Humble Consulting: How to Provide Real Help Faster

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Consulting in Complex and Changing Times

Organizations face challenges today that are too messy and complicated for consultants to simply play doctor: run a few tests, offer a neat diagnosis of the "problem," and recommend a solution. Edgar Schein argues that consultants have to jettison the old idea of professional distance and work with their clients in a more personal way, emphasizing authentic openness, curiosity, and humility. Schein draws deeply on his own decades of experience, offering over two dozen case studies that illuminate each stage of this humble consulting process. Just as he did with *Process Consultation* nearly fifty years ago, Schein has once again revolutionized the field, enabling consultants to be more genuinely helpful and vastly more effective.

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Humble Consulting: How to Provide Real Help Faster By Edgar H. Schein Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #115868 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-04-04
- Released on: 2016-04-04
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review
"*Humble Consulting* is a fine blend of poetic writing and practical methodology. It is an intimate conversation about how service, in this case consulting, works in the real world. All who want a deeper understanding of the way to create relationships that produce outcomes will value this book. To simply recommend it is an understatement."
—*Peter Block, author of Flawless Consulting, The Answer to How Is Yes*

"What is the most powerful force in consulting's relational success—where you and the client move beyond the transactional to the deeper transformational? I used to think it was what our amazing OD founders Ed Schein and Warren Bennis saw as the core value of Organization Development: what they called that special "spirit of inquiry." Now I see that it's something far more foundational. In a word, its "humility" and Ed Schein, with this book is modelling it for all of us in the way he, the master, is yet the student, disclosing his innermost doubts and mistakes, revealing his subtle insights and brilliant successes, and up-ending almost all of our assumptions of what really matters most. This is the first book I now recommend to consultants young and old: for without humility—a stance wide-open, a state-of "not knowing" and totally vulnerable and present-- you cannot do this work. The message: make humility your greatest strength, and never lose it."
- David L. Cooperrider, author of Appreciative Inquiry and Fairmount Minerals Professor of Social Entrepreneurship, Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University

"Ed Schein takes the principles of Humble Inquiry and beautifully extends them to the consulting process in this book. He humbly and generously gives us a window into his own life and consulting process by sharing real stories from his years of consulting, including his own inner thoughts and unexpressed feelings. Every consultant should read this for insights into how we should deal with our doubts, questions, and anxieties. This is another major contribution to our work and our field from Dr. Schein."
—*Matt Minahan, Chair, Board of Trustees, OD Network*

"In this book Ed Schein has looked back over his long and distinguished consulting experience and come up with an important book.   Anyone who is called upon to give help or advice, be they boss, consultant, parent or friend, should start by reading this. I used it to hold up a mirror to my own experience of giving advice and resolved to modify my behavior in future, to be more humble, in the Schein way."
—*Charles Handy, author of The Age of Unreason*

"Chock-full of useful case examples, *Humble Consulting* is about establishing a relationship with the client that is collaborative, personal, and empathetic rather than prescriptive. Schein has once again contributed significantly and creatively to our field of organization change and development."
—*W. Warner Burke, PhD, E. L. Thorndike Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, and Editor, Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*

"Ed Schein's books on consulting have always been the most professionally useful things I read. And this book could once again reshape the consulting industry. It shifts the place from which effective consultants operate from the head to the heart and from the heart to the hand. Essential reading!"
—*Otto Scharmer, Senior Lecturer, MIT, cofounder of the U.Lab and autbor of Theory U*

"Ed Schein has done it again! This book is a must-read for anyone in the helping professions who wants to make meaningful progress on complex challenges. Drawing on his own experience as consultant, scholar, and author, Ed brilliantly makes the case that it is through real human connections that we have the best shot at making a difference in an increasingly interdependent world."
—*Diane Rawlins, InsideOut Consulting*

"*Humble Consulting* pulls the curtain back on the pretense that the vast majority of consultants and consulting organizations put forward—that they have 'the answer.' I plan on keeping a copy in my office to hand out to consultants as they continue to show up and ask that I tell them what keeps me up at night and they respond with the solution that they uniquely have to address it."
—*James Hereford, Chief Operating Officer, Stanford Health Care*

"Long a critic of OD's overreliance on process, I've always admired Ed Schein's insistence that process consultation be relevant. Now, in his new book, Humble Consulting, he shows us how. In his usual and clear style, he calls OD practitioners to account and to help in powerful and integrated ways."
—*Chris Worley, Professor and Strategy Director, NEOMA Business School Center for Leadership and Effective Organizations*

"As someone who always strives to be a more effective consultant, I find Ed Schein's reflections and insights hugely reassuring. In *Humble Consulting*, with great care and sensitivity, Ed Schein shares years of wisdom and encourages his readers to reflect on and experiment with their own practice. I believe anyone working in a helping role will benefit from reading this wonderful book."
—*Philip Mix, organization development consultant and member of the NTL Institute*

