



articles

A Consulting Diaspora? Enterprising Selves as Agents of Enterprise

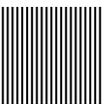
Andrew Sturdy

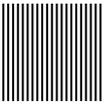
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Abstract. *While the concept of enterprise identity has been extensively discussed, the active role of individuals in promoting enterprise is less understood. This article presents enterprising selves not simply as a self-disciplinary outcome of power, but as agential, whereby actors support regimes of enterprise, either actively or symbolically. In particular, it explores a neglected group—former management consultants working as change agents within organizations. This ‘consulting diaspora’ is appointed on the basis of the prestige of their former occupation, as well as their enthusiasm for, and skills in, change management. They also embody enterprise through their ‘personal brand’ in the labour market and an anti-bureaucratic, pro-change orientation. However, these characteristics, combined with the perishability of their status, limit the ability of these actors to embed enterprise. Rather, it is through the loss of their novel, enterprising appearance—‘going native’—that change is reinforced. Thus, paradoxically, their enterprising nature runs counter to the adoption of techniques of enterprise. This has implications for our understanding of enterprise as organizational change, as well as the promotion of management ideas more generally. **Keywords.** enterprise; management consultants; management idea promotion; organizational change*

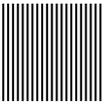




The notion of enterprise culture came to prominence in the UK in the 1990s in response to neo-liberal economic change and theoretical developments challenging the traditional separation of culture and economy (e.g. Keat and Abercrombie, 1991; Rose, 1990). Enterprise was seen as spanning economic, political, organizational and individual levels, with some presenting it as a totalizing discourse (c.f. Fournier and Grey, 1999). At its heart were the 'free' market and the 'sovereign' customer, familiar notions which were seen as central to all domains of social relations and contrasted with traditions of bureaucracy and stasis (du Gay, 2005). While research on enterprise culture can be seen as a largely UK phenomenon, enterprise as a discourse and set of practices is evident more widely and is of continued significance as its emergent characteristics have become more established. Indeed, developments such as portfolio and contract working, internal markets, outsourcing, de-layering and, in particular, the organizational change imperative, continue to dominate organizational research both in the UK and elsewhere (e.g. Barley and Kunda, 2004; Beer and Nohria, 2000).

A particular focus of research has been on how enterprise, as a set of ideas, practices and/or discourses has come to shape identities as self-disciplinary and 'enterprising' (e.g. du Gay and Salaman, 1992). Recently, attention has focussed on how actors adapt enterprise discourse as more active or ambivalent agents (e.g. Storey et al., 2005). However, actors continue to be seen as *recipients* of the discourse, rather than active promoters of it. Given that the discourse attributes both a positive value and moral imperative to being 'enterprising' (du Gay, 1996), it is reasonable to suggest that enterprising actors promote enterprise both actively and symbolically, by the example of their actions. The promotion of enterprise has been addressed indirectly elsewhere, in the literature on management ideas. Here, various actors in the 'management knowledge industry' such as gurus, the media and business schools are explored in terms of adoption, translation and resistance (Sturdy, 2004). But such actors are not necessarily enterprising in their actions or orientations. By contrast, we are concerned with a group who are enterprising in two senses—as promoters of enterprise, but also in their actions. We draw on research of former management consultants now working in business organizations, and examine the experiences of this 'consulting diaspora' in their role of promoting change and other enterprising practices. In doing so, we extend an understanding of the agential nature of enterprising selves, as well as the promotion of enterprise in the form of organizational change.

The article is organized as follows. Firstly, we explore the literature on enterprising selves and promotion of enterprise, before introducing the notion of a 'consulting diaspora'. After discussion of our research methods, we outline the dual characteristics of enterprising selves including orientations to skills, work effort and job mobility, and the promotion of enterprise in terms of constant change and challenges to bureaucracy. We then examine individuals' career experiences and reveal a paradoxical



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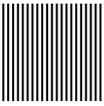
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relationship between being enterprising and promoting enterprise within organizations. We conclude with a discussion of our analysis in relation to enterprise, management ideas and embedding organizational change.

