Q&A: Heather Eberle, Internal Consultant with DPWN

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Before attending Thunderbird, the Garvin School of International Management, Heather Eberle worked as an external consultant. Once at business school, she focused her job search on lesser known internal consulting opportunities. After graduating in February 2006, she joined the Inhouse Consulting division of international shipping giant Deutsche Post WorldNet (DPWN). She spoke with Vault about her experience with internal consulting at DPWN, especially in light of her previous experience as an external consultant.

Vault: Tell me about your background prior to getting your MBA.

Eberle: I was in consulting for five years at a smaller HRIS/strategy implementation firm.

Vault: So when you went to get your MBA, were you specifically looking for internal consulting positions?

Eberle: Yes, consulting or operations. Internal consulting had always appealed to me because it seemed like the work/life balance was better than the external consulting opportunities.

With external consulting, the travel is difficult. Maybe you are home on a Thursday night, but then leave Sunday night- every week. You are lucky if you get 48 hours at your house every week.

Vault: How did you find the position at DPWN?

Eberle: Alumni recruiting at school. We also had alumni postings for other in-house consulting positions which opened my eyes to the size and scope of this job market. In my experience, these in-house jobs were often referred to as "in-house consulting" or "strategic projects group" along with some other key phrases. PMOs--project management organizations--which plan and manage projects are also an option and can be similar to consulting organizations.

Vault: How large is the DPWN InHouse Consulting group?

Eberle: In total around 150 people with about 20 each in our Fort Lauderdale and Singapore offices and the remainder in Bonn, Germany.

There is quite a bit of movement between offices as projects change. The organization is large enough to accommodate those who choose not to travel, but offers the opportunity for those who would like to work in another office. In addition, because of the Group's worldwide footprint, there are project opportunities in many different countries and regions.

The consulting practice started in 1999 in Germany and the U.S. group was incorporated a year ago. We just returned from the annual InHouse Consulting conference in Germany where one of the main goals was to build up the ties between the groups and networking.

Vault: Is it mostly MBAs or also undergrad analysts?

Eberle: Mostly MBAs.

Vault: How does the work at DPWN compare to your previous experience in consulting?

Eberle: I would say that it is pretty similar to what you would expect with respect to the typical consulting engagement- all projects differ based on client needs.

Within DPWN there are organizational strategy projects that last six to nine months, operations projects that last three months and incremental improvement projects that last a month or two such as sales force optimization. It all depends on the scope of the project.

Vault: How is staffing done?

Eberle: Staffing is based on availability and skill set. DPWN probably does a better job than some eternal consultancies, which have a tendency to move consultants around frequently. At DPWN you would not be pulled off your project and moved to a new project unless you have some very specific expertise that is needed and unavailable elsewhere within the group.

Vault: So who are your "clients" when you're working on an engagement?

Eberle: We only accept projects that are sponsored by a member of the management board. However, the client may be a director,
SVP or EVP with P&L ownership. In these cases we add them into the discussion regarding the consulting approach InHouse Consulting will employ. If there is no agreement, we decline to take the project.

**Vault:** And how are the projects requested? Or is it that they're not requested but that the CEO or some other high level manager wants your group to go in and work with a group?

**Eberle:** In many cases, the business is requesting assistance either because they lack the project expertise or need someone from outside their department who is better able to identify key issues or manage pressure from disparate stakeholders.

In other cases, we identify a business issue that appears to be similar to another project we have worked on. If we felt that the methodology and expertise of InHouse Consulting could help the business, we would prepare a proposal—however, this is less common.

**Vault:** And so it's not often that it's because of poor performance that you're there and they don't actually want you to be there?

**Eberle:** I think that it is less the case that the business does not want us to be there for two reasons. One, InHouse Consulting does not engage in projects that are unlikely to secure buy-in and therefore success. Two, as DPWN employees our goal is to increase the success of the Group—not get paid a fat bonus for a solution that won't work, and I think others in the business recognize this.

This is reflected in the amount of information you can get regarding the problem and solutions. I have found that it is really fun to get into the nitty-gritty because it is much more challenging to say here's 10 general best-practice recommendations versus here's 10 extremely detailed recommendations you can begin implementing tomorrow.

**Vault:** Why are you able to get into more detail?

**Eberle:** Because we are part of the company, there is zero likelihood we, as a consulting group, would data mine information from one project and use it for a competitor's project. For example, the five-year strategic operations roadmap for a business is not going to be shared with other consulting groups due to security concerns. By having access to the roadmap we may find out about an acquisition target that would change our recommendations.

The other great thing about InHouse Consulting is all the specialized knowledge we have within the group. It is enormously helpful to have a network to rely on if you have a question about anything logistics related. If you worked at an outside consulting firm unless you had a large logistics practice, it could take you days to come up with answers to some of the specialized logistics questions.

At Inhouse Consulting everyone is extremely supportive and friendly. The best part is that we all work together, working towards the same goal of increasing the organizational effectiveness of DPWN. I didn't always get that feeling as an external consultant.

**Vault:** What sort of projects have you worked on?

**Eberle:** I worked on a project investigating market opportunities which was great fun. I have worked on project working on sales force optimization and I am currently on a project looking at finance and accounting. The projects are quite different but each has been very interesting.

**Vault:** Were all these projects in Florida?

**Eberle:** They were all based in Fort Lauderdale but have included components from all regions of the world. The great thing about DPWN is that every project has a high degree of internationalization to it.

**Vault:** What are your hours like?

**Eberle:** Usually, 9 to 7. The group generally does not work weekends, which has been nice. There may be some travel, but it is not the weekly grind and usually you get to come home to sleep in your own bed—which means you are pretty much guaranteed to get a good night's sleep.

**Vault:** What are some other advantages of in-house consulting versus external consulting?

**Eberle:** One of the key advantages is that many in-house consulting groups have strong ties within the management level of the organization which often allows for movement directly from the consulting group into the management track.

In this respect in-house consulting is similar to project based management development programs, but in-house consulting groups typically have a higher degree of project diversity. Because you have worked on projects for a variety of functions within the organization, you can often follow an accelerated career path.
In-house consulting also allows you to build a really strong network due to the number of clients you work with. With external consulting, while there are opportunities to join the companies you're consulting with, you probably don't have experience working with a number of functions within the client organization.