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The Sociologist as Consultant

Ann Marie Ellis

Southwest Texas State University

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Book Reviews

The Sociologist as Consultant, Edited by Joyce Miller Iutcovich and Mark Iutcovich. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987. 287 pp.

Ann Marie Ellis

Southwest Texas State University

As the role of sociological practitioner becomes more widely accepted, sociologists with special expertise and entrepreneurial spirit may want to establish themselves as consultants. Few sociologists have training in business management. Many may be unaware of the activities of sociologists who have successful practices. With little published in this area, *The Sociologist as Consultant* presents itself as an exciting contribution for this emerging field.

The text promises two important goals: to examine the types of work done by consulting sociologists and to describe how to prepare for and establish a practice. Overall, the text did a creditable job in reviewing a range of professional consulting; it was found lacking in the section on establishing a consulting practice.

Part I has two chapters: applying a sociology in the consulting role, and the constraints in establishing and maintaining a practice. O'Toole, Turbett, and O'Toole, experienced consultants, identify a number of consultant roles in agency settings. They describe the application of the negotiation paradigm in solving practitioners' and consultants' problems. They also discuss issues and strategies that sociologists should consider in order to find work as consultants.

Lange looks at the prospects for anyone who would establish himself/herself as a consultant. Lange's perspective is less than optimistic, discussing constraints coming from within the discipline and misconceptions about sociology in the "real world," he suggests that, "instead of infiltrating the 'applied world' through consulting work . . . sociologists may have to be content with holding the ground they now have in academia. . . ." Lange calls for greater realism about career paths for sociologists, and he warns that, "the 'real world' and 'consulting sociologists' remain largely unready for each other."

Part II of the text describes consulting activities of sociologists. Fornaciari and Chakiris present an excellent overview of the role of organizational development (OD) specialists. The authors describe the OD consulting process from initial contact to completion and the actions and decisions associated with each phase. In a final section, they present some trends and implications of these for OD consultants.

Koppel cites examples of projects within the World Bank, USAID, and the

United Nations which have provided consulting activities for American sociologists. Koppel describes AID's social soundness analysis, a system that assesses the sociocultural context and consequences of projects, and the role of sociologist in multilateral development projects. The chapter includes discussion of the educational preparation and professional development of those who would work in the international sphere, and presents some basic issues for practicing sociologists in any area.

Mercurio's chapter on market research was disappointing. The chapter focuses on a narrowly defined area: store location research. Since market research is a viable and lucrative area, I had hoped for a broader article which would include managing projects, developing research designs and survey instruments, leading focus groups, or other activities that sociologists have found to be a natural area for their talents.

The inclusion of the chapter by Swatos, on consulting for churches, suggested a number of ways that sociologist/consultants can consult on the denominational or local congregational levels and as clinical pastoral counselors. Swatos notes that this may represent one of the oldest forms of sociological practice in America, but I wondered about the likelihood of funds on the congregation level to make this type of consultation viable today.

Smith, a trained engineer and sociologist, describes the utility of the combined disciplines for organizational analysis and managing change in high technology settings. Though few sociologists have academic preparation across these rather disparate disciplines, the real value of the Smith chapter is his excellent suggestions for interdisciplinary teaming.

Part III addresses training professionals for consulting practice and implications for education. Garrison reminds us that students may have post-baccalaureate professional lives that span fifty-plus years. He argues for a liberal education that stresses broadly based skills rather than narrowly defined programs with specialities in institutional content areas. He suggests that undergraduate educators stress the core ideas of our discipline, that sociology curricula be more integrated and sequential, and that elective courses be integral to our sociology program rather than designed as popular electives to lure non-majors. He challenges undergraduate educators to establish more rigorous standards in all our courses and especially in introductory sociology—emphasizing that the quality of our majors is crucial to the survival of our field.

Jones gives an overview of the elements in the education program of aspiring consultants and mentions several outstanding texts on educating consultants and establishing a consulting career. Among these was Gallessich's *The Profession and Practice of Consultation*. The Gallessich text is far more helpful in presenting models and approaches to consulting and information on establishing a practice than the text under review.

