

“Why then, do consultants make such a good living (well, usually... under healthier economic circumstances)? ”

**Blindfold your leaders and fire your consultants. I realise that is quite a statement coming from a consultant! Yet, if I have to be honest with my clients, they have every ounce of intelligence they need right there within their organisations to boost innovation, profit and competitiveness. The know-how, the energy, the wisdom lies with the people on the permanent payroll – a wealth of potential untapped.**

Why then, do consultants make such a good living (well, usually... under healthier economic circumstances)?

Sure, the external perspective is important - they bring research, new ideas, experience and clout - but mainly they get stuff done because they are not so attached to what the organisation is doing, what it has done so far or who is who in the zoo. Less baggage, fewer turf issues, less attachment.

But I've been curious as to why the people in the organisation cannot play this role for themselves?

They either know things on the inside, then pay a consultancy firm many millions to ratify that very insight or...

They don't know things and need someone else to come and help find a solution, even though most sources of information lie on the inside.

A few observations have helped me explain the phenomena. People inside organisations are rarely on the same

side. They are employed by the same company, but that's where it often ends. Any organisation is made up of smaller parts, including a variety of colourful personalities that are potentially divisive. And the moment the sense of an individual's identity is more defined by the smaller part, function or business unit, it splits the world into an "us" and a "them". Parallel to this, each part begins to "know" certain things. They have strong opinions and they advocate specific solutions generated by their narrow vantage point.

It is true that the internal tensions between functions can be an important and healthy component of the organisation. Surely the Finance Department must challenge all departments to find the best deals for flights, accommodation and the like; but the moment Finance blames Marketing or Sales for poor figures, the "us and them" dynamic has been kick started: finger pointing, defensiveness and resentment result! One is right and the other is wrong.

The perspective that's needed to be truly innovative as an organisation is lost. The approach to really understand why the figures are poor is missing. The smaller parts don't ask questions. It follows that they also don't listen. They don't have adequate perspective and the worst thing is they don't even know they are limited.

The issue that is playing out can be summarised in a word: ego.

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The dead giveaway that ego is dominating any situation is people argue as if there is a right and a wrong, when the issue on the table is clearly more complex and dynamic. They buy into an illusion. A further clue is that people come across as personally attached to their view: they defend it and propagate it with a sense of certainty. Their intensity is a giveaway that who they are and how much they are worth is all dependent on their view reigning over any other.

So, if you want to save on consultants, blindfold your leaders.

Make it impossible for them to see so clearly. Force them to let go of the illusion that they see the correct picture.

It is easy for all of us to agree that there is such a thing as sunrise and sunset. It happens. It is true. But not absolutely true. When it happens changes, depending on where you live on the globe. And if you watch from a satellite in orbit, there is no such thing as the sun rising or setting, just the earth turning.

The same is true in business arguments. People argue about truth as if it is absolute. Without real, in-depth inquiry, they can never understand the other perspective's relative truth. The only cure is to figuratively blindfold yourself to prevent you seeing what you see. Force yourself to NOT know – just for a few moments. Only then can you be open to see what

someone else sees. More and more organisational issues that have real impact on the bottom line could be resolved by truly seeing and appreciating the complexity of the whole – that one minor tweak in one or two areas could have a massive impact on customer experience and profitability. How must we synchronise things differently to enable a significant cut in lead times or add margin? To find that answer requires a real sense of collaboration among business units. The last thing you need is a sense of competition and hierarchy among functions. The power play, the relative rank, the identification with being right, is all ego's way of saying “I'm cleverer than you” and “I am separate from you”.

There is a good reason the ego does this. It protects us. It compels us to oversimplify things when it is not appropriate.

When we really listen to other views, the issues we look at become more complex by the minute. It begins to look like the complexity it actually is! And this means we have to deal with the feeling of grappling with something. We have to sit with the real sense of anxiety caused by not knowing what the answer is.

To make things worse, the moment we start to collaborate and ask questions, we slow things down. We fear that we are losing the small window of opportunity to get something done that is worth doing. We want to react quickly and capitalise.

But it is one of those tough

facts leaders need to meditate on daily: as certain as death and taxes and the Dalai Lama not coming to SA this year (NB This comparison may date: perhaps delete or replace with something more universal? ),delete as an individual, as a single business unit, you do not have absolute truth. It may look like it, taste like it, feel like it, but it is an illusion.

The only option is to put that ego on a very tight leash so that it can only bark down the corridors of the organisation – chasing the strings of consultants away. When the egos are chained, the leaders and employees can understand the big opportunities in an integrated way.