

# Your Next -- and Best -- Year as a Consultant

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## A. A Map of Your Practice

This is a macro process map for hypothetical consulting business; I offered it back then as a summary of key work activities that make up a consulting practice.

### 1. Defining Your Practice

Balancing

- Intention
- Capability
- Market Acceptance

### 2. Finding Clients

- Represent the richness and uniqueness of your offering,
- Efficiently.
- Remaining authentic.

### 3. Securing the Work

- Create enough structure to get traction
- Leave enough openness to let the engagement evolve

### 4. Delivering the Service

- Delivering perceived value within the promised contract
- Give voice to collective (and often unpopular) wisdom.

### 5. Supporting the Effort

- Ensuring service delivery does not stumble
- Keeping the evolving contract visible and consensual

## B. The Vision of Your Practice: Vendor or Consultant

### 1. The distinction

#### a. Vendor

- (1) Delivers a well-developed, relatively constant product
- (2) Hired when needs are known
- (3) Real value is the intervention
- (4) Intervention is predictable and managed
- (5) The practitioner and client have a transaction
- (6) Pricing is usually competitive and fixed

#### b. Consultant

- (1) Uses a variable process to develop a novel intervention
- (2) Hired when the need is unclear but still urgent
- (3) Real value is in the diagnosis
- (4) Intervention is emergent and orchestrated
- (5) The practitioner and client create a relationship
- (6) Pricing is open and compared to cost of symptoms

### 2. The issues

#### a. Avoid being a vendor when the real need is for a consultant.

- (1) Time management problems could signal a skill deficit, or...
  - (a) a chaotic work processes needing comprehensive redesign,
  - (b) jumbled product offering that turns "customer service" into a constant scramble,
  - (c) a poor corporate strategy which turns client acquisition into a Herculean task,
  - (d) poor management practices that leave everyone essentially running their own business,
  - (e) a bonus structure that contradicts the stated strategic objectives,
  - (f) a culture that honors the "cowboy project manager" despite high need for alignment and coordination.

#### b. Avoid being a consultant when the real need is for a vendor.

A good consulting strategy is to do what's obviously needed and then see why it didn't work.

- (1) Contracting with a consultant is sometimes a strategy for avoiding an obvious need.
  - (a) Sometimes you just need to train people how to manage projects correctly.
  - (b) Sometimes you need to clear away some obvious issues to see what's left (such as cultural differences, or managing across generations)
  - (c) Sometimes the senior executive simply needs to fire someone!
- c. Be clear..
  - (1) ..about the role you want to play in a particular engagement.
  - (2) ..about which role you have in the eyes of your client.
- d. The contracting and planning phases of the work may pull you toward being a vendor.
  - (1) The client wants you to be a consultant (open scope and budget),
  - (2) ..but the contracting agent wants a breakdown of hours per phase with a NTE budget estimate.
- e. In the same engagement, your role may shift from consultant to vendor and back.

### **C. The Scope of Your Practice: The Map of OD**

## D. Patterns of Growth

1. **What's your entry point into the field? What is your initial offering?**
  - a. Management 101
  - b. Better Meeting Skills
  - c. Creativity for the Dull and Uninspired
  - d. Managing Your Warehouse More Efficiently
  - e. More Effective Public Speaking
2. **What areas of practice can you bridge to with minimal effort?**
  - a. Moving from work groups to project teams
  - b. Jumping from high-tech to working with foundations.
3. **What areas of practice can you bridge to through partnering or professional alliances?**
  - a. Jumping from problem solving to process improvement (lite)
  - b. Moving from for-profit firms to larger not-for-profit organizations
  - c. Jumping to work in the biotech field after several years working in high-tech manufacturing.
4. **What areas of practice can you bridge to through training or education?**
  - a. Learning Six Sigma procedures and tools
  - b. Learning project management principles
  - c. Learning FDA or OSHA regulatory requirements.
5. **What areas of practice are you always going to refer to others?**
6. **Learn to learn from your engagement**
  - a. Use survey as a preamble to a course
    - (1) Then propose giving an expanded version of that survey to the whole company
  - b. Teach a course on project management only to full project teams
    - (1) Follow up a course with more targeted coaching
  - c. Use facilitation skills to run focus groups as a strategy for organizational assessment
  - d. Teach to a difference audience;
    - (1) Move from Proj Mgmt with high-tech to PM in health care.
  - e. Look for complementary partnerships

