



## SPOTLIGHT ON CONSULTING ISSUES: E-CONSULTING—CURRENT AND FUTURE TRENDS IN ORGANIZATIONAL CONSULTING

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*This is an ongoing series of articles on key consulting psychology topics using a “members-speaking-to-members” format. This Spotlight article explores the world of e-consulting. Consulting psychologists describe their experiences and perspectives in using web-based tools and resources that are helpful in their work with clients. Society of Consulting Psychology members also provide predictions regarding the future evolution of e-consulting, including suggestions for how consulting psychologists may contribute to the development and the effective and appropriate use of electronic tools and resources.*

**Question 1. In which areas of your work do you find yourself most frequently using web-based resources (e.g., on-line testing; search engines for research; client communications; chat rooms, web page etc.)?**

► I frequently use web-based resources. I e-mail both clients and prospects regularly. I work with support staff that utilize a variety of web-based client relationship management programs and search engines to research prospects and to conduct research for current clients. I use the internet for on-line assessments, in particular 360's, and to conduct other types of organizational surveys, career management systems, and interactive, web-based demo's and presentations. We also host on-line development guides and maintain an interactive web page.

—*Laurie Moret*

► My primary use of web-based resources is for on-line assessments. I conduct 360 surveys, employee opinion surveys and have my executive coaching clients complete some personality assessments via the web. In addition, communication via e-mail is the default method for 99% of my executive clients for scheduling, and for short responses to coaching questions. They prefer e-mail. I use the telephone for important interactions that require listening and responding to nuances. I conduct 99% of my research into leadership topics first via the web. I also have expanded my collegial network far beyond my region. The world has opened up to me and the most interesting people have found me via search engines. People from Switzerland, Venezuela, and China have found me using search engines. It's amazing.

—*Carl Robinson*

► I have primarily used search engines for research: including dissertations and related consulting psychology studies as well as potential client and/or employer web sites. I also use the web in communications with colleagues, professional organizations and potential clients/employers.

—*Bob Lusignan*



► I regularly use web-based resources in the following areas:

- On-line research for best practice information (references for clients).
- Web-enabled technology to design and deliver OD programs: Technology enables world-wide distribution of profiles, templates. Data can be collected on-line, stored dynamically, and recalled immediately.
- Web conferencing: for design and delivery of OD consultation.
- Mass communication tools (chat rooms) and client communications.
- Assessments: 360 surveys, Personality tools (e.g. Emergenetics, Personalysis, etc.)

—*Ann Marie Neal*

► The most frequent uses of the web for us are assessment (selection and development) and marketing. Regarding marketing, we find that more and more we are using the web and web-based resources to get our name and products out there for clients. Sifting through the complexity of web-based advertising can be a bear and a waste of money, so finding the right way to do it can be difficult. We are using more resources such as key word search strategies with search engines, targeted email newsletters, listings on professional sites, etc. Obviously, the more targeted you can be in getting your name out there on the web, the better. More & more, our leads come from HR professionals who have searched the web to find potential vendors, or who subscribe to a professional web-based service.

—*Sarah Glass*

► I have found that linking on-line testing procedures to our company web pages is helpful in: a) informing clients of other services, and 2) ensuring great client relationship management.

—*Brian Buford*

► The primary web based resources I use are search engines for research. I am very cautious in using e-mail for client communications, preferring telephones. I am sure this will change as real time video conferencing becomes more viable within the next year or two.

—*Lilli Friedland*

► I use several web-based resources: client communications (e-mail); various on-line assessments; using our company's web site as a service delivery tool for components of otherwise high touch projects.

—*John Fennig*

The most frequent resources I use are: on-line testing, the on-line leadership development system we developed, researching potential clients in preparations for sales calls, and responding to client requests for content related to their business strategies/cases, etc...



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—*Jill George*

## Question 2. What current or emerging trends are you seeing in e-consulting?

► I have been seeing greater openness and comfort in using technology for coaching and OD consultation. More clients have on-line capabilities and have ready access to the tool. Coaching used to be done face-to-face, then after September 11<sup>th</sup>, more clients were interested in telephone consultation. Now, I do a good bit of coaching/consultation via e-mail and through web-conferencing options.

—*Ann Marie Neal*

► I am seeing more and more clients interested in web-based development programs. They are not only seeking individual web-based "tools" such as self-assessment and 360, but they also want integrated career development websites that are accessible to everyone in the organization and house important information about competencies, internal and external developmental resources, assessment feedback, coaching resources, etc. Clients view web programs as a way to ensure consistency in processes (selection & development) as well as a tool to communicate consistent messages and information across the organization.

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nickname is  
"nothing but  
net" and that's  
not a reference  
to basketball.**

—*Sarah Glass*

► On-line leadership development is a large emerging market that we are hearing from clients. We are hearing increased requests for on-line performance management tools and resources. We have one client whose nickname is "nothing but net" and that's not a reference to basketball.

—*Jill George*

► Using instant messaging as a coaching tool. Being ever on-call as needed by a client (or at scheduled times you control). Use of inexpensive web cams and free software (e.g. Microsoft NetMeeting) to link geographically disbursed internal project staff and clients.

