

## CHAPTER TEN

# Towards Developing Consultancy Resources and Services

The first part of this chapter argues for a form of comprehensive consultancy provision and describes a way of achieving it which emerges from my experience and that of my colleagues in Avec. The second part indicates where effort needs to be concentrated in the next phase of development.

### I AN EMERGING STRATEGY FOR COMPREHENSIVE PROVISION

An inescapable conclusion of this book is that it is imperative that consultancy services be made readily available to all members of the church and community workforce when they are wanted and needed in accessible forms. Such provision would greatly enhance the effectiveness and well-being of the church in general and its practitioners in particular. Yet the total unmet consultancy need towers over that which is being met. The climate of opinion is only now turning slowly in favour of making consultancy provision. How can the enormous task of providing comprehensive consultancy coverage be tackled realistically and seriously in the present context? To address this question it is necessary to turn from considering the details of consultancy praxis, to plotting out elements of a strategy by which it would be possible to move steadily and surely from the present situation towards better provision. That is attempted in this section.

Fortunately, there is now a good base upon which to build a strategy: much work has already been done and experience gained. First there is a bald bulleted list of separate but interrelated aspects of the strategy. Then some of its more subtle nuances are discussed. Gradual and purposeful progress could be made towards convincing the Church constituency about the need for consultancy help and getting the administrators to make the resources available to provide it:

- by getting Christian leaders, workers and people to see that consultancy is an efficient and economic way of improving the effectiveness of the Church;
- by getting people to see that work and vocational consultancy is a profound professional and practical form of pastoral care for practitioners—it ministers to workers' souls as well as to their praxis;
- by getting the idea so widely accepted that consultancy help can be received from colleagues as well as from specialist consultants;
- by promoting the conviction that the consultancy help needed can only be provided through a combination of specialist consultancy services and practitioners giving and receiving consultancy help from each other in the workplace;

- by those who can providing, informally and formally, consultancy services to anyone open to receive them of such a quality and apparent value that even the most sceptical become convinced;
- by multiplying endlessly and continuously evaluated experiences of work and vocational consultancy and supervised opportunities to practise it for people in all spheres of church and community work, lay, religious and ordained;
- by getting both those who offer consultancy and those who receive it to study the theory, theology and practice of it;
- by helping church workers (lay, religious and ordained) at an early stage in their preparatory training to begin to learn how to be effective consultants and encouraging and assisting them to develop their skills throughout their working life through in-service and vocational consultancy programmes;
- by getting people to think of work consultancy as a normal healthy service needed by all at times, and not as a pathological activity;
- by creating an environment of thought conducive to the finding of comprehensive consultancy provision;
- by establishing as an element of good practice the budgeting of fees for consultancy services and support for workers (lay and ordained) and for projects;
- by developing a cadre of specialist regional/national/international consultants who are committed to building up the kind of provision described here, rather than developing an elitist consultancy service;
- by developing ecumenical, inter-church and inter-organisational collaboration in making overall provision and particularly in providing consultancy services for one another; (People in one denomination or diocese, for example, can provide consultancy help for some practitioners in another who cannot receive it from would-be consultants in their own denomination or diocese.)
- by researching the experience of providing and receiving consultancy help and its theology;
- by providing more literature and by producing tapes and videos on consultancy practice and processes.

This strategy is designed to affect the consultancy praxis of Christian institutions through key members of their workforce. The aim is to promote change from within through changes in the practice of people located in complementary parts of the overall work-systems: members and officers, administrators, educationalists, general practitioners, pastoral managers and trainers and through them the members generally. Thus it is a strategy of holistic gradualism developing from many nuclei of good practice and research. Approach-wise, therefore, the strategy is in harmony with the practice theory of work and vocational consultancy itself. That is precisely how it ought to be because it is about an aspect of the work culture of Christian institutions as a whole.

Overall, the principal advantages of this strategy are: it provides consultancy help as it develops it; it holds together praxis, theory, training and research; it affects practice working relationships and work culture at the same time; it builds up the

self-confidence of all implicated and of organizations themselves; it provides updating feedback from the actualities of work situations to training programmes; it is a consultancy instrument to the whole church; it is most likely to get to the heart of the consultancy matter.

