

HOW TO SUCCEED AS AN ENGINEERING CONSULTANT LEADER

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Abstract

Traditionally, being a successful engineering consultant meant having great analytical skills and being a subject matter expert in your field. In today's fast-changing economy and with globalization, a leader in engineering consulting means possessing excellent leadership qualities, advanced technical skills, being aware of your competition, and making services cost-effective for your clients and your own company. A number of factors are responsible for providing outstanding service to clients through developing a unique culture, customer service, professional integrity, and establishing the expert reputation. Prospect of a consultant within projects can vary from pure technical roles to coordinating and managing different roles, and combinations of these roles along with type, size, and scope of the project makes it even more perplex. This article discusses key points to succeed as an engineering consultant leader.

Keywords:

Engineering;
Consultant;
Leader;
SWOT Analysis;
Client.

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Introduction

Engineering consultants should possess the ability to recognize clients' problem areas, empathize with their plan, and recommend feasible solutions. A successful pathway to engineering consultant leadership takes practice, experience, interacting with diverse people, diligence, and much more. However, there are certain key aspects which require more attention to succeed as an engineering consultant leader, which are discussed in this article.

Key points to Succeed as an Engineering Consultant Leader

1) Leadership

Leadership refers to "the ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve organizational goals. [1]"

Leadership Formula

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- L = Leadership Effectiveness
- $L = f(l, gm, s)$

Where, (l) -Leadership Elements Leader,(gm) -Group Members, (s) -Context of the Situation [2]

When we talk about leadership, we have to consider all the factors pertaining to - the leader, group members, and array of influences in the situation. Leadership is a complicated subject and is a key element to be an engineering consultant leader.

Characteristics/Traits of Leaders –

This is best split into two categories and shown in Figure 1 [1]:

- a) General Personality Traits – based on how a person behaves at work and in their personal life.
- b) Task-related Personality Traits – based on task accomplishments.



Figure 1 Characteristics of Leaders (Source: adapted from Dubrin A.J., Leadership: Research Findings, Practice, and Skills, 2012)

Applying these characteristics to create a vision to execute consulting projects is challenging as environment, project, and the people you work with are constantly changing. Therefore, great leaders should do exceedingly well in adapting to different tasks and situations and with different mixes of people around them. Overall, a combination of these traits is the foundation to a pathway of success in engineering consulting.

2) Technical

Learn to delegate, find time to learn and improve your skills, spend one-on-one time with team members, speak business language when needed, understand delivery and risk. Every company is different and every role is unique, however, core qualities to drive your project through successful completion would require knowledge, speed, and awareness. Technical leadership is earned and as a technical leader you should be able to do the following:

- Provide useful insight to make intelligent, logical, and defensible decisions.
- Explain to your team members any part of the project or at least refer them to someone who can.
- Be responsive and proactive in making quick and thoughtful decisions. There is always a deadline irrespective of dollar value, big/small, or despite the potential consequences of the project. It is key to involve well-informed people in their field and bringing them together to make that decision quicker.

- Have a mental blue print of the project available to you at all times, which will help you in potential roadblocks.

3) Offering something unique and extra

Everybody is aware of qualities pertaining to - professionalism, time management, judgment, knowledge, communication skills and much more. Everybody is training or already has these qualities - so what separates you? Why should people come to you and trust you? One should always go that extra mile to distinguish themselves from the rest. People should come to you because your expertise and desire to provide the best service.

4) Strong point of view but flexible

Companies hire engineering consultants for their ideas, knowledge, skills, and opinions. Leaders in engineering consulting must be able to demonstrate this by providing firm recommendations, defending, and presenting those recommendations competently so that people act on them and return for more recommendations [3]. Additionally, one should be flexible enough to accommodate and consider ideas other than their own. One should always keep an open mind to potentially better solutions.

5) Marketing your services

Persistency and knowledge of your client base is the key to marketing your services. Communicate with your existing and or potential clients to understand their needs. This will allow you to better market your services. Remember that our credibility and reputation should always speak for itself. Interacting with new clients with no brand name can be a most challenging obstacle for starters, but everyone must start somewhere.

6) SWOT Analysis

A SWOT is categorized into Internal and External categories, and defined as [4]:

Internal (Strengths and Weaknesses) -Based on customer feedback, employee information (via employee survey) etc. The main goal is to look for capabilities, resources, and processes.

External (Opportunities and Threats) - Based on looking for secondary data that reveals something about the environment (mortgage rate, interest rates etc.), industry data, competitive data, customer data etc.

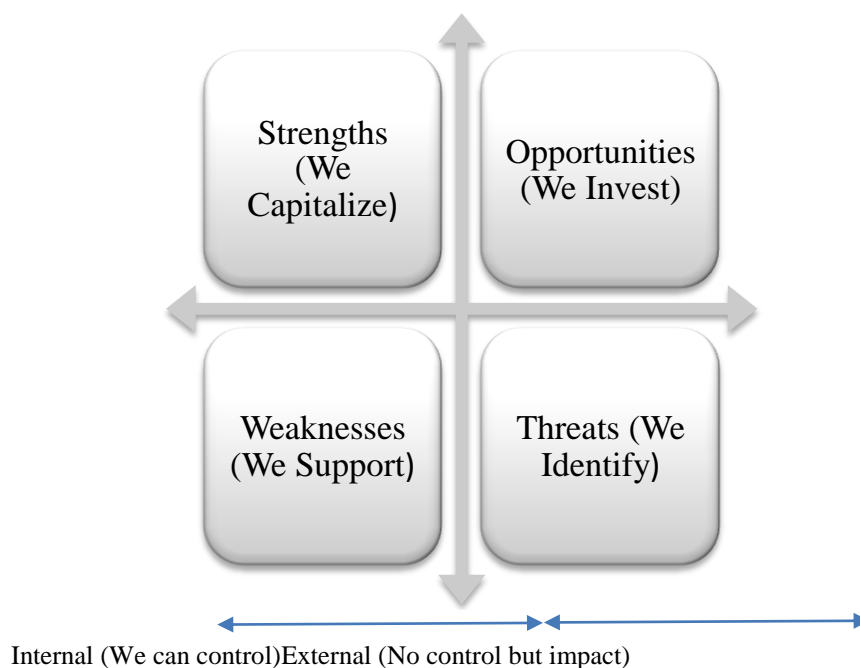


Figure 2 SWOT Analysis(adapted from various sources)

Analyzing SWOT will help company produce ideas, which can then be prioritized into goals and action items. The most important aspect is to actually implement the results of the SWOT analysis.

How to Generate Ideas from SWOT –

- Taking a company's strengths and matching them with opportunities.
- Matching-up weakness with strengths.
- Strengths that can offset weaknesses.
- The company has strengths that will help them capitalize on opportunities or investment and support strategic planning.
- Analyzing and taking action on opportunities that offset threats.

Engineering consultant leaders should base the frequency of performing a SWOT analysis in correspondence with changing market conditions within their industry. Furthermore, it is important to note that this tool is commonly used by salespeople to boost their sales, but that is not its only use. It is highly recommended that technical leaders take advantage of this powerful tool to gain a better understanding of how they can optimize their strengths and work persistently on being an industry leader.

Conclusion

The blending of leadership, technical abilities, vision, marketing, and SWOT analysis is a great mix of qualities needed to excel in and become a leader in engineering consulting. It takes experience and persistent learning to acquire these skill sets. Additionally, continuous improvement is paramount in an ongoing effort to improve yourself. Your overall focus should be to have a long-term mind-set so that opportunities for progression can be highlighted, measured, and evaluated.

References

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