"In *Humble Consulting*, master consultant Edgar Schein shows us how to escape the limitations of a traditional consulting practice to vastly improve both the impact and the meaning of our work. This book is at once brilliant and incredibly practical."
—*Anthony L. Suchman, MD, MA, consultant, Relationship Centered Health Care*

"*Humble Consulting* is a book every leader and every consultant should read. Using numerous cases from his own experience, Schein describes the specific components of a true helping relationship and shows the powerful impact when consulting rests on curious questioning that honors and unlocks the knowledge held by the other."
—*David L. Bradford, PhD, Eugene D. O'Kelly Senior Lecturer in Leadership, Emeritus, Stanford University Graduate School of Business, and coauthor of the bestselling books Influence without Authority and Power Up*

"Finally, a consulting process that demonstrates and emulates the type of culture toward which organizations and their leaders aspire."
—*Robert Cooke, author of Human Synergistics' Organizational Culture Inventory*

"Ed Schein once again moves the needle in refining the essence of consulting. Schein invokes a shift from considering clients as objects to considering clients as living, dynamic beings. The artistry of balancing formality and intimacy, dancing with the dynamic client system, paying attention to the environment, and engaging in endless reflective learning makes for a potent model and process. Read the wisdom and be open to transformation."
—*Sarita Chawla, President, Metalens Consulting; Senior Faculty, New Ventures West; and Diamond Approach teacher*

About the Author
Edgar H. Schein is the Society of Sloan Fellows Professor of Management Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management. He is the author of numerous bestselling books including the recent Humble Inquiry.

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Preface

This book brings together various insights and ideas I have acquired over fifty years of research, teaching, and consulting and, at the same time, reflects how the kinds of problems that organizations face in our rapidly changing world have forced the evolution of those ideas.

As I began my career as a human relations trainer and part-time consultant in the 1960s, I evolved the model of Process Consultation (introduced in my books Process Consultation, 1969; and Process Consultation Revisited, 1999), which emphasizes the need to involve the client in the process of figuring out what is wrong and what can be done about it. After several decades of working with this model and updating the book, I began to realize that the model we were using for organization and management consulting really had broader applications to all kinds of helping relationships, resulting in the 2009 book Helping. Analyzing the helping process from a sociological point of view also revealed how much our cultural norms influenced what we thought should be both the client's role and the consultant's role in the helping process.

In my own experience as a helper, it seemed crucial that the client really be able to tell what is bothering him or her and be able to be open and trusting in doing so. I then discovered that the major inhibiting factor to clients' being open and trusting is the cultural force in the United States toward telling as being the heroic model, which led helping and consulting models to be structured in terms of the formal professional stages of diagnose and then tell as recommendations. My management consulting friends told me that "this is required if you are really doing your job," which, to my dismay, I found many clients passively believed.

I recognized that the obsession with telling was a broader characteristic of the US managerial culture, which led me to write the book Humble Inquiry (2013) to point out how much potential harm was done in making subordinates feel psychologically unsafe in upward reporting if they saw safety or quality issues in how work was getting done.

In my own consulting efforts, I found that telling did not work and, furthermore, that the clients who called me in for consultation often had previously experienced the formal approach with other consultants and did not find the diagnose and then recommend approach terribly helpful. The formal process often missed the

real problem or recommended things that could not be implemented for a variety of reasons that the consultant evidently had not considered.

At the same time, the problems that confronted leaders and managers became more complex to diagnose and even more difficult to "fix." I also learned through several experiences that will be discussed in the cases in this book that sometimes just the earliest questions, comments, and puzzlements that I expressed in the initial contacts with a client proved to be very helpful in enabling the client to perceive and think about the situation. This often led to immediate next moves that the client could think of that were seen by both helper and client as immediately beneficial.

All this led me to go beyond the previous models and write about what I experienced—real help can be fast, but it requires an open, trusting relationship with the client that the helper Preface xiii has to build from the very beginning. Because of the difficulty and complexity of the problems, and because the client's own view of what is going on is so important in the relationship, this also requires a great deal of humility in the consultant. So in this book I will describe the new kinds of problems, the new consultant–client relationship that will have to be built, and the new kinds of attitudes and behaviors that consultants will have to learn in order to be really helpful.

I think of this as an evolution in my thinking. Many of these ideas may have been implicit in earlier works, but they are only now coming into consciousness both as insights and as new principles of what has to happen if we really want to help on complex, dynamic "messy" problems and if we want to do it fast because, in many cases, clients need to do something adaptive right away.

Where Does This Fit into a Larger Historical Context?

Humble Consulting draws on elements of many prior models that deal with complexity, interdependence, diversity, and instability. Almost every theory of helping refers to the concept of relationship, but few of them talk about levels of relationships and what is involved in negotiating them. One exception is Otto Scharmer's Theory U (2007), in which he explicitly differentiates levels of conversation in his analysis of how to reach the deepest level within ourselves and in our relationships to find the true sources of innovation.