Much of the detail of this programme is self-evident and illustrated in the earlier parts of this book. But it is necessary to explore further the ideas of meeting more of the needs for consultancy help through increasing the number of people who can provide specialist consultancy services and by building up the practice of workers giving to and receiving from each other consultancy help in their work places. It is imperative that these two modes of provision are developed concurrently as interdependent aspects of consultancy services: combined they represent the principle of subsidiarity and facilitate its practice. This is the ideal way to meet the need, to ensure that practitioners are as self-sufficient and independent as possible, that their autonomy and working relationships with colleagues are not undermined or compromised, that they are affirmed and challenged; that good consultancy help of one kind or another is available to them when they need and want it; that consultancy practice, theory, theology and culture develop together. This strategy minimises the real dangers of the establishment of exclusivist professional consultancy services and ensures that meeting these needs is, of itself, a programme of church and community development.

Interestingly, having adopted this approach I discovered that a similar conclusion had been reached through a research programme commissioned by the Department of the Environment into the management training needs of Urban Programme Project Managers. One of their conclusions was that inexperienced managers need two types of support: a local generalist and a national specialist.<sup>1</sup> Experienced managers also need such support.

Without any doubt there is a need for specialist consultancy services within the denominations and independent of them. Certain consultancy needs can be met only by consultants who are autonomous and quite independent of any of the consultants, those with whom they work and their organizations, and are seen to be so. The Avec experience proved that beyond any doubt. However, no matter how proficient and readily available such a service becomes it could never meet all the consultancy needs that church and community development practitioners have and especially those that need immediate first-aid help. Some of those needs can only be met by people on the spot, by colleagues or by others in their organization including those in senior positions. And, in any case, a proficient and readily available specialist service could, through its very proficiency and availability, prevent other important needs being met.

One such need is that nothing is done at a distance from the workplace that can be done in it. That is an application of subsidiarity. The health of an organization and the well-being of its staff and members depends upon it. For effectiveness and their integrity and satisfaction practitioners need to be as self-sufficient as possible. Another need is for workers to build up their working and personal relationships by giving and receiving help from each other. One of the sad things about the evolution of social work is that, in some circumstances, it stripped neighbours of the confidence to counsel and care for each other. They began to feel that they were not

qualified to do so because they were not "experts"<sup>2</sup> whereas in fact they were *the* local experts. Should this happen through the provision of consultancy services for church and community development practitioners it would be a travesty of the purpose of the whole enterprise because it would diminish rather than enhance workers and local resources, it would not be an exercise in vocational or organizational development. Building up co-consultancy infrastructures of the kind described reduces this danger and also minimises other dangers inherent in specialist consultancy relationships. Dangers, for instance, of workers becoming unhealthily dependent upon consultants, insecure in their own judgements, hesitant or unable to act without having consulted. These things impair workers and their relationships with any who resent the procrastination that ensues and what could appear to be the undesirable influence of an absentee consultant in their affairs. Consultants must take action to avoid these and other problems but, as we have seen in relation to consultancy in general, so must consultors. They need to be aware of these dangers and how to avoid and counter them. They will be best able to do so through being helped and trained to be as self-sufficient as possible in thinking through their own work. They need to be able to use the analytical and design tools used in consultancies in a dialogue with themselves, in other words, to be a self-consultant. Having got as far as they can on their own they then need to be able to turn for help to those working alongside them with confidence that they will get consultancy help rather than advice. In these ways workers act as first-aid consultants to each other and build up their own D.I.Y. consultancy services.

So we are forced back again to the need for both specialist and local consultancy provision. Combined, they strengthen the work force of any church or organization and enhance its power through creating highly desirable work consultancy infrastructures.

Avec and its training and consultancy programme researched, modelled and facilitated a comprehensive approach of this kind. Staff members provided specialist consultancy services whilst getting practitioners to offer to and receive consultancy help from each other. The way in which this was done through ten-day courses is described in some detail in Chapter Eight (cf pp 357-360 and Appendix III). This led some practitioners to organize consultancy conferences and projects and to establish co-consultancy arrangements, dyads and small groups (cf pp 356). This was a modest contribution to comprehensive consultancy provision.