Living and Promoting Enterprise—The Two Faces of Enterprising Actors

Much of the literature on enterprising selves examines managerial processes through which employee subjectivity is regulated (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Here, ‘the intent is to reconstitute workers as more adaptable, flexible and willing to move between activities and assignments and to take responsibility for their own actions and their successes and failures’ (Storey et al., 2005: 1036). In addition, individuals are expected to demonstrate qualities such as high work effort, risk taking, commercial awareness, and a ‘passion’ for organizational change and the customer. Many of these qualities are familiar employer expectations. However, what is distinctive about enterprise is that actors are seen to be enterprising in making themselves enterprising—‘becoming, in effect a microcosmic business; developing a strategy, marketing herself, developing “products”, establishing herself as a brand, understanding the market (for herself) and so on’ (Storey et al., 2005). Individuals are expected to work the labour market and take responsibility for their own development, through formal learning and job change (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; du Gay et al., 1996; Kunda and Ailon-Souday, 2005). Such a development is celebrated in the idea of the USA as a ‘free agent nation’ (Pink, 2001), populated by freelancers and contract workers who relentlessly promote the ‘brand called you!’ (Peters, 1997). However, it also applies to employees working in ‘anti-bureaucratic’ project-based organizations (c.f. Hodgson, 2004), where the next role has to be bid for in an internal market of customers, and where change is embraced and bureaucracy and stasis pathologized (Abrahamson, 2004; Sturdy and Grey, 2003).

While such images are common, others suggest a more complex picture. For example, there is considerable debate over the extent to which organizations have adopted an enterprise model (see Webb, 2004; c.f. Sennett, 1998), the coherence of enterprise discourse (Fournier and Grey, 1999), and its relationship with other discourses such as entrepreneurship and bureaucracy (du Gay, 2004; Jones and Spicer, 2005). Likewise, several studies have pointed to the different ways in which actors interpret, adapt and resist enterprise (Sennett, 1998). For example, du Gay documents how employees negotiate prescribed identities resulting in ambivalent attitudes (1996: 117). He cites a group of retail managers who resented the work intensification associated with ‘enterprise’ initiatives, but valued its new sense of ownership—‘this is *my* stock in *my* shop’ (du Gay, 1996: 161). Similarly, Fenwick (2002) describes a transformed type of enterprise which retains some familiar elements such as risk taking, but incorporates notions of ethical integrity and quality of life (c.f. Barley and Kunda, 2004). However, while these accounts reveal a more heterogeneous view



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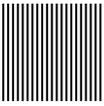
of enterprising selves, actors continue to be seen as recipients of the discourse or practices of enterprise, even if they are also creative and complex. What has been neglected are those who have not only been constituted as enterprising selves, but who act, more or less consciously, to promote enterprise in its varied forms. The agents of enterprise tend to be seen as either anonymous actors, monolithic managers or depersonalized talk and texts. But enterprising selves are a condition as well as consequence of enterprise.

As the extensive literature on management knowledge and learning demonstrates, the promotion of management ideas is not simply achieved through direct advocacy and rhetoric. Rather, it is achieved, often indirectly, through practice—learning through doing and by example (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This is especially relevant in contexts where the practices are highly valued. In the case of enterprise, for example, marketing oneself, embracing change and prioritizing the customer are in some contexts presented as moral or normative imperatives (Semler, 2004). Thus, enterprise can be promoted through a form of normative isomorphism at the level of the individual. While literature on the promotion of management ideas outlines a range of actors including business schools, management consultants and gurus, the business media and professional bodies (e.g. Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall, 2002), neglected in these accounts are agents who promote management ideas less explicitly such as individual managers moving between (and within) organizations. For example, while management consultants are often identified as key agents in the promotion of organizational change given their legitimacy as outside ‘experts’, this underestimates the ‘burden’ they face as outsiders bringing new and challenging ideas to organizations (Kipping and Armbrüster, 2002). This may be contrasted with the situation of managers acting as *internal* consultants who are typically less alien to their ‘customers’ when presenting new ideas, but lack the cachet of external consultants. Assuming appropriate political backing however, the staff status of internal consultants can make them better placed than externals to embed organizational change (e.g. Lacey, 1995).

