

PETER PRINCIPLE MEETS DOSS

PRINCIPLE: Secrets
for Engaging Consultants to
Management

You should expect a consultant to add value to your organization, moving it forward and upward toward your purpose, mission, and goals.

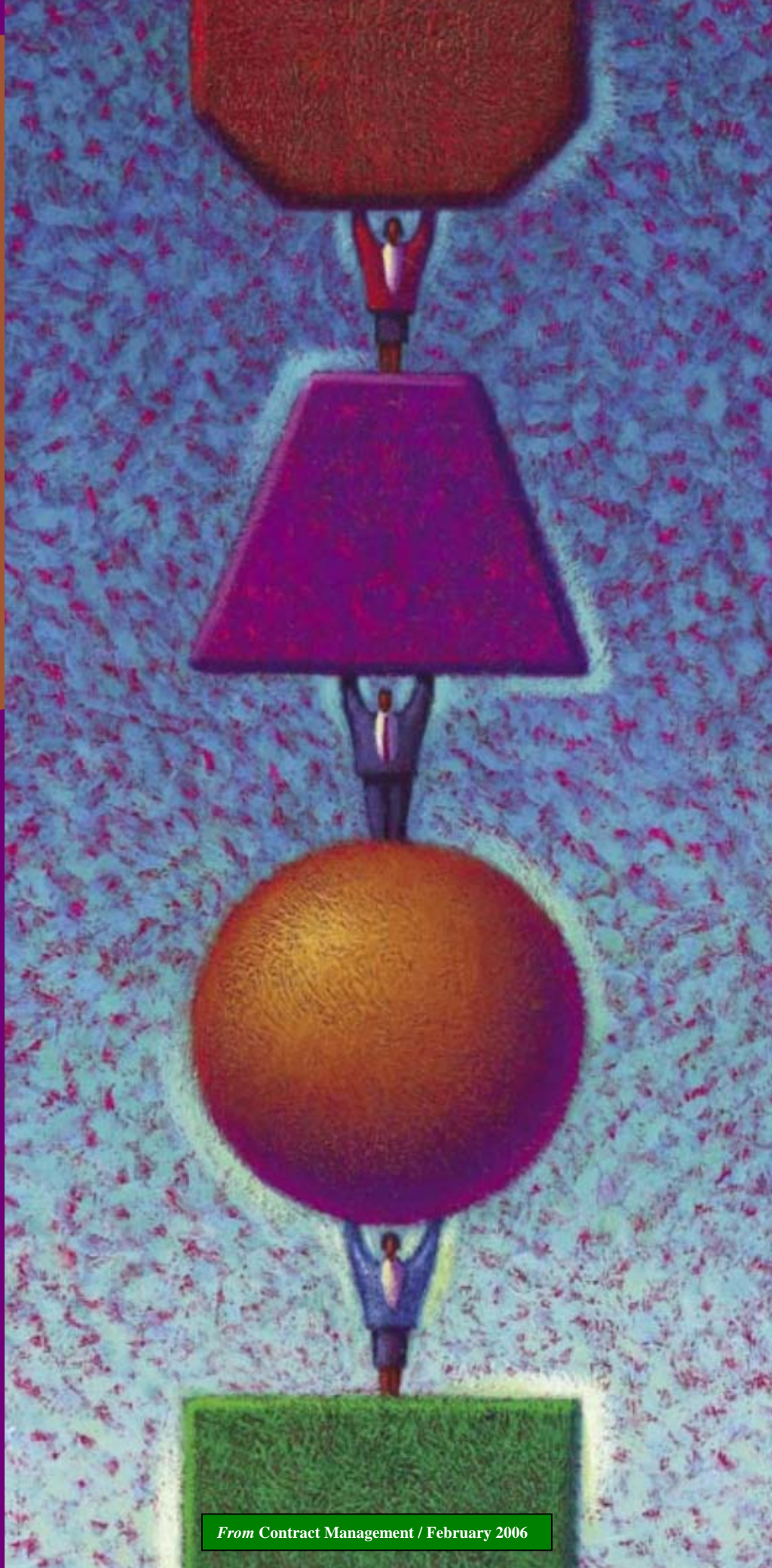
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About the Authors

