to embrace AI, with the potential to transform their organisations, what role is there for consultants in helping to make these transitions successful, not least in integrating AI with human workers? How will this “best practice” be shared so that consultants can learn more quickly?

**Big Data**

The exponential increases in big data that we have seen in the last decade are likely to continue, driven by cheap storage and processing capacity. As well as being an enabler of Artificial Intelligence, Big Data has its own challenges of data management and data visualisation, seeing the wood from the trees. It also brings challenges in managing a broad range of third party storage providers.

What roles might there be for consultants in data analysis teams? Skills and experience in building hypotheses – so that we can benefit from Big Data by asking useful questions? Skills in data management, and in targeting big data investment into areas where there is reasonable prospect of
a good return, are likely to continue to be in high demand? Skills in using and navigating ‘dark data’, data already gathered that can be re-analysed to service other objectives and outcomes?

To what extent will “fake news”, such a big feature of the political world in 2017, be a factor in the way businesses promote and measure themselves in 2030? Will there be new standards set by accountants and regulators, leading to a new raft of compliance consultancy opportunities? Or will blockchain technologies be harnessed to meet these verification needs?

If the democratisation of knowledge continues to grow, meaning that everyone has open access to information, will this impact the ability of consultants to earn revenues from private knowledge-banks? Alternatively, will “experience” rather than “knowledge” be what sells consultancy?

Tied to this is the question of the legitimacy of a consultant’s experience and recommendations. In an environment where “experts” and “expertise” are being increasingly criticised, what are the new challenges for consultants in establishing legitimacy and trustworthiness.

**Robotics and the Internet of Things**

Robotics and the internet of things are already driving the creation of new business models and supply chains. There are some major disruptive technologies which are currently at the piloting stage.

If driverless cars are the norm by 2030, it will not only impact the experience of driving. It is likely to create major change in the provision of motor insurance, which in turn may generate demand for strategic and business restructuring consultancy.

Will wearable sensors, connecting patients to medical providers, drive further advances in predictive and preventative healthcare? What might the opportunities be for technology and consultancy providers in the healthcare market of 2030, an ecosystem which in the last decade has experienced massive pressures on cost and resources?

By 2030, will Smart Cities have become a commoditised “plug and play” solution for local government and citizens, or will the management of local utilities and services continue to be at the forefront of technology innovation, driving consultancy opportunities for service architects?

What impact will robotic technology have on the workplace and on employment opportunities by 2030? For example, will robots using cognitive technology replace the traditional IT helpdesk, finding answers from a vast database of historical cases in a way that is faster, cheaper and more reliable than mere humans could emulate? Are there aspects of today’s consulting supply chain that will reduce or disappear? Such as programming? Or aspects above and beyond helpdesks, that will be provided by a new breed of robo-consultants who are managed remotely from low cost locations, with suitable insurance to cover the impact of any limitations in the algorithms through which they operate?

**Cybersecurity**

Our increasing dependency on remotely operated assets, connected over the internet, means it is likely that the current demand for cybersecurity skills and investment will continue to increase.
Businesses and governments are under sustained attack from both opportunistic and very focused assailants, exploiting weaknesses in technology and infrastructure for both economic and political gain. The increased availability of quantum computing may make current methods of encryption vulnerable.

What will this mean for the Consulting market in 2030? Will the problems we currently encounter have been resolved, or will they continue to plague governments and the economy?

Cybersecurity is a good example of where scarce, high demand skills may favour the use of consultants rather than in-house hires.

How will the supply market react – will cybersecurity remain a specialised discipline in a sophisticated game played out between equally clever consultants and criminals, or will it have become a “must-have” skill for every consultant by 2030?

Timeless Skills?

There are certain core competencies that have been considered essential for management consultants since the inception of the profession.

These include for example skills in engaging with clients, analytic skills, influencing skills, project management, risk management and change management. Effective consultants bring independence and objectivity, and will typically bring some functional or industry experience to understand and meet the business needs of their clients. For organisations undergoing major change, the use of consultants is also perceived as a way to speed up decision-making and reduce or mitigate implementation risks..

Will these skills and competencies still bring “value-add” in 2030? Will any of them have become harder for consultants to acquire, perhaps for example because AI might have reduced opportunities for junior consultants to learn analytic skills?

Will the major successful enterprises of 2030 have achieved their goals with or without engaging consultants, and if the answer is “without” then to what extent would the experience of consultants still be in demand by organisations who wish to mirror these successful enterprises? How will clients who use consultants measure the consultants’ performance?

Digitally native millennials will be in the 40s and 50s by 2030. The trajectory of the consulting profession in the next ten years will to a large extent be shaped by the inclinations and expectations of millennials as buyers and suppliers of consulting services. To what extent are their inclinations and expectations so radically different from the senior consultants in today’s market? And in 2030 will they be looking over their shoulders at a new breed of younger entrants and wondering about the disruption they will bring?

Perhaps the most important competence for consultants of all eras, which is likely to favour their professional survival, is and has always been the essence of the consultant’s motivation and trade: the readiness to help clients to understand, embrace and prosper from change.
Part 2 – Conducting the research

We intend to conduct the research through a mix of face to face interviews and a web-based survey. We are aiming to hold 50 – 100 interviews in the research phase, and to attract 500 – 1000 respondents to the survey, using social media (see Part 4 for potential hashtags), the WCoMC and CMCE websites and personal contacts as attractors.