The theories and models that are most relevant to understanding these kinds of problems and developing workable next moves were initially best articulated in the study of highly reliable organizations by Karl Weick with his concepts of "loose coupling," "sense making," "embracing errors," and "resilience" (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). On the sociological side, I have always found Erving Goffman's analysis of interaction and "situational proprieties" to be an essential model for understanding how relationships are formed, maintained, and repaired when damaged (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1967).

Closely related are the systemic models of "organizational learning" (e.g., Senge, 1990) and family therapy (e.g., Madanes, 1981). The work on "mindfulness" (Langer, 1997) is crucial in what I see to be the new skills that will be needed. The change programs that rely on so-called lean methods, based on the work of Deming and Juran that evolved into the Toyota Production System, are relevant if they are well executed and involve the employees who actually do the work (Plsek, 2014). Open sociotechnical systems approaches to problem identification and solution as evolved by the Tavistock Clinic have provided much more helpful ideas than standardized methods of measurement, analysis, and problem solving.

Perhaps most relevant of all is what Bushe and Marshak (2015) have identified in the last decade as "dialogic organization development," as contrasted with "diagnostic organization development," in highlighting what

leadership theorists like Heifetz (1994) also emphasize—that the complex problems of today are not technical ones that can be solved with specific tools. The best we can do is to find workable responses or what I am calling here "adaptive moves." This will involve new kinds of conversations of a more dialogic, open-ended variety. The emphasis on the concept of "moves" is important in this context because it implies action without necessarily having a plan or solution in mind.

In the end I fall back on much of my learning in running sensitivity training groups in human relations labs for the National Training Labs in Bethel, Maine, where the key operational concept was "spirit of inquiry" and accepting Preface xv that we did not always know where our learning process would take us (Schein and Bennis, 1965). Building a relationship that enables the client to "learn how to learn" was then and becomes now more than ever one of the crucial goals of Humble Consulting.

The spirit of inquiry is best exemplified nowadays in the concept of "dialogue" as propounded by Bill Isaacs (1999) and in Barrett's hugely insightful book Yes to the Mess (2012), which shows us brilliantly how the skills of improvisation as exhibited in the jazz combo provide some of the most important clues as to what helpers and leaders will have to be able to do in the future.

How the Book Is Organized Chapter 1 lays out the basic problem—the complex messy problems of today and the future require a new model of helping, coaching, and consultation. Chapter 2 lays out the new elements or components of the model of Humble Consulting. The following chapters then explain and exemplify each of those components. Chapter 3 explains the concept of a Level Two relationship. Chapter 4 shows how that relationship has to be built from the moment of first contact with the client by adopting a certain attitude that hinges on maximizing curiosity. Chapter 5 explores the whole concept of personalization as key to the new consulting model. Chapter 6 highlights that the consulting is almost always more helpful on the processes that occur between client and consultant as they explore how to make adaptive moves. Chapter 7 then explores the concept of adaptive moves in more detail and in terms of the innovations that are required to make them helpful. The book closes with some conclusions and challenges for the future.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gale Kizer:

In this 21st hundred years, people become competitive in each way. By being competitive at this point, people have do something to make all of them survives, being in the middle of often the crowded place and notice by surrounding. One thing that often many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Yeah, by reading a reserve your ability to survive increase then having chance to endure than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading a book, we give you this specific Humble Consulting: How to Provide Real Help Faster book as beginner and daily reading book. Why, because this book is more than just a book.

Theresa Wilkins:

Hey guys, do you wishes to finds a new book to see? May be the book with the name Humble Consulting: How to Provide Real Help Faster suitable to you? The particular book was written by well known writer in this era. Often the book untitled Humble Consulting: How to Provide Real Help Fasteris the main of several books this everyone read now. That book was inspired a lot of people in the world. When you read this book you will enter the new way of measuring that you ever know ahead of. The author explained their plan in the

simple way, therefore all of people can easily to recognise the core of this guide. This book will give you a lots of information about this world now. So you can see the represented of the world in this book.

Jackie Armstrong:

Is it anyone who having spare time and then spend it whole day through watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something new? This Humble Consulting: How to Provide Real Help Faster can be the respond to, oh how comes? It's a book you know. You are and so out of date, spending your time by reading in this completely new era is common not a geek activity. So what these books have than the others?

Lillian Thornton:

What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got learners? We believe that that problem was given by teacher on their students. Many kinds of hobby, All people has different hobby. So you know that little person like reading or as reading become their hobby. You need to understand that reading is very important and book as to be the factor. Book is important thing to add you knowledge, except your own personal teacher or lecturer. You discover good news or update regarding something by book. A substantial number of sorts of books that can you choose to adopt be your object. One of them are these claims Humble Consulting: How to Provide Real Help Faster.

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