—*John Fennig*

► I am seeing:

- With the use of "real time video conferencing" there is an increase in the creation of virtual teams. Companies throughout the world may bring in consultants briefly for various projects.
- A proliferation of coaches (many poorly trained and not credentialed) which may lead to coaching going out of vogue.

—*Lilli Friedland*



► I am seeing information technology (IT) emerge as a key enabling factor for consulting psychologists to leverage new ways of working and delivering their existing products/services, as well as a driver of new products and services.

—*Bob Lusignan*

► Primarily, I see an increased expectation and demand for electronic solutions. At the same time, I see a fairly low understanding and a corresponding need for education regarding the costs associated with these tools and functional customizations of them. I see e-consulting expanding the work day significantly, but also reducing travel demands significantly.

—*Laurie Moret*

### **Question 3. What do you find is your favorite or most helpful e-resource in your consulting work?**

► I access the Harvard Business School Publishing website frequently ([www.hbsp.harvard.edu/home.html](http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu/home.html)). I use the Google search engine ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) for most searches. I have also taken several web-based courses from different vendors.

—*Carl Robinson*

► The PAN (Performance Assessment Network, at [www.pantesting.com](http://www.pantesting.com)) testing is a quick and easy process to use. PAN is an internet e-testing system for the distribution, analysis and administration of professional assessments, tests and surveys.

—*Jill George*

I see a two-dimensional trend, where consulting psychologists will a) leverage the “e” delivery mechanism for existing products and services and b) be a resource for clients to leverage new technologies in their work environment.

► Many clients initially call because of our company’s web page advertisements. I believe that a strong first impression can be formed by the content and form of a website.

—*Brian Buford*

► My most helpful resources are on-line publications and newsletters.

—*Lilli Friedland*

► Client websites are most helpful to me. These sites assist me in quickly getting up to speed with clients and staying current.

—*John Fennig*

► I find the most helpful resources to be e-mail and on-line assessments (e.g. 360 feedback and others), with corresponding development interactive materials.

—*Laurie Moret*

► I am quite fond of the e-technology delivery of “best practices” sessions. Linkage ([www.linkageinc.com](http://www.linkageinc.com)) and Corporate Leadership Council ([www.corporateleadershipcouncil.com](http://www.corporateleadershipcouncil.com)) are large providers of such offerings. These are great tools to keep my skills fresh while never



leaving the office/home. This is a very cost effective delivery of information.

—*Ann Marie Neal*

► I would say that both search engines and pertinent web-sites have been my most helpful e-resources to date.

—*Robert Lusignan*

► I find that the most helpful tools are internal web-based processes that we have developed which make my life as a telecommuter that much better.

—*Sarah Glass*

**Question 4. Where do you see the future of e-consulting developing? Given this direction, where might be the greatest opportunities for consulting psychologists to participate in e-consulting in the future?**

► I see two key developments. First, people will have access to inexpensive, useful psychologically-based assessments to help optimize daily decisions. Second, psychology as a profession will influence the world of business, government and leaders on as even a footing as MBAs and attorneys do currently. This increasing influence will be accomplished via mastery and use of e-tools.

—*John Fennig*

► It seems to me that e-consulting has been evolving similarly to other developments in the field of corporate psychology. I see it evolving from an internally focused resource (used between corporate psychologists for knowledge management, communications, etc.) to an externally focused resource (used between psychologist and client). The benefits to clients are tremendous—but I see a need for psychologists to become more comfortable with the products, the tools rather than relying solely on a “face-to-face” delivery system. Places where I believe e-technology can be utilized include:

- Direct consultation with executives (they are so busy—but if they could log on and chat with their consultant versus schedule face-to-face meetings, the impact could be tremendous).
- Delivery of various assessment tools, such as 360 surveys. Quantitative tools have migrated to online delivery of late. Qualitative 360 tools could also move in this direction.
- “Best practice” knowledge management tools.

—*Ann Marie Neal*

► I see the expectation that consultants are computer-savvy and able to convey their resources online increasing. That being said, I believe there is also a need to modify expectations about how to use e-consulting most effectively and how to establish “email/e-consulting etiquette.”

—*Laurie Moret*

► More and more companies are moving to “web-izing” their selection & development processes, as well as, much of their training. As more and more of the once “high touch” programs are “going internet,” consulting psychologists have a responsibility to help clients understand what parts of the program are best served on the web, and what types are still best provided face-to-face. Helping



clients utilize the web to ensure consistency, ease of delivery, etc. is important; but equally important is helping them deliver the "right" message via the web as well as helping them design human interaction into the appropriate parts of the process.

—*Sarah Glass*

► On-line assessment, scoring and development using streaming media for video-based role plays, training on the assessment process and interpretation of results.

—*Jill George*

► I see a two dimensional trend, where consulting psychologists will: a) leverage the “e” delivery mechanism for existing products and services, and; b) be a resource for clients to leverage new technologies in their work environment.

—*Bob Lusignan*

► On-line testing has created much opportunity, discussion and criticism. I bet it is here to stay.

—*Brian Buford*

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