

## Why use a management consultant?

A manager will normally consider using a management consultant when faced with a complex or specialist problem. Typical examples include:

- A significant changes needs to be managed;
- There is pressure to deliver results in a short timeframe;
- The organisation is under-performing and the reasons are unclear;
- There are known performance problems but the solutions are unclear;
- Management need fresh ideas;
- Specific knowledge or skills are lacking in the organisation;
- Management cannot agree and need an independent opinion;
- An initiative has not achieved expected results and evaluation is sought;
- A temporary gap in capability needs to be filled;
- To initiate or manage a business project or programme;
- To prepare a business case;
- To manage a specialist procurement process;
- To advise on organisational design or development.

Organisations usually engage management consultants to fulfil a need that is outside the normal operations of the business. One exception is when a consultant fills a gap in a management team for a specific vacancy period. This may be a “business as usual” role or it may occur during a period of transition. It may make sense to appoint a change manager on a fixed term if the skill set required for the transition is not required permanently. There can also be benefits in engaging a consultant to fill a role temporarily to obtain an objective assessment of the scale and challenges of the position. A consultant with no intention of applying for the position has no reason to make a job seem bigger than it is. An independent assessment can bring a clearer perspective.

It is valid to use professional change managers rather than inexperienced staff. A fear may exist that use of management consultants will prevent existing staff from “stepping up to the mark”. Managers may also worry that information will be captured by the consultants rather than the organisation. These risks are real. Both clients and consultants have a responsibility to manage them. A consultant’s intervention in an organisation should leave it stronger and more self-sufficient than before. The consulting brief needs to specify minimum staff and stakeholder involvement and the documentation to be left behind. A consultant should always identify potential internal champions of change to management prior to disengagement – letting management know who can “step up”. The client needs to take responsibility for communicating the role of the consultant/s to people in the organisation. The consultant can reinforce that message but it the initial message needs to come from within the organisation. Internal knowledge is essential. Good consultants will listen to your staff and can help them develop professionally.