(1) Michael Singh example

f. Look for opportunities to "step up" or "step sideways"

## E. Areas for Growth

## F. The Consultant's Talent for Talk

### 1. Our most powerful tool is conversation, in all its variety.

a. We are often drawn to speaking as an expert.

(1) Finding that 7-second elevator pitch seduces us into focusing on our offering.

(2) When we try to "productize our practice" we essentially package our expertise.

(3) Our clients pull for solutions and results, and we fall to the temptation to offer answers and strategies.

b. We end up offering solutions without ever having explored the problem.

(1) If the relationship and the timing are not just right, we risk being irrelevant, even arrogant.

### 2. Seeding Insight

### 3. Given the pressure to prove the ROI of our effort, to "productize" our work, we sometimes abandon what is perhaps the unique value of organizational development consulting:

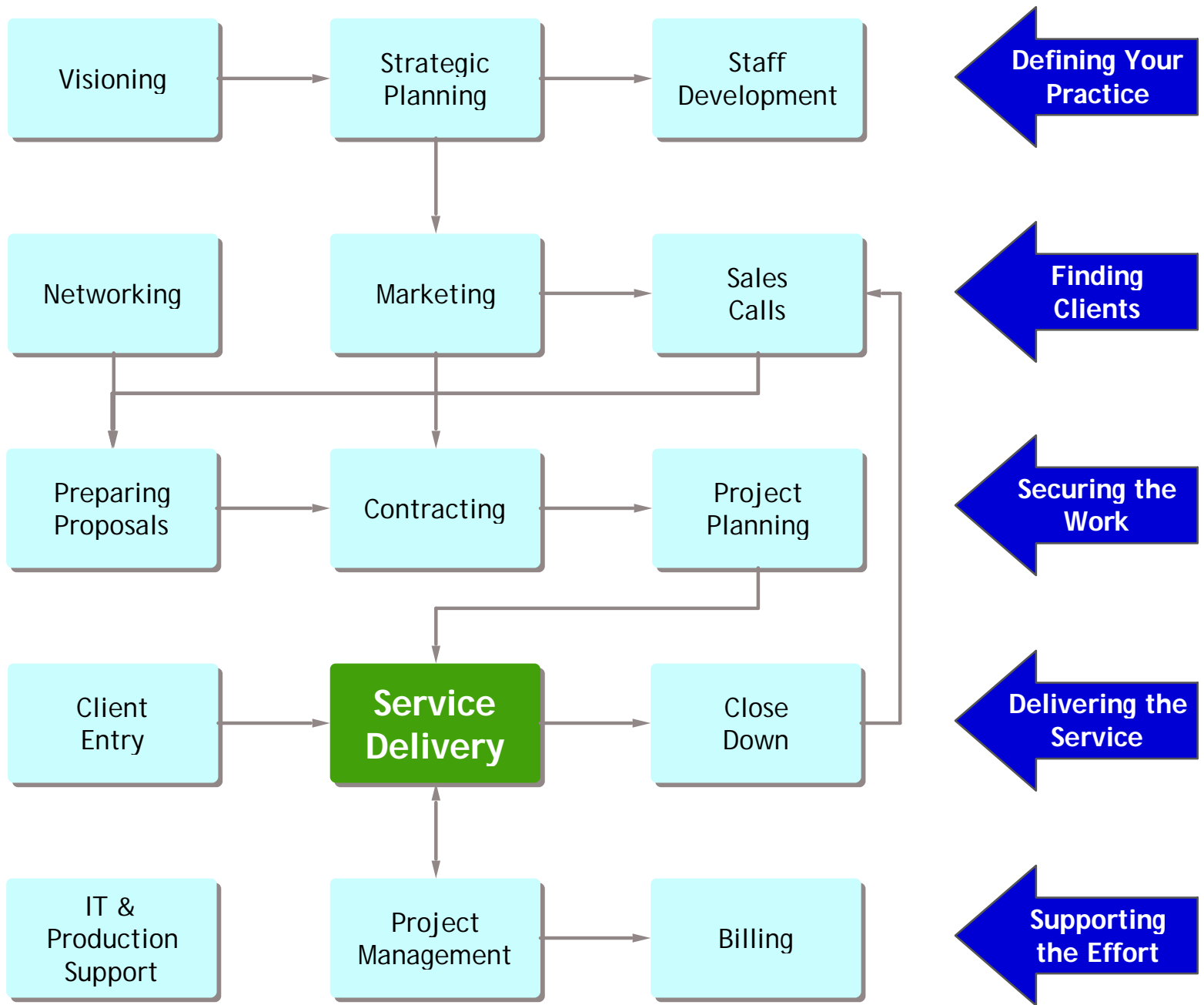
a. To bring fresh eyes to the concerns of our clients

