



Our House: Visual and Active Consulting (2020 Edition)
By Antony Williams
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Antony Williams is a rare consultant who shares his consulting methodology freely and gives insights into his consulting practice. *Our House* is an invaluable handbook for new and experienced consultants, sociometrists, psychodrama trainees, and practitioners who want to embed vitality among these they work alongside.

He shares his insights into organisation and human behaviour, his acceptance that all may not go well within human interactions, and his eloquence in describing consulting dilemmas, the process of alignment, and the vibrancy of awkward human behaviour makes for an invaluable resource for consultants working in organisations. He knows how to navigate the territory and wants to help others.

Antony's mastery of both concepts and language is reflected in his acuity with metaphor and analogy. Metaphors enable people to gain insight into their situation as if they have the third party alongside. They can lean into and explore similarities and differences without the heartache of diving straight into a wound. Well-chosen metaphors light up our imaginations and open doors to possibilities rather than us being stuck in the perceived limitations of the situation we are in.

When Williams' names the facilitator's role as structural engineer in a high-viz readers can immediately relate, appraise, and imagine resulting possibilities. Again, on page 8, the analogy of transformation in the kitchen to transformation in a company makes one not only see differently but see different things. This insight paves the way for the rest of the book.

Williams outlines one of his many organisation gems on page 8. Innovation efforts lose punch because the boundaries of decision-making are not set, and people wander in directions never allowed by the company.

If you ever wondered why profound and brilliant ideas flounder and are not implemented, this is it.

His phrase “Lapse into conventional business talk” rockets me into my experience of leaders who speaking incomprehensibly while I realise I have no idea what they mean or what they want, just as his phrases describing facilitation skills as the authority of a ringmaster, the aesthetic of a choreographer and the hypnotic power of an illusionist reminds me of the daring complexity of working in groups with representational methods.

We see the psychodramatist at work with Williams’ attention to warm up and preparation. Not only does he provide preparation for technical details for an intervention in *Our House*, he wants participants to come to his workshops well informed on the business dilemma they will engage with. Each person researches and interviews others about the problem they are addressing. He has them write ideas on cards before the workshop. He wants thoughtful, experienced wise ones in his workshop, not impulsive contributors.

Enhancing the metaphors within *Our House*, Williams breathes life into his methodology. Readers learn how to produce and facilitate a range of invaluable approaches to establish Clarity, Vitality, and Alignment within organisations:

- Pillars in basement
- A Laundry Programme
- The V perspective
- The living report card
- Crossing the line
- Lay it on the table
- Memory lane
- Hidden Influencers and
- The Live Leadership Review

Classical sociometric methodologies; continuums, spectrograms, and explorations of informal relationship networks and subgroups are displayed linguistically and diagrammatically with simplicity and clarity.

I have had the privilege of participating in many of Antony’s workshops where he refined these approaches and the tools he uses. To read their applications in *Our House* is a testament to the trust, courage, and tenacity Antony has in helping leaders resolve persistent tricky business dilemmas.

Armed with these approaches, any consultant has enough methodologies for years of application in the broad field of organisation consulting.

How many consultants approach their clients armed with a roll of tape and a collection of quirky magnets knowing their onsite tools are a table, a whiteboard, and some chairs? The secret with these tools is that Williams' sense of fun and orientation to exquisitely crafted question and group work interventions to display responses, relationships, and movement designed to help organisations to gather their own data about the *system* and to make meaning of those data. Resistance to participating imaginatively would be low.

Williams generously peppers perceptive questions throughout the book that any consultant might use to interview for a role or to explore the varied situations they encounter. What makes these questions special is that Williams' dedication to awakening and strengthening interconnections and differences among people dominates. They are not just sharp questions. These questions are crafted to awaken dormant interpersonal perceptions that will assist the business going forward.

Several case studies threaded throughout the book reflect Williams' implementation of the metaphors and methodologies. One standout narrative is that of Gale. What we learn is the relationship between organisation and system change and individual behaviour is irrevocably interwoven.

In this case, Williams uses the display of the alliances and schisms in the informal network of relationships for and against a proposed change, role reversal to draw out perspectives, mirroring, and strategic sociometric criteria resulting in significant behaviour change.

I was intrigued to read Williams' systematic reflection of the perspectives shared in role reversal, then realised the sensitivity he had with someone new to learning with psychodramatic methods.

This is the essence of this book. Readers have a lens into a master at work; a trainer, practitioner, and educator, and experienced consultant who knows that organisational work is more just getting on with each other. We can expect no less, and he delivers.

Williams' insights into how representational methods affect us and our relationships are tossed in throughout the book. See pages 97 *Why magnets?* and 107 *Place and 'placeness'*.

These musings reflect why it is essential we are physically together for experiential learning. It is not possible online.

Our House would be better off with a thorough edit, attention to consistent layout, headings, and use of fonts. Without this, tips, gems, and cross-references are lost or only happened on by chance.



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