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I could hardly wait to start working with my new client. A highly profitable software development firm in the northwestern United States with 400 employees was experiencing some organizational problems. At first blush, it appeared to be suffering from the predictable pains of unbridled growth and premature organizational puberty. I found the firm's founder charismatic, the young staff intellectually superior, the organizational culture electric with energy, and the suburban headquarters reminiscent of a well-endowed college campus. I was glowing with the confidence they expressed in my ability to do the job, particularly because of their historic resistance to using consultants.

This project had the markings of a challenge, but I believed my experience matched the client's needs and the initial goals we had established were achievable.

Once the project began, however, my excitement began to fizzle. After several months of meetings with the CEO to discuss progress and preliminary feedback, I started to feel on trial, intimidated, defensive, and unsure of myself. With each successive meeting, these reactions increased in frequency and intensity. Trust in my own skills and knowledge was waning, and I began to obsess over my preparations and documentation. I was starting to dislike the senior managers, and that, in turn, led me to question my objectivity toward the client. My emotions were getting in the way. This was no longer any fun.

After the first twelve months of work with the organization, I dreamed that this project would just fade away. I wanted to terminate the contract but did not. I worked harder to assure that my work was flawless and unassailable. Finally, after eighteen months, as the project started to lose steam, I began to understand what was happening. An insidious psychological process, of which I was unaware at the time, was taking hold and destroying the collaborative relationship I thought I had initially developed with the CEO.

You begin a new project with confidence and excitement. As time passes, you struggle increasingly with professional insecurity and work even harder, despite your growing desire to terminate your contract. What has happened? Psychological baggage influences the dynamics between client and consultant.

This intensive consulting project has since passed, and I have had the luxury of time and distance to reflect further. Three questions arise as I look back on the experience:

- What explains the strong reactions I experienced to this client group, stronger in some ways than those experienced with other clients?
- Could I have done more to establish and maintain a more productive client relationship?
- Are there elements represented in this case that prevail in every client-consultant relationship?

Consultants place a great deal of emphasis on what they do to help clients solve problems and meet challenges. But the quality of the client-consultant relationship often determines the success of a project and requires as much attention as the content of the expertise we provide. The need for successful adaptations to changing circumstances puts organizations under pressure to be flexible and innovative and places a greater demand on consultants to grapple with deeper dimensions of consulting relationships. Increasingly, they must confront perplexing, seemingly irrational behavior that becomes pervasive as relationships become collaborative. This article discusses the difficulties inherent in maintaining a collaborative relationship with clients and focuses on three components that embody the collaborative consulting relationship. These components—the Working Partnership, the Hidden Relationship and the Open Relationship—account for the interpersonal dynamics of every collaboration and provide consultants with a framework for understanding the often bewildering behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that emerge in such a relationship.

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The Paradox of the Collaborative Relationship

The client-consultant relationship stands or falls in relation to the quality of exchanges that move across an internal boundary between the two parties. This boundary exists due to their unique division of labor, and it is influenced by different sources of resistance and levels of expectations that each may have of the other. Managing the boundary requires that expectations be understood, resistance reduced, and the scope of the work clarified. The ultimate goal is to create a climate of openness, trust, and clarity. Boundaries can be problematic if they are too rigid or permeable. A paradox inherent in this collaboration confounds managing the boundaries or balance of the relationship: the consultant often needs a perspective on the organization as a whole, and he or she must stand outside the system in order to maintain objectivity; simultaneously, the consultant must have an active relationship with key members of the organization.

The paradox is further magnified because consultants must be authoritative in the expert sense to gain credibility and be effective. Although they bring an important frame of reference that may not exist in the organization, the relationship is made even more complex by the inherent dependency that develops from the consultant being viewed as "the authority." Both dynamics work against a natural collaboration. Today, many clients would still prefer that their consultant assume the expert role and give them direct advice, and too often consultants are happy to satisfy this desire and give it. When clients submit to dependency, collaboration becomes illusory. Collaborative relationships are often avoided, not because clients are ill-informed but because the alternatives to collaboration represent the path of least psychological resistance.