b. To help clients understand their own role in unconsciously creating their own reality, even when they deeply prefer something different.

c. To help the client develop fresh eyes of their own.

# A Macro Map for Consulting

Return or Next



And what about the range of services?

## Vendor

- Delivers a well-developed, relatively constant product
- Hired when needs are known
- Value is in the intervention
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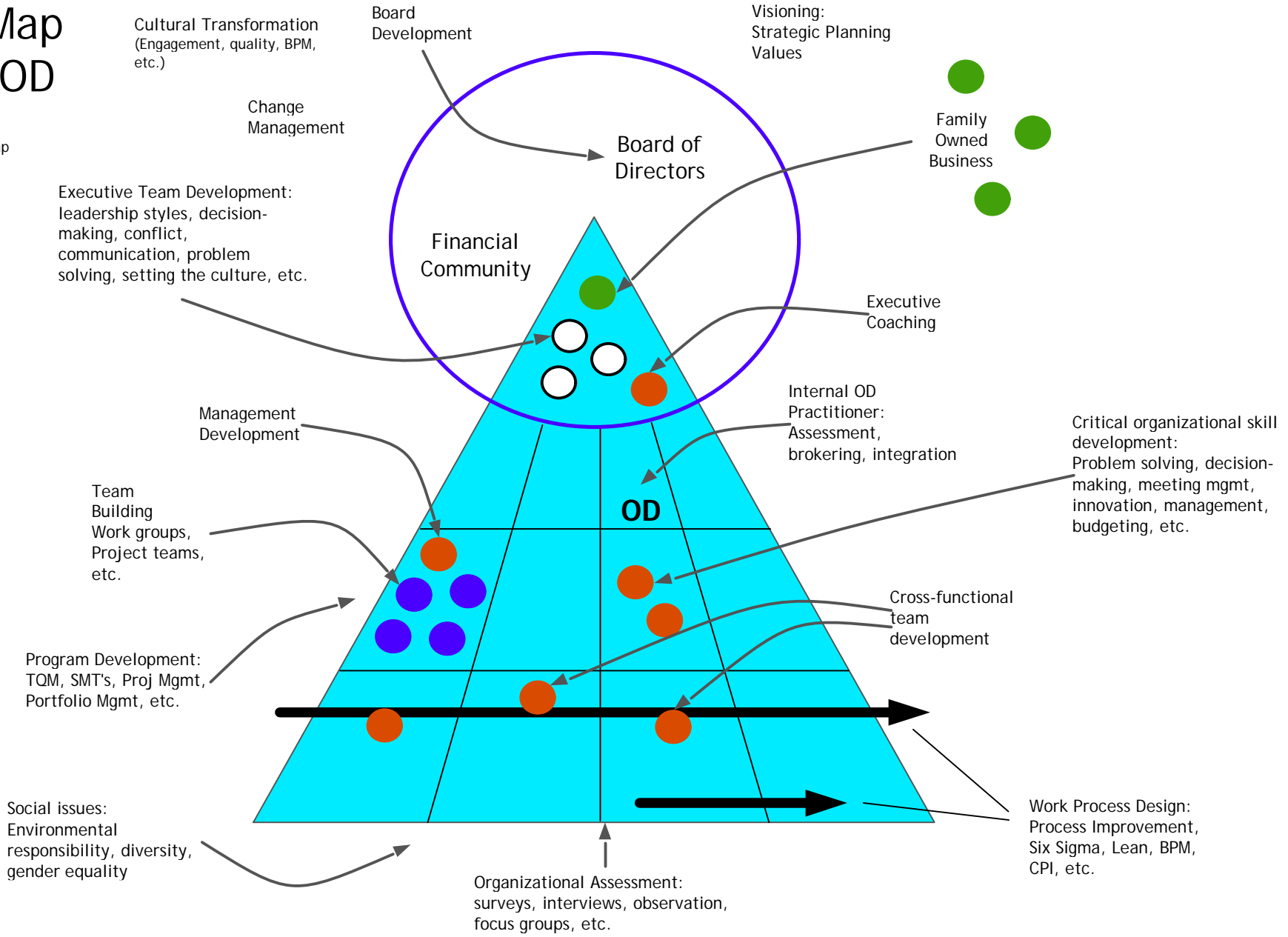
## Consultant

