Call for Papers

**The Changing Role of Consultants in Industry, 1850–2000.**

Workshop at the Maison Française d’Oxford, 2-10 Norham Road, Oxford OX2 6SE, United Kingdom.

10-11 May 2019

Submission deadline for proposals: 7 December 2018

While historians have explored the role of R&D in industrial progress, consultants as a specialist professional group are largely neglected. With few exceptions, only passing reference is made to their background and training, the circumstances of their engagement, the nature of the work and its success. Outside business consultancy, there has been little exploration of the range of consultancy work across different sectors of industry and within different time periods. Yet it is clear that consultants were often a key resource in knowledge management for firms, especially in emerging sectors making the transition from craft-based traditions to use of scientific knowledge. As the modern corporation arose during the late 19th century, firms faced a growing problem of managing knowledge. They set up in-house laboratories and began to develop R&D programmes. But, at the same time, consultants played a key role in spreading new technologies across firms, improving operating practices within factories, establishing standards and helping develop key supply industries.

This workshop will address these issues in the context of various industrial sectors across Europe and in the United States, and attempt to establish evidence on who the consultants were, the market for consultants and their impact. Questions that arise include:

**Who are the consultants? Studies of individuals or consultancy firms which illustrate the role of consultants.**

Shifting definitions of consultants over time: how has this changed and how has the profession evolved?

What of the emergence of professional service firms and process plant contractors who bundle consultancy with the supply of design, plant or buildings, commissioning, training and start-up? How did someone become a consultant? What gave them the expertise (and standing) to undertake such work? What networks did consultants operate in to sustain their work? What levels of remuneration were available?

**The market for consultants**

Who employed consultants? What are the challenges for a business in defining a consultant’s project? How readily is the consultant’s report utilised by the business? What kind of consultancy work was undertaken? Did it vary over time? At what point was the consultant’s work taken inside the business? Did any conflicts arise? If so, how were they resolved? To what extent were patents involved? What about the use of industrial consultants by banks, stockholders, financiers and/or government departments or agencies to evaluate capital schemes and projects?

**The impact of consultants**

How did consultants contribute to innovation and diffusion of technology? What types of knowledge were transferred? What was their relationship to formal in-house R&D – complement or substitute? Has their influence shifted over time? How has their technical advice influenced government industrial policies?

The workshop will be based on pre-circulated papers, approx. 5,000 words, with deadline of 30 March 2019. A selection of workshop contributions will be published in an edited volume.

Please send proposals (max 300 words) and a short CV by 7 December to: peterreed.42@gmail.com.

Notification for full paper by 19 December.

Organisers: Peter Reed (Independent Researcher), Jonathan Aylen (University of Manchester) and Viviane Quirke (Oxford Brookes University).

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