

When and How a Consultant Can Be Used Most Effectively

M. JAY BLAHA

This article presents answers to two questions often found in developing in-service programs. (a) When can a consultant be used most effectively? (b) How can consultant services be used most effectively? Guide lines are drawn which may be helpful in making better use of these services.

THE CALIFORNIA Association of Secondary School Curriculum Coordinators has been especially interested in making more effective use of consultants. This interest was highlighted during the two-day conference of the association last April when approximately seventy-five members convened in Los Angeles. Five groups devoted almost the entire time to a consideration of the problem of how to make better use of consultants and arrived at some significant outcomes.

During the summer session at the University of Connecticut the author had an additional opportunity to explore this problem while teaching a course in administration. Although the composition of this group differed somewhat from that of the curriculum coordinators, the outcomes were very much the same.

This article is an attempt to present the main guide lines developed by the two groups, together with the thinking of many educators in various parts of the country, and with ideas of the author based upon his experience in working with consultants and also in serving as a consultant.

As used in this article the term "con-

sultant" includes only those individuals who are not on a regular schedule of visitation or assignment. The term might be further defined to include only those individuals serving a school system "on call" or especially selected to assist in the development of a problem.

A further limitation is that the consultant is used in a group situation although most of the points developed would apply in other methods of use. It will be noted that the majority of the guide lines apply to a consultant from outside the school system where the consultant is to be used.

As stated in the title only two aspects of making effective use of consultants will be presented. Guide lines for determining "when" and "how" a consultant can be used most effectively will be included. Although they may not be arranged in order of importance, some recognition has been given to sequence. It is also recognized that it is most difficult to completely separate the "when" from the "how" in developing guide lines for using a consultant most effectively. It must also be stated that this article may not include all the possibilities.

When Can a Consultant Be Used Most Effectively?

The term "when" usually implies a concept of time or timing. It might be interpreted to mean in what situations or under what limitations or stipulations. Each of the following guide lines could be preceded by the question, "Why do we need a consultant?" The guide lines could then begin with the word "because" instead of "when."

A Consultant Can Be Used Most Effectively:

1. *When there is a need to evaluate a program to determine what the real problems are.*

It is recognized that not always is it possible for a consultant to uncover the real problems which may exist within a school system. However, it is within the realm of possibility for a consultant to make an evaluative survey and from the findings suggest areas which might be of interest. This guide line is intended to cover such situations in which no planned program of action has taken place. The initiative in this case may come from the leadership of the group or from the group itself. This is often a first step in an in-service education program.

2. *When the group wishes help in defining and limiting the problem.*

A group may often be so close to a situation that it becomes almost impossible to determine just what the problem is. The use of a consultant may provide the insight necessary for the group to come to common agreement as to the statement of the problem within proper limitations. There are situations where a group may not

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even realize that problems exist. Many times the consultant can assist in identifying those which appear most in need of attention.

3. *When a problem might be better introduced by someone from outside.*

Although this guide line is very similar to number two, it appears important enough to be given a separate heading. In this situation a consultant can be used effectively, especially when the introduction of the problem by one of the group would fail to secure the proper reception. Many times a group contains some members who seem to have a faculty for antagonizing others. Suggestions from these individuals rarely meet with much response. The role of the consultant becomes one of setting the stage and stimulating or challenging the group toward giving adequate consideration. A much better introduction might be secured by a consultant.

4. *When the group has exhausted its own resources.*

Although it is recognized that it is not always necessary for a group completely to use up its own potentialities, too many groups are prone to give up and seek outside help before there is a real need. A rather complete consideration of the problem by members of the group will place them in a better position to make a more intelligent selection and better use of a consultant. This does not preclude the use of a consultant as a resource person, an evaluator, or observer, however, as it is recognized that there are functions of this

nature also. Consideration will be given to these phases under another heading.

5. *When there is a need for progress evaluation.*

Much time and effort might be saved if a group will recognize a need for periodic evaluation. The use of a consultant to assist in determining and evaluating the progress of the group often helps to avoid going in the wrong direction and at the same time assists in charting a course for further action. How frequently we hear the expression that "If we had only known, we could have done so much better. We would not have made such a mistake." It should also be pointed out again that groups studying a problem often get so close to it that they have difficulty in seeing it in the right perspective. Using a consultant at this time will aid in avoiding that situation and will also provide an opportunity to secure renewed interest in proceeding.