The group that is the focus of this study, recently appointed former external consultants acting as internal change agents, has the potential to overcome the limitations of both external and internal consultants. They can be seen as hybrids, *both* insiders and outsiders (c.f. Merton, 1972). As we shall see, former external consultants working within organizations exemplify this dual form of enterprise promotion.

A Consulting Diaspora

Despite the rapid growth of management consulting, little research has focussed on consultants as participants in the managerial labour market. For instance, the ‘up or out’ promotion policies of large consulting firms have assisted a process of personnel diffusion in which former consultants



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are seeded into client organizations. This has created powerful 'alumni' networks, which provide a ready source of future business for consulting firms (O'Shea and Madigan, 1997). While some have suggested former consultants contribute to an increasingly consultant-savvy clientele (Czerniawska and May, 2004), these claims ignore the potential of ex-consultants to act as promoters of management knowledge and organizational change in their own right.

The movement of former consultants into management has been a long-term phenomenon linked to cyclical changes in the consulting industry. A recent example occurred following the 'tech bust' in 2000. Declining business confidence resulted in a worldwide contraction in consulting expenditure, resulting in staff and salary cuts (Kennedy Information, 2004). With many consultants looking for more secure and (work-life) balanced alternatives, increasing numbers of former consultants moved into mainstream business organizations (e.g. Boyd and Lee, 2004). This exodus of consultants to business extended the traditional career interaction between consulting and management, involving the increased flow of consultants into managerial careers and the potential promotion of consulting practice within organizations.

We suggest the exodus of former consultants can be interpreted metaphorically as a 'diaspora'. Derived from the ancient Greek (meaning 'the sowing of seeds'), 'diaspora' refers to the forceful or induced removal of people from their homeland to other parts of the world resulting in the diffusion of distinctive cultures (Braziel and Mannur, 2003). While originally limited to specific religious and ethnic groups, in recent years, the term 'diaspora' has been applied to communities defined by political, regional and sexual identities. The broader connotations of diaspora are evident in the focus not only on the diffusion of people and groups, but also to their identities, and the practices and ideas that they bring with them (e.g. Kirby, 2004). Hence, the notion of diaspora communities as 'enterprising' has addressed not only the ability of these groups to prosper in their new settings, through business acumen and entrepreneurial activity, but also how this enterprising nature is promoted amongst local populations (Kapur, 2001).

Methodology

Data for this study was derived from interviews, company documents, and secondary sources on consultancy lifestyles and career paths. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 respondents who had left management consulting to work in a range of Australian businesses. While the careers of management consultants often involve self-employment, we were specifically interested in former consultants who were working in large enterprises. Given the difficulty of identifying a group of 'former consultants', respondents were gathered through contacts within the consulting industry and major corporations. As outlined in

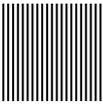


Table 1. Summary of former consultant interviewees

Pseudonym	Age	Career background	Current role and organization	Current job tenure (yrs)	Number of jobs during career
Adam	35–40	Training manager banking. HR consultancy 3 years	OD Manager; multinational pharmaceutical company	4–5	6
Angela	30–35	Global consultancy; 6 years change management	L&D internal consultant; resources company	< 1	5
Barry	40–45	Global consultancy; 5 years organizational change	OD manager; resources company	1–2	9
Betty	30–35	Global consultancy; 6 years IT implementation	Business improvement consultant; equipment hire company	1–2	4
Bronwyn	30–35	Global consultancy; 3 years change management	Change consultant; retail bank	< 1	4
Cherie	40–45	14 years training consultancy	L&D manager; university	< 1	4
Catherine	40–45	5 years business consulting; 3 years HR consultancy	HR manager; engineering company	< 1	7
Daniel	35–40	Training manager banking, 3 years global HR consultancy	L&D manager; investment bank	6–7	4
Garry	40–45	12 years production management ; 2 years global IT consulting	Supply chain manager; manufacturer	< 1	5
Hannah	30–35	3 years global consultancy; HR projects	HR manager; IT company	1–2	3
Ingrid	30–35	Global consultancy; 8 years IT implementation	Change consultant; insurance company	< 1	4

