10

STRUCTURING A PRESENTATION

This chapter outlines the structured presentation method of the world's leading management consultancy firms. Here we use the Pyramid Principle developed by Barbara Minto (1987), which in consultancy is regarded as the gold standard of structured communication. First, we discuss why presentations are so important in management consultancy. The second section is about some common pitfalls in presenting. Third, we put ourselves in the position of the audience. The fourth section outlines how the world's leading consultancies develop solution-driven presentation structures. Fifth, we introduce the issue-driven structure as an alternative form for special situations. Sixth, we elaborate on slide design. The chapter ends with a conclusion, a running case, a summary, and questions.

MAIN LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Understand the importance and the role of presentations in consultancy projects
- Understand the importance of knowing the audience's interests and prior knowledge
- Know when to use an issue-driven presentation structure and when a solution-driven structure

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- Know how to develop issue-driven and solution-driven structures
- Know how to create a storyline
- Know how to design a slide.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESENTATIONS IN CONSULTANCY

Physical consultancy product

The outcome of a management consultancy project is a recommendation. Typically, the advice is abstract. The details and underlying analyses are highly complex. A team of brilliant people has worked for months on the solution. Consultancy may be challenging to comprehend for the client. For people who have not been part of the project or followed it, understanding the work may be even more difficult. That is why consultants must do their best to explain their solution. Presentations play a critical role in this. The PowerPoint slide presentation is one of the most essential communication tools of consultants. But the explanation of the advice and the underlying analyses is only one reason why consultants use presentations.

The PowerPoint slide presentation is one of the most essential communication tools of consultants

Presentations at various project stages

Consultants use presentations at several stages of their projects.

- At the beginning of projects, consultants present themselves and their plan of action to the client and other stakeholders in the client organization. The goal of these presentations is to inform these stakeholders about the project and to gain their acceptance. Consultants can also motivate these stakeholders to cooperate or otherwise support the consultants' work.
- At project milestones, consultants present their interim results to the steering committee to keep them informed, solicit feedback, or obtain additional information.
- At the end of the project, consultants offer their advice to the client, the steering committee, and other relevant stakeholders. The consultants persuade the client to implement the recommendation. They convince the stakeholders to accept the advice and support the implementation.
- During the solution implementation, presentations also play a crucial role. The following chapters will elaborate on that topic.

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Presentations for various meetings

Consultants prepare presentations for their team meetings. During team meetings, consultants present the results of their analyses, and managers outline the next steps. Consultants also prepare presentations for steering committee meetings. Steering committees usually consist of the consultancy partner and the decision makers of the client organization. Consultancy managers present to the steering committees at essential milestones of the projects. Steering committees assess the work plans and the progress that the teams have made. Outside the regular meetings with the steering committee, managers can still give one-on-one presentations to individual members of the steering committee. Consultancy managers can use these individual presentations and conversations to test their ideas or inform people in advance to prepare for the next meeting of the steering committee. Managers can decide to do so if their ideas or proposals deviate from what steering committee members expect. In this case, managers want to avoid unpleasant surprises for the members concerned. Managers use one-on-one presentations to inform and convince these members of the value of the ideas or proposals. Figure 10.1 shows a project's timeline with the regular meetings at which consultants give presentations.

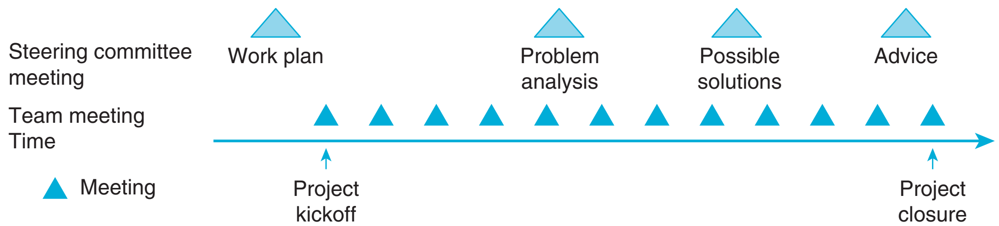

FIGURE 10.1 *A project timeline with meetings*

PITFALLS IN PRESENTATIONS

Assuming that the audience is as interested as yourself

For consultants, their projects are the most crucial things there are. They have been working on it day and night for the past couple of months. They also know the projects inside out. The analyses and advice are evident to them. But consultants should not fall into the trap of presuming that clients and other audience members are equally involved and equally knowledgeable about the projects. Clients and other members of the audience often have very different problems on their minds. The project is just one of the things competing for their time and attention. Consultants

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should take that into account when preparing presentations. They should keep their presentations short and straightforward.

Showing how much work you have done

But some (inexperienced) consultants may feel that they must prove their worth during presentations. As discussed earlier, the added value of consultants cannot be determined objectively. Consultants may face outspoken or unspoken criticism from some clients and/or other stakeholders that their added value does not outweigh their fees. That is why some consultants may feel the pressure to prove themselves during presentations. Some people may want to show how smart they are and how much work they have done. They then make presentations that are far too complicated and take far too long. Such presentations will exhaust the audience. Members of the audience will lose interest and give up. They get distracted and will stop paying attention to the presentation.

Some people may want to show how smart they are and how much work they have done

Talking too long

Consultants need to consider their audience's span of attention. People can listen to another person speaking for only so long. After that time, people become distracted, and their focus on the speaker's story drops off fast. It is always tricky to generalize, but for the sake of convenience, allow 20 minutes. It does not have to be that the presentation may last a maximum of 20 minutes. Still, after 20 minutes, consultants alternate the talk with a break or, for example, a discussion. Based on the available time and an average speaking time, consultants arrive at approximately 2,600 words. Consultants then plan the number of PowerPoints that they can present in 20 minutes. A rule of thumb is to reserve two minutes per slide. But of course, it depends on the content of the slide. Consultants do not put multiple messages on a slide and avoid letters that are too small for the audience to read. Consultants limit themselves to a relatively simple message per slide. In that case, they can safely present one or two slides per minute. A quick change of slides can also keep the audience's attention in the presentation.

ACTION POINT

Always ask the client in advance how much time you have for a presentation. Avoid nasty surprises.

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UNDERSTANDING THE AUDIENCE

It goes without saying that consultants make sure they know to whom they will present. Not only do they need to know who will attend the presentation, but they also need to understand how these people relate to the project. This brings us back to the stakeholder analysis. When consultants are going to present, they need to know what kind of stakeholders are in the room. Consultants must map the stakeholders in the audience. For example, consultants need to know whether there are stakeholders with significant power over the project. Consultants need to learn how the interests of these stakeholders relate to the client organization. Are their interests the same, or are the interests conflicting? Consultants must also know how acute the problem and the recommended solution are to the audience members. Will these people find the advice controversial or embrace it? It is not just about the influence and interests of the audience. Also essential is the audience's knowledge of the project, the problem, and possible solutions. The less prior knowledge the audience has, the more the consultants must explain.

Consultants must map the stakeholders in the audience

Two different starting points

When presenting the recommendations at the end of the project, consultants distinguish between two different starting positions.

- *The client and any present stakeholders know the problem*. The consultants have informed them earlier in the project about the outcome of the problem analysis. This audience knows what the problem is, where it exists, and why it exists. These people have a shared understanding of the problem. But they do not know how to solve the problem. The relevant question for them is: How should we solve the problem?
- *The stakeholders present do not know the problem*. The consultants engage relevant stakeholders in the problem-solving process. These stakeholders may receive the information they need to have to contribute to the process: the consultants inform them on a need-to-know basis. But these stakeholders may lack an overview. They do not have the big picture of the problem-solving process. Moreover, there are stakeholders in the audience who were not involved in the problem-solving process. Therefore, some people in the audience do not know the problem. They may have a flawed understanding of the problem, or their interpretations may differ. Stakeholders may blame each other for causing the trouble. Some people may deny the problem's existence, whereas others may even be unaware of the issue. For such an audience, the relevant question is: Is there a problem?

TWO DIFFERENT INTRODUCTIONS

Each starting position demands a specific introduction. The introduction consists of four parts: situation, complication, question, purpose. This structure is part of Barbara Minto's Pyramid Principle. The first part is the 'situation', which is a brief description

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or profile of the client company. It must be recognizable because consultants do not want any controversy over the opening lines of their presentation. Consultants want their audience to agree with the first thing they say. They want to show that they know who the client is and that they understand that company. The second topic is the 'complication', which goes to the heart of the consultancy project. It is the reason why the client hired the consultants. From this point on, the structures for the two different audiences diverge.