The relationship can also be viewed on two levels. On one, it is a process where the consultant serves in the role of helper. Yet, on another level, the relationship often presents itself as a microcosm of the dynamics that exist in the organization. In other words, what is going on in the organization will be replicated in this relationship, and one of the consultant's responsibilities is to observe, interpret, and extrapolate from this microcosm.

Making a collaborative relationship work is easier said than done. I believe a set of dynamics between client and consultant, addressed partially in psychoanalytic theory, can explain what underlies, as well as what undermines, the relationship. A consultant must be prepared to sort through some potential psychological baggage that accompanies these dynamics if he or she is committed to collaboration.*

Clients may search for the quick-fix solutions because it is easier for them, consciously or otherwise, to avoid the real reasons for a problem. Exploring the source of a problem could become psychologically disturbing and arouse defensive reactions. It is often "safer" to operate at a superficial level and avoid confronting disturbing issues, fail to engage in a collaborative relationship with the consultant, or stick with whatever seemingly simple magic bullet may be in vogue.

Line managers may lose interest in an improvement project if the focus begins to shift from technical or business issues to personal concerns. Somewhere during the process, a manager may begin to realize that responsibility for the problem is not entirely others'; his or her own management style and philosophy are at least partially to blame. In these cases, it may be easier to terminate the project than to confront what may seem a daunting need for some type of personal change.

Consultants with a process orientation often begin with a set of working strategies and assumptions that can enhance the collaborative relationship:

- They start with the premise that insight leads to learning and learning contributes to the client's capacity to develop professionally, organizationally, and perhaps even personally.
- They realize that relevant information can come from a variety of sources. They seek information, and position themselves to be receptive to it, while they strive to be neutral to all parties within the client group.
- They create boundaries in their client relationships, yet work to develop an environment of trust and safety for the client.
- They assume that the client's definition of the problem is not always the fundamental problem. In other words, they suspend early judgment and avoid believing the client's diagnosis.

*Psychoanalytic models of the mind are now being used to clarify life in organizations and to deal with issues concerning career, individual, and organizational stress; organizational culture; leadership and entrepreneurship; and family business. Manfred Kets de Vries, Abraham Zaleznik, Harry Levinson, and others have created a sound framework for bridging psychoanalytic theory and organizational behavior.

The Three Components of Collaboration

Consultants often operate like detectives by trying to decipher and interpret what is going on in the organizational world of others. In a sense they are code breakers, constantly presented with different types of information. During interchanges with a client they sometimes understand the meaning of this information, they are sometimes at a loss, and sometimes they fail to even pick up on an important piece of evidence that is in front of them.

Consultants are code breakers, constantly presented with different types of information.

The model introduced here serves a dual function for managing the diversity of information that emerges during collaboration. If used to diagnose a consultant-client relationship, it can help a consultant recognize the underlying significance of the client's behavior and of the consultant's reaction to it. As a prescriptive model, it can help consultants understand the range of overt and covert, conscious and unconscious thoughts and behavior within a collaborative relationship.

Successful consulting depends on information gathering and interpretation. Unfortunately, behavior, thoughts, and attitudes that confound, confuse, or bother us can become relegated to the sidelines or even derail our progress. An alternative approach is to understand these dynamics as a potential source of rich data that can ultimately help us serve the client. The Working Partnership, the Hidden Relationship and the Open Relationship all present themselves, to varying degrees, in every client-consultant relationship.

The Working Partnership

The development of a comfortable working relationship is the first step in forming a collaboration. It is characterized by mutual liking, trust, and respect and consists of three elements.

There needs to be an agreement about the goals of the consulting program, a consensus about the tasks of the work and an emotional link between the client and consultant. The working partnership creates a positive attachment between the participants and an implicit or explicit understanding that the goals and tasks are realistic and appropriate for both parties. The process required to reach agreement on goals and tasks creates what is often called an emotional alignment that establishes the bond, and the degree of this alignment is a principal contributor to the outcome of the relationship.

