The Instinct to Understand

Luis de Sousa

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Welcome

This site is a prerelease version designed to help reviewers explore the current draft and provide feedback.

It features an interactive reference for "The Instinct to Understand: Games Clients Play in the Consulting Jungle" — a War Room perspective on power, play, and the deep need to make sense of what's really going on.

This work offers a lens into the realities of consulting: not just frameworks and templates but the lived world of games, dysfunctions, and archetypes.

Inside this playbook, you'll find practical insights for navigating the emotional and political dynamics of professional environments.

Like a seasoned facilitator who senses tension before it's voiced, you'll learn to recognise recurring patterns, name the unspoken scripts, and shift dysfunctional dynamics.

Dedication

To those who took courage so others could find clarity.

They entered uncertain rooms, posed the difficult questions no one dared to ask, and quietly made the way safer for those who followed.

This book was born from the need to write my way through the noise - to make sense of the power plays, unspoken games, and hidden rooms we all navigate.

If I could name them, maybe I could understand them. And if I could understand them, perhaps others could too.

Luis de Sousa (2025-06-13)

Introduction

In the Organisational Zoo, suits gleam like panther coats, and KPIs flash brighter than peacock feathers.

In meeting rooms lined with glass and jargon, consultants are trained to walk tall, deliver clean decks, and never show fatigue.

Their unspoken contract:

Be the smartest mammal in the jungle.

Play the game, but never name it.

Let the Tiger roar, the Snake whisper, and the Sheep comply.

But now and then, between sprint demos and slide reviews, one hears it.

A whisper. Not from the engagement lead, nor the agile coach, but from someone cracking beneath the mask of animal roles.

"There's another space. It's not on Teams. No metrics. No slide transitions. Midnight. Bring nothing but your truth."

Initiation: Through the Consulting Mirror

One night, after four back-to-back fire drills and a silent Uber ride through rain-glossed streets, a tired analyst follows that whisper.

He finds not a zoo—but a clearing.

No Lions posturing. No Foxes scheming. No Owls lecturing.

Just humans.

Eyes rimmed red from dashboards and doubt. Hands that once pointed at strategy maps now tremble slightly. Tongues, once fluent in frameworks, stammer out something real.

"I built a dashboard no one read." "I facilitated alignment while misaligned with myself." "I envy the intern who left at five."

The Forgotten Rule

An elder sits near the edge. Once a Partner. Now a myth. Possibly both.

"You do not speak of this room outside this room. Because if the Zoo finds out, they'll rebrand it. Turn it into a wellness sub-initiative. A gamified empathy lab."

Everyone nods. Even the Bull quiets.

Where the Real Work Lives

Here, consultants don't compete. They collapse gently—into themselves.

The Dog doesn't chase approval. The Owl admits he's tired of knowing. Even the Peacock says, "I'm not sure I shine anymore."

And something magical happens.

They don't pitch. They reflect.

They don't escalate. They soften.

They don't fix. They feel.

And when they return to their teams, Zooms, and transformation roadmaps— they bring back something no framework teaches: the memory of being seen.

Not as archetypes. Not as roles. But as souls negotiating survival in suits.

The Meta-Game

Some forget. Some become facilitators of this hidden clearing. Some become the whisper itself.

There is a space beyond the client workshop, where the consultant meets not the deliverable, but the part of themselves they outsourced long ago.

To find it?

You must first stop performing your animal—and start listening for your shadow.

And yes—

You have to break the first rule.

Part I

Consulting as a Human Drama

Figure 1: This sketch illustrates the dual nature of consulting: above the surface, consultants and clients perform structured roles and deliverables; below the surface, emotional and psychological dynamics drive the real drama.

In every consulting engagement—whether focused on data transformation, strategy alignment, or cultural change—something deeper is constantly in motion beneath the surface of deliverables. While PowerPoints are refined and dashboards deployed, clients and consultants alike participate in a complex web of interpersonal "games." These are not merely inefficiencies or communication quirks—they are structured, patterned behaviours that serve unconscious psychological and political purposes.

This chapter combines insights from **Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis** with **Arthur Shelley's *Organisational Zoo*** to explore how these games manifest in the wild terrain of data and management consulting. Each game is not just a tactic; it's a dance between personalities, roles, and fears. By mapping these games to **Organisational Zoo archetypes**—from the cautious Turtle to the status-conscious Peacock—we reveal the behavioural subtext behind common consulting challenges.

The taxonomy is structured around six core **psychodynamic themes**:

1. Avoiding Accountability
2. Deflecting Focus
3. Externalizing Blame
4. Maintaining the Illusion of Progress
5. Protecting Identity and Status

6. Resistance Disguised as Neediness

Each section introduces:

- A consulting game in context

- Its relevant Zoo archetype(s)

- The psychological payoff for the client

- A strategy for the consultant to shift the dynamic

Beyond Behavior: Understanding the Deeper Currents

This is not simply a book about client quirks. It's about the **psychodynamics of organisations**, the **unspoken emotional contracts** beneath professional roles, and the **hidden forces that shape decision-making** in complex ecosystems.