Consultants want their audience to agree with the first thing they say

- For *a knowledgeable audience*, the complication is the known problem. The consultants suffice with a brief description of that problem. Then they present the third part of the introduction. This is the most critical question in the mind of this audience. The consultants repeat the key question of the project: How should the client respond to the problem? The final part of the introduction is the purpose of the presentation. The consultants inform the audience that they will present their recommended solution.
- The consultants use a different introduction for *an audience that is not (entirely) informed about the problem*. The complication for these people is their uncertainty about the problem. Consultants mention this uncertainty. Then they must make explicit the question that lives in the minds of this audience. This question is as follows: Is there a problem, and if so, how do we solve it? Consultants then clarify the purpose of their presentation. For this audience, the goal is to present the problem analysis and, in case of a verified problem, recommend a solution. Figure 10.2 displays the two starting positions and their suitable introductions. For clarity, this figure is limited to problems, but it is also applicable to opportunities.

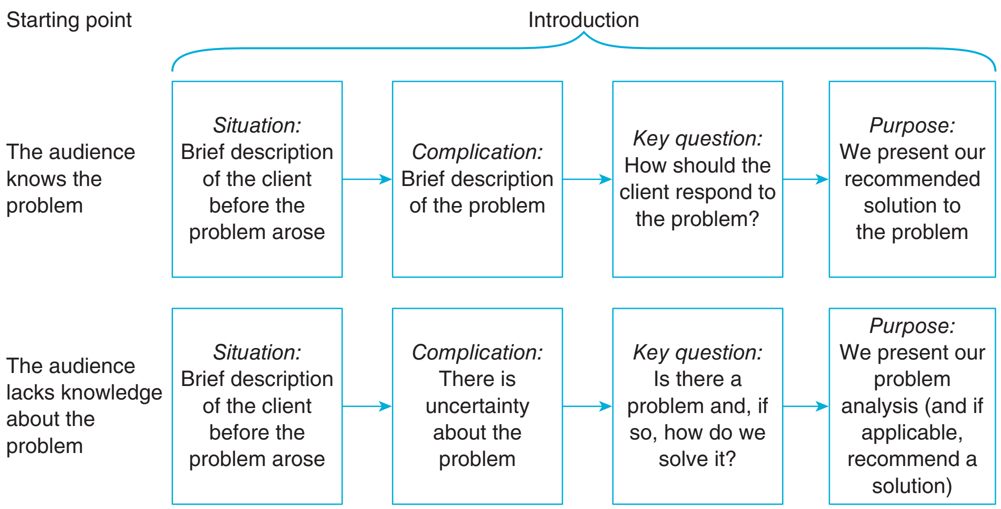

FIGURE 10.2 *Different introductions for different starting points*

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ACTION POINT

Make sure you know who is in the audience and what they know and want.

STRUCTURING THE PRESENTATION OF A SOLUTION

Consultants can use the 'Minto Pyramid Principle' (see Chapter 7) for presenting their recommendation in a structured way. This principle is decomposition of a main message into a hierarchy of sub-messages that resembles a (two-dimensional) pyramid. The main message is the recommended solution which is the consultants' answer to the client's key question. Depending on their clients' needs, consultants may decompose their messages into arguments (explanation of solutions) and actions (implementation of solutions). First, clients want to know *why* this is the best solution to their key question. They want arguments or explanations. Only when they are convinced of the solution do they want to know *how* to implement this solution. They want to learn about implementation actions.

Answering why questions

Consultants need to convince clients of the value of their solutions. They provide a set of arguments to answer clients' why questions: Why is this the best solution for my problem? The set of arguments should be MECE: mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive.

- The *vertical* relationship between the two levels in the top structure in Figure 10.3 is the why question: the lower level provides arguments for the higher-level statement, which is the recommended solution: 'B should enter online education.'
- The organization of elements at the same level is about the *horizontal* relationship. Consultants can present their arguments in a *parallel* way (the top structure in Figure 10.3) or in a *deductive* way (the bottom structure).
  - Parallel means that there is no order or sequence of arguments.
  - Deductive argumentation follows a sequence from a general statement to specific statements.

The example in Figure 10.3 uses the same arguments for the parallel and the deductive structure. In practice, the arguments may differ. Figure 10.3 is limited to a single level of arguments, but consultants can break these arguments into sub-arguments, thereby creating an additional level.

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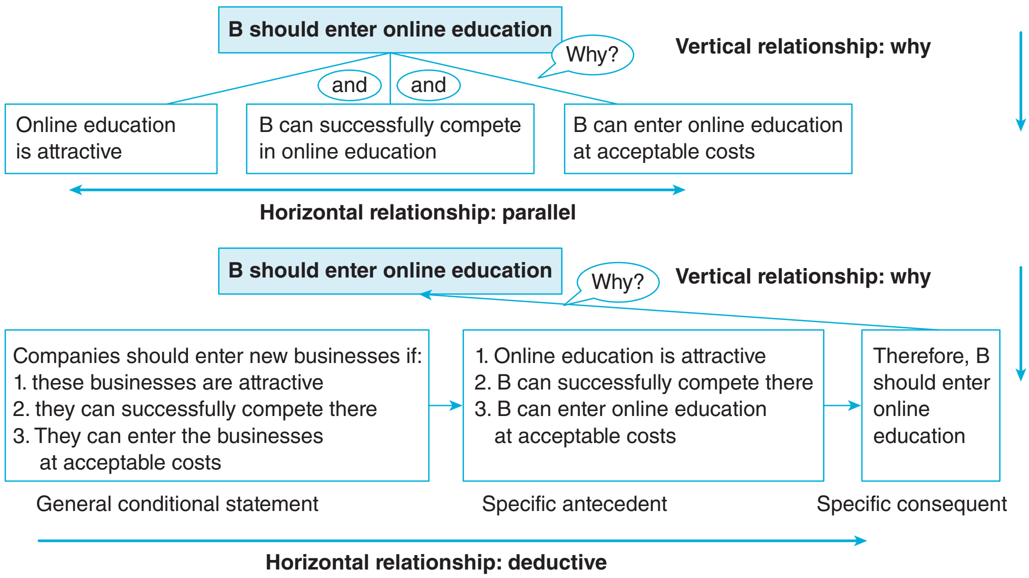

FIGURE 10.3 *Presentation structures for answering* why *questions*

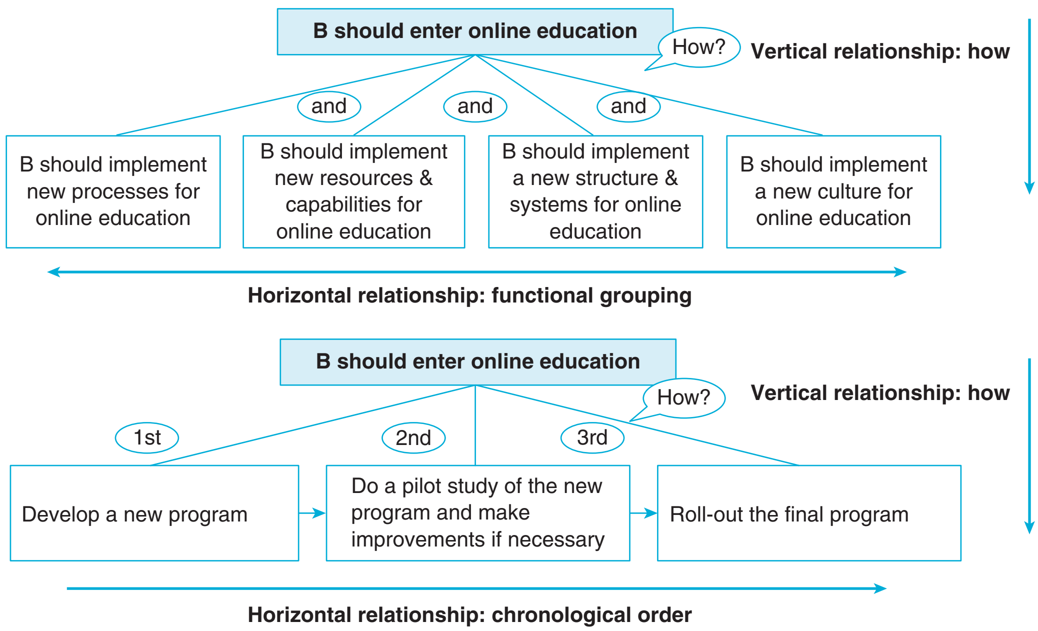

FIGURE 10.4 *Presentation structures for answering* how *questions*

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Answering how questions

Clients who are convinced of the value of the solutions will develop a how question: How should we implement the solution? Consultants will provide a set of actions for implementation. The *vertical* relationship between the two levels in the top structure in Figure 10.4 is the how question; the lower level indicates how the higher level should be implemented: the implementation actions. The action set should be MECE. Consultants can present their actions in *functional groups* (the top structure in Figure 10.3) or in a *chronological order* (the bottom structure). Functional and chronological order are examples of *horizontal* relationships. Figure 10.4 shows only a single level of actions, but consultants can break these actions into sub-actions (see Chapter 11).