6. *When the group finds a need for specific and/or technical information.*

Often it has been found that the progress of the group has been delayed due to inadequate technical data with reference to the problem. This situation may call for the use of a consultant on a rather short-term basis. The group then proceeds either with or without the services of a consultant. It might also be stated that much time and energy can be saved through the use of a consultant's help in supplying the desired information. More consideration ought to be given to the conservation of human energy.

7. *When the group needs a "shot-in-the-arm" to maintain confidence in the value of further efforts.*

Many excellent starts have faltered because of the development of a feeling of futility. The recognition of the status of the group at a time like this and action in providing the help of a consultant will very frequently stimulate the individuals to renewed effort. Motivation is needed constantly and the consultant can usually furnish that inspiration.

8. *When the group needs assistance in summing up and evaluating the work that has been accomplished.*

Again this may appear to be the same as number five; however, the interpretation in this instance is somewhat different. Many times it has been found to be valuable to secure a consultant to serve at the close of an activity. Here the consultant evaluates what has been accomplished in relation to what might be considered an adequate solution to the problem.

Using a consultant in this manner assumes that adequate orientation has been provided. Further suggestions relative to this guide line will be found in the second part of the article devoted to "How Can Consultant Services Be Used Most Effectively?"

9. *When there is a need for assistance in determining the next steps or follow-up.*

There are a great many results of group effort which fail to accomplish their fullest potentiality. The use of a consultant to suggest the next steps or follow-up may save the first efforts and aid in allowing the results to have their fullest effect on further action. How often reference is made to the fact that a group gave much time and effort to the consideration of a problem and then nothing came of it. It would seem

that a good way to stifle any group initiative would be to fail to realize all the values that could be secured. This guide line is possibly an extension of that suggested in number eight.

How Can Consultant Services Be Used Most Effectively?

There are many ways in which a consultant may be used in a group situation, such as: a director of the study, a leader, an observer and evaluator, a resource person, a member of group action, and as an individual assuming several of the mentioned roles. Just how the consultant will be used will depend upon many factors. There are, however, some guide lines which may be of value in securing results.

He May Be Used More Effectively If:

1. *There is a definite understanding and agreement by the group that a consultant is needed.*

If almost complete agreement for the need of a consultant is not reached, it would seem undesirable to provide for such services. The handicap under which the consultant would work would be too great.

2. *There is a definite understanding and agreement by the group as to why they need a consultant.*

It cannot be taken for granted that members of a group always realize why a consultant may be needed. An analysis of why they need the services will by the very process provide for a much better understanding of the problem. The need then becomes more specific and the consultant can function with much more facility.

3. *There is definite recognition and statement of what is wanted.*

Although somewhat similar to number seven it would seem to be a next step. Having in mind what is wanted will aid the consultant in recognizing the status of the group relative to their thinking on further action. This also should assist the consultant in deciding whether or not he feels capable of working with the group.

4. *There is agreement as to the framework and limitations within which the group must work.*

This point might best be explained by an example. If the group is considering a problem such as the design of a new laboratory, there would be limitations as to size, cost, equipment, etc. Time is frequently wasted when boundaries are not defined.

5. *There is agreement by the group as to the criteria for the selection of a consultant.*

This guide line has a twofold purpose. Setting up the criteria will aid the group in defining and limiting the problem. The criteria, made known to the consultant, will provide him with additional information as to the problem and will aid in giving him a feeling that his selection is based upon what potentially he has to offer. Knowing the group has confidence in him, he can work much more effectively and in many capacities.

6. *There has been proper clearance with all who may be concerned.*

There are instances when groups have invited a consultant without clearing with proper channels and the results have not been satisfactory. A consultant cannot work effectively if he finds his presence is regarded as too antagonistic to others who may be concerned.

7. *There is a résumé prepared of all that has transpired to date.*

This process provides for clarification of the status of the group and permits the consultant to begin where the group has arrived. Time and effort are again saved for both parties.