Theoretical Triad:

- **Transactional Analysis (Eric Berne):** Why people repeat dysfunctional interactions.
- **Organisational Zoo (Arthur Shelley):** How people adopt survival archetypes under pressure.
- **Psychodynamic Consulting:** How unconscious emotions shape business behaviour.

These frameworks come together to reveal that clients aren't being "difficult"—they're **playing out strategies of protection, identity, and status** that they've learned to survive in organisational life.

Meta-Themes That Shape the Zoo

1. The Dual Reality of Professional Life

- **The Zoo vs. The Clearing:** Outer performance vs. inner truth

- **Framework vs. Feeling:** Rational tools vs. emotional undercurrents

- **Role vs. Soul:** The expert mask vs. the vulnerable self

2. Hidden Games and Power Dynamics

- **Unconscious Scripts:** Emotional survival patterns in professional disguise

- **Systemic Defenses:** Organizational immune responses to truth

- **Unspoken Contracts:** What's never named, but always enforced

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Navigating the Zoo

The Zoo is not chaotic—it is patterned. Turtles retreat, Peacocks display, Snakes manipulate, Dogs overcommit, and Monkeys distract. These behaviours can feel frustrating—until you realise they are **predictable responses to invisible incentives**.

That's the gift of this approach: once you know the map, you can navigate with clarity and compassion. You become not a zookeeper but an **ecosystem partner**—nudging behaviour toward health without forcing change.

What This Book Offers

- A **taxonomy of consulting games** rooted in emotional payoffs

- **Animal-based archetypes** to simplify behavioral complexity

- Strategies to **de-escalate, reframe, and transform** interactions

- A humane, playful lens to view client resistance—not as opposition, but as adaptation

This work is not about taming the zoo. It's about **making peace with its rhythms**, **illuminating its patterns**, and **co-creating spaces where truth and transformation can coexist**.

Final Word: The Instinct to Understand

At its core, this is a book about the deep human need to make sense of what lies beneath the surface—both in others and in ourselves. The consulting zoo is filled with games, yes. But each game is also a **cry for clarity**, a **bid for safety**, or a **defence against shame**.

To navigate it well is not just to play the role of a consultant—but to become a **mirror, a witness, and an integrator of the fragmented selves** that emerge under pressure.

Welcome to the Consulting Zoo. Watch carefully. Listen deeply.
The creatures are not what they seem—but every one of them has something to teach.

Chapter 1

Avoiding Accountability

Figure 1.1: This sketch illustrates how organizations may invite consultants while subtly avoiding responsibility. Each animal character represents a different behavioral strategy used to delay, deflect, or outsource accountability—highlighting the psychological games at play beneath formal engagement.

Organisations often invite external consultants with an appearance of openness to change, yet subtly resist engagement to protect familiar dynamics. These behaviors are not just passive obstacles—they are strategic "games" that preserve individual control, shield teams from discomfort, or outsource the burden of

decision-making. Understanding the *animal archetypes* behind each behavior helps consultants engage more effectively with the underlying psychology.

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1.1   Game: "We Brought You in to Ignore You"

- **Zoo Archetypes:**   Giraffe (aloof visionary),   Hedgehog (defensive executor)
- **Description:** Consultant is formally engaged, yet subtly excluded from influence.
- **Payoff:** Symbolic progress without disruption.
- **Antidote:** Contract for shared decision-making and delivery milestones.
- **Zoo Strategy:** Appeal to the Giraffe's strategic goals; create clarity for the Hedgehog through structured agreements.

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1.2   Game: "Can You Facilitate Us into Agreement?"

- **Zoo Archetypes:**   Parrot (talkative deflector),   Snake (manipulative controller)
- **Description:** Consultant is tasked with resolving conflicts others avoid.
- **Payoff:** Avoids direct responsibility and preserves fragile team cohesion.
- **Antidote:** Clarify facilitator boundaries and assign internal ownership for resolution.
- **Zoo Strategy:** Provide structure for the Parrot to channel energy; expose the Snake's process gaps through transparency.

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1.3   Game: "We Already Tried That"

- **Zoo Archetypes:**   Elephant (institutional memory),   Hedgehog
- **Description:** Historical failures are used to invalidate current solutions.
- **Payoff:** Maintains safety by avoiding risk and re-engagement.
- **Antidote:** Introduce "safe-to-fail" pilots to reduce fear of repetition.
- **Zoo Strategy:** Honor the Elephant's memory while framing learning as evolution; support the Hedgehog with low-risk experiments.

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1.4 Game: "The Lone Wolf Justified"

- **Zoo Archetype:** Wolf (autonomous, mission-driven, tribal)
- **Description:** Decisions are made unilaterally to avoid delay or challenge.
- **Payoff:** Preserves autonomy, avoids friction or compromise.
- **Antidote:** Ask, "How will this scale without you?" Offer delegation pathways.
- **Zoo Strategy:** Position collaboration as strength, not compromise; frame support roles as force multipliers.

1.5 Game: "I Protect So I Control"

- **Zoo Archetype:** Bear (protective, dominant, overparenting)
- **Description:** Leader withholds access or decisions under the guise of protecting the team.
- **Payoff:** Maintains control while appearing benevolent.
- **Antidote:** Frame transparency as empowerment. Ask: "What are you protecting them from?"
- **Zoo Strategy:** Acknowledge the Bear's good intent, then co-design gradual exposure strategies that support team resilience.