STRUCTURING A SOLUTION-DRIVEN PRESENTATION

In the following text, we discuss the presentation of advice to a *knowledgeable* audience. Here we assume that the consultants have regularly informed the audience about their progress during the project. The purpose of this *final* presentation is to convince the audience to accept the advice and implement it. Consultants take the first starting position because the audience knows the problem.

The importance of a question

Clients and other stakeholders in the audience already have enough other things on their minds

How do consultants convey the message to the client and the stakeholders present in the audience? Consultants have powerful and valuable messages. Some people assume that the audience is keen to hear their message and that the audience must be on the edge of their seats to listen to what the presenters have to tell. Unfortunately, the practice is often very different. Clients and other stakeholders in the audience already have enough other things on their minds. Their heads are already full of other problems and concerns. If consultants still want to impose their messages there, they will encounter resistance. The audience will not be open and will pay little or no attention to the consultants' presentation. The members of the audience are not interested in information as such. They are only interested in information that answers questions they are struggling with. If these questions are important to them and they cannot answer them themselves, then they are willing to listen to the consultants' answers. Therefore, the consultants' messages must answer substantial and challenging questions of clients and other stakeholders in the audience. Questions are intended to make the audience interested in the consultants' answers. For knowledgeable audiences, consultants use the project's key question to present their advice. After all, the key questions were the reasons for the projects. Clients and stakeholders would very much like an answer to these questions.

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Figure 10.5 shows the solution-driven structure for a knowledgeable audience. To make the picture clear and understandable we have kept the structure very simple. However, the structure can be expanded.

1. After the introduction and presenting the purpose of their presentation (see Figure 10.5), consultants present *the client's evaluation criteria and solution constraints* as starting points for solution development.
2. Consultants present *a methodological justification*: how did they develop solutions? They explain their method and data for developing solutions.
3. Consultants discuss *the different possible solutions*. They provide an overview of the alternative options that they have developed.
4. Consultants present *an evaluation of these options* based on the client's criteria and constraints. The recommended solution emerges from this evaluation as the best.
5. Consultants present the details of *the recommended solution* (see Figure 10.5).

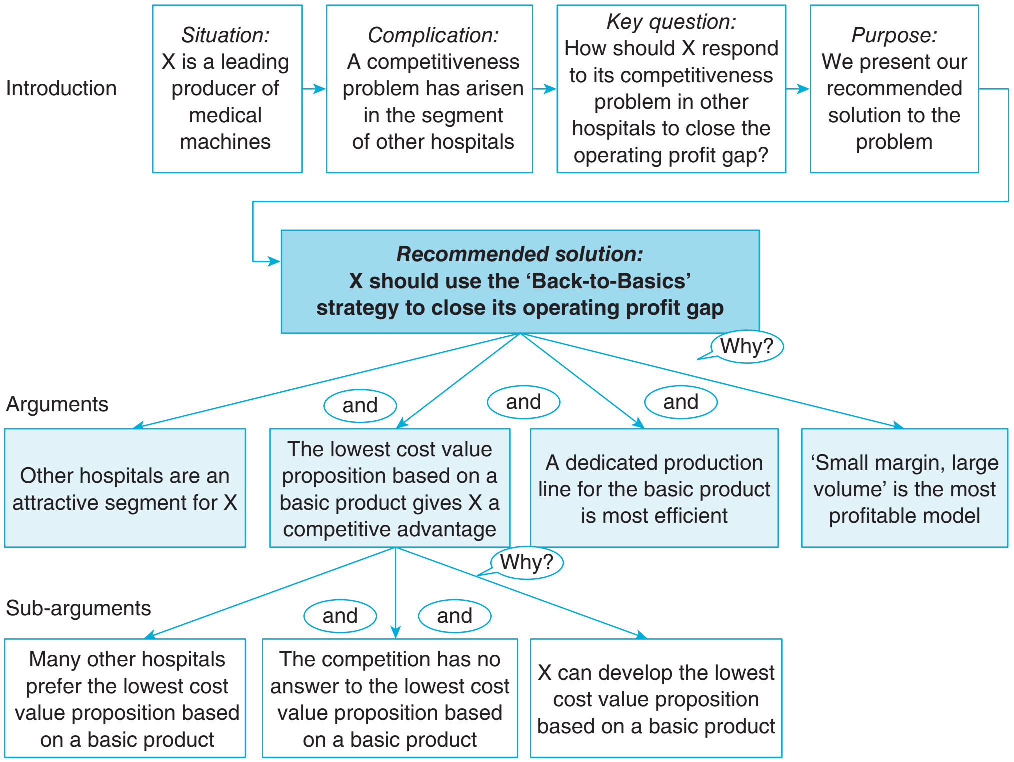

FIGURE 10.5 *An example of a solution-driven presentation structure for a knowledgeable audience*

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ACTION POINT

Do not push your message but pull the audience with questions. Then answer these questions with your message.

The introduction of the solution

Figure 10.5 visualizes the whole structure of the presentation. The case of the by now familiar company X illustrates the presentation. You read this structure from top to bottom. Consultants start with the introduction. They use the introduction structure suitable to a knowledgeable audience (see Figure 10.2). Because these people already know the problem, consultants do not have to spend any significant time on it. They can move on to the solution fairly quickly. The focus of a presentation for a knowledgeable audience is the solution. Therefore, we call it a solution-driven presentation. The consultants present their recommendations, which are the best solutions. What will the audience think first when consultants present their solutions?

Convincing the audience

The logical question of the audience is: Why would this solution solve the problem?

They will wonder why this advice is a solution to their problem. The logical question of the audience is: Why would this solution solve the problem? This why question pops up in their mind when consultants present their advice. Therefore, consultants need to answer that why question. Consultants must provide arguments why their recommended solutions will be the best solutions to the problems. The recommended solutions are accepted solution hypotheses. Consultants tested these hypotheses by assessing their assumptions. These assumptions are what people need to know or believe for accepting these solutions. Consultants have analysed the assumptions and shared their analytical findings with clients and relevant stakeholders. These people have accepted these findings and thus the assumptions. Now consultants can use the accepted outcomes of their analyses as arguments to support their recommended solutions. The supported assumptions of solution hypotheses become the arguments of the solutions. In this way, consultants convince the audience of the value of the recommended solutions. Here it comes down to the persuasiveness of consultants. How convincing are the consultants? How compelling is the presenting partner of the consultancy firm? Consultancy partners not only sell projects but also recommendations.

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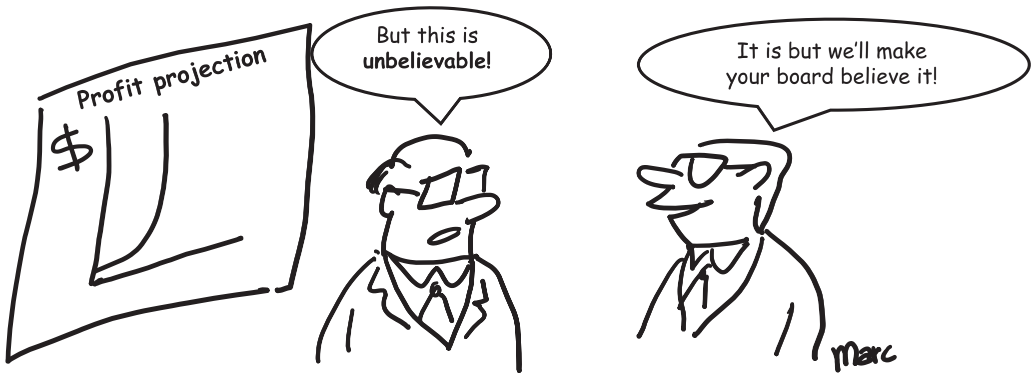

The argumentation structure

The argumentation structure of Figure 10.5 matches the format of assumptions of the solution hypothesis in Figure 9.14. Figure 10.5 shows only the sub-arguments of one argument to keep the picture clear. Consultants have sub-arguments ready for each of the four arguments. If the available time is limited, consultants present only the first level of statements. If there is more time and the audience asks for it, consultants also offer a second or even a third level of arguments. Even if the presentation time is limited, consultants should be prepared to answer questions about their reasoning and provide lower levels of argumentation.

