# Research projects while at RG

## Project: Consulting 101

Short Description: Develop reusable training material for onboarding new employees. The training focuses on orienting the new team members to consulting as a career. This orientation includes expectations of them as seen from multiple perspectives (manager, client, and other team members), skills and behaviors that correlate with consistently strong professional performance, and an introduction to the natural evolution of a career in consulting.

Methodology: I started by developing a basic framework of skills and behaviors tied to successful consulting. This framework had 4 primary elements. Each of these primary elements was further decomposed into a number of sub-elements.

For each of the four primary elements, I elaborated the framework to show how each sub element contributed to meeting, or exceeding, expectations of a junior consultant.

I also worked with the IT team at RG to build out a series of brief survey tools that were sent to selected individuals across the firm. Senior leaders were asked for their input on the relative importance of the pieces of the framework as well as open ended questions regarding what determines success and failure for new employees.

Newer members of the company were asked for feedback on how their personal experiences at the company had conflicted with what they expected when they first joined the firm.

In both cases, I analyzed the responses to the surveys, highlighted emergent themes in the training material, and chose particularly strong quotes for direct inclusion in the material.

Findings: This project resulted in a framework of characteristics that contribute to a successful career in consulting. This model was anchored on four traits/behaviors: Personal Effectiveness, Ability to Build and Maintain Strong Relationships, Excellent Communication Skills, and a Drive for Continual Learning. The material outlined each of these traits in broad terms and then decomposed them into discrete actionable behaviors. The survey material provided 1st person perspective from both senior leaders and new associated related to these traits and how they contributed to success or failure in the firm.

## Project: Veterans Affairs

Short Description: Chartered by the CEO to lead a research team investigating the impact on efficacy of treatment and cost implications of outsourcing the medical treatment functions of the VHA.

Methodology: First step of the project was identifying the team. I identified five consultants from across the firm that brought together strong skills in research, writing, and problem solving as well as having domain experience with health care generally, and VA specifically.

Once the team was assembled we began by addressing the question of whether VA’s health services could effectively be outsourced. This hinged on three questions:

1. Are there any legal barriers which require health services to veterans and dependents be provided directly by VHA?

2. Is VHA organized in a way that lends itself to outsourcing the medical care component of its work?

3. What commercial organizations exist that have the capacity to take on VHA’s medical services and is there a compelling case to be made that they could do so profitably?

We investigated the first question by researching the statutory and regulatory limitations of outsourcing government work, and determined quickly that there was no legal barrier to this course of action. To examine the second question we analyzed VHA’s internal organization and business model using publically available documents to identify logical ‘breakpoints’ where outsourcing could be done with a minimal disruption of other work within the agency. This also allowed us to make first order approximations of the monetary value of the business being considered for outsourcing.

The third question required us to develop a list of companies as potential comps. We compiled a list of the largest health insurers and HMOs in the county and compared the size of their annual patient population to VA to assess capacity to absorb the veteran community in the event of outsourcing. Then we analyzed the cost per patient of treatment by VA and compared that to cost per patient in the commercial organizations to ensure that there would be a sufficient profit motive as incentive for a commercial carrier.

The final phase of the project was assessing the relative quality of care through VHA against care provided in the open market to verify whether outsourcing would help or harm veterans. To do this we conducted extensive research from quality of care metrics from a variety of sources and specifically delved deeply into the results of two pilot projects that VHA had launched in recent years called Project Arch and Project Hero for outsourcing care. We also conducted interviews with several individuals who had been both inside VA during these projects as well as on the commercial care-giver side for first person perspectives.

Findings: This project had a few key findings. First, there is no legal barrier precluding VHA from outsourcing veteran care. Second, there are ample commercial entities with both the capacity and the financial incentive to take on this work if the government chooses to outsource it – in fact there is the potential for the government savings on the order of $30B based on the superior cost efficiency of commercial plans. Third, VA health care compares very well to commercial services, and is substantially better in certain key areas including mental health care.

Basic findings: The VA could outsource its healthcare work and potentially save substantial amounts of money doing it, but veterans care may suffer as a result.

## Project: Building a predictive model for pricing professional services to the US Government

Short Description: Analyze hourly labor rates provided by contractors working directly with the US government to develop a predictive model that would accurately determine the market price for services

Methodology: I began with a data set extracted from calc.gov, a government project to make the labor rates of government contractors across a variety of GWACS accessible and transparent. By downloading the data from this site I had access to more than 49,000 labor categories from thousands of contracting firms across the county. Importantly, I also had other information on the labor categories including educational requirements, years of experience, on site or off site work, and small business status.

I subjected this data to a multiple linear regression analysis to assess the value of each of these key variables in driving pricing. I then used the model to assess a predicted price for each of the 49,000 labor categories and calculated the predicted values’ margin of error against the actual data set. I iterated this for each key variable individually and as a group to fine tune the model

Findings: The data provided do not allow for a workable predictive model. There is too much variance in pricing by different firms, and extreme outliers create too much ‘noise’ in the data. The only variable with relatively strong predictive value for pricing was years of professional experience and even isolating that variable required substantial ‘cleaning’ of the data to offer value.

## Project: Building a repeatable external research methodology for Robbins-Gioia

Short Description: Develop a repeatable externally facing research methodology for RG to allow for consistent quality results when researching particular markets or particular companies

Methodology: I started by

Findings: This project

## Project: Wrap Rate deep dive

Short Description: Research the history of pricing practices within a consulting firm and compare them to prevalent commercial practices to assess viability of our approach and recommended improvements

Methodology: I started by

Findings: This project

## Project: Building Organizational Capacity

Short Description: Assess the roles across a consulting firm to determine with positions are most highly leveraged in terms of providing differentiated client facing value and determine how effective HR policies are in finding, recruiting, training, deploying, and retaining these key players.

Methodology: Began by using a strategy map and specifically customer focused value chains to assess where Robbins-Gioia (RG) creates value for clients. Next, in coordination with human resources we categorized every position in the company as one of 19 general roles and assessed these roles against three variables:

1. How unique is the work this role does to RG?
2. How much client-facing value does this role provide?
3. How much variance in performance do we see from people in this role?

Using these three categories we were able to isolate the roles that provide the most differentiated value in the eyes of clients and, importantly, which of these roles would benefit the most from improving the talent management initiatives.

We then assessed the relative strengths and weaknesses of the talent management functions specifically as they pertained to the key roles we had identified.

Findings: This study identified 5 roles in the firm that were both strategically important and sufficiently variable in performance to benefit from increased investment. Further, we identified which HR practices needed particular attention for these specific roles. We also identified several roles in the firm that were candidates for outsourcing or partnership rather than maintaining them internally.