- Use a variable process to develop a novel intervention
- Hired when the need is unclear but urgent
- Value is in the diagnosis
- Intervention is emergent and orchestrated
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Return or Map  
or Next

# A Map of OD

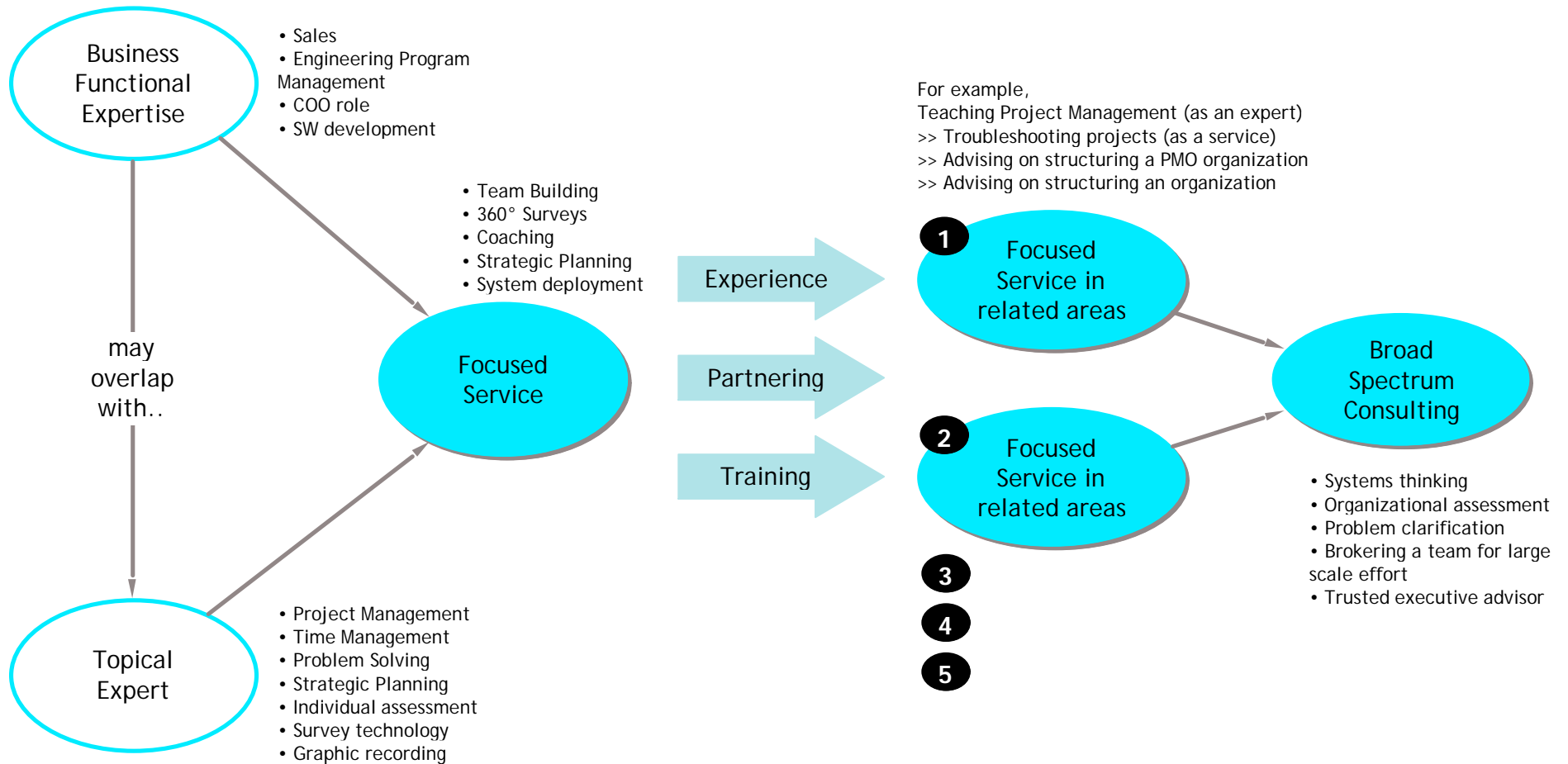
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JLT's map

