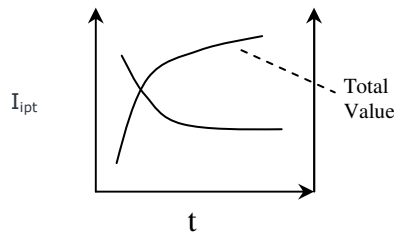


Focus on Situational IT Assessments
By Don Curt

The value or return on your consulting dollar spent can be at its highest during the first few weeks of an engagement. This may seem counter intuitive and contrary to actual experience in many cases, however, if you use your consultant effectively, as described in this article, you can get very high early return AND retain that value in on-going work efforts.

First off, what in general is the value of a consultant? It depends on the type of consultant you are hiring. If the value you are looking for is an extra pair of hands to work independently or along side your team, that type of consultant is really performing in a staff augmentation role. The value generated by the staff augmentation consultant is most probably linear in nature over the time of the contract. The person was hired for a particular technical or functional skill they possess and the value becomes evident in the production of some expected output or event.

Another type of consultant, and the one being addressed here, is the IT management consultant. In general you hire this group or person to give you two things, a pair of fresh eyes and knowledge which you can subsequently infuse into your organization and processes. Of course there is also some form of tangible deliverable as well, such as a report document, which sums up the engagement work and recommendations. All three of these areas bring value to you and are the measures of the return on your consulting dollars. The value however is not linear. A good consultant will have a way to look at your business that comes from a trained eye of experience. That initial insight is what you want to capitalize on. It is the years of experience and knowledge that the consultant has; being compared, contrasted and tested against the information which is gathered, in the early going, about your situation. The fresh eye and knowledge impartment are at their peak. In a quantitative analysis one could think of the curve of Incremental Intellectual Input (I_{ipt}) over time being in an exponential curve format.



The goal is to capture the consultant's value over the steep part of the curve – on a continuous basis. The way to do this is to break down the engagement into a series of specific efforts over time. The first phase to be considered should be the Situational Assessment.

Situational Assessments

As defined within my consulting practice, the situational assessment is made up of three parts. First, after the domain area is clarified (e.g. alignment, governance, software engineering, project management, etc.), the current state or situation is documented. This includes identification of current practices deficiencies, environments, business plans, customer demands, or any other issues which "bubble" to the surface through a quick set of interviews with key personnel and review of particular domain best practices (or lack thereof). The goal here (and with the total process) is not a 100% analysis. If the top 20% of the current situation needs are identified it usually follows that 80% of the total domain's needed actions can be identified.

Next, a quick assessment is prepared. The assessment takes each one of the identified situational needs and develops a corresponding statement of direction. For example if a situational need is a more efficient software engineering process, the assessment item may state a direction towards code sharing and reusable code. The assessment items tend to be short one paragraph descriptions of the direction that should be considered.

The last element is the actions. For each statement of direction in the assessment a particular action is recommended. Following the above example, the action on reusable code may be to implement the usage of software engineering tools or process such as the Rational Unified Process.

The entire situational assessment, including provision of a deliverable document can easily be done in a one to three week engagement. The process is fast, not costly, and maximizes the Intellectual Input of the consultant.

Sustaining the Value

The situational assessment maximizes the usage of consulting Intellectual Input vs. time. It is short in duration but is very useful in driving key statements of direction and actions which an organization can immediately begin to work on. Tremendous value can be achieved for a minimal consulting dollar spent. To retain this value over time, the key idea is to keep the consultant operating on the steep part of the curve. Starting with the situational assessment, a series of high value, short term engagements are possible which continually take advantage of the fresh eye and knowledge impartment an IT management consultant can provide.

[An example of a CIO Services performed Situational Assessment. \(Cleansed of company specific information\)](#)

http://cioservices.us/papers/sa_example.pdf

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