

**BOOK REVIEW**

***MANAGEMENT CONSULTING:  
A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE INDUSTRY***

**Sugata Biswas and Daryl Twitchell**  
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1999 (\$34.95)

Reviewed by John Quay

*Management Consulting: A Complete Guide to the Industry* is a very useful compilation for students considering consulting careers. It contains an overview of the industry (drawing largely on the Kennedy Information Research Group); some thoughts about the nature of consulting work and lifestyle; 71 pages contributed by consultants from firms in the private, public and nonprofit sectors; advice on planning your consulting career, writing resumes, getting through the screening process and negotiating optimum compensation agreements; and finally some very useful appendices including 59 pages of "cases" used by firms to test applicants' problem solving abilities, and 15 "frameworks" for handling these cases - e.g., using Porter's five forces industry analysis, BCG's growth-share matrix, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), etc.

Sprinkled throughout the book are lots of good tips and ideas. For example, "consultants need to differentiate between what clients are asking for and what they truly need." Or, "certain people are just not built for the work and lifestyle of a consultant. Only those that can thrive under the pressure of hard work, can perform multiple tasks simultaneously, can cope with ambiguity and uncertainty, and can remain calm and collected when stressed or tired will be able to maintain a positive perspective on consulting and stick with it." And, in an interview situation even simple questions "are actually invitations for you to provide a richer, more impressive description of your skills and abilities." This advice is followed by a list of commonly asked questions to practice on, such as, "What are your three greatest achievements?" and, "How would you describe your ideal job?" For good measure, the authors also include a sample interviewer's evaluation form showing the performance factors, traits and skills on which they rate applicants. In short, the book offers students the full array of "to dos" when approaching firms for a consulting position. Even the appendices cover a broad spectrum of cases ranging from brain teasers (why are manhole covers round?) to pricing (how is the retail price of a bottle of red wine determined?).

As a former recruiter of consultants, I have a few suggestions. The book could be improved by some examples of successful letters and resumes. The authors give general advice (e.g., don't make it too long or too short) but annotated examples would be more helpful. Also, in connection with negotiating a better compensation package, they provide charts and numbers

for calculating the applicant's best deal, but offer no examples of letters or discussions showing how to conduct these negotiations without alienating the offeror or blowing the opportunity.

Finally, this book is about "big consulting." The contributors—a plurality from Harvard—are with big firms. Their presentations are puff pieces for their practices. Engagements are usually several hundred thousand to several million dollars in size. Consultants work in teams on assigned pieces of the project. And while some consultants will rise to the top to become multi-millionaires, many won't. Instead they will find the life bureaucratic, highly political and very pressured. Fortunately, there are many small firms and sole proprietorships which still offer some flavor of the early days where individual consultants developed creative and collaborative relationships with client CEOs. For their clients, these smaller firms can do reasonably well with jobs under \$50,000 or \$100,000—engagements which most big firms don't bother with.

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