Human Capital Solutions (HCS) consultancy drives growth at SpenglerFox and helps solidify bonds with clients

**Interview with
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How is SpenglerFox's HCS Practice Group doing? Do you see any interesting trends as concerns demands for specific services?

If we speak specifically about the key services SpenglerFox offers as part of its HCS package, there is strong interest in leadership development across all geographies.   If we look at career transition counselling, then there is higher demand for that service in Central and Eastern Europe and Southern Europe compared to other markets, i.e. such as the Middle East and Russia. At present I see that the current wave of M&A (Mergers & Acquisitions) processes drives interest in career transition advisory. Overall, it depends on companies' individual situations and the overall health of the local economy.

What we do find though, in the Middle East, is that clients are increasingly asking for team building and team effectiveness development services. This is because, in that region specifically, companies work with a lot of diverse teams of expats: as concerns nationalities, religions and cultures. There are a lot of mixed backgrounds. So company and organizational management is looking for smoother leadership styles and greater fluidity in team leadership processes.

In our day-to-day advisory we focus, for example, on management style. We had one project in the Middle-East, where we worked closely with an expat GM, who felt his leadership team to be slightly dysfunctional. So for that company we launched a specific tool analysis project: examining how each person's individual leadership style fit within the style needed for the overall management team. We ran a series of workshops analysing a) how people work in teams; b) what conflicts might arise due to different points of view/levels of experience across the team and c) how to work with and leverage the team members' diversity to benefit the entire management team and its common goals. This resulted in our defining a list of actions that could be taken to promote acceptance of diversity and differences in management styles.

What drives companies to invest in HCS Services?

Overall, I think it's a willingness to invest in people. To look at their personal traits and dive below the surface. To be successful, businesses need to look at management team effectiveness and the leadership traits of persons running these teams. At present, I see a lot of our clients expressing interest in competitor benchmarking. This is a service that SpenglerFox has offered for the last 3 years now. Basically, our clients want to know how their business, their organizational structure, their leadership and their employer branding holds up against their competitors. Our clients want business intelligence (BI) data so they can learn how to compete best in the market. It's also important to note that businesses' subsequent approaches to competitor benchmarking processes are as varied as the customers they serve.

For example, we had one client come to us with a request to analyse its talent organizational structure. It needed an analysis of the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) business to see how companies treat and work with their employees so as to foster innovation: how do companies motivate employees and business teams to drive innovation. The project involved extensive talks with employees on the topic of innovation and related issues. We did a broad battery of interviews with talent throughout a range of FMCG-oriented organizations.

Ultimately though, each benchmark can be unique: i.e. should the client look for assessment of shared-service centres? The degree of our (SpenglerFox's) input varies according to the situation. In some cases this depends on how far along a client is in a particular process. For example, our counsel could go as far as to recommend stopping a process or, alternatively, working with the client to determine how to make the best of a process that it has already implemented.

Another project we've been involved in required a partner for mapping overall candidate and talent perceptions of the regional pharmaceuticals market. The client asked us to look at candidates' views of different pharmaceutical companies: i.e. what is the company known for? what is its reputation? Some companies are known for innovation, some for career development potential (i.e. job assignments and job rotation), some for compensation packages and some, unfortunately, may have a negative positioning, i.e. be known for something negative such as an autocratic management style for instance.

With the above-mentioned competitor benchmarking projects, it is important to note that SpenglerFox succeeds in this area, because of the access we have. If you look at leadership and development or career transition services, those projects are usually self-motivated, i.e. the client approaches us with a specific need. However, with competitor benchmarking, that type of support evolves from good, long-standing relationships and internal discussions of client needs. We usually sit down with clients to discuss and assess how decisions are taken within the company and how the company analyses what it expects to happen on the market. We work through a number of question sets to determine how benchmarking services might ultimately benefit the client.

I'd like to wrap up my answer here with a mention of our Time to Perform (Executive Onboarding) support services. I think this is an important part of our HCS offering and it's something that might not be familiar to everyone. What we look to do with this service is support new talent in a company or existing talent, who have recently undertaken a new role. We take on the role of career coach for these executives. We help management teams to understand where the new recruits are

coming from, what challenges they see for the business, etc. Meanwhile, we also work to liaise with the onboarding executive on the company's vision for their leadership role (i.e. based on our long-term experience working for the given client. We provided this type of coaching for two General Managers recently in a leading multinational beverage company. Although it's not a new service per se, it is a new form of support for executive roles and can be offered as an add-on service to executive search projects. We adapt our onboarding counsel to the specific needs of our clients; in most cases focusing on mutual understanding (executive to business and vice versa) of business needs and on further honing new executives' soft skills where necessary.

Let's wrap up with a question we like to ask all practice group leaders. How is ICT impacting your business?

Technology has facilitated the practice of virtual teams. I've seen a strong rise in the number of virtual teams; it's getting bigger and bigger. While virtual structures used to apply to specific business areas, they are now going broader. I think you have to be careful how you manage use of technologies though: you need that initial focus on face-to-face encounters. It's important to have personal contact before letting management teams evolve into virtual set-ups. Also when working in teams driven by technologies allowing for virtual presence, you need to bear in mind generational factors. Younger people may take online chats or video calls as a given, while older generations may lack a feel for how to communicate using these products. It's clear that the cost-cutting aspect of tech is valuable for companies, but management teams do need an awareness that these same technologies change how negotiating is done; how people act and behave. They require greater levels of awareness and a need to notice nuances or subtleties in conversations. Then there is the issue of managers and their employees never "turning off". Businesses have to weigh the potential negative consequences of that new reality.

Generally though, I think the proliferation of tech inside businesses affords management teams many opportunities. We see more managers going virtual, which allows them to expand their teams and to work in wider groups. We also see more talent being brought to management

teams from remote areas; thanks to the connections new technologies make possible. Technologies also help businesses (in some cases) work around relocation issues. Overall, I think technologies are a benefit to business growth and management processes. But they can be difficult to use properly, provided the strong, good, underlying personal relationships are not in place. You need to build the *personal* behind the *tech* to make it work.

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