

CHAPTER FOUR

From My Model to Yours

This is a bridge chapter between my experience and yours, between my approach to consultancy and yours. Up to this point, I have been concentrating on an exposition of my approach to consultancy and to being a consultor and a consultant. Throughout, the aim has been to provide information which would enable you to develop your own model of consultancy. You could find my model or elements of it helpful. I hope you do. Even if this is the case, you still have to make them your own. Undoubtedly, as you have read this book you will have been noting ideas to which you feel attracted and those which simply do not appeal to you. You may have been comparing and contrasting your approach to consultancy with mine. Suggestions are made in this chapter which could possibly help you to make the transition from studying my approach to forming and developing your own. They relate to:

- reviewing, clarifying and possibly revising basics of your approach to consultancy;
- applying your approach to a given case;
- the ongoing developing of your praxis through working at challenges and difficulties.

These sections represent complementary ways in which we shape, fashion and develop the manner in which we go about consultancy (and other things as well). On the one hand ideas and personal factors condition our choice of approach. Consciously and unconsciously we select and design ways which are a fit with our beliefs, values and understandings about how things work. We do this by learning directly and indirectly from others, by personalising approaches and methods and by coming up with ideas of our own. On the other hand, what happens when we put our preferred approach into practice can condition and modify our approach. The hard realities of the workplace quickly reveal weaknesses in our methods or in our inability to practise them skillfully enough. Amongst other things thorough going analysis of these difficulties helps us to identify what we did which contributed to the undesirable results and what we could have done to avoid or nullify the effects. Such information is vital to the shaping of approaches which are effective in the rough realities of human and spiritual interaction. So, vocational aspirations and problem solving make critical contributions towards the formation of practice theory which is consonant with the practitioner's beliefs and moral and spiritual values and operates effectively in the realities of the workplace. Effective practice theory is, in fact, a praxis bridge which can carry much two-way traffic between the ideal and the actual. Such practice theory is a made-to-measure working suit: ready-

made versions fit where they touch. (Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian, commenting on the white garments referred to in Revelation, said they were starched stiff and fitted where they touched.) This analogy has its limitations like all others. Practitioners, consultants and consultors, have key roles to play in tailoring their practice theory. Reflective practitioners soon outgrow their practice theory suits as the growth of their body of experience and knowledge requires changes in the dimensions and shape of them. Consequently, practice theory is in a continual state of evolution through new vocational insights and challenging encounters with human and spiritual factors.

All this means that what follows outlines a programme of reflective exercises for those of you who wish to develop your own consultancy practice theory and theology. It is a chapter to read and do.

I Reviewing, Clarifying and Possibly Revising Basics of Your Approach to Consultancy

This section suggests ways in which you might:

1. review and possibly revise your own definition of, and approach to consultancy;
2. review and possibly revise your own consultancy model, and note unresolved issues;
3. articulate the basic elements of your practice theory and what needs to be strengthened;
4. draw up your own codes of good practice and annotate it for strengths and weaknesses.

1. Your Definition and Approach to Consultancy

Form your own definition of consultancy. Do the first draft straight off out of your head and heart. Re-read the definition given earlier on pp 1, 23, 133 and 147. This could lead you to edit or revise your own. Note fundamentals of your approach in relation to:

- human and spiritual needs;
- consultancy processes;
- consultancy relationships;
- knowing and understanding;
- theological functions and responsibilities;
- theological abilities required;
- spirituality of consultant and consultors.

What emerges may be built into the descriptions of your consultancy model (point 2), your practice theory (point 3) and your codes of good practice (point 4).

2. Your Consultancy Model(s) and Unresolved Issues

A way to get at the essential characteristics of your model(s) is as follows.

- Review the models noted and described in this book. You may possibly need to research models which interest and intrigue you but which are not fully described (see pp 27-31).
- Describe the model or models to which you yourself are attracted or use or are committed to. There are several ways in which you might depict your model (or models): by describing it in words; by representing it through the use of metaphors and images; by using diagrams and flow charts to represent the dynamics and critical paths of consultancy processes. You might try using a combination of these methods. Then consider your model(s) in relation to the non-directive consultancy model, pp 27-29.
- Consider whether your model(s) has changed through reading this book. If so, how and what influenced or caused the change?
- Describe your approach to consultancy to a potential consultor who has little or no experience of consultancy or, worse, to someone who is somewhat suspicious of it. Apart from helping you to clarify your approach, this is a useful thing to do.
- Note unresolved issues, they are items for your development agenda.

