The *Academic* Consultant Connection

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TO: Fellow consultants
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And he gave it for his opinion,
that whoever could make two ears
  of corn
or two blades of grass to grow
  upon a spot of ground
where only one grew before,
would deserve better of mankind
and do more essential service
to his country
than the whole race of
politicians put together

Jonathan Swift
Gulliver's Travels

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Integrating the Benefits of Different Efforts at Management Consulting: The Case of Human Resources, Organization Development and Organization Design

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Abstract

To ensure that management consultants help organizations to solve the *right* problems, four alternative ways of integrating the benefits of separate approaches are derived, and the advantages and disadvantages of each are discussed. Examples of HR, OD, and Design are used to highlight the key issues of integrated versus separate approaches to management consulting.

In an earlier paper by Kilmann and Mitroff (1977), it was argued that a critical ingredient in the consulting/intervention process is to minimize the Type III error, defined as the probability of solving the wrong problem instead of the right problem. However, since most consultants seem to be expert in only one or, at most two, diciplines and since individuals in general seem to assume that their view of the problem is the correct one (based on their area of expertise), the possibilities for significant Type III errors are ever present. When one considers the extent of specialization in the field and the observation that most consultants work as individuals rather than in interdisciplinary teams, the presence of Type III error might be quite extensive indeed.

It is not enough to simply point out such issues and then assume that consultants and interventionists, once cognizant of the impact of narrow or incorrect problem definitions, will automatically know how to translate these concerns into action. More specifically, if one considers just three major approaches to organizational improvement, as in Human Resource Management, Organization Design, and Organization Development, the *difficulty* in combining the perspectives, variables, and change methods into a comprehensive problem defining/solving approach is evident. (If additional or even more diverse views to organizational improvement were considered, the task would appear hopeless.)

What does it take to really develop combined, or integrated, approaches to management consulting? What are the alternative ways in which this can be done? How well will each alternative of including several separate ap-

proaches to organizational improvement be able to manage the Type III error? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative form of integration?

These questions get at the heart of effective management consulting for they explicitly recognize that each separate disciplinary approach must be missing something, and that a combined approach is more likely to define and solve the right problem. Focusing again on the fields of Human Resource Management (HR), Organization Design (Design), and Organization Development (OD), it can be shown that each emphasizes different target variables to be addressed in the organization, while systematically ignoring other types of variables. In fact, it will be shown that what one approach takes as a given, the other approaches take as an unwarranted assumption. Furthermore, it is by understanding these different assumptions that one can propose how the separate approaches can be integrated, and what the benefits and costs (in a general way) of different forms of integration are likely to be. This would help different management consultants to better understand just how the Type III error can be managed, and to move this understanding another step closer to the improved practice of management consulting.

The remainder of this paper briefly describes the nature and differences of HR, Design, and OD for the purpose of exploring the basis for integrating these approaches to organizational improvement. After the critical underlying assumptions of each approach are proposed and compared, attention will shift to considering integrating links with their associated advantages and disadvantages for the consulting process. Finally, the paper concludes by generalizing the discussion of HR, Design, and OD to integrating other types of improvement programs and consulting approaches.

Underlying Assumptions of HR, OD, and Design

HR, OD, and Design all share the objective of improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and adaptability of the organization from the behavioral science perspective. It might be said, however, that each focuses on a different behavioral domain, or at least seems to concentrate on a particular entry point, even though a number of similarities are also evident. Those aspects which are most unique to each can be summarized as follows:

HR is concerned with the match between persons and designated jobs, now and in the future. This includes understanding and analyzing the detailed nature of the job in order to select individuals with the most appropriate set of skills, abilities, and other job related attributes, in addition to best developing the given people in the organization for the jobs in the future. Flamholtz (1972), for example, has defined the field of HR as consisting of five primary functions: acquisition, allocation, utilization, maintenance, and development

of people in relation to jobs. HR consultants would therefore enter the organization and concentrate on improving the performance of these functions and thereby improve the overall performance of the organization. If the organization has experienced problems, it is these functions that define the nature of the problem, specifically some aspect of the people-job interfaces in the organization.

OD, on the other hand, is most concerned with the quality of interpersonal relationships in the organization, the overall climate, and the generation of valid information, free choice, and internal commitment of organizational members (Argyris, 1970). Behavioral norms regarding risk taking, expression of feeling, development of trust and genuineness are related to this focus (Bennis, et al., 1969). While there are many diverse methods of OD, it is probably the improvement of organizational climate which is core to this approach. Thus, an OD consultant entering the organization would tend to assess its problems in terms of suboptimal interpersonal relations and a climate that does not foster sufficient trust, motivation and commitment. This climate and the general people-people interfaces in the organization would become the target variables to change in order to improve the overall organization.

