



Bringing new thinking to clients

JOSEPH WARUINGI, Managing Director Advantech Consulting, talks about management consulting, the growth of the firm and the services they offer.

BY KAGENI MUSE

Management consultants are becoming a key part of today's business culture and not without good reason. Do you need a particular set of skills that are not available in-house without incurring the cost of hiring a full time employee? Hire a consultant. Need a fresh pair of

eyes for an objective opinion on how you are running your business? Get a consultant. Need to make tough decisions without antagonising half your staff? Having too many projects spread across the globe and need someone with the expertise to manage them for you for the duration they are running? Then you might consider hiring a consultant.

Joseph Waruingi has been in the business for more than 20 years, first as an Associate Director at PwC in charge of Strategic ICT Consulting

and later with Advantech, a firm he started in 2003 after he saw the need for personalised management consulting services. He says a consulting firm is able to provide clients with services where they lack the skills in-house to address a business challenge or where the client is pressed for time but needs results fast.

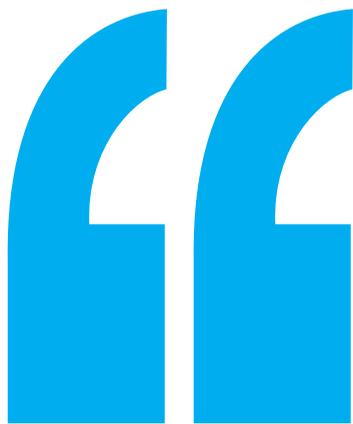
"For all the organisations we offer Strategic ICT Consulting, we start with business process mapping and optimisation. This assists us and

client to identify business processes that are redundant, duplicated and those that require to be changed. This is a consultative process to ensure buy in by client staff. Business optimisation ensures inefficient and redundant business processes are not automated and hence businesses can manage costs. We add value to our clients by bringing new thinking in their sectors," Joseph says.

Having worked with many different companies across Africa and in many sectors, and with its expansive network of experts across the continent, Advantech is able to provide a fresh perspective and quick solutions.

Investing in opportunities

Joseph says Advantech's success has proven that there is a space for mid-sized niche consultancies in management consulting in Kenya



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despite the presence of the Big Four for a long time. The firm was successful within its first year to offer services to blue chip companies in Kenya, government agencies and the governments of Ethiopia, Zambia Ghana and Eritrea.

"We stay on top of our game by ensuring we offer cutting edge, relevant and practical advice to our clients and maintaining constant touch with them to anticipate their future needs and advise them. Having skilled staff is paramount and we put a lot of effort in up skilling our staff."

Advantech started by offering management consulting services and as their list of clients grew, they begun offering additional services like Monitoring and Evaluation for development partner projects across the social sectors of health, education and agriculture. They are now operating in with an intent to grow this to 34 countries, especially in Francophone Africa, by 2020.

The firm also offers Supply Chain Management services in projects in the health sector for pharmaceuticals and management of cold chains.

"Advantech's business model is to have our headquarters in Nairobi and grow our service portfolio in Africa through partnerships with local firms and individuals. Through international partnerships we are able to get business opportunities that are multi country and which require multi skilled consultants and we believe this model is sustainable for the foreseeable future," Joseph says. "We are eyeing to build a pool of experts across Europe and Asia too."

Facing the challenges

A major challenge remains in the long cycles for getting new business especially government tenders, which has affected cash flows as has politics and related conflicts in the continent.

Many have complained about the cost of hiring management consulting firms. How does Advantech price its services without outpricing itself with SMES that are too in need of their services? Joseph notes that SMEs are the bluechip companies of tomorrow and while they will encourage them to set aside an appropriate budget for the kind of value they will receive, Advantech is still keen on working with small firms so as to build relationships and put a foot in the door.

"Pricing for consultancies is dependent on what the client perceives as value. We constantly analyse competition and their pricing models to ensure we are competitive. We focus on small-scale corporates and entrepreneurs because we know they will become big in the future. We discount our service fee to them so as to invest in future business relationships."

Advantech boasts of being a knowledge and learning organisation.

"Clients require demonstrable skills, knowledge and experience. We invest in the training of our staff. We sponsor our staff to international conferences and to work with our partner firms in Africa for learning. We believe this helps us keep our skills and experience up to date and helps with staff retention."

Joseph says the firm is working on an employee share ownership plan to entice workers to stay as well as creating a positive learning environment.

"I lead from the front on all projects and coach our staff a lot. We have lunch hour meetings once a month where staff share experiences they have had and can learn from each other." ●

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