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When selecting a consultant, hiring an employee, or solving a problem, we offer a simple framework that can help you achieve balance in resolving the issues simply. For that matter, this framing is useful in all sorts of decision-making considerations. The secret? Apply, in tandem, the Peter Principle and the Doss Principle thinking to reflect competency versus compatibility components, i.e., tangibles versus intangibles.^{1,2}

Do You Need a Consultant?

What would it cost if you do nothing?

Would you be more successful because of the consultant's help?

Do you have internal resources to face the situation?

Why Engage a Consultant?

If you needed a kidney transplant, would you do it yourself? If the air conditioner in your car was not working, would you repair it yourself? Most likely not. Transplant surgery is so serious and specialized that you would turn to an expert—a transplant surgeon. Though you might try to repair an air conditioner, you would probably find that it makes better use of your time to use a specialist with the right tools and know-how.

In our opinion, there are four main reasons to engage a management consultant:

- (1) To serve as a neutral third party to take actions within an environment that is very political or where the actions may be controversial,
- (2) To seek new synergies from within the organization that require working cross-functionally through space controlled by strong-minded managers,
- (3) To obtain expertise from the consultant, and

- (4) To accomplish a project for which no one internally has the time.

Given these reasons, what should you expect from the consultant? You should expect the consultant to add value to your organization, moving it forward and upward toward your purpose, mission, and goals. This should be your mind-set. If not, then you may get results that are not focused on your original purpose. At the root of all this is the hope and expectation that the consultant will perform well and reflect well on you.

Evaluate Your Need for a Consultant

The Institute of Management Consultants USA (IMC USA) has identified three considerations to help determine whether a consultant is really needed.³

- (1) Assess the impact on the organization if nothing is done. Will your need for a consultant dissipate if you wait?
- (2) Do you know what success looks like? Are you clear on what you expect from the consultant?
- (3) Do you have internal resources to resolve the issues?

If the answer is “no” to these questions, engaging a consultant is warranted.

A Caveat

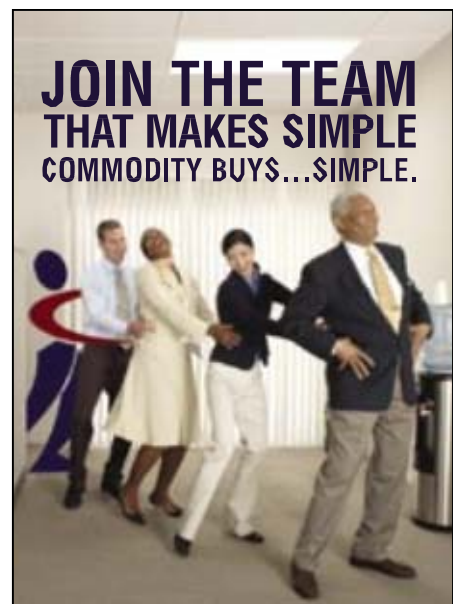
Many people put the title “consultant” on their business cards, but while they may have solid expertise in their fields, some do not have the training and experience to work as a consultant. You should make sure that anyone you engage has earned professional certification and has been screened.

If you are looking for a management consultant, for example, look for the certified management consultant, or CMC® mark. Certification does not guarantee a consultant's services, but it does signify that the person subscribes to a code of ethics and has undergone a process of client and

peer review to assure competence, trust, and client satisfaction.

