

How to hand draw a quarter consultant: getting the most from your consultant

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Abstract

This poster outlined how to get the best out of your evaluation consultant. The title came from a playful use of the words “How to hang draw and quarter” a consultant (the original being not quite so playful). The idea for a paper came about because it became clear to me that there were many similarities about what we as consultants and client want from each other but also some clear differences. Also I had recently completed a research study that looked at the relationship between clients and consultants in rural industry and some of the same issues were raised there. There were issues such as: clarity about the task, the task being properly resourced and commitment from both parties to the job in hand.

I intended to give a paper on some of our good, bad and ugly experiences and consultants but was given a poster spot at the conference instead. I decided that instead of recounting I would ask for experiences from delegates. It seems that this was a good move. I received many positive comments about how much delegates appreciated being able to contribute through the poster session and I received many comments on the posters themselves. In the end we had to put up three poster pages to cope with the number of comments.

The poster asked for contributions from conference delegates about what they like (if they are consultants or if they are clients). Coloured pens were left with the poster for delegates to use to write their comments and following are those comments.



Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd

Title: Getting the most from your Consultant

This poster is interactive. Please add your comments and suggestions to either of the columns below.

What consultants like (please add your comments)	What clients like (please add your comments)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear brief • Indicative budget • Budget to fit job • Client contact person with appropriate authority available to answer queries before tender closes • Being aware of the different agendas of stakeholders beforehand • Input to be planned at a realistic NEED of the project/initiative and not because of a deadline or 'political reporting' • Realistic expectations – don't expect a Rolls Royce evaluation on a Mini budget • Realistic timeframe – especially for impact assessments • Capacity to negotiate, i.e. methodology and methods used (to ensure they are appropriate and will enable collection of most useful data) • Contract manager with some evaluation experience • A commitment to dissemination and utilisation of findings • Clear linkage of evaluation to organisational governance and/or strategic plan • Top management buy in • Consistency in expectations spelt out in RFT and those put forward on project commencement (or room to negotiate when change is needed) • Timely feedback on questions and drafts • Capacity to negotiate contract, especially deliverables • Clients who have good consultant engagement practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable/appreciative of the political environment we work in • The draft report has been thoroughly read before handing in • Open, honest, respectful communication throughout and beyond contract period • Clear understanding, feedback and discussion from both parties regarding project and evaluation objectives • Professional but approachable and friendly attitudes • Value for money (x2) • Quality assurance processes • Continual feedback/communication • Capacity to learn and adapt and to be a team member • Creative ways of presenting "reports", i.e. through pictures and sound, not just text • Honesty • Skills/competence • Sees the BIG picture • Feasibility in approaches • Consultant is able to answer questions about the process • Consultant works to support the evaluation being linked to the organisational learning and development • Senior consultant in the contract does the work stated in the contract • Using the people actually proposed – rather than more junior people • Timely delivery • Regular updates on progress

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background documentation, access to relevant data • Clients who don't squeeze more out of the evaluator once the job is finished – without paying for it! • Clients staying true to contract and project brief despite changes in their staffing • Clients being clear about what they want <i>before</i> they develop the project brief • Clients capable of participating in the evaluative process so that their comments/criticisms of the evaluation outcomes are appropriately informed • Prepared to brief consultants transparently rather than saying “we want to see what you say” which is double speak for “we want to steal your ideas!!” • Being paid in a timely manner • Gaining permission to use the evaluation in journal articles and teaching • The report being published – disseminated • Opportunities for oral/workshop feedback • No surprises • Trusting working relationship with client 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues raised early • Compliant evaluators! • That value is added overall • Clear reporting that addresses the brief provided • Contract paper not seen as a vehicle to cite personal papers/reports, i.e. too much internal focus • Flexibility – ability to change or add focus as needed or as becomes apparent throughout the course of the evaluation • Make the complex simple • Consultants do not over promise what can be achieved for budget • Consultants do not retro fit previous work into current project and then just re-badge it • No surprises • Trusting working relationship with consultant
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