The comprehensive approach is as theologically sound as it is pragmatically and developmentally necessary. It contributes to the ministry of the Church being and becoming what it should be, collaborative and collective (cf pp 290-291). Paul spelt this out quite unmistakably in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12. People who genuinely and selflessly help other people with their work become less egotistical and operate as colleagues and co-workers rather than as solo workers and *prima donnas*. Over and over again I have seen this happening to members of the Avec work consultancy courses. For this reason alone it is highly desirable that as many clergy, religious and laity as possible have opportunities to act as consultants and co-consultants to each other. Building one another up through genuine sharing and investing in each other's ministry is an enormous privilege and an extension of our own vocation. It contributes to the realisation of the church as the covenanted body

of Christ and the priesthood of all believers and helps people to be workers who need not be ashamed.<sup>3</sup> When practitioners from different denominations and faiths and secular disciplines offer to and receive consultancy help from each other, consultancy becomes an instrument of ecumenical and social development, missiology and inter-faith dialogue. When this happens consultancy develops deep relationships and mutual understanding between those who differ significantly in religious conviction and belief but who find they face common work problems and that they can help each other with them.

Therefore, the kind of consultancy provision advocated contributes towards achieving ultimate purposes. For me these purposes are about a dynamic pattern of interdependent human and spiritual relationships through which all are loved and cared for and by which all are developing as they go about the day to day work of the church in the church and in the world.

## II GENERATIVE ELEMENTS

Progress has and is being made towards the provision of consultancy services. As this book shows Avec (cf pp 6 and 373-388) has made various kinds of contributions. At best, appraisal schemes are gateways to consultancy help and they are legion. And there is a growing number of technical publications for consultors and consultants, some are introductory, whilst others are handbooks and text books like this one. However, a critical point has been reached in the evolution of consultancy services in the Church. Avec has ceased to trade and, although some in-service training courses incorporate aspects of its approach, the extensive programme of consultancy services it provided is simply not available. Some services are available through individuals and agencies but to the best of my knowledge no other organization is offering services comparable to those provided by Avec.<sup>4</sup> And this at a time when a paradigm shift is occurring in the work culture of churches and allied organizations in the U.K. Egalitarian, participative and non-authoritarian working relationships are becoming more widely accepted. Increasingly more clergy, religious and laity are using methods of social analysis and being urged to become accountable, reflective practitioners and to form accountable reflective communities. As we saw in the introduction, work and vocational consultancy services are important features of this emerging work culture and, along with in-service training, they are needed to help practitioners to enter and grow into it. Work consultancy services having proved their value are increasingly in demand. As appraisal schemes become more effective the demand will grow. But there is a serious shortage of consultants and affordable courses for training them.

Meeting the need for consultants is frustrated by factors other than the shortage. There is considerable confusion about the precise nature of consultancy and bewilderment about the different forms it takes. There is an absence of generally recognised practising qualifications and registers of accredited consultants for church and community work to help would-be consultors to vet consultants. In fact, most people offering services, including myself, are self-elected and self-trained consultants. This means that there is an over reliance on personal recommendations and finding helpful consultants by trial and error. This is serious, because, as we have seen, those acting as consultants can hinder and harm as well as help

consultors. It had been assumed that the church generally and appraisal schemes in particular could readily make use of consultants from the business world. But experience is showing that the transfer of consultancy skills from business and industry to the church is more complicated and problematic than was previously thought, not least for theological reasons.

At this critical point, emphasis upon orientation, promotion and training could give impetus to the strategy described in the previous section. Four modes of orientation and training could be generative. Urgent action is required along the following lines.

### 1. Promotion, Orientation and Education of the Church Constituency

The church generally needs to be much better informed about the nature and value of consultancy: those with power and influence in the body politic as well as those who are practitioners. Work consultancy is an off-the-stage, back-room activity. For the most part it has to be done confidentially and therefore privately and hidden from sight (although, of course, the same approaches and methods can be and are used publicly). Results are rarely attributed. In many cases to succeed consultants must avoid publicity. It is an expensive labour intensive activity: for the most part one or two consultants work with individuals or small groups. One of the major disadvantages of these essential conditions of providing these services is that it does not get the attention and the funding that is given to more dramatic activities to meet extreme needs or the routine work of the church—all of which can benefit from consultancy. Yet the quality of all kinds of work depends now, and will do so even more in the future, upon building and maintaining an adequate and comprehensive consultancy infrastructure properly serviced and funded so that it can provide essential services. Time and again, a few hours consultancy has saved or salvaged or greatly enhanced the effectiveness of projects in which salaries of the workers alone have run into £100,000 per annum, to say nothing of the capital and running costs, for as little as £500 in consultancy fees. The economic value of consultancy is known by those who have experienced and practised it but it is normally hidden from view and its quality and value are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