Design has a different concentration than the other two approaches. Specifically, organization design can be defined as the arrangement, and the process of arranging, the organization's structural characteristics to attain or improve effectiveness (Kilmann, et al., 1976). These structural characteristics include the design of departments, divisions, and sections, and the management hierarchy of authority and responsibility. Redesigning the organization chart by combining, modifying or adding various departments (e.g., product vs. functional design), or by changing the formal locus of management decision making (e.g., centralized vs. decentralized design), are customary change targets. Thus, if the organization seemed to be less effective than expected, a Design consultant would define the organization's problems in terms of inappropriately differentiated subunits or ineffective integrating mechanisms (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1969). The focus of the Design approach is therefore the subunit-subunit interfaces, and changes would be made in the form or the coordination of subunits in order to improve organizational effectiveness.

The above brief summaries of the three major approaches suggest some critical differences in assumptions and strategies. Organization Design, while explicitly altering the structural variables in the organization, is not directly attempting to improve either the interpersonal relations or the human resource aspects. Design assumes that the climate in the organization will even allow structural changes to take place and that the people already in the organization have the proper competence and training to perform in the new subunits effectively. HR directly addresses the functions of acquisition, allocation, etc., regarding the job performance of organizational members (and whether or

not new members need to be selected and trained). However, in order to concentrate on this people-job interface, HR assumes that the broader structural design of subunits, within which jobs are defined, is appropriate and effective for the organization. HR also assumes that the climate in the organization is conducive to effective selection and training efforts (including job design and job specification) and that strictly interpersonal relationships are also fine. Lastly, while OD explicitly addresses such climate aspects of the organizations, it ignores the impact of structure on the behavior of people and does not consider the HR functions that are much broader than interpersonal relationships. Similar to Design, OD assumes that the given people in the organization are the right people. While similar to HR, OD assumes that the given design is fixed or already effective.

Figure 1 summarizes these assumption comparisons by noting the three basic assumptions which the three approaches make as a total, even though each approach only tends to question and not take as given only one of the three assumptions. The other two assumptions, in each case, are not questioned. Rather these other assumptions are implicitly considered as valid assessments of the organization. Also shown in Figure 1 are the separate strategies or interfaces which each approach concentrates on in order to improve the organization, given that the other stated assumptions are valid. Stated differently, the questioned assumption of each approach represents what that approach is proactive about in questioning, defining problems, and implementing solutions. The other two assumptions in each case, at best, are considered in a reactive manner. Thus, Figure 1 shows that HR questions whether the people and defined jobs in the organization are in fact appropriate, and would define problems and develop improvement programs by operating on the people-job interfaces. These would be done under the assumptions that the structural arrangements presently in the organization are appropriate and that the climate and interpersonal relationships are also appropriate. The same type of argument follows for the other two approaches as shown in the figure. Incidently, each approach certainly makes a number of other assumptions about the organization, its environment, its purpose, etc., but Figure 1 highlights the assumptions which are expected to draw out the major differences in the three approaches.

Towards an Integration of HR, OD, and Design

The major challenge is to develop an integrated approach to organizational improvement that combines the advantages and minimizes the disadvantages of each of the three separate approaches. At a minimum, this would require that virtually nothing in the behavioral domain of an organization would be taken for granted, as a given, or be considered as fixed. One would

Strategic Interfaces for Consulting	Critical Assumptions	Consulting Approach		
		HR*	OD*	Design*
People-Job Interface	People and the design of jobs that are presently in the organization are appropriate and effective	?		
People-People Interface	Climate and interpersonal relations that are presently in the organization are appropriate and effective	—	?	—
Subunit-Subunit Interface	Structural arrangements and coordinating mechanisms that are presently in the organization are appropriate and effective	—	—	?

*HY = Human Resources; OD = Organization Development; Design = Organization Design

Figure 1. Strategies and Assumptions of HR, OD, and Design

seriously consider the possibility that the structural design, the quality of personnel, and the organizational climate are *all* in need of improvement and not just one of these, as has typically been assumed. But then the issue emerges as how to combine or at least coordinate the three separate approaches.

One type of integration would be to apply each approach independently and simultaneously. That is, HR, Design, and OD experts would diagnose the organization at the same point in time and even plan and implement programs to improve their areas of concentration, but without any coordination or communication among them. While all behavioral aspects of the organization are likely to be considered in this type of combination, one has to question the likelihood of a successful and an efficient road to improvement. Even though the three approaches are different, they have their similarities, or more importantly, there are critical interdependencies to consider.