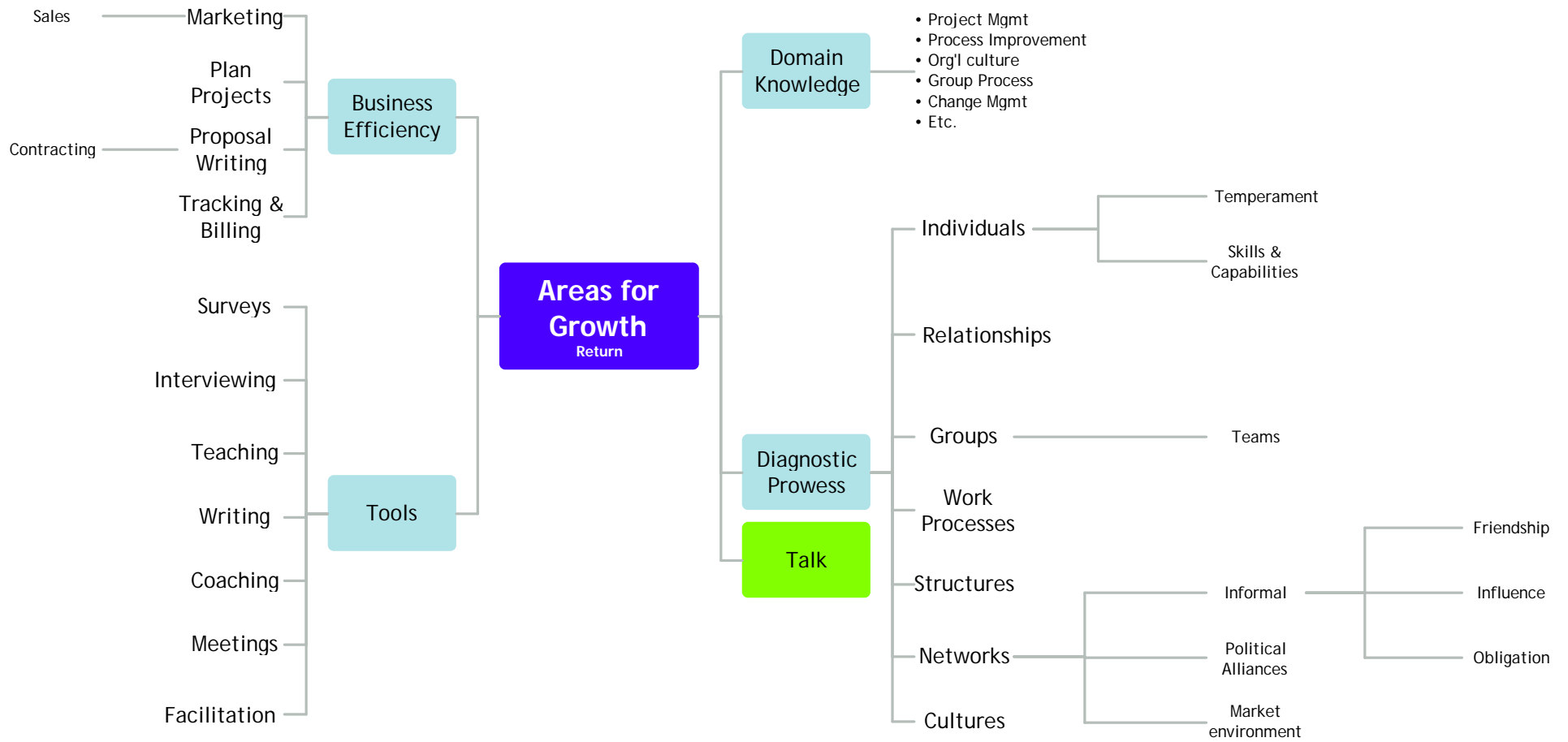




# Patterns of Growth

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# Talk Types

Return or Top2

Goal

Definition /  
Challenge

Rhythm

Relationship

Values

Process

## Creating Insight

Help the client see what they cannot ... and see their role in creating their distress

Client's understanding *is* the problem ... and the opportunity

Speak to next step in client's awareness rather than next step in the problem

Both intimate and distant; both "on their side" and neutral

Patience, Client-focused, Curious

Focus on listening; reflecting back client's understanding; follow the energy

Reframe the client's model of the world

Problem is emergent; looking for client's new understanding

Subordinate your own opinion

Provides guideposts, reconnaissance, but cannot make the journey

Create a safe container for ambiguity, complexity, and anxiety

Listen for underlying meaning; unspoken assumptions; unseen options

## Expert Advice

Transfer of information and advice

Problem is clear ... and contained

Clients' ability to understand

Client accepts you as an expert (Teacher, Auditor); sees themselves as NOT

Valid expertise, fair exchange

Expert sets the agenda; questions asked; questions answered

## Professional Problem Solving

Find a solution to a shared problem

Leverage expertise and experience

Divergent at start, but convergent at the end

Situational; typically group of equals; mild authority figure

Thorough, Creative, Empirical

Open discussion; possibly a template for the work

## Giving Direction

Transmission and acceptance of assignments

Delegation of assignments and responsibilities

Primarily one-way; only seeking acknowledgement coming back

Contextual; clear hierarchy

Efficiency, Respect, Justice, Relevance

Give the target the information they need

## Friends Talking

Reinforce the friendship; fill in the gaps in time

Balancing 'me' and 'we', task and social

Back and forth; emergent focus

Equals; confounded by other unequal relationships

Connection, Safety, Feeling heard, Support, Fairness

Process more important than content