

HR Partner as Consultant

Using the 7Cs Framework

December 2006



The Alliance & Leicester adopts the 7Cs of consulting

To improve its interactions with internal customers the Alliance & Leicester's Management Development team worked with WizOz to learn and adopt the 7Cs of consulting. This model has enabled the team to focus on its core offering, deliver added value and prioritise its work in the best interests of the business.

When Julia Hill joined the Alliance and Leicester as Management Development Manager her first priority was to find a model of internal consulting that would allow her team to prioritise budgetary spends on management development activity. She wanted the management development team to be confident in its ability to:

- Add value to its customers
- Prioritise a finite development budget
- Work to a consistent model of internal consulting
- Say no to customers.



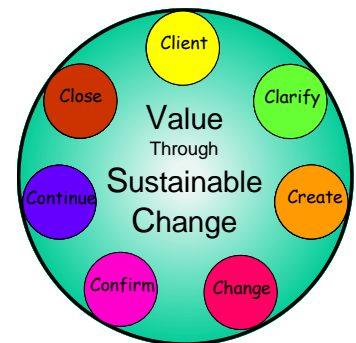
The team supports the various divisions and centres of excellence at the bank. It looks after the company's 1,400-1,500 people managers and the induction programme for new joiners. As such, it has many different clients, including heads of human resources and line managers, and an excess of transactions to deal with.

To address the way it engaged with its internal customers the team felt it needed a standard offering and a process that allowed it to prioritise its work, focus on the right initiatives and add value. "We needed a consistent framework for our interactions with people in the business so they would understand what we could offer and the resources we could give them," says Julia.

"We had recently reviewed a number of initiatives and realised we should have asked better questions before leaping in and creating a solution. But we couldn't sort out our core services as we had so many requests to manage every day." In addition, Julia wanted to determine how she could reshape the team to add value, while also identifying what value meant to the business.

One of Julia's colleagues had been trained in the 7Cs of Consulting by Mick Cope, founder of WizOz, a coaching, training and consulting firm, and suggested that this approach could help the management development team. The 7Cs consultative approach touches each aspect of the consultancy life cycle and provides tools to enhance engagements with clients and deliver long-term change. The framework is based on the following areas and activities that impact the success of a change programme:

- **Client:** Understand the client's environment, their perception of the situation and test that they fully understand the impact and outcome of the change they desire
- **Clarify:** Examine the nature and detail of the client's problem. Identify areas that are risks to the assignment and ensure that unspoken factors are uncovered
- **Create:** Balance divergent and convergent creative activities to create a solution that is supported by all stakeholders
- **Change:** Recognise the fundamental elements that drive and underpin the change process. Manage resistance to change, segment the consumer group and understand all the implications in the development of a transformation strategy
- **Confirm:** Verify that change has taken place
- **Continue:** Sustain change by mapping and managing the forces that will erode the value of your work
- **Close:** End the engagement with the client, emphasise the need to release dependency, understand the final outcomes, the differentiated value, learning and what further action may need to be undertaken.



On meeting the team members for the first time Mick used the 7Cs to find out more about the issues the team faced and whether they were approaching them in right way. "He wanted to make sure this wasn't just a quick fix for us," she says. "He lives the 7Cs and it shows in everything he does. He challenged our thinking on all aspects of the project, which helped us better understand what we were trying to do."

The whole management development team and a couple of business partners spent three of the course's four days learning skills that would help them work with their clients in the business. "It was easy to see where it would be useful for us," says Julia. "One of our big issues related to who the client was; we often found we were working with the wrong person our solution ended up in the wrong place."

Julia feels that the power of the 7C's framework is in its simplicity. "It uses a simple, easy to remember framework and uncomplicated language to deliver a blueprint to drive value in all client transactions. The model gives us a way to say 'no' as well as 'yes'. This ensures that when we accept a request it is the best use of resource. And when we say no, the client and the team both understand the reasons why."

The fourth day of the course gave the team members the opportunity to play back their understanding of the 7Cs either by describing a hypothetical project or one they'd recently worked, and be assessed by peer review, which was a new experience to many. Even though the team had a lot of work pressures at the time, everyone was passionate about going through with the assessment process and all arrived with presentations prepared, which, as Julia says, shows how important it was to them. "Even though it was quite stressful for some it was a very productive day with some great presentations, and just the right level of integrity and rigour."

On returning from the workshop the team agreed to adopt a consistent approach to the implementation of the 7Cs model. It used the model with clients, shared the principles with colleagues in other functions where it would add value, and then waited to see the impact on the business. "When we receive a request we now meet with the client to go through the 7Cs. This makes sure it has been thought through properly and the client really needs what we're being asked to do. We haven't done that in the past. Rather than just changing the process we're getting into the desire behind why people want something to happen."

By holding 'ask the panel' surgery sessions at team meetings any member can bring a real-life issue to discuss, we then all find a solution by using the 7Cs model. In this way, we start to agree priorities and identify where we can add the most value to our clients. "Gradually, we have started to receive feedback on how the business has been responding to this new way of working," she says.

One particular member of the team saw the 7Cs as the tool she needed to challenge some of her key clients on their effective use of training spend. Julia remembers receiving an excited phone call from her colleague a couple of weeks after the workshop. "Julia, I'm feeling really great," she said. "I was at a people development meeting today and one of the directors asked if I had been on an assertiveness course. I'd used the 7Cs to challenge the value of a proposed development activity, and he realised that we needed to adopt an alternative solution. We're saving £14,000 by doing it another way."

Another member of the team used the 7Cs approach to help one of her directors explore ways that her own team could add more value to the business by setting more clients focused annual performance objectives. "These types of interactions not only add value to the business but also makes each member of my team feel as if they are personally adding value in their roles."

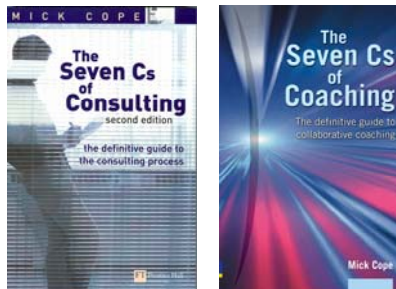
While the team can see the difference the 7Cs approach is making to its various client engagements there are considerable commercial benefits to Alliance & Leicester. Julia plans to measure the impact of having taken the course but can already see that:

- Management development consulting projects are now more effective and more likely to deliver sustainable change
- By prioritising consistently and working on what the business actually needs the team is continuously adding value
- The team can now ensure it is working with the right customers and stakeholders

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- By balancing the different motivational needs of the client, consultant and customer the management development team can help bring about sustainable change
- Having the time to focus on its core offering gives Alliance & Leicester full access to the extent of the team's skills and expertise.

In the future, Julia sees the team taking on more of a coaching role in response to requests from the business and plans to adopt the 7Cs of coaching framework to build on this and help with people development. "It makes sense for us to do it as we know we like the framework and the simplicity of the approach. It's a natural evolution for us." Looking at the team's progresses with the 7Cs so far, the team has become more focused on its core business, is delivering real value to Alliance & Leicester and is taking pride in its work.



For more information on the work the Julia has undertaken with developing an HR Consultancy approach in Alliance and Leicester – please contact Mick Cope – mick@wizoz.com