Specifically, the reason that the separate approaches have made assumptions about other types of variables being fixed and at an effective state is because *they had to*! If certain other variables were not fixed or assumed appropriately in tune, a viable improvement effort could not be undertaken even from a particular vantage point. For example, if HR consultants really

felt that the structural design was going to change or needed to be changed, it would be hard to argue that people with certain characteristics or competencies should be hired and trained if it was not known what the tasks and jobs of the near future would be. And HR has not developed the tools or even the concepts to estimate what the future structural design would look like (let alone to formulate the new design). The same examples could be drawn for the other two approaches.

Perhaps the three approaches could be applied in some sequence taking into account some of the important interdependencies among them. Suppose that a Design consultant first examined the organization for problems in subunit arrangements and coordinating mechanisms and then suggested a program of redesign. An OD consultant is then brought in to assess the climate of the organization, especially to see if the organization were prepared for a structural change, and subsequently to foster motivation and commitment to that change effort (assuming that members could influence some of the redesign decisions in order to enhance their ownership of the change). Third, an HR consultant is brought in to assess the job skills of present organization members to see if the members could be reallocated effectively to new subunits or if new people need to be hired so that performance in the redesigned organization would be effective. Fourth, the top management group then seeks to institute the structural changes after the climate has been appropriately developed, after the acquisition and allocation of people to jobs has been planned, and after the new design was formulated.

Certainly, the above sequence enables each approach to build upon or add to the others, precisely because what one approach has assumed, the earlier approach (in sequence) has sought to take into account. One would expect much less dysfunctional consequences than the first type of integration which allows each approach to do "its own thing" without any consideration to important interdependencies. However, even the sequenced type of integration has its shortcomings. First, just what is the proper sequence: Design, OD, then HR, as in the example above? What about having an OD consultant first come in to establish a good climate; then the HR consultant to get an accurate assessment of the organization's current people competencies (as well as projected future competencies), and finally, the Design consultant enters to consider structural changes with the proper climate and the proper individuals. It is not too difficult to argue for almost any sequence depending on the nature of the organization and its potential problems. Therefore, the whole efficacy of the sequence integration rests rather heavily on instituting the right sequence. Perhaps in the long run, sequence does not matter so much since each approach could be brought in more than once. In the short run, however, deciding on a given sequence is quite necessary and important.

This shortcoming of sequencing suggests an additional type of integration. What if all three kinds of consultants worked together in an interactive man-

ner? Over time, they would continue to work as a team in deciding just what aspects or combined aspects of people-job, people-people, and subunit-subunit interfaces should be the basis for the problem definition and the subsequent change programs. Built into this integration is the possibility for continuous feedback among the three approaches (and not just one-way feedback or inputs as in the sequential integration) with the advantage of total flexibility. If this integration seems like the ideal, in some sense it is as long as the organization and the consultants are willing to pay the price. The demands for coordination among consultants, two-way communication channels, mutual respect and acceptance of different viewpoints and assumptions, are potentially immense. In fact, this interactive integration is the greatest challenge to disciplinary (non-interactive) training that most consultants receive and act upon, and at the same time, requires the organization to understand, appreciate, and want such a complex and multifaceted approach to its problems. If the top management of the organization is not inter and transdisciplinary in outlook, are they likely to see the need for and support the interactive integration?

The independent-simultaneous, the sequential, and the interactive are three types of integration that can be applied to enhance the consulting/intervention process for HR, OD, and Design. But an important message of this paper is to recognize that these same issues of assumption differences, integration needs, problem definition, and managing the Type III error are also pertinent to all types of consulting approaches and styles. Consequently, attention will now be focused on extending the above discussion to a general model of integration for management consulting that goes beyond the specifics of HR, OD, and Design.

Integrating Management Consulting

The integrating links discussed for HR, OD, and Design are similar to the three types of interdependencies suggested by Thompson (1967): pooled, sequential, and mutually reciprocal. With these in mind, two dichotomies are proposed to further define these three types of interdependencies and a fourth one.

The first dichotomy considers the nature of the dependency of one consulting approach on another vis-a-vis their assumptions. Is the approach independent of, or interdependent with, other approaches? The former suggests that each approach can proceed without any reliance for success by the results (or lack of results) of other approaches. The latter suggests that the inputs from other approaches are necessary for each approach to be successful. The second dichotomy concerns whether the application of the consulting approaches in question are to be done simultaneously or in sequence. This dichotomy is thus a matter of timing.