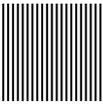


Table 1. (Continued)

Pseudonym	Age	Career background	Current role and organization	Current job tenure (yrs)	Number of jobs during career
Kim	30–35	Global consultancy; 3 years change management	HR consultant; investment bank	1–2	3
Keith	35–40	HR manager retail, 2 years HR consultancy	Employee relations manager; food manufacturer	2–3	6
Lauren	30–35	Global consultancy; 10 years business improvement	Change consultant; insurance company	2–3	3
Leah	30–35	Global recruitment consultancy for 5 years	OD consultant; retailer	< 1	7
Lucinda	30–35	Global consultancy; 5 years organizational change	Change manager; airline	1–2	3
Natalie	30–35	Global and niche consultancies; 5 years performance improvement	L&D manager; law firm	4–5	4
Patrick	40–45	8 years consulting organizational change	HR manager; local government	5–6	5
Quincy	25–30	Global consultancy; 3 years IT implementation	IT consultant; transport company	1–2	2
Ralph	40–45	10 years production management; 7 years global IT consulting	Supply chain manager; food manufacturer	< 1	3
Renata	40–45	3 years organizational change consultancy	OD manager; telecommunications company	4–5	5
Rosemary	50–55	Global consultancy; 10 years IT consulting	Director; executive recruiter	7–8	4
Sophie	25–30	2 years organizational change consultancy	OD manager; engineering consultancy	1–2	5
Susan	35–40	9 years organizational change consulting	Culture change manager; retail bank	4–5	4

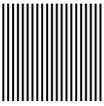


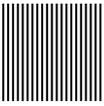
Table 1, respondents had complex job histories and exhibited significant job mobility and ‘zig-zag’ careers across different functions, industries, and in several cases, back and forth between consulting and organizational settings. To further contextualize the activities of respondents, interviews were also conducted with human resource managers—management recruiters—from nine of the respondents’ companies, and a variety of company documentation was collected, including organization charts, policy documents and examples of respondents’ change projects. This was supplemented with secondary material including articles about consultancy lifestyles and career paths, job advertisements and a range of websites and weblogs written by ex-consultants.

In tracing the journey of former consultants into business organizations, we began our interviews by asking respondents to reflect on their career histories before exploring their current jobs, activities and relationships. Interviews lasted between one and two hours and were recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts and documentary evidence provided a rich source of qualitative data, which was coded and analysed using *QSR NVivo* software. Two issues that developed from this analysis were firstly the enterprising nature of respondents’ careers (specifically how interviewees viewed their consulting identity as a valuable labour market commodity), and secondly the role of ex-consultants as agents of enterprise (their activities as change agents and advocates of enterprise within their organizations).

Given the aim of our research was to explore individuals’ transition from consulting into organizational roles, we did not investigate their peers, although the interviews with HR managers in nine of the firms did provide insights into the reasons for employing former consultants as well as perceptions of their organizational impact. As with interview research more generally, it is important to be cautious about treating the data as an exact reflection of the empirical world and practices it describes (Kvale, 1996). However, given our focus on identity and enterprising selves, the chosen method generated considerable insight regarding an important and unexamined group in the domain of management knowledge intermediaries. In the sections that follow we review this data and outline the implications of the consulting diaspora as both enterprising selves and agents in the promotion of enterprise.

Being Enterprising: Moving from Consulting to Organization

Taking charge of one’s learning and development, promoting oneself on the labour market as a distinctive brand and developing a ‘portfolio career’ are cornerstones of an enterprise identity (Storey et al., 2005). For most of our respondents, making the switch from consulting to an organizational role involved such an enterprising ethos based on the belief that their consulting careers had given them marketable skills which made them attractive candidates in the labour market.



