



MCA outlook:

How did we cope without them?

A successful project isn't just about engaging with corporate objectives but with the people at ground level says **Fiona Czerniawska**, director of the think tank at the Management Consultancies Association

“Consultants, it seems, are everywhere: management consultants, tax consultants, security consultants, technology consultants, health consultants, personnel consultants, transport consultants. Even consultants have consultants. Blimey! What's happened to British management? When did it stop taking decisions and start dialling up a help-line? How did companies ever cope without them?” (Daily Telegraph, May 2006)

Why is it that every survey of clients shows high levels of satisfaction with the work consultants do for them, yet the public reputation of consultants seems so low? A recent MCA survey may provide some of the answer.

Responding to our questionnaire, 86% of respondents said they were either partially or completely satisfied with the service they received from consultants. However, we also asked people to tell us what role they'd played in the project. People were asked to classify themselves as decision-makers, influencers, project managers, people who had been seconded into the project to work with the consulting team or “end-users” – people affected by the consulting project in some way but not directly involved in it.

Looking at satisfaction levels from this point of view revealed that those who decide to use consultants are much more likely – in fact, four times as likely – to be satisfied as people who were seconded from elsewhere in the client organisation to work on a project.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, decision-makers tend to view consulting projects in a positive light because that validates their decision to use consultants; it may also be that they are in a better position to see the overall benefits. Perhaps people seconded into projects from elsewhere in a client organisation and end-users feel put-upon; maybe they resent the consultants' presence. Perhaps this dichotomy is inevitable.

So should we be worried about it? Yes, because it is the level of engagement among



people who work with the consultants which determines success. Every manager has their own view on how you best manage consultants. Most will tell you it is a

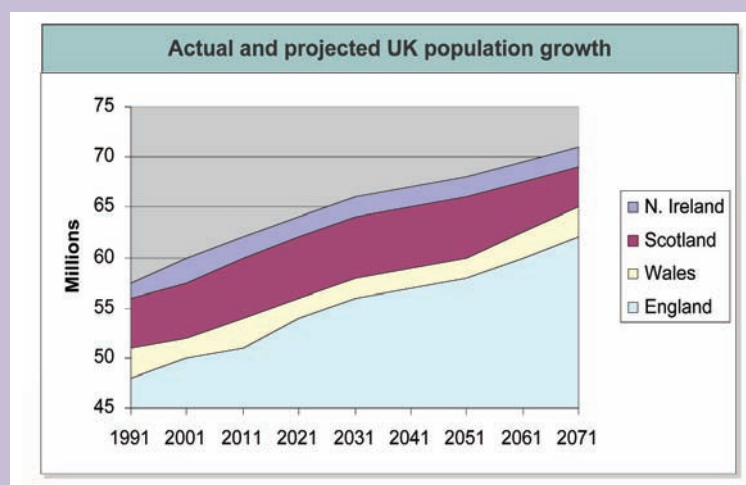
combination of credibility on the part of the consultants, clarity of objectives, and good communication. These aspects are undoubtedly important but improving the way in which junior and middle-ranking staff work with consultants is just as important to success.

Joint working and not imposing a rigid methodology are important to people who work side by side with consultants, but the most important factor in making the relationship work at this very personal level is the extent to which the people involved from the client side gain something from the experience. After all, why should they put up with the disruption of having consultants in if they don't benefit?

That no one gets out of bed on a Monday morning to improve their employer's share-price is a truism of modern management, so why should we expect the people involved in consulting projects to think any differently? CR

Vital statistics:

UK population to rise by seven million by 2031



Source: 2004 – based national population projections, Government Actuary's Department