3. Basic Elements of Your Practice Theory

One way in which you could discover the basic elements of your practice theory is by listing every point you can think of in a brainstorming session. Having got the list you can then identify key elements and cluster other points around them. (That is how I got at the seven elements of my practice theory.) Then, very much as in relation to models (point 2 above), you could revisit Chapter Two and see whether it has anything to say to your model(s).

4. Your Codes of Good Practice

You could adopt the same procedure again: get out your own codes of good practice for consultors and consultants, compare them with those presented in pp 143-145, and, if necessary, revise your own codes to include further thoughts.

II Applying your Model to Given Cases

The previous section suggested you heighten your awareness of the basic principles of your own approach by comparing them with mine. A complementary follow-through exercise is to see what your approach looks like in practice and possibly compare it with mine. You could do this by considering one of your own consultancy projects. Look at the action you intend to take if it is a new project or at that which you took if it is a partially or fully completed project. The action reflects the theory and the theology of your approach. Now do a similar exercise on my approach. Work out the action that you think would have to be taken to put my approach into practice and assess the likely outcome. Compare and contrast your approach and mine to see how both could be improved. You could do this exercise from either a consultant's or consultor's point of view.

A similar exercise could be done on the worked example in Chapter Three. Establish the points at which critical decisions were/had to be made about

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alternative courses of action. Note the possibilities. Assess what your approach might have led *you* to do as the consultant. Compare and contrast the action you think you would have taken with what was actually done. Another exercise would be to do a similar thing from the consultor's perspective.

This is a systematic, conscious and somewhat sophisticated version of an activity in which we are continuously engaged: comparing the what, how and why of what we do with what others do.

III The Ongoing Development of your Praxis Through Troubleshooting

No matter how well we practise the art and science of consultancy as consultors and consultants we will continually meet difficulties related to:

- the church and community work subject matter about which we are consulting;
- the consultancy relationships, procedures and processes in which we are engaged.

With respect to the first, Part Two of this book could be useful. But it is to the second group of difficulties that we now turn. By doing so we change the focus *from practice theory* (i.e.: that which experience shows makes consultancy effective and that which prevents it from being so) *to unresolved problems* (i.e.: to the issues, challenges and quandaries encountered by consultors and consultants as they pursue their practice theory tracks). Moving from practice to problem consciousness takes us into difficulties inherent in the complex human, contextual and spiritual factors associated with seeking, receiving and accepting vocational help and the proffering, providing and giving of it. Some of these difficulties could result from malpractice whilst others could indicate inadequacies in the existing practice theory itself. Thus the approach now adopted is to work from problems encountered back to practice theory whereas in Chapter Two, and to a lesser extent in the previous sections of this chapter, it was from practice theory forward to the action most likely to produce the desired results and avoid or overcome potential difficulties. The result of the complementary, combined and sustained use of these two approaches, the one deductive and the other inductive (cf p 78), deepens our understanding of consultancy processes, builds up our skill in promoting them and refines our practice theory. This section offers ways and means of working at problems yourself and with others. It also introduces the trouble shooting access charts presented in Chapter Five along with notes on some outstanding and recurring issues and problems.

1. The use of Standard Solutions

A skeleton key to dealing with any problem is careful attention to its specific features and especially those which are subtly idiosyncratic. Amongst other things, this means that standard or blanket solutions are to be approached circumspectly. They might well work because similarities as well as differences do exist between a problem experienced by one person and another; but then again they might not. It is unadvisable to adopt them automatically; they need to be carefully assessed for

applicability against the peculiarities of the situation. Standard solutions are, therefore, best seen as ideas and suggestions which give a potentially useful starting point in problem solving. *And that indicates the status and significance of the suggestions in this section and later in the access charts.* Undoubtedly, scanning what has helped others and thinking laterally can help, provided that the analytical focus starts and ends with the particularities of the problem being experienced.

2. Tackling Consultancy Difficulties

Not surprisingly, the approaches and methods used by consultors and consultants to help them to analyse and design church and community work can be used on consultancy processes to equally good effect.

(a) *Generic thinking stages.* Suitably adapted, the eight stages (cf pp 79-83) in creative and imaginative thought can, for instance, help consultors and consultants examine consultancy action which has been taken and to chase out faults in processes and procedures which might be causing problems in projects and programmes.

(b) *Cases and problems.* Difficulties normally present themselves in one of two forms. *Cases* are one form. A case is a sequence of events in which the consultor and/or the consultant experienced inter-personal difficulties of one kind or another which complicate, impair or undermine their ability to consult. *Problems* are another form. Problems are generally expressed in terms of "how to do this or that". Cases and problems are differentiated because they respond best to different kinds of analytical treatment. Appropriate forms of treatment are described in Display 2:3. Both are based on the eight thinking stages but formatted in quite different ways. The differences are striking.