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For those who had gone into management consulting straight from university, their tenure as a consultant was viewed as a fast-paced apprenticeship, a managerial 'coming of age' involving an expansion of their professional skills, as well as their personalities and work attitudes. Many characterized their consulting experience as enjoyable, working on high pressure projects in different client settings. As Barry (a pseudonym) noted, '... you get a lot of experience in a short amount of time because you're dealing with multiple projects over a period of time ... it's a good finishing school for an MBA'. In particular, the development of consulting skills in 'project management', 'client management' and 'change management' were seen as important outcomes of a consulting career providing an advantage in the professional labour market. For example, Lauren emphasized how her time in a large consulting firm had developed skills that proved valuable in her later career:

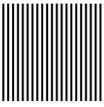
I think there is a consulting mindset, a consulting skills set, that is somebody that can go in, can diagnose problems, can diagnose issues, work with solutions, and work with different people to drive an outcome ... So, it did definitely give me those consulting skills.

Respondents also commented on how their time as management consultants had made them 'sharper' and more commercially oriented, aware of the business imperatives of 'delivering value' to customers and identifying the 'business case'. As Daniel noted:

It gives you a commercial edge because you definitely think in terms of, 'is this adding value? They are paying for me. Is this worth it?'. There is an element of service which is a really good thing to have.

Delivering value was also highlighted in respondents' emphasis on the intense work ethic they had developed as consultants. Many spoke of their focus on completing projects and tasks on time and on budget and how this often entailed long working hours and 'all-nighters'. As Quincy acknowledged of his former consulting colleagues, '... they get the job done. That's why clients hire them. It might cost a lot of money, but they get the job done. They see it through to the end'. Working as a consultant therefore had a powerful influence upon respondents' work practices and identities. Importantly, this consulting ethos was seen as valuable in undertaking the career shift to organization.

However, in keeping with the ambivalent responses to enterprise noted earlier, interviewees were also critical of aspects of consulting work. For instance, younger respondents were critical of the hot-house nature of big firm consulting, particularly the long hours and constant travel, and the impact this had had on their personal lives. Kim talked about how she had 'burnt out at the age of 24' after end to end consulting projects, long hours and constant travel. Others expressed frustration with the repetition of consulting assignments and the need to broaden their skills beyond project-based organizational change. As Sophie outlined, '... we were just getting the same work constantly ... so it's not really exciting when you're



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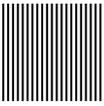
doing that for project after project after project'. In a different vein, Garry expressed the frustration of failing to see his interventions through to completion; 'I wanted to be involved in the end to end improvement in an organization'. Indeed, many respondents expressed the need to expand their operational and functional expertise by moving into a corporate setting. As Susan noted of her desire to move from consulting to organization, 'I thought it would sharpen my CV, I thought it would deepen it'. These attitudes were expressed in a more extreme form on industry websites and discussion boards, where issues of long working hours, rigid management control and career uncertainty were a source of frequent criticism (BigTime Consulting, 2005; GreenDotLife, 2006).

The move from consultancy to organization highlights the ex-consultant as an enterprising professional trading his or her elite skills or 'brand' in the broader corporate labour market. At the same time however, such concerns were informed, by an ambivalence towards their situation founded on concerns regarding work pressure, lifestyle and the need to broaden their work experience.

Agents of Enterprise

Corporate demand for former consultants emphasized their role as agents for the promotion of enterprise and organizational change. This was evident not just from the employees, but from those involved in hiring them. As Rosemary, a director of a recruitment firm noted, executives in many large corporations had developed a familiarity with consultants through IT implementation and other change initiatives, and were keen to internalize change management skills through the employment of ex-consultants. These claims were supported by job advertisements and consulting discussion boards which stressed a corporate demand for ex-consulting staff in internal consulting roles. Having worked as a management consultant, therefore represented an important source of 'reputational capital' in the managerial labour market (Martin, 2005).