8. *There have been some suggested procedures developed for consideration.*

Although this guide line will apply only to certain situations it seems a necessary one for those groups that have been giving some consideration to the problem before the consultant participates.

9. *The consultant is given suggestions as to how the group feels he might function most effectively.*

Sometimes it is very difficult for the group to accomplish this suggestion. It will probably depend upon the status of the group. Group members usually have some ideas as to how they feel the consultant can work most effectively.

10. *The consultant is given a complete review of the status of the group as to: origin of the problem, composition of the group, progress to date, limitations or framework within which the group must work, and needs of the group as members have defined them.*

Several of the above points have been mentioned in other guide lines but are listed again for their importance. Providing the consultant with some insight as to the origin of the problem will assist him in anticipating possible plans of action. Knowing something of the composition of the group will aid the consultant in becoming a member with a minimum loss of time. It is understood that the situation will determine how much information ought to be provided.

11. *The consultant is provided with an orientation including such data as: name and location of the school in which the group functions; type of school organization; size of school enrollment, etc.; type of community and/or description of the community; statement of the philosophy of the school and/or hand books, etc.; statement of the outstanding problems of the school; and statement of any policies which might need to be considered in dealing with the problem.*

Too often we assume that others know our situation as well as we do. Some information provided to the consultant helps him to identify situations in his experience which might be quite comparable. Too much detail should be avoided. However, on the other hand, don't assume too much.

12. *The consultant is provided with some suggestions as to a tentative schedule of meetings.*

Most individuals appreciate knowing at least the tentative schedule of meetings, etc. This will permit the consultant to adjust his personal plans during his stay in the school. Use the Golden Rule as your guide in this as in the other guide lines.

13. *The group has made definite provision for his reception upon arrival and plans for his stay.*

This guide line is similar to number eight but is cited because it is often overlooked. Remember the consultant is a guest.

14. *There has been adequate provision made for hospitality involving the consultant.*

This guide line emphasizes the point that often groups assume no responsibility for the convenience of the con-

sultant. Those little social courtesies extended to the consultant contribute greatly to more effective work.

15. *The consultant is provided with some time, between his arrival and the meeting scheduled, to explore the situation.*

Time provided to permit the consultant to get his feet on the ground and catch his breath is most important. There are many instances when a consultant arrives just in time to get to a meeting. Provide time to get acquainted with the environment.

16. *The consultant is so treated that he has a feeling of really being wanted.*

Although you may be paying for his services, it does not abrogate your responsibility for treating the consultant as a guest. This may appear as undue emphasis but recognition of this point will be conducive to much more effective work by the consultant.

17. *The consultant is used in such manner that he feels he is a member of the group.*

The consultant should be able to feel a sense of belonging. If he is set apart from the group, he will most likely function accordingly. More effective use of his time can be made if the group acts as a whole.

Teachers Look at Supervision

MATTHEW J. WHITEHEAD

This article reports results of a study of teachers' attitudes toward instructional improvement. Data for the study were collected from high school teachers in North Carolina.

MANY VOLUMES dealing with the improvement of instruction in secondary schools have been written within the past quarter century, but few, if any, have given the classroom teachers' point of view on this topic. The purpose in this article is to describe current supervisory practices in North Carolina Negro High Schools. In the succeeding portion of this article 115 North Carolina Negro High School teachers "look at supervision."

One way to secure data on current supervisory practices of high school teachers in the state of North Carolina was to use a questionnaire. This article represents findings of 115 schedules which were submitted to 115 North Carolina Negro High School teachers.

These teachers represent 69 of the 100 counties in the state.

Data from the returned schedules revealed that these 115 teachers were currently employed in schools which ranged in faculty size from 4 teachers to 56 teachers, the median faculty size being 17. Table I shows the distribution of teachers within these schools.

TABLE I
SIZE OF FACULTY IN SCHOOLS REPRESENTED

Faculty	No. Teachers
50-59	6
40-49	8
30-39	8
20-29	29
10-19	29
0-9	35
<hr/> N	<hr/> 115

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