Opportunities for an all-round sharing of ideas about and experiences of consultancy in the Church could be valuable. One way of doing this would be through a conference similar to one organised in 1994 by the South Bank University, London under the generic title, "What makes consultancy work—understanding the dynamics". Some excellent papers were produced and subsequently published, mainly but not exclusively from the secular experience of consultancy.<sup>5</sup> Such consultancy conferences would enable the sharing and gathering of different experiences. There were some rich exchanges on consultancy at an ecumenical conference at Westminster College (now Westminster Institute of Education), Oxford in 1996 on, "Reflective and Collaborative Practitioners in Ministry".

### 2. Preparing Trainees and Practitioners to be Consultors

A case has already been made for the importance of making all future church workers at an early stage in their pre-service training aware of different forms of consultancy and their respective merits. Ideally, they should have evaluated

experiences of consultancy (some through tutorial relationships) and instruction into what is involved in acting as consultors.

One way of giving introductory training to practitioners to act as consultors, consultants and co-consultants in one fair swoop has been described (cf pp 357-360 and Appendix III). Codes of good practice for consultors and consultants have been offered (cf pp 143-145). Emphasis has been placed upon the value of entering into the practice theory of consultancy through being a consultor. In this way practitioners get a real understanding of what it is like to be on the receiving end of consultancy before they attempt to offer it. Talks, lectures, articles, case studies, evaluated experiences, personal testimonies and demonstrations can help to inform people and to contribute towards the comprehensive provision outlined earlier.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Apprenticeships and Mentoring

For those who wish to build up their experience and expertise in order to act as local or specialist consultants, mentoring, apprenticeships and supervised practice complement introductory training, as does the study of the growing body of literature and case study material.

### 4. Extended Training for Consultants

Large numbers of people have developed consultancy skills through the kinds of induction and training described earlier. But disappointingly, comparatively few have emerged capable, willing and free to act as specialist or professional consultants. Consequently Avec found it difficult to recruit sufficient full- and part-time staff members. The Conference of Religious experienced difficulty in recruiting consultants to staff a consultancy unit to serve religious congregations and members. Westminster College, encountered the same difficulty when it researched the possibility of setting up a consultancy unit in applied theology. When the staff faced up to this difficulty they decided to put the development of the unit on hold and concentrate on designing and providing a training course in work and vocational consultancy. A course is now being offered through a partnership between Cliff and Westminster Colleges and The Urban Theology Unit.<sup>7</sup>

Validated consultancy courses will indicate that those who have successfully completed them have some knowledge of the theory and practice of work and vocational consultancy. Whilst these qualifications would give some idea of knowledge and ability they will not be a professional qualification nor will they necessarily guarantee the competence of people to act as consultants. A professional association is needed to do that. Consultancy courses could, however, contribute to the research into ways and means of training people to act as work and vocational consultants. They could also be a means of identifying and equipping people who might help to provide more and better consultancy services in and for people in the Church. Training programmes would, in turn, provide evaluated feedback which would help to make pre-and in-service training increasingly more relevant to the actualities experienced by practitioners. Consequently all engaged in the learning/practice system would benefit from these educational feedback loops: students, consultors, consultants, staff training institutions and the Christian and secular constituencies they serve.

Pursuing these elements purposefully could prove to have a generative effect on every aspect of the outlined strategy. It could give momentum to the wide ranging effort that is going into making comprehensive provision, set up new working partnerships, provide new resource material for practitioners and researchers and establish work and vocational consultancy as the priority that it ought to be in the Church.

