CHAPTER TWO

BASIC ELEMENTS OF CONSULTANCY MODELS

In this chapter five basic elements of consultancy modes are identified, described and modelled diagrammatically. This leads to a standard outline for examining and describing of the models in Part Two. The chapter concludes with a section on experiential and vicarious understanding of modes and models and a brief note about related help and support models.

1. Models and Modelling

Consultants select, or adapt or invent or simply grow into models, which enable them to practice their preferred mode of consultancy. Indeed, one of the key objectives of this book is to encourage and help practitioners to understand and to develop their own models of consultancy[1]. Models are halfway houses in theory building. The models in this book are variously depicted in words, metaphors, images, charts, diagrams and flow charts. Together they represent basic characteristics, structures and dynamics of models.[2]

2. Five Basic Elements of Consultancy Models

Consultancy models have the following five basic elements. These have been used consistently in the presentation of the models described in detail in this book to facilitate ease of access to them and comparison of them. They are:

        (a)   knowledge;

        (b)   praxis;

        (c)   application;

        (d)   understanding of consultor's work;

        (e)   principles.

(a) Knowledge

This element is about the knowledge and bodies of knowledge associated with a particular model of consultancy and upon which consultants committed to it draw. It describes underlying concepts, theories, and hypotheses. The aim is to give a picture of the knowledge and understandings underlying and underpinning the particular model and its praxis.

(b) Praxis

Praxis is used in this book as a generic term to describe the accepted approaches and working methods associated with the human art of putting a consultancy model to work. It is about the actualities of what consultants do and how they do it *and* their reasons for doing things in the way they do. So it is about practice (the ways in which consultants act) and the practice theory or the theory of practice (theories of action) and the dynamic and dialectical interaction between them in the actualities of consultancy engagement and reflection.

Two aspects of praxis are described. They are referred to as the *modus operandi* and the *operational mode.* The first of these, *modus operandi,* focuses on the methods, procedures

and processes by which the model is put into action in consultations and how it is made to work. This could be described as "practice theory". Strictly speaking the second aspect, the *operational mode,* is integral to the first. It is about how consultancy personnel deploy themselves to put the model into operation, the basics of the arrangements made to use the model strategically. This gives a picture of the consultancy work force and their professional and structural working relationship with consultors and their organization. This aspect, sometimes lacking in descriptions, gives a contextual view of the consultants at work in the consultancy setting. Yet another aspect of praxis, the consultant's perception of and approach to the consultor's work, is noted under (d) below.

Essentially praxis is about action and "theories of action". This is a term used by Argyris and Schon for "the values, strategies and underlying assumptions that inform individuals' patterns of interpersonal behaviour". They see theories of action operating at two levels through *"espoused theories"* used to explain or justify behaviour and *"theories in use"* which are implicit and tacit.[3] Espoused theories predominate in the descriptions of models in this book because they draw heavily upon the reasons given for consultancy behaviour. But there are also insights into theories in use and the material from which to deduce them.

(c) Application
This element is about the nature and forms of work to which a model has been applied. It is about the match required between model and work setting for creative consultancy to occur.

(d) Understanding of consultor's work
This element is about the knowledge, understanding and experience considered necessary for effective consultations about the field of work in which consultors are engaged and the attributes they require to do it. It is also about what knowledge they need to have of the consultor's work situation and whether they need to visit it. Consultants differ in their views about these matters, as indeed do consultors. What consultants think about this matter becomes part of their praxis and of their model; what consultors think influences their choice of consultant. Extracting and highlighting this element helps to differentiate the skills required to do the consultant's work from those required to do the consultor's work. In turn this helps consultants to consider and discuss rationally what consultants need to understand of the consultor's work to be able to engage with them creatively.

(e) Principles
The subject matter of this element varies considerably from one model to another. The title, "principles", is used as a one-word umbrella term for those things which undergirds the praxis of the given model and to which those who practice it are committed. They could be fundamentals (truths or laws or concepts which are the basis of reasoning and or action) *or* values or assumptions. They are about such things as: the nature of human being, behaviour and relationships i.e. ontology and, for some theology; individual and collective purposeful action and creativity; the nature of human action at work.