The next steps

After the audience has accepted the recommended solutions, they wonder how to implement these recommendations. Consultants should anticipate that question and prepare suggestions for implementation. This is the subject of the next chapter.

STRUCTURING A PROBLEM-DRIVEN PRESENTATION

With an audience that does not know the problem

The client knows the key question, but some of the stakeholders in the audience may not be familiar with that question or their interpretations of the problem may vary. Consultants start their presentations with introductions that everybody recognizes. Consultants begin their presentations at their audiences' knowledge level. If consultants start immediately with something unknown, the audiences will not comprehend it. Then people in the audience will generally lose their attention. Consultants, therefore, develop introductions that are familiar to all stakeholders present in the audience.

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Presentation structure

Figure 10.6 visualizes the whole structure of the presentation. Again, company X illustrates the presentation. You also read this structure from top to bottom. Consultants start with the introduction. They use the introduction structure suitable to an audience that does not know the problem (see Figure 10.2). Because those present do not identify the problem, consultants must spend significant time on the problem. Consultants cannot move on to solutions quickly. If you introduce the solution too soon, the audience will wonder about the problem that your solution is supposed to solve. The focus of presentations for such audiences is the problem. Therefore, consultants call it a problem-driven presentation.

If you introduce the solution too soon, the audience will wonder about the problem that your solution is supposed to solve

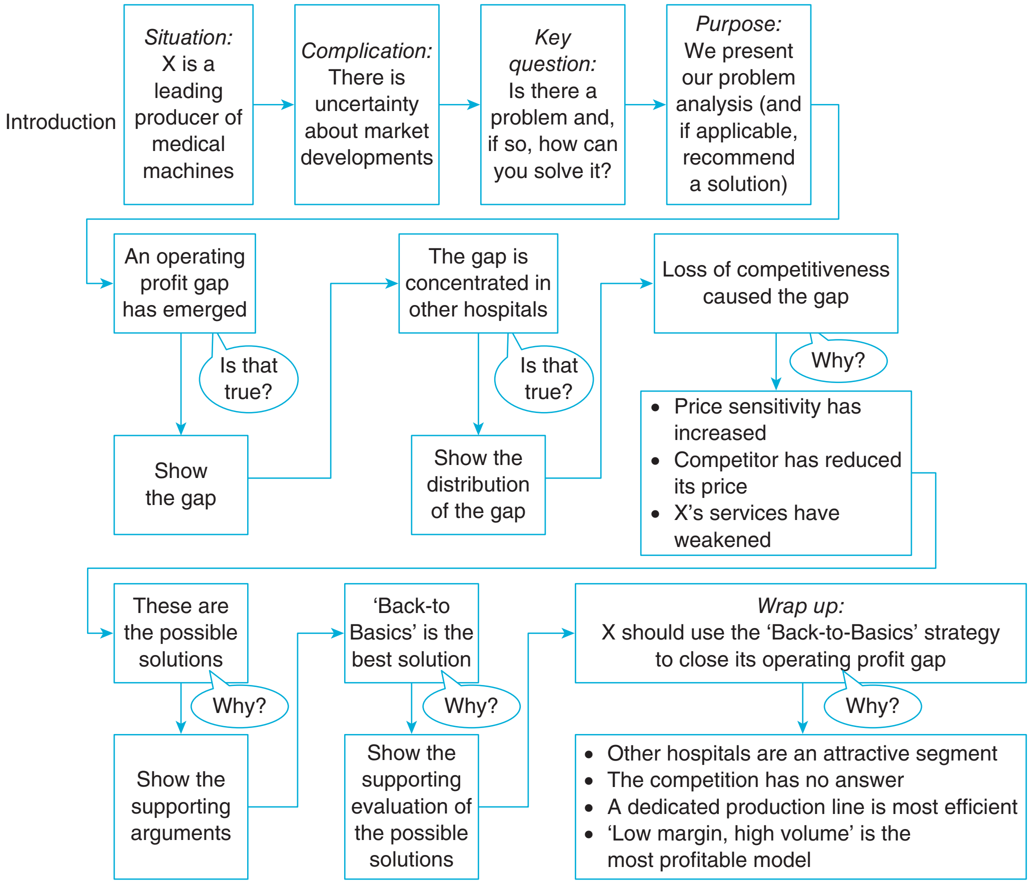

FIGURE 10.6 *An example of a problem-driven presentation structure for an audience that lacks knowledge*

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THE SEQUENTIAL ANALYSIS

The presentation structure mirrors the Sequential Analysis model. Recall the process steps of the problem analysis: Is there a problem? Where is the problem? Why does the problem exist? These are the questions that come to the audience's mind in succession.

ACCEPTING THE PROBLEM

Consultants start with the first question of this audience. Is there a problem? This question is vital for people who are unaware of the problem or deny it. An adequate answer to this question presents the negative performance gap: the client's realized performance is well below the objective. This is a factual and objective answer to the question: facts do not lie.

ACCEPTING THE PROBLEM LOCALIZATION

After this convincing proof of the problem's existence, the audience will wonder *where* the problem is. Because the location of problems is a potentially sensitive topic, consultants must again provide factual answers. They present the quantitative distribution of the performance gap across the segments. The presentation of the facts prevents endless discussions in which everyone defends their own truth.

ACCEPTING THE PROBLEM EXPLANATION

After the audience accepts the localization of the problems, consultants answer the next question in the audience's mind: What caused these problems? They are open to explanations of the problems. The consultants' answers are the supported problem hypotheses. Consultants use the outcomes of their analyses of the supported hypothesis assumptions as arguments of the problem causes. The more comprehensive these analyses are, the more convincing the evidence is to the audience.

PRESENTING THE ALTERNATIVES

After the audience accepts the explanations of the problems, they have sufficient knowledge of the problems. Consultants can follow the argumentation structure of the solution-driven presentation (Figure 10.5). But if the audience is critical, then consultants can include the fourth step of the Sequential Analysis process. What are the possible solutions? Consultants present an overview of the possible solutions. These are the accepted *solution* hypotheses. By offering alternative solutions, consultants show that they have orientated themselves broadly. Consultants then share the client's evaluation criteria for solutions. Subsequently, consultants use these criteria to evaluate and compare the possible solutions. Based on this evaluation, consultants present their recommended solution.

ACCEPT THE RECOMMENDATION

The choice of a solution is the mandate of clients. Clients make decisions. Consultants only make recommendations. To make things easier for clients, consultants substantiate

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their recommendations as much as possible. Consultants provide clients with arguments based as much as possible on factual analyses. Here consultants can use the findings of their analyses of the hypothesis assumptions. Entirely fact-based substantiations of recommended solutions are not possible. Solutions are about the future and there are no facts about the future. Decisions, therefore, are ultimately matters of judgement. In any case, consultants must provide logical arguments and realistic assumptions for their recommendations to facilitate the clients' judgement and support the clients' decision making.

POLITICS

Consultants hope that the audience is satisfied with their recommendations. But the advice of the consultants may also count on resistance from (some) members of the audience. As indicated earlier, the interests and values of stakeholders can differ. For example, for environmental movements the sustainability aspects of solutions are critical, while for works councils employment and the well-being of the workforce are decisive. There will be stakeholders who prefer different solutions because every possible solution can have advantages and disadvantages for specific stakeholders. Some stakeholders favour one specific solution, and others want another option. The choice of a solution is, therefore, also a *political* choice.

CLIENTS AS PRESENTERS

The political situation brings us to the question: *Who* should present the solution? So far, we have assumed that consultants present, but that does not always have to be the case. If messages are difficult for specific stakeholders to accept, presentations may evoke resistance from these people. Clients can leave such difficult messages to consultants. In such cases, consultants are the bogeymen and clients watch how consultants answer the stakeholders' critique. Then consultants become the bad guys and clients can play the good guys.

Although consultants can provide good arguments for solutions, it is often better for clients' managers to present the solutions themselves. In this way clients' managers show that they are committed to the solutions and that they take responsibility for the implementation. Presentations by clients indicate that it is the client's solution rather than the consultants' solution. In this way, clients can prevent the 'not-invented-here syndrome'.

ACTION POINT

Do not try to please everyone in the audience at all costs. Focus on clients because they have hired you.