Invariably, clients ask themselves sobering questions about the consultant they have hired: "Does this individual really know what she's doing? Can I trust her? Will she help me solve the organizational problems I now face or will she hurt me or con me? Does asking for help mean that I can't solve my own problems?" Clients' requests for help are often laced with a degree of ambivalence: "I want to know the extent of my problems but am I prepared for the changes that may be required of me to manage them?" If trust is not established through actions that address this component, then commitment will be compromised.

What makes for a good working partnership between client and consultant? From the consultant's side, the partnership is strengthened by professional concern and compassion, and also an abiding willingness to help the client face his or her problems. As in any helping relationship, the conditions of empathy, genuineness, and respect are probably central in developing the partnership since an almost overwhelming need by the client is to trust his or her consultant. During a project, consultants often experience very strong reactions to their clients. Here, the consultant's job is to try to understand these feelings, make responses to the client aimed at encouraging mutual understanding, and maintain a consistent level of professional guidance and support.

The working partnership also hinges on the consultant's ability to assure that the client has actively contributed to the planning and implementation of the work and understands the rationale behind the strategies and actions they are about to embark on. In this regard, the Working Partnership is as much about educating the client about the process as solving the problem.

From the client's side, he or she must have the capacity to trust the consultant so that the linking can occur. The real issue of fit is found in the working partnership. If the client cannot conceptually understand and appreciate what the consultant is trying to do and why he or she has chosen a particular strategy, a sound working partnership will not develop. This now places responsibility on the client to learn, understand, and accept the process; otherwise, the relationship regresses back to a one-way dependency on the "expert" consultant. Clients unwilling to take on this responsibility end up subverting our attempts at collaboration.

My initial contract with the software firm was smooth and predictable. A small task force had been formed to evaluate potential consultants, nominate three, and recommend one to the CEO. I met with the CEO and was offered the job the next day.... if I could provide additional information that would satisfy a final selection criterion: "What were your college SAT scores?" I was asked.

Since they were taken more than twenty-seven years earlier, I could not recall them exactly and gave my best estimate. I learned then that all employment decisions were based partially on these scores and that having a degree from a short list of exclusive colleges and universities was the sine qua non of employment at the firm. (At the time, I did not consciously recognize the impact of this question on my own attitude toward the client. Nor did I try to have an open discussion with him about whether and why this was an appropriate question for him to ask.)

My working partnership with the CEO seemed to develop easily and quickly. The first stage of the project was an organizational diagnosis to articulate the problem, and since he was a former professor and academic researcher (while I was currently in both roles in addition to my practice), our beliefs and standards regarding research methodology and the validity of measurement instruments gave us a common foundation for the relationship. He understood and agreed with my recommended approach and expressed commitment to enhance both the organizational climate and his own leadership skills. I communicated my position and values regarding confidentiality, client participation in the process, and billing matters. We discussed our ideal organizations and found that our visions converged. The client expressed confidence in me and optimism for the impending project.

Both clients and consultants vary in their ability to cultivate working partnerships. Consultants need a well-developed ability for monitoring the emotional side of their clients and responding to it, especially during difficult periods of the change process. They must also be able to understand and modulate their own feelings toward the client during the periods when progress moves in halting steps and they become frustrated. I find that most consultants focus to some degree on this component of the collaborative relationship and work hard to enhance it. The contracting phase of a consulting engagement essentially addresses many issues in the Working Partnership, and Block (1981), among others, has provided valuable guidance.

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The second component, the Hidden Relationship, has received significantly less attention because we are less conscious of its prevalence and often confuse it with the Open Relationship. Nonetheless, the Hidden Relationship can be insidious, and, if not managed, it can block any hope of collaboration.

The Hidden Relationship: Transference and Countertransference

The Hidden Relationship represents the psychological phenomenon of transference by the client. It entails a misperception or misunderstanding of the consultant regardless of positive or negative reactions, and can be the client's defense against acknowledging a need for change in his own behavior.