Respondents were well aware of their job brief as change agents and highlighted how their background as consultants made them particularly change focussed. This was presented in a positive light and linked to individuals' self identity. As Ingrid stated—'now I'm here trying to find new changes all the time, new challenges, keep people moving'. As former consultants, part of their role as change agents was their superior knowledge of external practice and their capacity to act as a bridge between their organization and 'leading edge' practice. For example, Lucinda noted how her background as a consultant was seen by her new employer as an important source of external expertise; 'There's a perception that bringing in someone like me to that role was stepping up the level of people within the HR area'. Similarly Leah stated, '... I need to tell them what's happening in the market, how we can do it better ... so people are constantly learning things from me and learning about new products and suppliers and ways of



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doing things'. Interviewees also expressed a strong personal commitment to change as a positive state, stressing the need to question organizational custom and practice. As Angela noted:

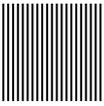
I think they do bring you in because you challenge what is known, and your skill in external consulting is trying to get to the root cause of a problem and ask the difficult questions, because you can. Here, they've always done things a certain way. So fresh blood is going to challenge that.

The role of ex-consultants as agents of enterprise was also highlighted by the *content* of the change they promoted. Many respondents were engaged in the implementation of culture change initiatives which sought to make employees more responsive to change. This was a common theme in our interviews, particularly for individuals charged with the 'transformation' of their organization's values and culture. Hence Susan outlined how her department was involved in 'rolling out' a new set of corporate values across a workforce of many thousands, involving workshops, road-shows and training events. In a less explicit manner, Lauren emphasized her role in promoting new thinking: 'we are really focussing on building the skills of the line managers ... and part of their core competencies should be around managing change and leading change'.

In their new jobs, former consultants were also often organized in a structure that characterized the enterprise discourse within organizations—an internal market. Many respondents were identified as 'internal consultants' to the broader business, signified by job titles such as 'Change Consultant' or 'HR Business Partner'. This reflected a broader reorientation of staff functions, which now operated as internal consulting units to the broader business, sometimes on a fee for service basis. This internalization of market principles was emphasized by several respondents who, like the retail managers cited by du Gay (1996) earlier, stressed their autonomy from traditional reporting relationships. As Susan stated, 'Nobody tells me what to do. I essentially run a consulting practice here. I've got 30 people internally ... which manages the [company] culture but also provides a service'. Indeed, respondents characterized their interactions with other managers as based upon a mentality of 'client service' and a 'consultant-client relationship' that challenged the regular bureaucracy of divisional hierarchies. For example, respondents recounted examples of their work which involved diagnosing problems for their 'clients', conducting interventions to improve managerial skills, implementing new techniques, and facilitating and coaching groups and individuals.

Fitting In: Moving Up or Moving On?

We have seen how the distinctive background, expertise and status of former consultants made them attractive to employers as agents of enterprise. But to carry out this role, individuals also needed to 'fit in' with the culture and broader politics of their host organization. Their legal status as fellow employees, appeared insufficient to overcome both



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their position as knowledge outsiders (e.g. as change agents) and the loss of mystique in no longer representing an outside consulting firm. Time spent in the organization, building relationships and gaining the support of senior management, was seen as essential to developing organizational legitimacy. A good example was Susan who had, over five years, taken on a strong organizational identity and was recognized as a core member of the business:

Senior executives use us all the time for different things. So we are very credible in the internal market and seem to be a trusted adviser ... I mean when you've touched people's lives as deeply as the (Project) programme you have a very privileged position.

However, while the perceived images of the 'trusted adviser' and 'change agent' characterized a positive identity for some respondents, others highlighted the difficulties in adopting such roles. For instance, Lucinda noted how establishing legitimacy as an organizational insider takes time, 'you can't go in there and just expect everyone to be "Oh great, thanks for coming in and helping to solve our problems"'. Even in cases where organizations encouraged consulting expertise, many respondents noted the problems of organizational resistance. As Angela noted:

Over time I just need to establish myself. These are important people, I can't waste their time. I have to have very targeted and relevant conversations with them for them to be interested in hearing. So that's my battle at the moment, establishing some sense of credibility and usefulness to get them on board.