Ademek and Boros describe the applied sociology intern as a junior consult-

ant. The authors adapt Van Horne's typology as a means of analyzing internship roles, and they present four cases which illustrate consulting roles of their interns: researcher, program developer, evaluator and field educator. Each case study demonstrates the capability of students in different practice settings.

The chapter by Melick presents the case that sociologists with applied experience in a second field (her own is nursing) have advantages because of their dual career preparation. The author draws on her own professional experience and responses from an exploratory study of professionals with dual career preparation to outline the advantages and the disadvantages of such a background for consultant work.

Part IV focuses on establishing a consulting practice. In a very practical chapter, Williams and Jones describe the relationship between research consultants and agency practitioners—a relationship characterized more by conflict than consensus. Williams, a research consultant, and Jones, a public agency practitioner, discuss reasons for this conflict and present specific strategies for achieving consensus and cooperation.

In the following chapter, Bernie Jones shares useful insights from his years of operating a non-profit corporation. Jones discusses problems that are the nemesis of many business persons: client building, marketing yourself, managing cash flow, collecting fees, and maintaining one's integrity with non-profit clients. He offers some pithy advice: "time," "cost," and "quality" are three important variables in the consulting business; let the client dictate any two, as long as the consultant can specify the third.

Hutslar's chapter on "entrepreneurialship" offers the promise of finally getting us to the nuts and bolts of establishing a practice, but the information that I had hoped would be there simply wasn't. Instead, Hutslar (a personal, business, and sport management consultant) gives us "some personal tips that you can take or leave." His tips include, "when you work closely with people, brush your teeth frequently so that you will have pleasant breath." It was at this point that I began to search for a different text on establishing a consulting practice and met with the Gallessich volume. Her widely cited text presents basic information for the novice, which includes the processes of each phase of consultation from entry and relationship building to the final phases of evaluation and termination.

The final section of the Iutovich text, "Sociologists in Practice," includes articles by Canan on consulting for city government, Boros on consulting with a grass roots community group, and Thoresen's formal and informal consulting with athletic teams and camp owners about homosexuality. Since the volume already has a section on consulting activities for sociologists, these last chapters seem out of place at the end of the text.

Overall, the text presents a picture of the enormously varied ways in which sociologists act as consultants. As such, it will be of value to anyone with

curiosity about the consultant role or to those who teach in the practice areas. For those who are ready to try their hand at consulting, the section on establishing yourself as an entrepreneur, which could have been the heart of this text, left me wishing for more.

The Use, Non-Use, Misuse of Applied Social Research in the Courts, edited by Michael J. Sacks and Charles H. Baron. Cambridge Mass: Abt Books Inc, 1980. 189pp. Hardback

G. Melton Mobley, Ph.D., J.D.

Attorney and Adjunct Associate Professor of Sociology Georgia State University

The title of this modest but useful book casts a rather longer shadow than accuracy should allow. While not light, the articles are easy to read. One needs no training in statistics or advanced research methods, though both would enhance the insights which have been drawn. There are no equations or long, jargon-filled paragraphs that so torture the readers of some professional journals.

Although not new, the book is still relevant, possessing, if not a timeless quality, at least an enduring value. The collection of articles and comments provides a panoramic yet insightful view of the issues that arise when courts in modern American society confront problems that require—or at least would benefit from—social scientific analysis. I found this of value from both of my perspectives; i.e. as a practicing trial attorney and as a sociologist.

The book follows the conference style, having one or more short introductory papers preceding a transcription of the panel discussion that followed. The introductory papers are brief, often only a page or two. The treatment is never exhaustive, but most papers offer something to make their inclusion worthwhile, if only a new twist on an old topic. The comments that follow the introductory papers are often distracting, but valuable because they reflect the way members of certain communities approach the issue that had been discussed.

An exception to this generally favorable evaluation is Michael Kirby's piece which purports to "provide a framework for understanding the effect and value of one form of applied social research, project evaluation, upon the criminal justice system." The piece is not badly written. It simply states the obvious: funding sources must understand enough about evaluation to order a useful study; research methods must be explained simply so that the people who pay for and use it can understand it; research methods must fit research problems; and valid evaluation requires an experimental or quasi-experimental design. Kirby's is not the only inclusion that suffers from the malaise of stating the obvious, but it is typical of one troubling characteristic of some of the articles