In the description of each model there are notes about the "principles" associated with it. This element also covers assumptions and understandings about the nature of knowledge upon which the model is based, i.e., the epistemology implicit in the model. Consultancy epistemology is considered not in the description of each model but in relation to all the modes and models in Chapter Nine.

Figure 1:1 transposes this list of elements into a spatial model, which indicates how the elements relate to the consultants and consultors. Figure 1:2 is a blank grid diagrammatic model derived from Figure 1:1. I devised it to encapsulate essentials of any given model and to illustrate and to contrast the modes and models described in this book. It is in fact a *model of the elements of consultancy models.* It places the elements in a framework. It does not indicate the dynamics of consultancy models and the interaction of the elements, which are variable and complex. The absence of interactive arrows indicates this. Students and consultants have used the model of the elements to model their own approach to consultancy.
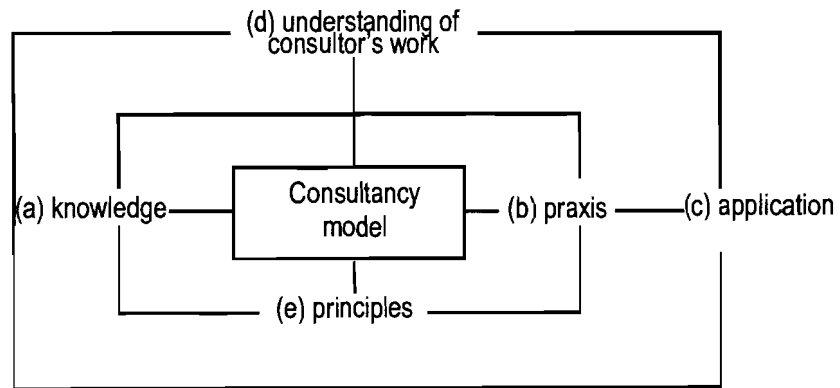
These elements of consultancy models can be construed as three systems. One is formed by the knowledge, the consultant's praxis and undergirding principles, i.e. it comprises a + b + e. This system can be referred to as the *core consultancy model* and is represented in the inner rectangle of Figure 2:2. When this system is applied to a particular field of work, a second system is formed and comes into operation. Other attributes are added to the core consultancy model: application; understanding required of the consultor's work. This system comprises [a + b + e] + [c + d] which can be described as a *fieldwork model* and is represented by the inner and outer rectangles of Figure 2:2.

Differentiating between core and fieldwork models is clearly important. Amongst other things it helps consultants and consultors to consciously consider the fields of work to which a particular core model can be applied and what is involved in shaping it into an effective fieldwork model. Thus, it safeguards against the casual or doctrinaire misappropriation of a core model beyond the range of its applicability.

A third system operates when a field work model is applied to specific consultors, their work situations and contexts. When this occurs, (c), becomes the work to which the field work model is being applied. This system combines selected apposite aspects of the field work model i.e., of a + b + d + e, with the actualities of consultors and their situations and the ways in which they are perceived by consultors and consultants. This system comprises [a + b + e] + [d + consultor and work] which can be described as *the model in action.*
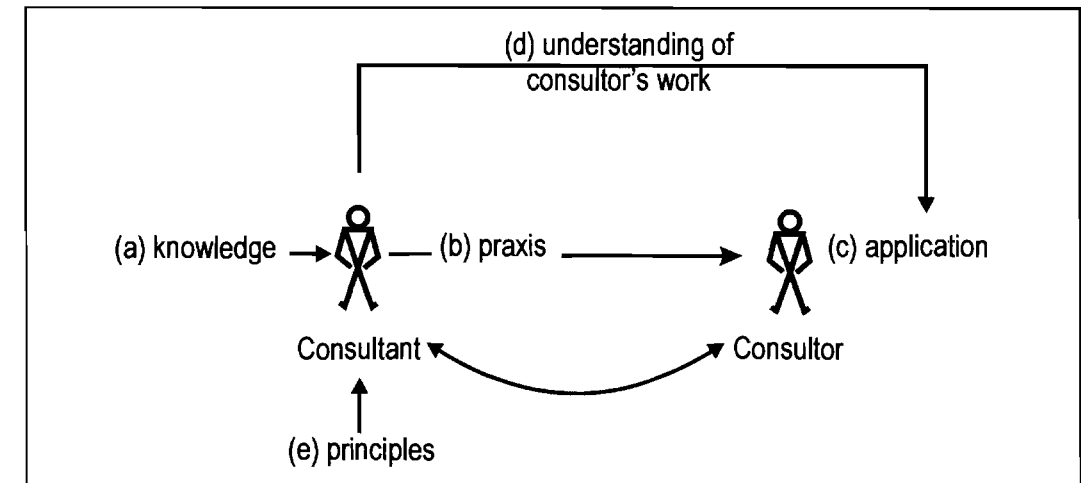
Figure 2:1: Five Basic Elements of a Consultancy Model

