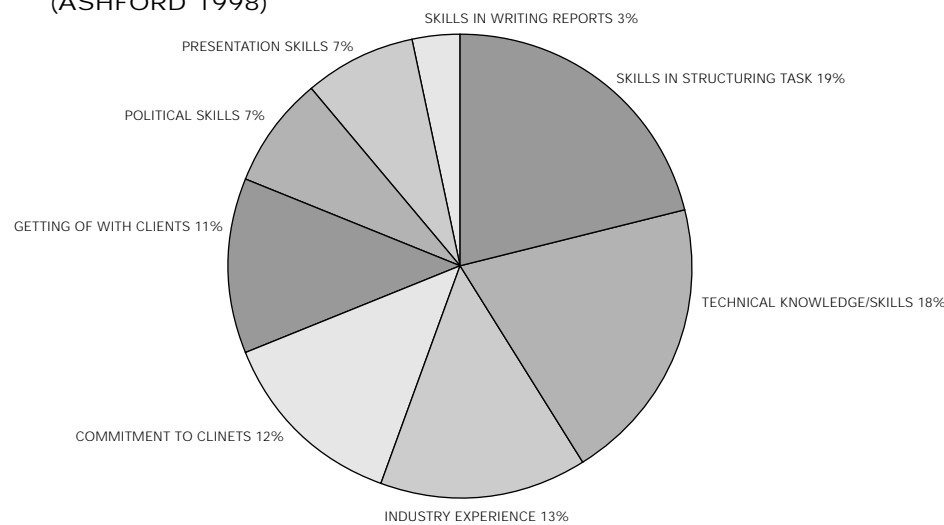


consultants, but differ in the way they're ranked. Here are the clients' top five qualities, in ranked order, with the consultants' rating shown in brackets.

1. Skill in structuring task (3)
2. Technical knowledge/skills (4)
3. Industry experience (5)
4. Commitment to clients (1)
- Getting on with clients (2)

So although clients and consultants order the criteria differently, they at least agree on what are the top five of the thirteen criteria. Ashford's data relies on only 96 responses (Ashford 1998): 54 consultants and 57 clients — some respondents being both 'client' and 'consultant'.

FIGURE 1.1 WHAT MAKES A GOOD CONSULTANT: THE CLIENT'S VIEW (ASHFORD 1998)



The difference between the two highest ranked criteria and the next highest rank is only 4% and so even one person's opinion could sway the data considerably. Therefore these minor differences need to be treated as just that: minor. What Ashford's data gives us though is a set of essential attributes for good consultants about which both clients and consultants agree. Let's examine each of these, why they're important, and how important they really are.

skill in structuring tasks

Both clients and consultants rate 'skill in structuring tasks' as one of the top

five qualities of a good consultant. The irony is that many consultancies have a 'patented' method for structuring and project managing tasks, which seems to make this a non-issue at least at a macro level. Taking management consulting as an example, Accenture (once Andersen Consulting) have a methodology they call Method 1. McKinsey's have their own set of analysis tools and procedures, documented in *The McKinsey Way* (Rasiel 1999). Most consultants in any discipline will have project management methodologies, systems and procedures, which result in each of their client engagements being structured similarly.

But skill in structuring a task comes from a deeper place than methodology: it's also about the thinking pattern.

Thinking patterns

Different people think differently — this we know. Take for example optimism and pessimism: is the glass half-full or half-empty? Understanding a situation optimistically or pessimistically is a choice we can all make, and at the same time it's a habit we can follow or break. In NLP these filters are known as metaprograms (e.g. Woodsmall 1998c, Bodenhammer & Hall 1997).

Approaching the world with a 'glass half-full' approach creates a particular lifestyle and opportunities for improvement and confidence. The 'glass half-empty' approach can lead to different experiences. Master Consultants need to be able to recognise such patterns in themselves and their clients, as we shall see.

FIGURE 1.2 WHAT MAKES A GOOD CONSULTANT: THE CONSULTANT'S VIEW (ASHFORD 1998)

