

# High-Impact Consulting

How Clients and Consultants  
Can Work Together to Achieve  
Extraordinary Results

Completely Revised and Updated

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Level of 100% Performance!

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expression of Calvin's insightful remark, "It is often easier, but less useful, to transmit to a client a valid diagnosis of what is wrong and what should be done about it, than to interact with members of the client organization in such a way that the things which 'should' happen actually come to pass."<sup>1</sup>

As noted earlier, the conventional consulting paradigm is not designed to mobilize organizational change. High-impact consulting, by contrast, focuses on implementing solutions as much as on discovering them. It is explicitly designed to produce all three elements of consulting success: expert recommendations, bottom-line results, and client capacity to sustain improvements. Indeed, high-impact consulting aims to expand the skills, confidence, and enthusiasm of the client to go even further. It is designed to help the Calvins of the world to farm as well as they know how to farm, and then to learn even more.

Here's an example of high-impact consulting in action:

The United Aluminum Corporation, a rolling and processing mill in Connecticut, invested large sums over a five-year period in technical consulting to install the rolling-mill control equipment the consultant recommended. The resulting productivity gains were only a few percentage points a year, however.

A colleague of mine, Keith Michaelson, collaborated with an internal consultant at the company to address the need for greater productivity. A small group of mill operators and supervisors were invited to help the company capture greater benefits from its investment by further increasing the rolling mill's throughput.

In a series of brainstorming sessions, the consultants tuned in to the participants' resistance to improvement as well as to the participants' ideas for achieving it. The consultants encouraged senior management to respond to a number of "hidden agenda" items that surfaced.

Once management had met with the team of mill personnel and dealt with their questions, the group agreed to shoot for a 15 percent gain in six weeks. The team ran the project. It was made very clear—by word and deed—that the consultants were there to provide methodological help but were not the ones in charge of the project. All members of the team were encouraged to contribute their ideas. By the end of the six weeks, pro-

ductivity had actually increased by 17 percent—amount gained over the preceding several years—only sustained in subsequent years but actually again without further capital investment.

### The Next Step

At around this same time, company management to improve their on-time shipment record, which was only 70 percent. They were about to engage a consultant to install an order-tracking system, at a cost of about \$2 million.

The company's experience in the rolling-mill control equipment problem suggested that a purely technical solution might not solve the on-time shipments problem. So the company postponed the systems study and asked Michaelson to help them shoot for some rapid results on the on-time shipments problem.

In collaboration with several internal consultants, Michaelson proposed and then helped carry out the following pilot project, without making any changes in the information system. The mill managers agreed to try, with some consulting assistance, to ship 100 percent of orders on time during a one-week experiment by "doing everything right." One month of preparation was scheduled before the trial week. The managers were not asked to commit to maintaining that level of service after the one-week experiment. Employees in every department were asked to help prepare for the experiment, and everyone's ideas were welcomed.

During the one-week pilot (and the following week, too) every single order was shipped on time. Thereafter, delivery performance never fell below 95 percent. Some modest information-system improvements were needed to sustain the performance, but nothing like a \$2 million system.

### Reversing the Five Fatal Flaws

These two projects illustrate a consulting process that eliminates most of the risks of conventional consulting and adds dimensions that can multiply the benefits of consulting many times. The approach sharply contrasts