Intangible Factors in Selecting a Consultant

You are probably aware of how tests and résumés help evaluate job candidates. You may be good at delineating what tasks are important. Yet, even with candidates who have stellar scores and solid experience, you don't “bat 1,000.” Why? The clues are in the other factors—the people-side components. For example, consider a computer programmer who is superb at



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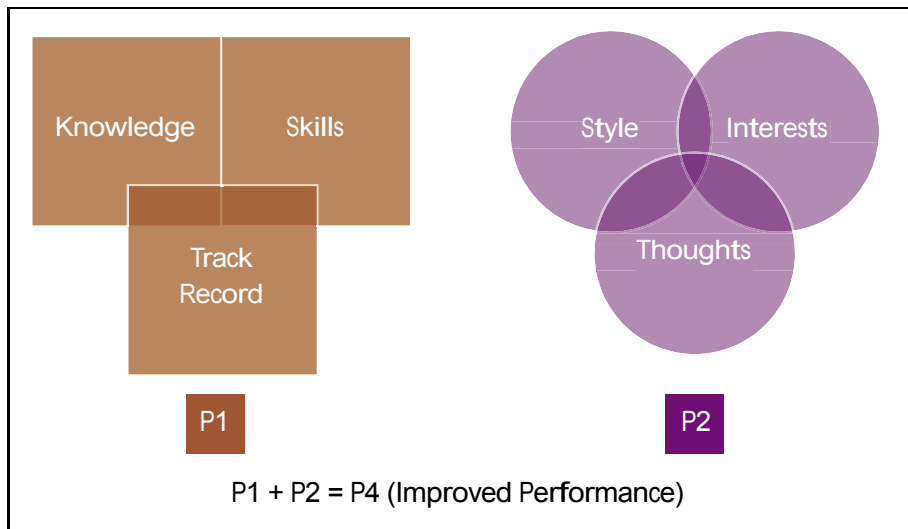


Figure 1. The Peter Principle Meets the Doss Principle

sect in a person, P1 + P2 is not P3, but P4 to represent the synergy in improved performance. (See Figure 1 on this page) The P4 stage might be the condition noted by Abraham Maslow's pyramid as self-actualization, the state in which an individual's strengths (P1 factors) are aligned with their passions (P2 factors).⁶

Some examples of the pairings of competency and compatibility are shown in Table 1 on page 45. In this table, we use the additional terminology of task-side (competencies) and people-side (compatibilities) components. These also can be considered the hard-side versus soft-side factors. (Most people who fail do so because of the soft-side considerations.)

Thus, the full-course approach in seeking a successful consulting intervention includes considering both the task-side competencies and people-side compatibilities. Just as individuals can rise to their level of incompetence, they also can rise to their level of incompatibility.

Selection Matrix

Table 2 on page 46 summarizes the tandem use of the competencies and the compatibilities in evaluating a consultant. This matrix provides a framework with which you can customize specific needs of an organization or an assignment. It offers a structured process by which to check for important clues that will predict success or failure more accurately. It can be used to discern gaps in a person-job match and then to close those gaps in a person's credentials.

Engaging a Consultant

If matching the characteristics in Table 2 were all that you needed to do, you would bat 1,000 consistently in selecting people for each and every task! You need to consider one last set of factors. Engaging a consultant is much like selecting a surgeon for transplant surgery. There is usually a lot at stake that will affect you and your organization. You want and need to have confidence that the consultant you select will deliver the results you

generating code. Yet, if promoted to managing a project, this person fails miserably, because good code-writing skills do not directly translate into effective leadership. You probably know this, but succumb to the siren call of technical competence over the intangibles or effective leadership. We can be so focused on the tangible components to the exclusion of the soft-side considerations.

Finding and selecting consultants who are able to do the work is more straightforward when there is a carefully thought-out process for applying the right tools to the task. These tools include references, testimonials, certifications, success with projects

of similar scope and complexity, plus paying attention to the balance between accomplishing the task and the relationship with the people in the organization.

Because of the importance of the human element in a consulting engagement, let's take a closer look at the interplay between the people-side and task-side components.

