

# Consultants... Always ride them like a horse!

How to manage external professional suppliers

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You've lost control. The budget figures you are looking at on the screen of your laptop are all in red. Deep red. You call a meeting of all the key stakeholders and team members but when you try to speak your jaws are wired shut and instead the consultant you are using stands up to lead and chair the meeting. You listen in horror as the scope of the project expands to include almost every fashionable management fad, balanced scorecards, CRM, e-enablement... The external suppliers you have been working with are grinning from ear to ear, pound notes flutter from the ceiling and form a large but neat pile in front of them. All the while, your joint venture partner is repeating the mantra, 'Effort is yours - Benefit is mine'.

It's only a dream but you still wake with a start and feel unsettled enough to make the long journey downstairs to the fridge for a glass of cold water.

As the New World continues to take a hold of the real world, more and more projects become virtual. They cut across the organization, across a number of strategic or non-

strategic partner organizations, across an increasing range of suppliers, across countries, continents and across the time-zones of the globe. This environment is fertile opportunity for professionals who specialize in advising organizations in complex situations - consultants.

Traditionally the role that most consultants had on projects was to act as 'transferors of knowledge or best practice' - people who had seen a situation or solution elsewhere and could be relied upon to provide that solution to the client. Or had a killer methodology to apply.

However, there is a fundamental problem. One of the key things which defines the New World of business is the fact that change occurs faster than we can learn - so a problem which is genuinely new to the client is also probably genuinely new to the consultant. Or worse, a problem that looks familiar to the consultant may actually rely on a completely new solution for the client. So what value does the consultant bring?