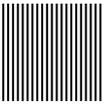
Indeed, many of the younger respondents who had recently moved from consulting expressed frustration with the very different environment of their new employers. Betty, for instance, emphasized how the male, blue-collar culture of her current employer, an equipment hire company, contrasted markedly with the professional services environment she was familiar with:

... the culture here is very much the old boys club ... I've been in a couple of meetings with the CEO and it's just all swearing and you know, 'these GMs have got to get their cocks on the block' type stuff! ... So you're sitting there going, 'okay?'.

The less pressured work pace of organizational life was also criticized by respondents, illustrating how this group conformed to many of the values of enterprise. As Angela commented:

When you're external, you've got to be fast. There's deadlines and budgets to stick to a lot more. When you're working internally ... I just kind of cruise along a bit more, which I guess I'm getting used to, but it still doesn't sit with me that well.

A more extreme expression of organizational alienation was demonstrated by Quincy who was dismissive of his current employer and work colleagues:



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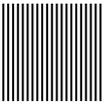
In an environment like this, there'd probably be about two or three people, my boss and a couple of others, who've got brains. The rest of them park it at home when they leave. Totally brainless!

For some respondents the shift from consulting to organizational settings involved more than a culture shock and nostalgia for earlier times, but also a perception that their identification as a former consultant and its associated prestige was a perishable commodity. Hence, Daniel, who had moved into an internal consulting role in an investment bank six years previously, believed he had not only lost some of his 'edge' and become more 'bureaucratic' and 'comfortable', but that perceptions of his expertise had also changed, 'once you become known to people as a person day to day, some of the mystery, the gloss goes. You are not enigmatic to them any longer'. The fragile status of former consultants in organizational roles was also stressed by Rosemary, who as an executive recruiter had detailed insight into managerial careers. She saw the enterprising nature of former consultants as based upon the imperatives of their previous employers rather than simply self-discipline. Accordingly, the move away from external consultancy threatened their labour market power and ability to reinvent themselves:

I have said to some people (former consultants) ... 'Look, you might be learning something now, but keep in mind that this organization is draining you. The reason they have picked you up and put you on a two year contract is you have got some skills and they are draining those skills from you. So who is going to be developing your skills for the next wave? Whereas at (consultancy) there was always somebody pushing stuff at you, are your skills going to be still as sharp in five years time as they are today?' ... You have either got to make an adjustment to become like them—'put the spots on'—or you have to find a way yourself of developing those skills that make you new and relevant and bright and shiny again.

A common response to the culture shock of organizational life and the draining away of their prestige was to move on quickly. Indeed the career histories of many of the respondents demonstrated that the move from consultancy often involved multiple job changes within short periods of time. For example, after working for five years in a leading global consulting practice, Barry undertook five job changes in six years. While some acknowledged concerns regarding their job mobility, others interpreted frequent job moves as a strength in terms of broadening their careers. Indeed, many respondents drew on an enterprise discourse of market rationality in rejecting the notion of long-term commitment to a single organization and emphasized a preference for frequent job change and new challenges (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Webb, 2004). As Bronwyn reflected, 'I've never felt part of any one company. I have never felt an attachment. I've never had any problem with leaving'. Similarly, Lucinda argued:

I feel I could always get another job. I'd love to be made redundant ... what is the worst that could happen? Get made redundant, get a good pay out and then I just go and get another job.



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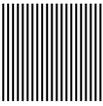
Importantly, moving back to consulting, and hence reinforcing their consulting identity, was seen as an option by many, including those who appeared to be well ensconced within their organizations. For example, Renata's role as a senior manager in a global telecommunications company did not prevent her from acknowledging the possibility of moving on; 'at heart I'm a consultant and I suppose my thinking is that I'll go where there's good consulting work to do'. While these comments indicated a possible future course of action rather than a purposive strategy, they nevertheless provided an indication of individuals' continued identification with consulting alongside or beyond any organizational affiliation.