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DEVELOP THE STORYLINE

After consultants have designed the presentation structure, they develop a storyline for the presentation. Consultants may use Post-it notes on a storyboard because this flexible approach allows making changes to the storyline if new insights emerge (Figure 10.7). Each Post-it gets a line with a message. The lines of the series of Post-its should read as a story. Consultants call this storyline the '*horizontal flow*' of the presentation. Storylines are the basis for PowerPoint presentations. But consultants can also turn storylines into text reports. Consultants structure both PowerPoint presentations and written reports as storylines or sequences of messages, on respectively slides and pages.

Storylines are the basis for PowerPoint presentations

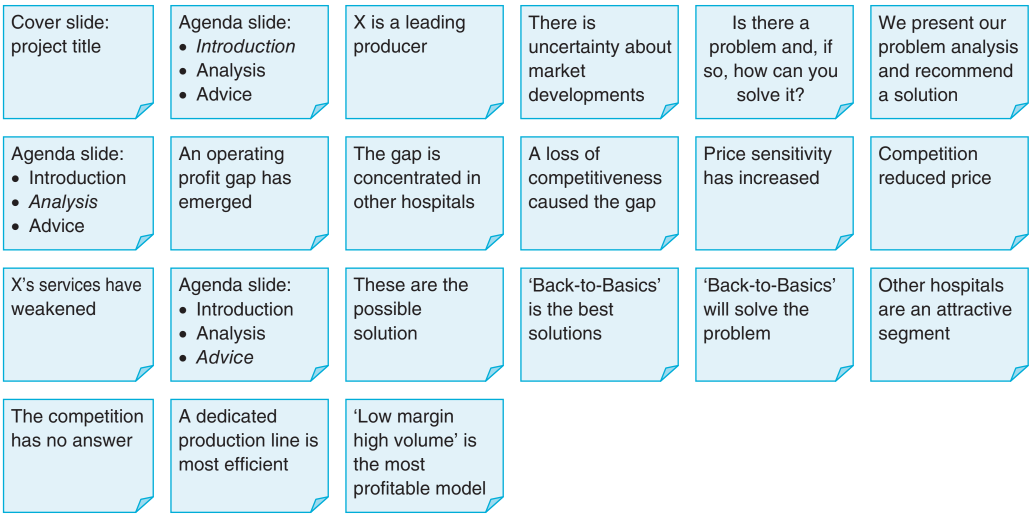

FIGURE 10.7 *A presentation structure in Post-it notes on a storyboard*

Presentations about opportunities

So far, we have only discussed problem cases. But consultants also analyse client *opportunities*. If the audience is knowledgeable about the opportunity, then consultants can use a solution-driven presentation structure (Figure 10.5). But the audience members may not know or not believe that the company has an opportunity. There may be stakeholders who deny or question the opportunity.

THE SEQUENTIAL ANALYSIS OF AN OPPORTUNITY

The presentation of solutions for opportunities to audiences that lack knowledge is different from problem cases. Like the sequential analyses of opportunities differs from problems, so do the presentations differ. Unlike problem analyses, the starting point of opportunity analyses is not a gap. Consultants distinguish three steps for opportunity analyses:

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1. Consultants explain *why* the client has an opportunity.
2. Consultants present *where* the opportunity is.
3. Consultants show *what* the (estimated) size of the opportunity is or by how much performance can improve.

Figure 10.8 visualizes the opportunity-driven structure for a presentation to an audience that does *not* know the opportunity. Or at least there are a few participants who have no knowledge or perhaps deny the opportunity.

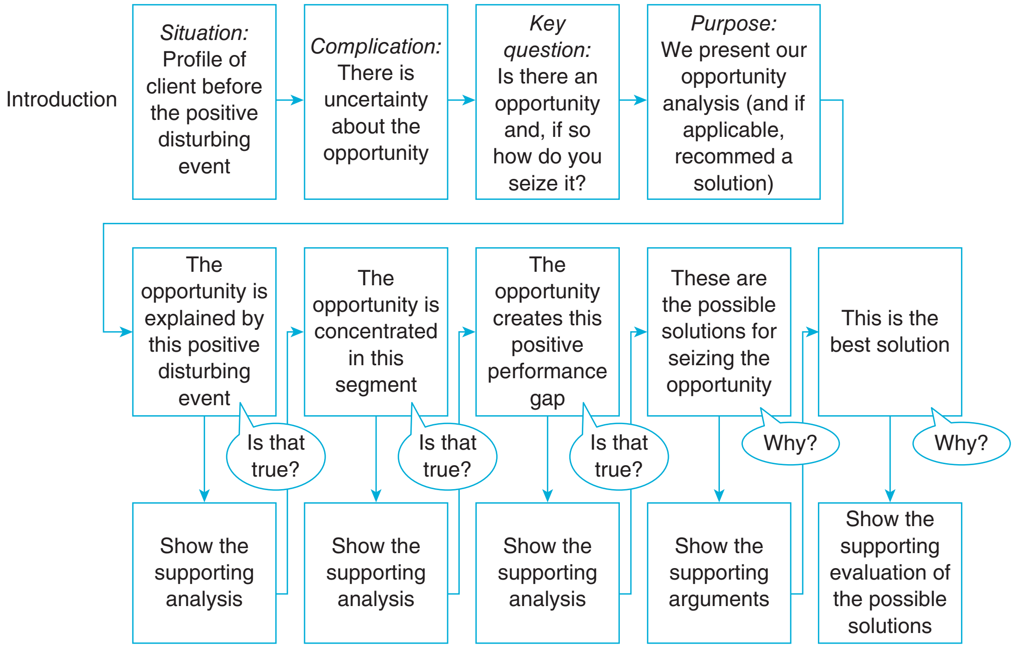

FIGURE 10.8 *An opportunity-driven presentation structure for an audience that lacks knowledge*

DESIGNING SLIDES

The slide as the carrier of a message

Consultants use only one (1) message per slide

Each Post-it note serves as the basis for a PowerPoint slide (Figure 10.7) as the lines on the Post-it become the slide titles. Consultants use only one (1) message per slide to make the slides relatively simple and easy to understand for the audience. Chapter 8 already outlined some basic ideas about slide design. The slide titles or messages

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logically follow each other and together form the *horizontal flow* of the presentation (see Figure 10.9).

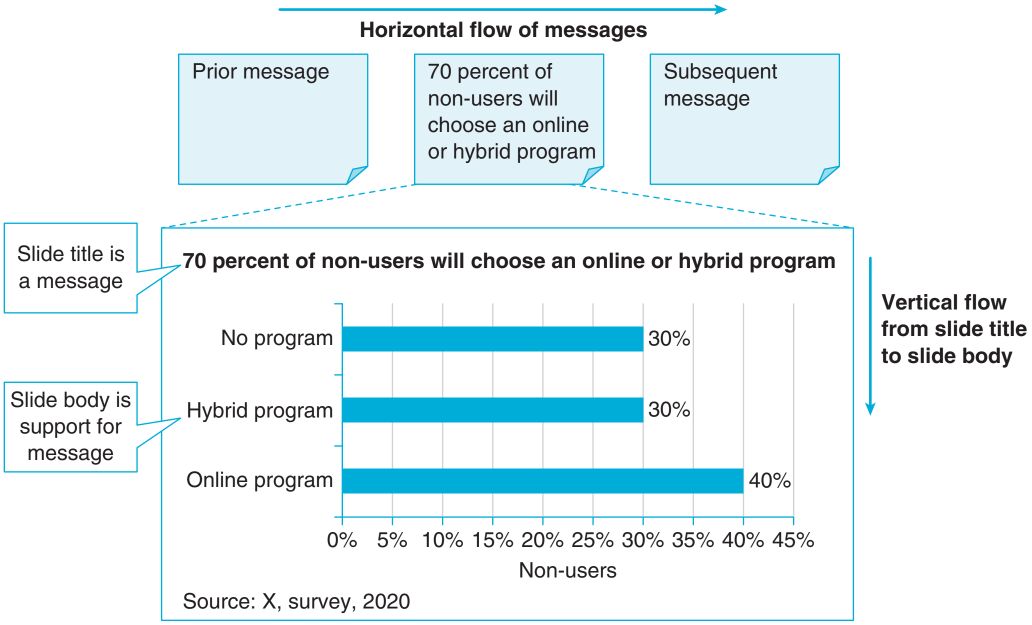

FIGURE 10.9 *Horizontal and vertical flows of slides*

A top-down approach

Consultants distinguish between three components of a slide: the slide title, the slide body, and the slide justification. Consultants start top-down. They take the line (message) from the storyline and make it the title of the slide. Then consultants design a slide body that supports the message in the title. The slide body must be consistent with the title. Consultants call the relation between heading and body the '*vertical flow*' of the slide (see Figure 10.9). The justification of the slide body concerns the source reference. If the underlying method and analytical techniques are complex, consultants make back-up slides with explanations.