The Peter Principle Meets the Doss Principle

In 1969, Peter and Hull published a treatise saying that "people in organizations rise to their levels of incompetence."⁴ This states the obvious—we can only do well those things in which we are trained, learned, or have experience. These are the characteristics we find on résumés. Twenty-three years later, Doss published that "for optimal success on the job, both the competencies and the compatibilities need to be aligned with the job and the person."⁵ We attempt to discern the compatibility factors through interviews of the candidate, but often we are not certain what those factors are or how to compare them with other candidates in the selection process. Doss lists the competency factors (P1) as knowledge, skills, and track record. He names the compatibility factors (P2) as style, interest, and thoughts. He further says that when the appropriate P1 + P2 factors inter-

Case: Presentation of a firm's safety audit

Given: Presenter was totally factual, specific, and blunt about the faults

Problem: CEO was critical about portions of the report; presenter told the CEO that he was wrong

Conclusion: Presenter's recommendations were accepted but all follow-on work was terminated; people-side insensitivities damaged the relationship

Situation	Task-Side Component (E.g., Things We Do)	People-Side Component (E.g., How We Do Things)
1. Dealing with people at work	Managing	Leading
2. Planning	Mission statement	Vision statement
3. Hiring	Competencies (knowledge, skills, and track record)	Compatibilities (personality style, values, and thought preference)
4. Personality style	Task emphasis	People emphasis
5. Team	Results, performance	Chemistry
6. Appraisals	Work done, accomplishments	Interpersonal relations, teamwork, and support of others
7. Business agreement	Doing it right	Doing what's right
8. Customer service	Complete tasks in timely fashion within budget; seek feedback on delivery of results	Meet expectations; team with client to build relationship; seek feedback on attitudes and behaviors
9. Other paired terms	Hard-side issues Objective Tangible	Soft-side issues Subjective Intangible

Table 1. People-Side and Task-Side Considerations

need and be a credit to you, especially for a career-defining project. The consultant needs to know how to consult to a management team.

Just as a good physician will diagnose and understand your situation before recommending treatment, a good consultant also diagnoses before recommending or prescribing a solution—and this work must be done in the early stages of the assignment.

To do this, a good consultant will find out about your situation through questions. Because of the importance of diagnosis, you should pay close attention to how well the consultant develops insight into your issues. Consider the following about the potential consultant:

- Is this person able to listen and reserve judgment?
- Does this person have the necessary experience and knowledge?
- What is the track record of the person actually doing the work?
- How well does this person deal with sensitive issues?

- How is the fit between this person and your organization's culture?

Additionally, the effective consultant will need to know the following from you:

- (1) Clearly articulated need or objective,
- (2) Work completed as of this moment of need,

- (3) Desired outcomes,
 - (4) Timing and milestones, and
 - (5) Budgetary requirements.
- From Concept to Practice**
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Competencies	Knowledge	Skills	Track Record
Questions to Ask	What they learned— grades, transcripts, test scores, and interests in keeping up with best practices in the field.	What they know how to do, including the processes they have learned on the job and business acumen.	Where they have practiced their knowledge and skills successfully, gained positive experiences, and done work similar to that involved in the new assignment.
	What is your understanding of the problem? What fresh ideas can you bring to the assignment?	How do you work with people in your client organizations?	Is your past experience of sufficient depth and complexity to address the current need? What do past clients say about you?
Compatibilities	Style	Interests	Thought Preference
Questions to Ask	Refers to both personality style (e.g., DISC and MBTI) and leadership styles. It also refers to performance when under stress.	These are the personal values and motivators, i.e., what is most important to them? Values and interests are sometimes grouped into social, technologic, economic, political, legal, philanthropic, ethical, and regulatory factors.	Are you an analytical, linear thinker, or an intuitive or visionary thinker? How do you approach an issue? What do you need for your assignment?
	How do you deal with people with diverse personalities, especially those with whom you disagree?	What are your values? How do you handle situations where your values differ from those of your client? Are there any clashes of values? Are they customer focused or remuneration focused?	Can you see the big picture or are you more interested in the details? Can you make the needed conceptual leap?