Although the client may be conscious of feelings or perceptions regarding the consultant, the fact that the client is misperceiving (seeing the consultant in certain ways as someone he or she is not) is not conscious. If it were conscious, the transference would not exist. All people, and in this case all clients, possess a predisposition to engage in certain distortions of other people. Aspects of the consultant's behavior or appearance often serve as a trigger that allows the client to form a predisposed perception. The phenomenon of transference is a resistance or, more accurately, a defense. It is as if maintaining certain feelings toward and perceptions of the consultant allows the client to keep shielded from his or her awareness of painful experiences.

Transference is based on four major feelings that every human being experiences: love, hate, feelings about dependency, and feelings about one's self-image. The feelings people have about dependency and self-image, in particular, affect the degree of transference. Transference probably occurs in all relationships, but its effect is magnified and intensified in any help-giving relationship. Timing seems to play little if any role in the occurrence of this hidden relationship. It often occurs at the moment of first contact with the consultant—or maybe even prior to contact, since expectations about the intervention and fantasy about the consultant can emerge before the work begins.

"Transference pull" is a ubiquitous

phenomenon in any helping relationship. Since all consultants are partially a blank screen, in that most of their personal backgrounds and characteristics are unknown to their clients, transference can be triggered and has the potential of intruding on the collaboration. This, in turn, can have an impact on their work.

This means that a consultant must be aware of and prepared for a transference throughout the consulting relationship, because he or she might be seen as a threat by some in the client organization. In these cases, the consultant will be tested repeatedly and can expect hostility when change is introduced.

I was first introduced to the organization at a large luncheon forum that brought together many of the employees as a means to explain my upcoming work with the organization. One individual in particular shot me menacing looks from the moment I walked in the door and asked during a Q&A what assurance they would have that I would not divulge trade secrets regarding software code and other proprietary corporate information. Verbally and nonverbally, the signal from him was clear: "I know very little about you, and, even though all that I have heard is positive, I don't trust you. I don't like the idea that you'll be poking around here." After the meeting, I learned he was a respected senior-ranking vice president.

Transference operates in both directions. When experienced by the consultant, countertransference represents reactions toward the client. There are two views on countertransference: the older, Freudian-based belief is that it is linked to the consultant's past significant relationships. These reactions will typically address the consultant's unresolved needs rather than the client's problem or development.

The more contemporary view, and the one I believe explains most of the countertransference that consultants frequently experience, suggests that it can be induced by the client and is not a sign of the consultant's unresolved issues. In this view, the countertransference process is regarded as an appropriate, natural emotional response that is useful as an information-gathering tool. Of course, the consultant has to be aware that countertransference is taking place in order to use it constructively. Induced countertransference is a form of nonverbal communication achieved though a process known as projective identification. Unfortunately, "the way projective identification works in the consulting relationship is little understood or studied by consultants" (Kets de Vries, 1991, p. 311).

The unconscious transfer of information occurs in two phases. It begins with the client's denial or rejection of thoughts or feelings inherent in his or her unconscious image of a situation. The client therefore alters an uncomfortable experience by imagining that part of it is an attribute of someone or something else, rather than him or herself.

In the second phase of projective identification, the recipient of the attribution or projection—the consultant—is essentially inducted into the originator's—the client's—scheme of things. The consultant is subtly pressured into thinking, feeling, and even behaving in a manner consistent with the feelings or thoughts projected by the client.

The impact of projections from a client and the vulnerability (or receptivity) of consultants to the projection, which in turn elicits the countertransference, is not a pathological sign. Rather, it can be a rich source of information about unconscious dimensions of the client's organization.

Applying the concept of projective identification to client-consultant relationships begins with two assumptions. The first is that this projective process is ongoing and the organization's inability to deal with it can actually influence the organization to bring in an outside consultant. For example, if a manager denies his or her own lack of competency and "projects" it onto others, that manager may recruit a consultant and define the problem as staff incompetence. A second assumption is that developing anything close to a collaborative relationship places the consultant in the client's sphere of organizational social relationships. Working in the same vortex of organizational dynamics that swirl around others who work there, the consultant can get drawn into its effect.

