

Consultancy and Professional Practice

W7: Concluding & Evaluating

Capturing & Commoditising Knowledge

Dr Lukas Wallrich (l.wallrich@bbk.ac.uk)



Knowledge as Consultancy's Core Asset

Explicit

Codified, written down.
Methodologies, frameworks,
reports.

Relatively easy to capture

Tacit


Personal, experiential. Judgement
calls, intuition, "knowing how."

Where real expertise lives

Embedded

In systems, processes, culture.
Organisational routines.

Often invisible until disrupted

 Think about your own way of working: what makes a difference that you couldn't easily **write down**? And what's baked into how your organisation operates, almost **invisibly**?

The Commodification Process

Turning bespoke consulting work into standardised, reusable products:



1. Codifying

Writing down what was done—methods, findings, approaches

2. Abstracting

Removing client specifics to create generalisable frameworks

3. Translating

Packaging for different audiences—from internal consultants to external clients

Many familiar examples: McKinsey's Organizational Health Index, BCG's growth-share matrix, Bain's Net Promoter Score. All started as insights from **specific engagements**, then got packaged.

Contested Commodification

Heusinkveld & Benders (2005) found that commodification involves **internal legitimization struggles**:

- New concepts must gain “**good currency**” internally before market launch
- Partners may resist sharing knowledge that gives them competitive advantage
- Junior consultants see codification as threatening: *if it's in the system, why do they need me?*

⚠ **Knowledge is power**, and sharing it isn't always in individuals' interests. Failed commodification often fails internally before ever reaching clients.

Heusinkveld & Benders (2005)



Solutions in Search of Problems

Once again (recall W2, Sturdy): when you've invested in a packaged solution, you have incentives to frame client problems in terms your solution can address.

- “Hammer looking for nails” syndrome
- Not necessarily cynical: consultants may genuinely believe their approach works
- But it creates **blind spots**: aspects the methodology doesn't cover get downplayed

⚠ Sometimes selling a standardised solution *is* what the client wants and what's appropriate, but more akin to sales than (process) consultancy.

💡 The best consultants use frameworks as **thinking tools**, not recipes. Diagnosis drives the solution, not the other way around.



Ethical Dimensions

Transparency

Are clients aware they're getting a standardised product?

Fit

Is the solution genuinely appropriate, or recommended because it's what the firm sells?

Intellectual Property

Whose knowledge is being commodified?
Does the original client have a claim?

Currency

How up to date is the packaged knowledge?

⚠ There's a **financial incentive not to be transparent** about standardisation. Failure happens when fit is neglected.



GenAI and Knowledge Capture

Large Firms

RAG systems over internal knowledge bases make every report, methodology, and case study instantly searchable

Small & Freelance

The **explicit knowledge gap narrows**: AI gives solo consultants access to frameworks that once required a large firm's knowledge base

Can AI capture tacit knowledge?

Startups like 99Ravens use AI to **interview** experts and extract reasoning into reusable “digital personas”

💡 GenAI doesn't create new knowledge—but it makes captured knowledge far more **accessible**. The Heusinkveld & Benders tensions remain: whose knowledge gets captured? Who benefits?

⚠️ If entry-level work gets automated, how do the next generation of consultants learn the **embedded knowledge** that comes from doing it?

Week 7: The Full Picture

Evaluation

The tension between **proving** and **learning**

Disengagement

Planning for **positive endings**

Knowledge

Turning experience into **assets**

💡 The concluding phase is not just about ending—it's about **learning**, **leaving well**, and **building for the future**.

✍️ **For class:** Work through the written materials and reflection prompts, and bring your thoughts and questions.

Coming up later in the module: Professional development & reflective practice