Keep it simple

There is a tendency to put too much information in a slide. This is especially true if there is a limit to the number of PowerPoints that clients allow for presentations. Then people want to put too many messages on a slide. Besides, people may be tempted to place more information in the slide body than support of the message requires. Chapter 8

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already discussed that slide bodies should just defend slide titles: no more and no less. Consultants avoid information in the slide body that is not needed to support the slide message. Consultants keep slides simple because unnecessary data makes it more challenging for audiences to understand slides.

Avoid wordy slides

PowerPoint presentations are not text reports. The report pages should provide complete information to readers. Report writers are not present to explain their writing. How different it is with PowerPoint presentations. Unlike pages, slides do not have to do the communication work on their own. Presenters and slides together communicate the messages to the audiences. Therefore, consultants do not create PowerPoints that look like report pages. See Figure 10.10 for an (exaggerated) example of a bad slide. Slide bodies should contain the essence but not too much detail. There is simply not enough space on slides for large numbers of words. Consultants do not want to use font size 10. Clients should not treat slide presentations as substitutes for reports.

Recommendations

- You have to do this, and this, and this.
- You also have to do these three things: (a) this, (b) this, and (c) this
- Furthermore, it is necessary that you do this and this
- In addition you have to consider this and that
- We also recommend that you do this and this
- You need to do that also
- For the implementation phase, you have to do this, this, and this
- In case of this, you need to do these things: a, b, and c
- You have to do this, and this, and this
- You also have to do these three things: (a) this, (b) this, and (c) this
- Furthermore, it is necessary that you do this and this
- In addition, you have to consider this and that
- We also recommend that you do this and this
- You need to do that also
- For the implementation phase, you have to do this, this, and this
- In case of this, you need to do these things: a, b, and c

FIGURE 10.10 *A slide is not a text page*

Disclaimer

Consultants may give clients digital copies of slide presentations. Clients may distribute the PowerPoints to stakeholders who did not attend the consultants' oral presentations. People who were absent during these meetings will not get the exact comprehension as those who were present. The absentees miss the presenters' oral explanations. Therefore, consultants may put a disclaimer on slide decks like: This presentation is not complete without a verbal description.

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ACTION POINT

Do not try to make PowerPoints that are still understandable without your oral explanation. Slides should convey the messages together with you.

Different charts for different messages

Consultants visualize their data as much as possible. Most clients and other stakeholders understand visuals easier than texts and tables. The audience does not want to read slides like Figure 10.10, and these people should not think about having to understand tables of 10 rows and 8 columns full of numbers. Digesting such slides takes too much energy. After a few slides, audiences get tired, and their attention weakens. Therefore, consultants visualize the information whenever possible. If they have quantitative data, then they do not show tables but charts.

Temptations to create fancy-looking charts

Computer programs can produce so many graphs nowadays. Chapter 8 discussed software for (interactive) visualizations that consultants use. One push of a button is enough to create the most fancy-looking charts. It is tempting to develop sophisticated-looking diagrams. In such a case, the form may take precedence over the content. Clients and present stakeholders will be less charmed by the graphic art pieces that consultants can get from such software. Remember that clients and stakeholders should understand the consultants' presentations with as little effort as possible. Consultants do not exhaust their audience with graphic art that unnecessarily complicates slides. Consultants make smart use of the software to make presentations more attractive instead of more complex.

One push of a button is enough to create the most fancy-looking charts

The importance of the message

The software knows the consultants' data, but it does not know what message consultants want to convey. Let us use an example about scores of companies on customer decision factors. The left-hand bar chart of Figure 10.11 organizes data by company. But as the right-hand bar chart shows, consultants can also rank the data by decision factor. What graph should consultants use? It depends on the message that consultants want to convey. For example, assume that the consultants' message is: 'Price and quality are strengths of competition whereas performance and quality

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are strengths of X'. Then the left-hand chart is the best choice. But the consultants' message may also be: 'X loses on price and service to the competition'. Then the right-hand chart is better.

Messages and chart types

Chapter 8 already touched on chart types. Here we provide an overview of message types and recommended chart types (see Figure 10.12). The saying is: different horses for different courses. We will explain a few graphs. But we will not explain everything because we assume that much is already known.

BENCHMARKS

If consultants want to compare two of several things, a horizontal bar chart is best. Consultants use bars for benchmarks. For example, comparisons of companies are candidates for bar charts (see Figure 10.11). But for an industry cost curve, consultants use columns (see Figure 10.13). The letters represent the different companies in the industry. The column width reflects the production capacity of the companies (in numbers of products).

FIGURE 10.11 *Different chart types for different messages*

COMPONENTS

As discussed before, consultants often decompose a subject into components. If consultants want to show the value of the elements, then they may use pie charts. For example, consultants want to present the market shares of the client and the other

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companies in the industry. Sometimes consultants want to compare at the component level. Then they may use stacked bars. See, for example, Figure 8.19. If consultants decompose performance gaps into components, they may use bar waterfall charts. See, for example, Figure 9.16.

Message is about:	Comment	Recommended chart type
Comparisons	Comparisons in general	Bar chart
	Comparison of components	Stacked bar chart Funnel chart
Components	Components in general	Pie chart Radar chart Sun burst chart Tree map
	Decomposition of a performance gap	Bar waterfall chart
Relations	Relations in general	Scatter plot (2 variables) Bubble chart (3 variables) Surface chart (3 variables)
	Portfolio of products, projects, or businesses	2 by 2 matrix (or variants, such as 3 by 3)
Time series	Time series in general	Column chart Line chart Combo chart (column and line)
	Time series in combination with comparison	Stacked column chart Area chart
	Contribution of solution to performance	Column waterfall chart

FIGURE 10.12 *Message types and chart types*

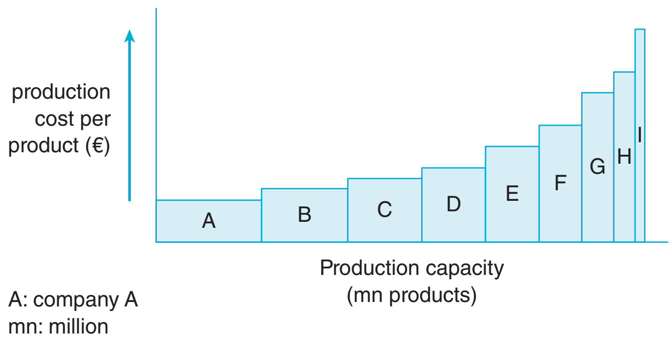

FIGURE 10.13 *An industry cost curve is a comparison with columns*

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TIME SERIES

People associate column graphs and line graphs with a time course. Therefore, consultants use column or line charts for time series. If consultants want to further specify the rate of change over time, they can add an arrow and a balloon with the average growth or shrinkage. For example, the '9%' in the oval in Figure 10.14 is the compound average growth rate of sales (CAGR).

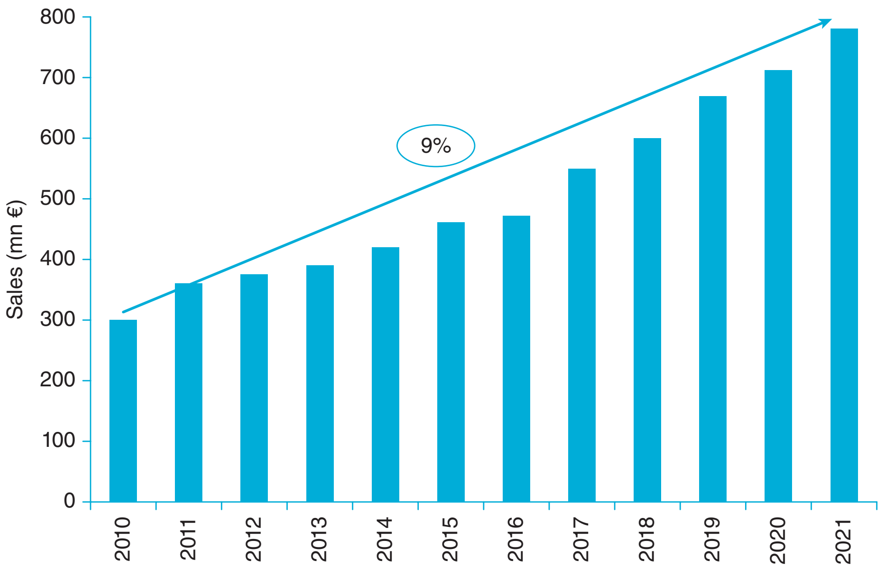

FIGURE 10.14 *A column chart with extra information about the rate of change*

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Visualizing qualitative data