Combining the two dichotomies results in four types of integration: Independent-Sequential, Independent-Simultaneous, Interdependent-Sequential, and Interdependent-Simultaneous, or to simplify the labelling, piecemeal, shotgun, additive, and interactive, respectively. Figure 2 shows the four integrations among consulting approaches. The figure also shows a graphical representation of each integration. For convenience, the three circles represent three approaches and the arrows indicate whether or not inputs and outputs of each approach are linked together over time.

The shotgun integration has the advantage of no waiting time to provide potential benefits from each approach. Each approach proceeds as it likes at the same time. All separate variables are considered and there is little need for coordination and communication among consultants with this form of integration. The disadvantages, however, stem from the possible disruptive effects of the separate change efforts especially if certain interdependencies among approaches really do exist. Also, there may be considerable redundancy and an inefficient use of resources if the separate approaches are very similar or at least if they have some strong overlaps. Finally, if the root of the organization's problems lies not within any separate domain of an approach but *between* two or more approaches, a gap in problem definition may go unnoticed since the consultants from the approaches do not communicate to one another. Thus, there is no possibility for developing a synergistic problem definition. On the other hand, even with the disadvantages, the shotgun integration is still expected to manage the Type III error better than any single approach applied continuously because the shotgun does consider more variables and problem definitions. It is the interdependencies and the dysfunctional consequences from shotgun implementations that create the major source of concern.

The piecemeal integration has the advantage of not causing such potential implementation problems because each approach proceeds at a different point in time. Thus, if there are no time pressures for improvement, implementation is much easier. The piecemeal approach, as the shotgun, is also relatively low cost to apply since there is little need for coordination or communication among consultants. However, one disadvantage is that a waste of resources would take place if the wrong separate approach is tried first, second, etc., rather than the right approach being tried initially. This assumes, of course, that the organization's problem is necessarily rooted within the domain of one approach and not between approaches. The latter possibility would make the piecemeal integration even more disadvantageous. In addition, the organization may get "tired" of one approach after another that does not solve its problems effectively. As the next and next approach are tried, totally independent of one another over time, the attitude often is, "Well, here we go again!" And, the failures of one approach may affect the enthusiasm and commitment of subsequent approaches, even if these are independent.
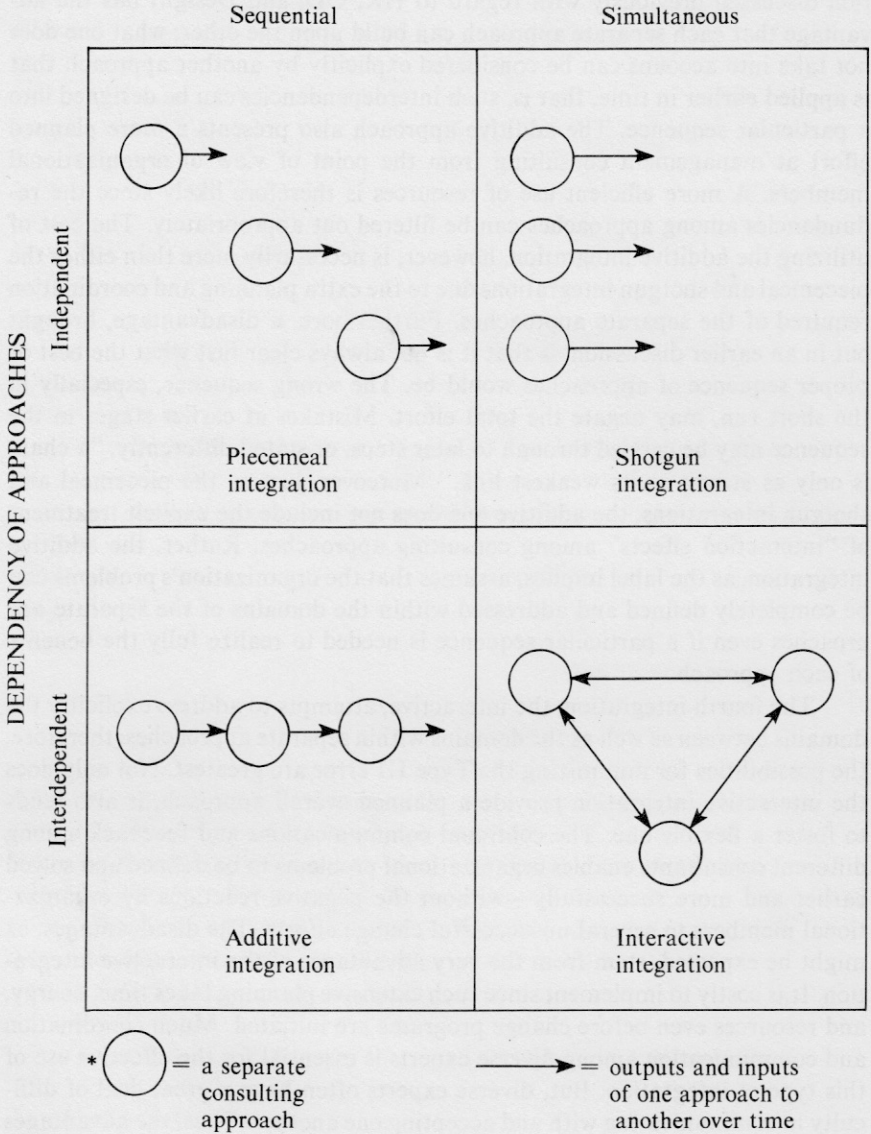
TIMING OF APPROACHES