The marketability of former consultants' skills therefore appear to have a limited life, and their attractiveness to corporate employers relies upon a close identification with their previous consulting career. Paradoxically, it appears that these very qualities, which place new appointees in a liminal or transitional state between external and internal consultant, are less likely to be effective in the promotion of new practices than when individuals have spent time developing their internal legitimacy. Newly appointed former consultants may retain some of their status from their previous employer and the skills associated with that role, but, they often remain outsiders in terms of their knowledge and newcomer status. At the same time, they lose the legitimacy and prestige of external consultancy and become frustrated with what they see as bureaucratic practices and unenterprising colleagues. Many of those individuals who encountered resistance fitting into corporate life therefore sought to return to some aspect of their former consulting lifestyle and identity.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article we have contributed to debates about the nature and outcomes of enterprise, through an account of a group who appeared to be enterprising both in themselves and through the ways in which they promoted enterprise. Without subscribing to the notion of a fully coherent enterprise discourse, we have shown these individuals to be enterprising in their acquisition, marketing and positive orientations towards project and change management, as well as their anti-bureaucratic ethos and (sometimes ambivalent) enthusiasm for high intensity work. They were recruited on the basis of this 'brand' within enterprise structures of internal markets and customers, in order to promote change and enterprise culture. However, many found the experience problematic in terms of failing to be accepted by, and identify with, their organizations. In addition, the depreciation of their initial prestige was exacerbated for many, who continued to identify with their prior role and status as external consultants. As a consequence, few reported a sense of success in promoting enterprise or sustaining an enterprising self without moving on.

Thus, being enterprising—being oriented towards responsibility for self development and realizing one's value in external labour markets—



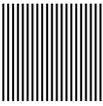
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paradoxically appears incompatible with the development of enterprise within organizations, especially in terms of embedding organizational change. Although we were not able to systematically explore the impact ex-consultants had on their organizations, the minority who felt that they had achieved more success were those who had remained in post and who had become less alien and threatening to their peers. This ambivalence towards organizational belonging parallels Sennett's (2006) argument that work stability is now viewed by many employees as both a source of stigma as well as 'moral prestige'. While our study relied largely on interviews with a limited number of respondents, future research utilizing longitudinal case studies of ex-consultants and detailed observation of their work may well provide further insight into this apparent paradox.

More generally, our study supports others who have pointed to how actors interpret, actively translate and are often ambivalent about enterprise, especially in terms of work intensity and 'balance' (du Gay, 1996; Sennett, 1998). However, such accounts still tend to portray actors as recipients, even victims of enterprise. By contrast, we have argued that enterprising selves are also active in the promotion of enterprise, either as part of a managerial or change agency role, or through the visibility and imitability of their enterprise-based actions such as marketing oneself as a brand, and expressing pro-change values. It is important to recognize that enterprise and other managerial practices are not simply promoted and learned through the rhetoric of gurus, consultants or business school lecturers. Rather, learning is also achieved through participation in enterprise as a practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

By focusing on the promotion of enterprise, we have also drawn attention to an otherwise neglected group of actors in the promotion of management ideas and in change agency more generally. Despite the recognition of an increasing number of former consultants working in organizations, little attention has been given to them except as gatekeepers to external consultants. While the prestige of consulting firms is recognized as significant in legitimizing the practices they promote to clients, the way in which this corporate status-effect becomes temporarily embodied in individuals, making them attractive to employers outside of consultancy, has been largely ignored. Indeed, such a group has the potential to overcome the disadvantages claimed for both internal and external consultants. Their newness combined with their corporately-derived status brings advantages over conventional organizational change agents, while their legal status as fellow employees combined with their familiarity in the organization lessens the 'burden of otherness' typically experienced by external consultants. However, we have seen how their enterprising nature means that this potential is unlikely to be realized as they typically fail to become socially embedded. Rather, this consulting 'diaspora' conforms to the characteristics of similar groups in being spatially dispersed and oriented to their consulting 'homeland' in such a way as to maintain a distinctiveness from their non-consulting 'hosts'.

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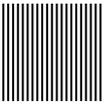


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