Figure 2:2: A Model of the Five Basic Elements of Consultancy Models

To facilitate comparison of the models, the following standard outline has been used to describe the basic elements of each model, apart, that is, from the epistemology discussed in Chapter Nine.

I   Th story of the model's development

II   Knowledge of consultancy informing the model, element (a).

III Praxis of the model, element (b).

IV   Application: work settings to which the model is applicable, element (c).

V   Understanding of the consultor's work, element (d).

VI   Principles, element (e).

VII A summary of key features of the model.

Various aspects of the underlying theory, philosophy and, in one model, theology appears variously in these sections. Arranging the text in this way means that, whilst it does not configure and describe consultancy models as "core", "fieldwork" and "in action" models, it provides the materials for anyone to do so.[4]

Describing the elements of models in this way posed some problems. Perhaps this is not surprising! In models where the theory and practice are well integrated, the elements are closely cross-referenced and interrelated and therefore flow in and out of each other. At times I felt I was engaged in a sacrilegious activity of pulling things apart that belonged together and possibly courting the danger of distorting the model in the process. Undoubtedly, seeing and experiencing models in their wholeness is important but that does not always help to understand the parts and how they fit together. When such feelings overtook me I reminded myself of the confusion from which this book emerged caused by the difficulties of differentiating models and the need to help people, including myself, to place models on a conceptual map. And in fact the way of describing the models appeared to be meeting this need. Differentiating the elements contributed to this. It also enabled people to see a model from the different perspectives offered by the elements. In turn this revealed differences between the elements of one model and another otherwise easily overlooked.

Descriptions of the underpinning principles (element (e), section VI) proved to be much briefer then expected mainly because either they had of necessity been referred to in the description of the "knowledge" (element (a), section II) or they were implicit in it. To a much lesser extent this is also a feature of the description of praxis (element (d), section III).

Notwithstanding the descriptions of the models are offered as an aid to understanding consultancy models and a gateway to studying them further.

Brief notes have also been included of other models.

3. Experiential and Vicarious Understanding of Modes and Models

One section of this book is about a mode of consultancy of which I have extensive experience, both as a consultor and as a consultant, and about my own particular model of it. But for the most part it is about modes and models I have accessed through what those who practise them have written about them which is a vicarious way of getting to know them. In describing models I have experienced I am speaking from within the model with the authority of evaluated first hand personal experience. I know the feel, the ethos, the theory, the theology and the relational dimensions of it. When describing models I have not experienced I am speaking from outside, as an observer, however as a curious one trying to get into what those who are insiders feel and think; I am trying to become what Philip Meadows describes as a "virtual insider"[5]. This is precisely what I try to do when acting as a consultant in order to understand and empathize with consultors and their work-views.[6] What I am doing here, therefore, is a particular application of this process: I am studying other people's models to get into their consultancy work-views. Such an approach facilitates genuine, respectful enquiry and reduces the danger of producing cardboard figures of other models or using them as Aunt Sallies. Wherever possible I have allowed people to speak for themselves about their own models through using their own terminology and diagrams and quoting them, sometimes at length. I hope that what I have written will encourage and enable people to go to the carefully referenced primary sources.

However, describing other people's models proved to be no easy task as it is commonly accepted that modes of consultancy which function through getting consultors actively engaged with consultants in the consultancy processes are difficult to define and to describe to people who have not experienced them. Edgar H Schein encapsulates widespread experience when he says of his model:

> Process consultation is a difficult concept to describe simply and clearly. It does not lend itself to simple definition or to the giving of a few illustrative examples, because it is more of a philosophy or a set of underlying assumptions about the helping processes that lead the consultant to take a certain kind of attitude towards his (sic) relationship with the client.[7]

All this I have tried to take into account as I researched and reflected on and wrote about the modes and models of consultancy of which I have direct experience and those of which I have not.