The projective process is a stream of communication that yields otherwise hidden information. Typically, this information addresses issues that the client is struggling with but for which he or she cannot take ownership.

Given these two assumptions, the projective process provides an opportunity for vital insight. It is a stream of communication that yields otherwise hidden information—data about the situation otherwise unavailable through more ordinary means of investigation.

Typically, this information addresses issues that the client is struggling with but for which he or she cannot take ownership.

The CEO, noted in the national media as one of the most brilliant practitioners in his profession, has an impressive presence in meetings. He exudes sharp analytic skills, a memory like a hard drive for details and concepts, and a polished interpersonal demeanor that enables him to effectively draw others into his agenda. His style often exudes warmth but may at times be experienced as intimidating. He is the architect of the firm's emphasis on tangible indicators of intelligence (e.g., SAT scores and diplomas from elite colleges), and he often repeats a mantra of the corporate culture: "We're really smart, we do things in a smart way, and we always do it right the first time."

I had scheduled a number of meetings with him to provide preliminary feedback on the assessment and to provide personal feedback and informal coaching on his leadership effectiveness. Although he found the conceptual models of leadership valid and helpful, he became quite defensive when the discussion turned to the need for his own behavioral changes. When the feedback to him focused on issues of control, not "walking the talk" (not owning up to mistakes he made and forcing others to take responsibility for strategic or operational errors), he began to attack the validity of my data. His tone changed instantly from cordially conversational to hard-edged argumentative. As I think back on these discussions, I recall that a pattern accompanied his transformation during the meetings: when the topic related in any way to his accuracy or past judgment (that is, was intelligence-related), he went into attack mode. I, unfortunately, did not recognize the subtleties of the pattern at the time.

I was influenced by the unusually strong value placed on intelligence in this culture and was comparing myself to members of the organization. My initial response was to believe that I was less intelligent than the client group and certainly less than my primary client, the CEO. Since the firm's culture, and the CEO in particular, put such a high premium on being smart and perfect ("do it right the first time"), this self-perception was unconsciously induced by them and led to the pushing of a countertransference "button." At the time I was conscious only of the belief that I would have to work twice as hard to match the organization's expectations of me, dispel their aversion to consultants, and make a meaningful impact on the organization.

A classic psychoanalytic explanation would suggest that I had unresolved issues from my past that related to my self-image at the time of this intervention. Though unaware of it then, I had become dependent on the CEO by seeking acknowledgment from him and others that my intelligence was equal to theirs. A more contemporary explanation, however, would propose that I was drawn into the client system's inner, unconscious image that related to their own issues regarding intelligence. These issues, in turn, were projected onto me. It was important to their outer self-image that they were not only highly intelligent but more intelligent than others. The CEO was irrationally preoccupied with intelligence because he needed to feel superior on this dimension; the other executives' reaction was to identify with this as a defensive response. They took on the same beliefs, values, and attitudes regarding intelligence as their leader. The effect, ultimately, was to induce the issue in me through various comments and questions that inappropriately crossed the client-consultant boundary ("Your SAT scores, Mark?").

In my desire to establish a collaborative relationship through behaviors related to the Working Partnership, I tried to be helpful and sympathetic from a relatively uncritical perspective. This led me to collude with the distorted image of the situation that the client conveyed ("We're very smart, everyone else is less so."). In the early stages of the relationship, when the partnership was fragile, my pull to identify with the client was often strong, and I did nearly everything in my power to look and act very smart. Unfortunately, as an uncritical mirror of the client's projective process, I missed out on important information, which undermined my effectiveness.

In reality, the CEO expressed confidence and support in me through companywide e-mail. But I was drawn in by the powerful projective identification operating below the surface in the executive suite and interpreted my capability and intellect as below par.