The interviews will allow us to explore themes in depth, to stimulate provocative views and to compile a database of real-life evidence to support our eventual conclusions. We will also create a small number of hypotheses which we can test during the interviews. We hope that a number of our interviewees will wish to assist the research by also providing contacts, resources and offers of publicity.

The survey will be conducted on a web-based tool such as Survey Monkey. It will help us to gain a critical mass of respondents, and to prioritise our conclusions in a quantitative way based on survey questions such as “please rank the following trends in order of impact”, “please rank the following trends in order of probability”, as well as offering space for free-format comments and a request for us to be able to come back to the respondent to follow up on comments of interest.

We will need to manage an effective balance between interviews and the survey. Inviting too many interviewees to “guess the future” could become unmanageable in terms of reaching conclusions. A small number of expert thoughts is likely to be more useful than a large number of speculative ones.

In our interviews we are aiming to speak to a representative range of people from the following broad categories:

- CXOs of mature and recently-formed organisations which buy consultancy services (“Clients”)
- CXOs of organisations which rarely or never buy consulting services
- Consultants in different age brackets (ranges to be agreed, potentially 20-30, 30-40, 40-65, 65+) and from a mix of large consultancies, small consultancies, and one-consultant operations.
- Consultants specialising in strategy, design, and implementation services
- Consultancy training providers, both in-house and external
- Consultancy recruiters and interim service providers
- Academics, students, authors / journalists and award-winners
- Industry bodies such as the MCA and the IoD.

We are looking for a small number of these interviews to take place in February 2018, to enable us to refine our ideas and questions prior to us conducting the survey and the majority of the interviews in April – July 2018.

We will also make use of selected additional data sources which our academic advisors recommend to us. We have had a recommendation from one of our academic panel, for example. To consider Richard Susskind’s research on how IT is shaping the future of professions.

One potential additional research route, whose merits we have yet to evaluate, is to pose the question “What do future consulting skills look like” direct to an Artificial Intelligence engine such as IBM’s “Watson” or Google’s “Deep Mind”.

9
Part 3 – Resourcing

The key resource needs are:

- Interviewers
- Interviewees / people who can recommend interviewees
- Analysts
- Editors
- Marketers to promote the survey and the final report
- Project office / project management

Interviewers

We would aim to make maximum use of WCoMC members, together with the resources of any other organisation that wishes to come on board, to conduct interviews, interviewing personal contacts and / or allocated interviewees. We would plan for around 100 interviews over 4 months from April to July 2018.

If 30 people each do 2 interviews, and 5-10 people each do 4-8 interviews, then we could cover the ground by involving 35-40 people in interviewing.

We would leave it to the interviewer and interviewee to decide the format (call, video, face-to-face). It will be important to have guidance notes to ensure consistency of approach, and an agreement with interviewers that they will produce timely write-ups in an agreed format.

The guidance notes will address data protection and also the need to ask interviewees whether or not their comments can be attributable.

Interviewees

The profile of desired interviewees is set out in the section above. We will look to WCoMC members and their contacts, and other organisations who come on board, to suggest suitable interviewees. The project office will keep a master list of interviewees.

Analysts

We will need 6 to 12 people to review interview notes and survey responses, together with other existing academic research, perhaps divided into subgroups of 1 or 2 people for each of our six key themes. They could be sourced from business school or university students, or from interns / apprentices at consulting companies. The analytic work would be conducted over a fixed period of 6 weeks in June / July 2018.
Editors

The editors will produce the survey questions, the interview guidance, and compile the final report in consultation with the analysts. The editors might be the same as the team of 7 people who produced this research proposal. The editors’ role will involve time in April, June, July, September, October, and November 2018, and can be done as relay between team members.

The editors may of course also take on some interviewing activity.

Marketers

The marketers will determine the launch and publicity strategy, including events and press contacts, for the final report. This will require 1 or 2 people part time, either from WCoMC or a sponsor, in the final quarter of 2018.

There will also be an opportunity to promote this research, and our early recommendations, at the WCoMC’s annual Change Lecture in May 2018.

Project Office / Project Manager

We will need to run a small part-time project office of 1 or 2 people for the period from April to July 2018. to manage the survey, issue guidance to interviewers, compile a working list of interviewees, and chase up interview notes. This could potentially be populated by WCoMC members, a sponsoring consultancy organisation, or a business school / university.

We should look to appoint a part time Project Manager from the Centre of Excellence.
Part 4 – The structure and title of the published report

The structure of the final report will emerge once we have started the research phase and begun to analyse the findings.

A potential flow might be as follows:

“In ten years’ time the world of consulting as we know it today may not exist.

This is because of…. (select, say, 3 main points) the speed of change, the impact of technology, democratization of knowledge, important new industries (energy, driverless cars etc)

These will fundamentally change the nature of … (again select a few) the type of help required, the technology used, size of programmes, skills needed.

The result will that NEW organisations will be created, and NEW skills will be required.

Actions for today’s consultants are…”

The title of the research programme is “Consulting Skills for the Future”. When it comes to producing the final report, we may have come up with an alternative title which will reflect our conclusions. Ideas put forward so far include:

“Management consulting tools and intelligence in the age of AI”

“Extreme change ahead: How can the management consulting profession thrive in 2030 and beyond?”

“The death of management consulting”

“The total reinvention of management consulting”

“The new era of management consulting”

We might also create a hashtag such as #deathofconsulting or #reinventingtheconsultant to generate social media attention.