Visualizing *quantitative* data with charts is a well-known practice. But how do consultants display *qualitative* data? Consultants want to make as many subjects as possible measurable, and they measure as much as possible. But it goes without saying that not everything can be quantified. There are limits to what you can quantify without appearing artificial. Part of the problem analysis and part of the solution may not lend themselves to quantification. These parts of the presentation are qualitative. Besides numbers, consultants can use text. Yet, they do not want PowerPoints like text pages (see Figure 10.10). Consultants present keywords instead of showing complete sentences. They visualize relationships between keywords using boxes, arrows, chevrons, and other graphic forms. Computer programs offer many ready-to-use forms to visualize textual information. Think, for example, of PowerPoint's SmartArt. Consultancy firms may have their own digital libraries of icons and other visual forms. Figure 10.15 presents some examples of visual forms. Consultants can use these forms to show process flows, categories, and other visual structures of qualitative data.

There are limits to what you can quantify without appearing artificial

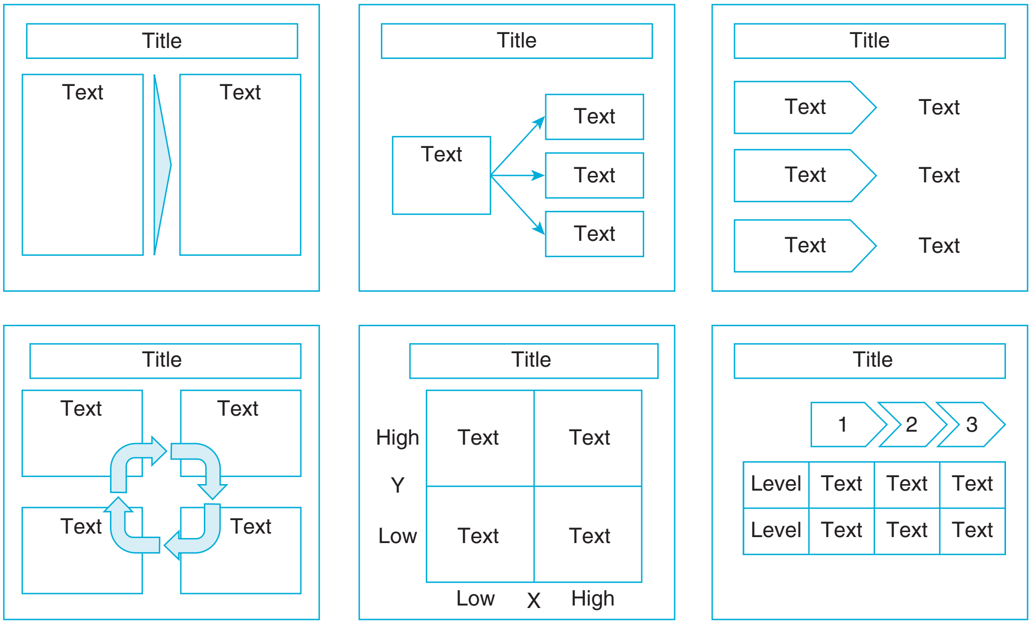

FIGURE 10.15 *Some visual forms to present qualitative information*

Visualizing the presentation structure

As you have seen, consultants pay a lot of attention to the structure of presentations. Consultants use various techniques to emphasize the presentation structure

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to the audience. Clients and other stakeholders present must have the structure well in their mind. Otherwise, the following questions may arise:

- Where are we now in the presentation?
- How does this slide fit into the bigger picture?
- How far along are the consultants with their presentation?

By emphasizing the presentation structure, consultants can manage the expectations of the audience.

THE AGENDA

A well-known technique for structuring presentations is the agenda. Consultants make agendas for presentations. As usual, they present the agenda slide at the beginning of their presentations. Consultants repeat the agenda slide every time they arrive at a new agenda item. They indicate the current topic by placing a box around it. Figure 10.16 shows the agenda with a moving box on the left side.

THE TRACER

Another technique for structuring presentations is the 'tracer'. Tracers are small visualizations or texts in the top right or top left corner of each slide. Figure 10.16 shows a slide with a tracer in the top right corner. Tracers inform the audience where slides fit in the bigger picture of presentations. Tracers may point to agenda items. More sophisticated tracers like in Figure 10.16 may have multiple components. Each component may point to an agenda item. Consultants highlight the focal component of the tracer. For example, in Figure 10.16, the tracer consists of three chevrons. The consultants highlight the first chevron, which points to the presentation's first section. But consultants could also use the chevrons to indicate the various steps of a process, such as the client's value-adding processes or the process for implementing the consultants' advice.

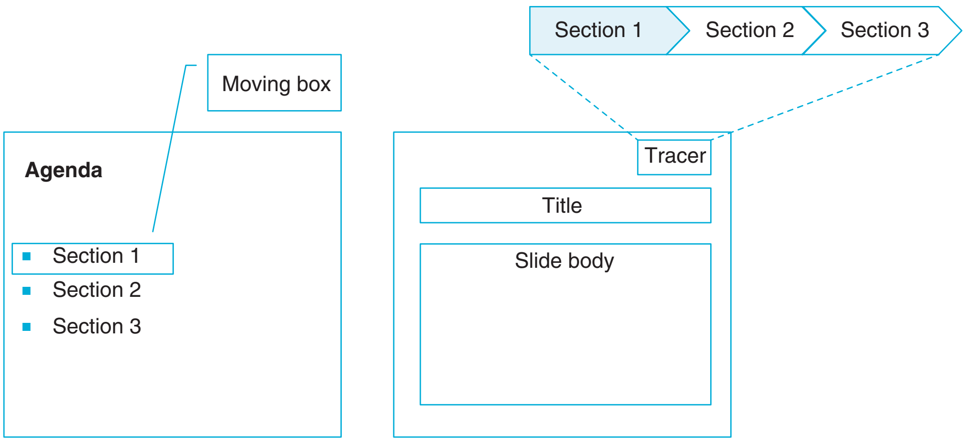

FIGURE 10.16 *Visual techniques to emphasize the presentation structure*

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DELIVERING PRESENTATIONS

Our focus is on the screen content of presentations. But personal delivery of presentations is a crucial success factor. A comprehensive discussion of all aspects of effective presentation is beyond this book but Figure 10.17 provides some practical advice.

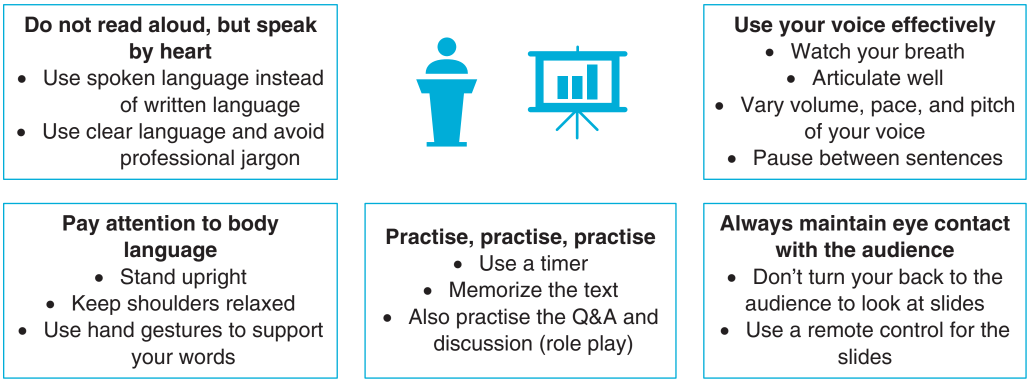

FIGURE 10.17 *Some practical advice for presenting*

CONCLUSION

Consultancy can be abstract and complex for clients and stakeholders. Moreover, the traditional (people-based) delivery model of consultancy lacks a physical product that clients and stakeholders can see and touch (we acknowledge the software products of asset-based consultancy). Furthermore, clients cannot objectively measure the added value of consultancy. Therefore, communication with clients and other key stakeholders is critical for consultants. Presentations are one of the most vital communication techniques of consultants. Consultants present their work plans, analyses, and recommendations to clients and other key stakeholders during the project. Because consultancy can be so complex, structuring of presentations is so essential. Consultants use structuring to simplify their presentations. Simplifications help clients and other key stakeholders in the audience to understand consultants' presentations. The audience's understanding is critical for their acceptance and support for work plans, analyses, and advice.