The countertransference experienced during this period of the project was potent. It made the work unpleasant because I was putting in too much (unbillable) time as a way to compensate for the belief that, even though I was not as smart, if I worked really hard, they would think I was. Unfortunately, all I was conscious of at the time was anger and resentment because the client was unappreciative of the extra toil and trouble I was devoting.

Countertransference represents the consultant's internal experience, rather than his or her behavior toward the client. It may or may not be acted out by the consultant. In my case, the behavior was a result of the countertransference induced by projective identification—the mirroring of a preoccupation with intellectual competence.

Not all emotional reactions by a consultant are countertransferential. Many consultants' reactions are simply expressions of valid and realistic human responses to particular situations and therefore part of the Working Partnership or the Open Relationship.

The Open Relationship

The Open Relationship refers to that component of the total relationship that has no transference associated and is not directly related to tasks. It has two defining features: genuineness and realistic perceptions. Genuineness is the ability and willingness to be authentic, open, and honest. Realistic perceptions are those uncontaminated by distortions from transference or other defenses. In other words, both client and consultant see each other in an accurate and realistic way.

This dynamic is experienced on two levels. There are nonintimate interactions that typically take the form of chatty conversations not linked to the organizational task. Although some of these interactions seem superficial, they may convey a very human kind of respect for the person to whom they are directed. The open relationship is also experienced in intimate interactions that express how one feels about the other.

When a consultant tells a client "I really enjoy your sense of humor" or a client tells the consultant that "I get angry when you're late for a meeting," they are both contributing to the Open Relationship in an intimate way.* This greatly affects the process and outcome of the consulting because it supports the Working Partnership. The consultant contributes to it through genuineness, facilitating the client's genuineness, and attempting to see and understand the client realistically. Clients contribute through their struggle to be genuine with the consultant and to perceive him or her realistically. Focusing on the Open Relationship is often an effective strategy for managing the barriers of client transference.

About one month into the project, I received a call from the vice president who had expressed his concerns during the introductory luncheon forum. I interpreted his remarks as transference-related at the time, since he had formed these strong impressions without knowing anything about me. He wanted to meet with me, and I saw this as a window of opportunity to build a relationship with him. As gruff and threatening as he seemed during that initial introductory meeting, I learned from others that he was the soft heart of the organization.

> Transference and countertransference are normal indirect consequences of the consulting relationship.

"Tell me what books to read so I can learn to manage better" was how the meeting began and the level at which it continued through its duration. My agenda was to get this guy to trust me and not to convince him that all the wisdom of exemplary managerial behavior resided in books or could be learned sufficiently from reading. I provided a bibliography and elicited from him areas in which he wanted to improve. His demeanor struck me as frigid, absent of any affect. Nonetheless, he agreed to meet a second time, and, in the interim, I sent him articles and a few books from my library.

My objective was not to uncover the source of his transference (the Hidden Relationship), nor was it totally focused on developing the Working Partnership. Rather, I wanted to reduce the manifestation of the transference. By the fourth meeting, our interchanges became warmer dialogues. He talked about his historic distrust of consultants (and how I broke his stereotype), his ideas about high-tech entrepreneurship, his displeasure with how the firm was not doing more to develop its younger members, and how the culture needed to reflect the needs of its workforce more closely. The discussions were friendly conversations marked by genuineness and both nonintimate and intimate interactions. He was expressing confidence in my abilities and a willingness to discuss his managerial dilemmas. I offered my impression of how the quality of our interactions during these meetings was making my work with him more enjoyable. He ultimately became the strongest supporter among senior management for my recommendations, and he pushed the CEO for a timetable that would keep the momentum of the project moving. By focusing on the Working Partnership and the Open Relationship, our interactions improved, the transference was reduced, and the collaboration was strengthened.