Figure 2. Alternatives for integrating approaches to management consulting.*

The additive integration (analogous to the "sequential" type of integration discussed previously with regard to HR, OD, and Design) has the advantage that each separate approach can build upon the other; what one does not take into account can be considered explicitly by another approach that is applied earlier in time, that is, such interdependencies can be designed into a particular sequence. The additive approach also presents a more planned effort at management consulting from the point of view of organizational members. A more efficient use of resources is therefore likely since the redundancies among approaches can be filtered out appropriately. The cost of utilizing the additive integration, however, is necessarily more than either the piecemeal and shotgun integrations due to the extra planning and coordination required of the separate approaches. Furthermore, a disadvantage, brought out in an earlier discussion, is that it is not always clear just what the best or proper sequence of approaches would be. The wrong sequence, especially in the short run, may negate the total effort. Mistakes at earlier stages in the sequence may be carried through to later steps, or stated differently, "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link." Moreover, just as the piecemeal and shotgun integrations, the additive one does not include the explicit treatment of "interaction effects" among consulting approaches. Rather, the additive integration, as the label implies, assumes that the organization's problems can be completely defined and addressed within the domains of the separate approaches even if a particular sequence is needed to realize fully the benefits of each approach.

The fourth integration, the interactive, attempts to address explicitly the domains between as well as the domains within separate approaches; therefore, the possibilities for minimizing the Type III error are greatest. Not only does the interactive integration provide a planned overall approach, it also tends to foster a flexible one. The continual communications and feedback among different consultants enables organizational problems to be defined and solved earlier and more successfully—without the negative reactions by organizational members to several unsuccessful change efforts. The disadvantages, as might be expected, stem from the very advantages of the interactive integration. It is costly to implement since such extensive planning takes time, energy, and resources even before change programs are initiated. Much coordination and communication among diverse experts is essential for the effective use of this type of integration. But, diverse experts often have a great deal of difficulty in communicating with and accepting one another. Thus, the advantages of this integration can only be realized if the disadvantages can be controlled and managed.

Conclusions

The four types of integration (shotgun, piecemeal, additive, and interactive) present alternatives for management consultants seeking to manage (minimize) the Type III error more effectively. What is important to point out is that even the piecemeal or shotgun integrations have advantages for dealing with the Type III error over just separate consulting approaches. Of course the potential dysfunctions during implementation have to be considered, but if the possibility of solving the wrong problem seems to be the fundamental issue in the long run, then perhaps some implementation dysfunctions can be tolerated for a better problem definition. Naturally the organization and consultants will always have to weigh these trade-offs and considerations. With regard to the additive and interactive forms of integration, the even greater benefits of managing the Type III error while implementing programs with less potential dysfunctions, are evident. But can the consultants and organizations manage different approaches in an intensive, interactive manner?

Finally, it seems appropriate to re-emphasize the role of assumptions in integrating different consulting approaches. The example of HR, OD, and Design was used in order to provide some specifics on this very intangible matter. Assumptions, by their very nature, are implicit, fuzzy, and even unconscious in people's minds. To bring these assumptions to light for each approach to management consulting is a major and a critical task. If this is not done, it becomes almost impossible to begin weighing the benefits and costs of alternative integrations for a particular set of separate approaches being considered. It is hoped that the case of HR, OD, and Design helped to demonstrate that assumptions *can* be made explicit and can serve to pinpoint the important interdependencies among approaches. Only by such an assumption analysis along with alternative forms of integration, can the practice of management consulting contribute its full benefits to defining and solving problems.

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