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RUNNING CASE

The Audience

Consultancy NoSlideshow has developed possible solutions to Keyboard's problem. Partner Kate and her consultants have evaluated these options and selected the option labelled 'A-Focus' as their recommended solution. Josh, Keyboard's CEO has invited Kate to present her advice to his top management team. The meeting will take place next week. The venue is the boardroom, and Kate will get an hour for presentation *and* discussion.

She starts the preparations. First, she thinks about the purpose of the presentation. Kate no longer must convince Josh of the value of the advice. He has already informed her that he is delighted with Kate's recommended solution. But Josh does not decide alone on the solution. There is a big top management team that can participate in the decision-making process. Josh has made it clear to Kate that it is not a done deal. There are a few critical people on the team. Some even deny that there is a problem.

A Problem-Driven Structure

Kate will kick off her presentation with non-controversial and even complimentary words about what Keyboard is and what the company has already achieved. 'Keyboard has rapidly become the number two player'. Since the audience has not yet reached a consensus about the existence of the problem, Kate must start with a question about that problem.

She will begin with the following rhetorical question: '*Does Keyboard have a problem*?'. Kate will not wait for the answer but will show a slide with the profit gap compared to the market leader (see Figure 6.16). The management team members who denied the problem cannot deny these numbers. All must recognize that their business is underperforming.

Now Kate can launch her next rhetorical question: '*Where is the problem*?'. Again, Kate will not wait for the answer but will show a slide with insights from the analysis. She will compare the varying profitability of customers (see Figure 7.24).

After the audience accepts the analysis, Kate can put the following question to them: '*Why does the problem exist*?'. Josh told Kate that a few other top managers still think that scaling disadvantages drove low profits. Kate must clear this misunderstanding before she can reveal the actual causes. Otherwise, the people who believe in the diseconomies of scale will not be open to other explanations of the problem. Kate will show Figure 6.17 to prove that factors other than scale cause most of the profit gap. She will acknowledge that there are disadvantages of scale. Still, Kate will also show that these disadvantages only explain a small part of the gap. Next, she will explain that a series of unprofitable business practices causes most of the problem gap.

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After the audience has accepted the explanation of the gap, Kate can present the possible solutions. Based on the client's criteria, she will demonstrate that the 'Back-to-Basics' option is best. Finally, she will substantiate this recommended solution. Figure 10.18 shows the presentation structure.

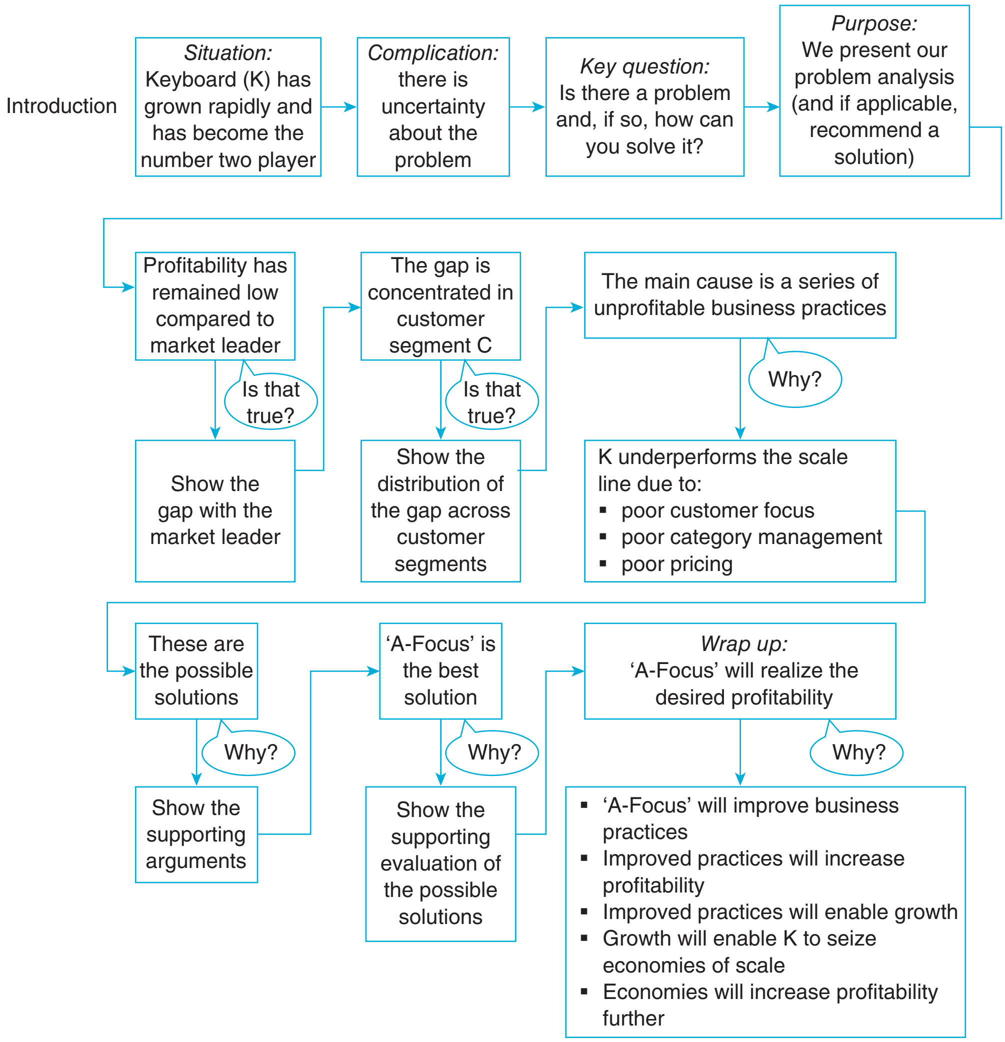

FIGURE 10.18 *A problem-driven presentation structure*

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SUMMARY

This chapter started with outlining the importance of (structured) communication for consultants. Consultancy is abstract and complex for clients and other stakeholders. Communication with clients and stakeholders is essential for consultants to:

a. inform clients and stakeholders
b. convince them of the value of the analyses and advice
c. motivate them to support the consultancy project and implement the advice

Consultants use presentations throughout the project:

- an introduction of the work plan at the project kick-off
- updates of the progress of problem analysis and solution development during the project
- presentation of the advice at the end of the project

Consultants present to the steering committee and to wider audiences of stakeholders. The chapter also discusses some pitfalls in presentations. Consultants can feel pressured to prove their worth in a presentation. They can make the presentations too complex and too long. As a result, consultants lose contact with their audience. The audience cannot follow the presentation and lose their attention.

Presentation structure

We outline how consultants structure presentations. They do not start with creating slides but define the message first. Consultants do not push the message down the audience's throat but pull the audience through rhetorical questions. Consultants use different questions for different situations. If the audience does not know the problem, the main questions are as follows: Is there a problem? Where is the problem? Why does the problem exist? How to solve the problem? The answers of the consultants raise questions from the client and other stakeholders in the audience. Consultants use the analysis outcomes of the problem hypotheses tests to support their problem analysis. Likewise, they use the tests of solution hypotheses to substantiate their recommendations. The presentation structure fits the audience's knowledge.

The storyline and slide design

The presentation structure forms the basis of a storyline (the horizontal flow). Subsequently, consultants translate the storyline into a series of slides. Each slide has one message in the title. The slide body supports that message (the vertical flow). Consultants visualize quantitative data in the slide body via charts. The consultants

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also seek visualization for qualitative data. Finally, consultants use tracers and agenda slides with moving boxes to clarify the presentation structure.

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QUESTIONS

1. The audience for the final presentation consists of the project steering committee and the chairperson of the client's works council. You have kept the steering group informed, but the works council chairperson has very little knowledge of the client's problem. How do you deal with this significant difference in prior knowledge of the members of the audience?
2. You present your recommendation to expand the client's product range. One of the arguments is that consumers will respond positively to this expansion. However, one of the audience members, the client's production director, disagrees with your findings about consumer responses. He questions your analysis method and data. How can you best respond to this criticism?
3. In an online video presentation, the participants can read the PowerPoint slide on their computer screen. This way, they can read much better than in a physical meeting room setting where the presentation screen is at least a few feet away from them. Do you think it is good to put more information on the slides in a video presentation?

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