Cases are, of course, problems. *Specific cases and problems* arise out of particular situations and incidents. *General problems and cases* recur regularly in different situations and guises. Dealing with specific cases and problems involves focussing upon their particularities exclusively. To do this, the temptation to focus on other similar cases and problems must be resisted except, that is, to use them to help to understand those under consideration. General application of any findings follows the analysis of the particular. Dealing with general cases and problems is the reverse process. Several examples of the same kind of difficulties as possible are scanned to extract the basic common features that need to be taken into account. This information is formatted in the case or problem solving mode and given the full analytical treatment. What emerges should be generally applicable to the family of cases and problems.

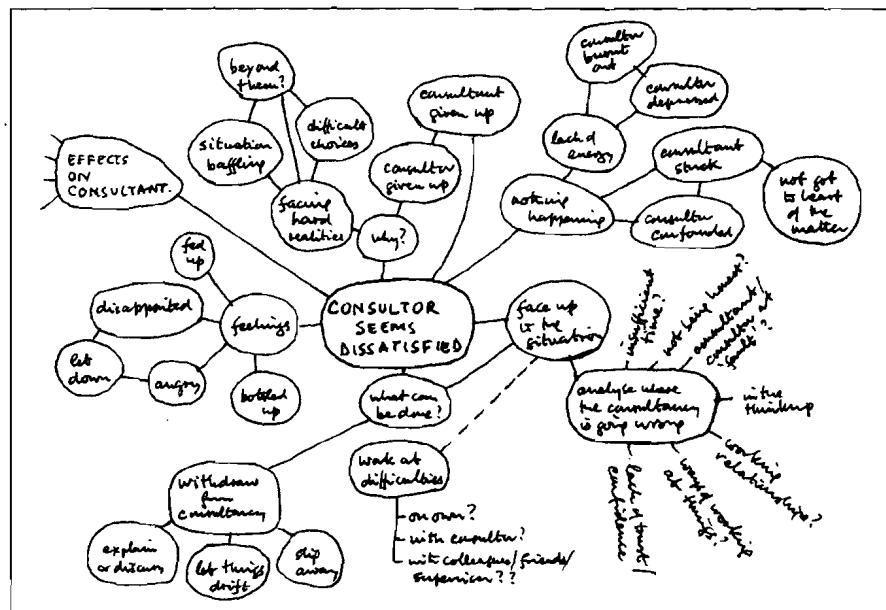
With any difficulty, therefore, it is necessary to decide whether it is amenable to treatment as a case or as a problem and whether it is best treated specifically or generally in order to use the appropriate facilitating structures. Whether analysing a case or a problem, consultors and consultants are more likely to get to the heart of the matter if they:

- write an analytical note or a record for their own reference of what has led them to be concerned (cf p 88);

- describe whatever they are feeling and thinking as accurately and honestly as possible no matter how unflattering and painful this might be;
- note and review as many explanations as possible of what is happening and any hunches (hypotheses) they might have;
- put their explanations and hunches in order of probability;
- decide precisely what they want to achieve and avoid;
- discover courses of action which are a fit for them, those with whom they work as well as all the above considerations.

The next two sections can be aids to these tasks.

(c) *Brainstorming.* Brainstorming is one way of getting information of this kind out of your head and on to paper, possibly in "brain patterns" or whatever way can help you. An example of a brain pattern is given in Display 4:1. Having done this it



Display 4:1 A Brain Pattern Example: Consultor Seems Dissatisfied

is useful to scan any other ideas you can, either to collect those which you have not thought of or to compare and check out your own list against others.

(d) *Using troubleshooting access charts.* Much information has already been provided, particularly in Chapter Two, about possible causes of problems and ideas about possible ways of dealing with them. Some of this information can be located through the extended list of contents and the indexes. That which is not easily located in this way has been made much more accessible in charts in the next chapter. They are after the style of troubleshooting charts commonly found in equipment manuals but with significant differences described in the introduction to

them. They list symptoms of unease or presenting problems, possible causes and suggestions for remedial action. They will serve you best when they help you to bring into focus as many ideas as possible and then, having scanned them, to select those to be used *in your own analysis*.

3. Tackling Difficulties On Your Own and With Others

All the methods in this chapter can be used by consultors themselves on their own or with others. When working on their own they are responsible for structuring their thinking and working things out; when working with others these tasks can be divided and shared.