### III IN CONCLUSION

Individuals, of their own volition, are actively promoting and providing consultancy services through pursuing one or more aspects of this strategy. Whilst some churches say that they are convinced of the value of consultancy, they seem to give a low priority rating to making adequate provision for it. An inescapable conclusion is that the greatest hope of significant progress still lies in highly motivated individuals, centres of excellence and agencies or units which can provide specialist help and training. For the foreseeable future it is they who will provide limited resources and will be the conscience of the consultancy need, the custodian of the vision, the source of inspiration and they will maintain the pressure upon the churches and allied organizations to take the institutional action that is so clearly required.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES: Chapter Ten

1. *Managing Urban Change: A Report on the Management Training Needs of Urban Programme Project Managers* prepared for the Department of the Environment by URBED (Urban and Economic Development) Ltd (HMSO) 1988 section 6.1 p 41f.
2. cf for example Seabrook, Jeremy (1978) *What Went Wrong? Working People and the Ideals of the Labour Movement* (Victor Gollancz Ltd). Writing of working people in Bradford, Seabrook says, "Human skills (no less than work skills) absorbed unselfconsciously by the family have been taken away from them without effort and laboriously invested in professional social workers who have to be taught them, an act of human plunder." p 116f, see also pp 100, 211, 214.
3. cf 2 Timothy 2:15.
4. Amongst consultancy services on offer a few known to me can be mentioned by way of illustration. I have not surveyed or classified them. Approaches and methods vary considerably. The Oxford Diocese of the Church of England provides training in consultancy and is developing a course with Brookes University, Oxford. The Bible Society has developed a programme of consultancy services to help local churches to be missionary communities. These services were designed and organised by the Revd Barrie Cooke, whilst he was the Senior Consultant at the Bible Society. He is currently researching the work done over several years. Information can be obtained from Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon, SN5 7DG. The Conference of Religious (Roman Catholic) has done much to build up the consultancy facilities available to members of religious orders. MODEM, Managerial and Organizational Disciplines for the Enhancement of Ministry, was founded in 1993 "to set the agenda for management/ministry issues so that by the year 2000 the value and disciplines of those engaged in the management of secular and church organizations will be mutually recognised and respected." Information about MODEM can be obtained from Suite 503, Premier House, 10 Greycoat Place, London, SE1P 1SB. Amongst other things, MODEM has produced an annotated membership directory giving details of the people offering various kinds of consultancy services. The listed areas of the members' interests and expertise include: investment consultancy, management consultancy services, ministry consultancy, personnel consultancy. At best, appraisal schemes are gateways to consultancy help and they

are legion. And there is a growing number of technical publications for consultors and consultants, some are introductory, whilst others are handbooks and text books.

5. The papers were published in Casemore, Roger (*et al*) (1994) *What makes Consultancy Work—understanding the dynamics* International Consulting Conference 1994 (South Bank University Press). Unfortunately out of print.
6. *Telling Experiences* is an example.
7. A course is now being developed and offered through a partnership between Westminster College Oxford, Cliff College, Calver and The Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield. *Westminster College*, founded by the Methodist Church, has recently amalgamated with Brookes University, Oxford. It has pioneered an international distance learning programme in applied theology. *Cliff College* is a Methodist Institution situated between Sheffield and Chesterfield. It has an ecumenical and international student body. It is a mission training centre preparing laity and ministers for evangelism and Christian service. It has open educational access for its basic college courses. Graduate and post-graduate courses are validated by the University of Sheffield. It has a research programme. This is now acting as the lead institution to the course. *The Urban Theology Unit* is a Methodist Foundation which operates ecumenically. It has a pre-service training programme for ministers and a range of first and further degrees validated by the University of Sheffield. These colleges have a range of interests in consultancy for mission and ministry in contemporary society. They have quite different theological stances. Consequently the interaction between staff, students and colleges will of itself provide profound all round opportunities for learning. Details from Cliff College, Calver, Hope Valley, Derbyshire, S32 3XG. The course is a postgraduate two-year part-time course leading to a diploma or an MA in work and vocational consultancy for mission and ministry. It will be delivered through a combination of distance learning units, residential study and structured reflection upon practical consultancy engagement. Course members will study the theory and the theology of work consultancy. They will engage in the practice of consultancy as consultors, consultants and co-consultants to each other through various supported exercises based on their own studies and work. They will engage in assessed consultancy project work. A significant feature of the course is that it will contextualise work and vocational consultancy theory, practice and theology. Critical aspects of contemporary thought about the nature and the theology of church and community work, ministry and mission and the culture of organizations and communities will be studied.