Table 2. Characteristics of Competencies and Compatibilities

- Define the job, task, and assignment in people- and task-side terms. Describe the things that need to be done and even how the job should be done (job/task side). Characterize the type of person who will fit the needs of the job as well as the organization.
 - Characterize candidates with the same terms. Compare the fit of the candidate with the job-side and people-side characteristics.
 - Note areas of match or difference between the candidate and the job.
 - Determine whether the mismatches are critical or not in successful execution of the job.
 - Consider in a candidate's supporting material and in interviews whether he/she understands what to do in a consulting situation. Does he/she know how to consult to management?
 - Make a hiring decision based on "best fit," a balance of people- and task-side factors.
- For example, if you are hiring a fund-raising consultant, the job description may read as follows:
- Energetic person with a passion for follow-through. Has the experience to reach key decision-makers. Has excellent writing and speaking skills and is persuasive and assertive, but not aggressive and obnoxious. Needs to develop plans and then implement the plan to seek funds to grow the organization.
- The applicant background may read as follows:
- Financial background. Prior work as business officer of small nonprofit agency. Very professional and has interfaced with CEOs and CFOs. Extremely organized and process-oriented. Effective use of numerical data. Worked successfully on fund-raising efforts with the president of the nonprofit. Highly regarded, ethical person. In Table 3 on page 47, can you anticipate the success or failure of the selection? A review of the potential gaps in the example suggests two areas of concern in placing this candidate —skills and style. Note that scores of 1–2 are probably acceptable. A score of 3 suggests gaps in the candidate's skill or compatibility set that he or she may want to address. Scores of 4–5 are serious ones that will be the source of a candidate's incompatibility

Competencies	TASK Requirements	Candidate	Potential Gap*
Knowledge	Social science, economics, and fundraising	Accounting and finance	1
Skills	People skills, persuasive, speaker, project management, planner	Planner and financial management	
Track Record	Fundraising in similar situation; experience in reaching decision-makers, and successful fundraiser	BFO, business analyst, and worked on fund-raising team	
Competencies	TASK Requirements	Candidate	Gap
Style	Energetic people person; personality style that is action-oriented and likes face-to-face with people; extrovert	Detail person who takes care to do it right; personality style is somewhat cautious, but also wants action	
Interests	Social, people interest; motivated to help people; fundraising is thus driven by this interest	Economic motivation first; a more task-focused approach to seeking funds	
Thought Preference	Big-picture person; analytical thinking follows; rapid problem-solver; demonstrates cost-benefit mind-set	Organized analytical thinker and problem-solver; prepares a plan and works the plan	

*Scoring: A low score represents a small gap. The larger scores, larger gaps.

Table 3. Task-Person Match for the Fund-Raising Consultant

with the job. Please note, however, that this matching is but one of several tools you can use to anticipate success when engaging a consultant.

In a Nutshell

You want the consultant to add value to your organization, moving it forward and upward toward your purpose, mission, and goals. To achieve these, you must balance the competencies (Peter) and capabilities (Doss) of a consultant with your needs and the nature of the people with whom he or she will have to interact. You have some tools to help you select the right consultant. The key is to use a well-thought-out process that takes into consideration what is important to you and your organization in matching the competencies and capabilities of a prospective consultant to

your needs and to verify that the person or people you choose meet your criteria. It's really very simple! CM

Endnotes

1. L. Peter and R. Hull. *The Peter Principle: Why Things Always Go Wrong* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1969).
2. R. Doss. *Theory P: A Formula for Improving Personal and Organizational Performance*. (Houston, TX: Human Side Press, Ltd., 1992).
3. Janice Scanlan (Editor). *How to Hire a Management Consultant and Get the Results You Expect*. Institute of Management Consultants USA (www.imcusa.org).
4. L. Peter and R. Hull. *The Peter Principle: Why Things Always Go Wrong*.
5. R. Doss. *Theory P: A Formula for*

Improving Personal and Organizational Performance.

6. A. H. Maslow. *The Further Reaches of Human Nature*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1971).

Reference

Ian Jacobsen. *Leadership at Your Fingertips*. (Los Altos, CA: Westchester Publishing, September 2002).