Achieving Collaboration: Managing the Transference and Countertransference

Developing collaborative relationships with clients involves sensitivity to the "pull" that consultants have to elicit transference. We need to be equally aware of the fact that clients have the ability to push our emotional buttons as well and elicit countertransference. Transference and countertransference are normal indirect consequences of the consulting relationship, and the more process-focused the work becomes, the greater the probability these dynamics will send one off course.

Three guidelines can steer a consultant over the potentially bumpy road:

* What would have been an open, honest response to my client's question about my SAT scores?

- Identify when, where, and with whom the Hidden Relationship is operating. Periodically step back and assess your primary relationships within a client organization, and monitor your performance at managing the Working Partnership and Open Relationship. Table 1 provides some typical early warning signals of countertransference.
- The Hidden Relationship represents valid information to understand the client system and develop appropriate interventions. Use the data.
- Manage the transference and countertransference, and prevent it from derailing the intervention. Be mindful that countertransference can disable an otherwise healthy collaborative relationship and make your life with the client miserable.

An understanding of why clients are coming for help and why they are coming now, rather than at another time, may provide insight on the transference and countertransference and information for planning a response to it. Accepting the notion of client transference also can ease our unpleasant reactions to its manifestations, such as hostility or resistance. It is possible that, at some point during an intervention, a consultant might get angry with the client. Anger may evolve from an issue belonging to the Working Partnership, but it may in turn trigger a countertransference reaction revealing the consultant's own unresolved issues.

How does one take stock of these dynamics and determine whether they are operating at any point in time? One strategy is to adapt an existing proven model. It is commonplace for practitioners in the psychotherapeutic professions to meet regularly with a more experienced colleague or a peer group to discuss cases and problematic interventions. Unfortunately, management consultants seem to be much less inclined to meet on a scheduled, shadow-consulting basis with colleagues who are not personally involved in the same assignments. This is a missed opportunity.

The model involves monthly or bimonthly meetings with four to six colleagues who do not work on overlapping projects. They discuss the status of current assignments and what they have learned from recent successes and failures, and they present prevailing dilemmas that have left them baffled. They also talk about how they feel working with various clients. It is here that colleagues can help you determine whether your behavior and emotional reactions with clients belong to the Working Partnership, Open Relationship, or Hidden Relationship. Once identified, decisions can be made and strategies developed for managing each of the components. These meetings can be a sobering and ego-threatening experience, but their upside may change the way you develop and manage the collaborative client relationship.

After discussing my difficulties with a few trusted colleagues, I realized I was managing the countertransference in the Hidden Relationship poorly. This may have been obvious to anyone else skilled in management consulting, but I was too close and personally involved in the situation to see the bigger picture clearly. It may have been making me miserable, but, more important at the time, I was not doing what was best for the client. Rather than continuing to identify with the client's projection, I began to carefully call him on it. By providing clear examples to the CEO of his resistance and antagonism to my past feedback, we were able to discuss how this was replicated in his interactions with others at the firm. I acknowledged his comments and organizational policies that related to intelligence and pointed out how they had the effect of making others feel stupid, leading to his subordinates' lack of confidence in themselves and, eventually, to a "play it safe and don't take risks" organizational culture—not a healthy attitude for such a competitive industry.

All that I could do was interpret from the outside-in. My role was not to be the CEO's therapist, nor was I interested in engaging him on the deep personal issues I believed represented part of the emotional baggage he was dragging into the organization. Recognizing countertransference for what it was enabled me to be more effective. Ultimately, the feedback to him led to incremental behavioral changes that had a positive effect on the staff. ■

Table 1. Telltale Early-Warning Signals of Countertransference.

Feeling intense emotional reactions or unusual feelings (e.g., feeling intensely angry, demeaned, vulnerable, devastated, "shaken to the core," manipulated, drained, irritated).
Forgetting appointments
Losing patience
Feeling sleepy, bored, or unable to concentrate
Intervening beyond the call of duty
Reducing attention or denying service completely
Attempting to persuade or convince a client about your viewpoint—at any cost
Arguing for no good reason
Avoiding a client
Wishing the client would terminate or seek services elsewhere

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