4. Related Support and Help Models

Consultancy is one way of providing help and support to practitioners and organizations in the secular, religious and voluntary sectors. Other ways of providing help and support are burgeoning.[8] Some of these operate through people acting as coaches or mentors or supervisors to practitioners or as accompanists to those engaged in the appraisal of their work and their programmes. Then there are structured programmes designed to enable leaders and members of religious organizations to review or audit their organization and its work. Some are DIY schemes; others employ independent guides or facilitators to assist church leaders and members as they work through the programmes.

These various approaches to helping practitioners and organizations have things in common with each other and with consultancy. For instance: their objectives and approach to human relationships are similar; by and large they use carefully formulated structures, procedures and schemas to promote facilitative processes; consultants facilitate whilst those who provide help in other ways engage in consultations with their clients. But they differ significantly and subtly. Unsurprisingly, therefore, boundaries tend to be blurred between different forms of providing facilitative help. The resulting confusion is of the kind between different modes and models of consultancy discussed in Chapter One section three. Consequently, generalizations about different support systems and their relationship to consultancy models could misrepresent and distort.[9] As we have seen making meaningful distinctions involves, inter alia, examining the elements of different ways of providing support. This would provide information comparable with that on consultancy in Part Two. Whilst such an examination is beyond the scope of this book it is possible for anyone wishing to compare and contrast consultancy modes and models and support systems to do so by using the modelling apparatus developed in Chapter Two and applied in Part Two.

References and Notes

1. see Chapter Four of *Consultancy Ministry and Mission*

2. With reference to diagrams and modelling see: Lovell, G (1980 and 1991) *Diagrammatic Modelling: An aid to theological reflection in church and community work* (an Avec Publication, 1991, originally published as Occasional Paper No.4 by the William Temple Foundation); Checkland, Peter and Scholes Jim (1990) *Soft Systems Methodology in Action* (John Wiley and Sons) p45 et al on "rich pictures" which are seen as a better means of recording relationships connections and dynamics than linear prose; Senge, Peter et al (1994, 1995 corrected) *The Fifth Discipline Field Book: Strategies and Tools for Building Learning Organisations* (Nicholas Brealey Publishing) pp173-177; Lovell G *Analysis and Design* (1994) pp105, 180, 175 and 181-184; Lovell, G (2000) *Consultancy Ministry and Mission* pp99-91, 278-279, 296, 303-304, 333 and 337.

3. Schon, Donald A (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Towards a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (Jossey-Bass Publishers) pp255-260.

4. Incidentally in *Analysis and Design (AD)* and *Consultancy Ministry and Mission (CMM)* I did something similar without being aware of these three aspects of a model. The books describe complementary aspects of the *core consultancy model*. Then, through an extended description of the nature of church and community work and the workers required to do it (a quarter of the text), *CMM* converted the *core* model into a *field work* one. The worked consultancy examples in *AD* described it as an *in action model*.

5. Philip Meadows describes "virtual insidership" in an article in *Discernment* (New Series, Vol.3 No.2, 1996). The article is about promoting genuine understanding in inter religious dialogue. I have used some of the ideas to develop my ideas about work-views.

6. see *Consultancy Ministry and Mission* pp51-71.

7. Schein, Edgar H. (1988) *Process Consultation: It's Role in Organizational Development Vol. 1* (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company) p45f.

8. In *Consultancy Ministry and Mission* p363- 370 I differentiate consultancy from other members of a compatible family of activities:
    enabling and facilitating;
        undertaking work reviews and assessments;
        mentoring;
        proffering spiritual direction;
        personal counselling;
        facilitating spiritual exercises.

9. In an earlier book, for instance, I argued that a basic difference between facilitating and consulting is that consultants have technical knowledge of the subject matter under discussion, which facilitators do not have. But I now realize that this is a questionable generalization even though it helps me to distinguish between what I do as a facilitator and what I do as a consultant. For example, I acted as a facilitator when I helped a group of Benedictines to examine critically their monastic life and the theology and praxis on which it was based. My expertise was in the process, not in the subject matter. I would have acted as a consultant had I helped the same group to design a church and community development project, because that is a field in which I have some expertise. Cf *Consultancy Ministry and Mission* p366.