1.6 Meta Insight

All these games share a core feature: the reluctance to share **power** and **vulnerability**. Whether masked as vision, protection, independence, or memory, each game seeks to avoid the perceived risk of joint ownership. The true consulting leverage lies in co-creating safe yet firm accountability structures—ones that respect individual motives while encouraging systemic trust and distributed leadership. When done well, this process turns protective instincts into collaborative transformation.

Chapter 2

Deflecting Focus
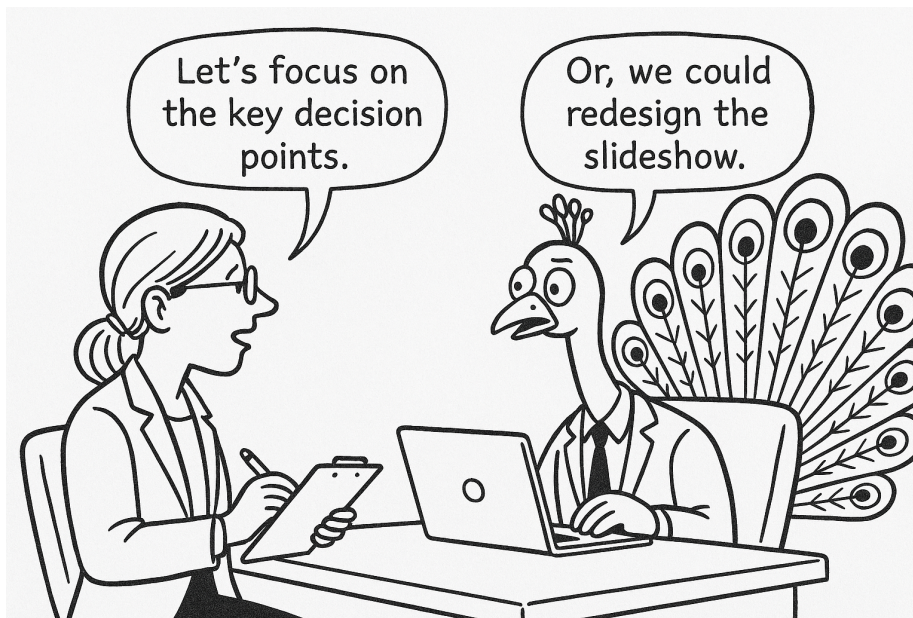
Figure 2.1: This cartoon depicts the consulting game of deflecting focus. While the consultant proposes prioritizing key decisions, the Peacock client shifts attention toward redesigning the slideshow. This illustrates a classic avoidance maneuver where style is substituted for substance.

In consulting engagements—especially those involving transformation, data, or strategic change—resistance rarely shows up as outright hostility. Instead, it often takes the form of **deflection**: shifting attention from substance to distraction, from decisions to decoration, or from ownership to invisible influences. This

section outlines key *deflecting games* consultants encounter, paired with insights from *The Organisational Zoo* to help identify and navigate these behaviors effectively.

2.1 Game: "Make It Pretty So We Don't Have to Use It"

- **Zoo Archetype:** Peacock (image-conscious, approval-seeking)

- **Description:** Stakeholders obsess over visual design and presentation, while avoiding real adoption or usage of the solution.

- **Payoff:** Project appears innovative and attractive without requiring behavioral change.

- **Antidote:** Tie aesthetic decisions to actual usage metrics and business value.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Acknowledge the value of beauty, then guide the Peacock toward function-first design decisions.

2.2 Game: "Yes, But What Does the Data Say About Feelings?"

- **Zoo Archetype:** Swan (graceful, emotionally attuned)

- **Description:** Quantitative insights are dismissed in favor of perceived emotional truths.

- **Payoff:** Maintains intuitive or political narratives while discrediting evidence.

- **Antidote:** Integrate qualitative input into quantitative findings; frame data as a source of empathy, not control.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Honour emotional concerns before transitioning to pattern-based analysis.

2.3 Game: "Please Solve Culture, But Don't Touch Anything"

- **Zoo Archetypes:** Sheep (conformist) + Snake (manipulative, avoids accountability)

- **Description:** Leaders request culture change but resist addressing real enablers—norms, power dynamics, or leadership behaviors.

- **Payoff:** Appears progressive while avoiding structural risk.

- **Antidote:** Surface the unwritten rules and what the organization tolerates and rewards.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Use peer storytelling to mobilize the Sheep, and draw the Snake into visible influence via narrative co-creation.

2.4 Game: "Look Over There!"

- **Zoo Archetype:** Monkey (playful, distracts with novelty)

- **Description:** Teams constantly pivot to shiny tools, trendy frameworks, or irrelevant data rabbit holes.

- **Payoff:** Avoids accountability and commitment by staying in a state of exploration.

- **Antidote:** Anchor conversation to the agreed outcome; implement idea parking lots and structured retrospectives.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Use time-boxed ideation to channel Monkey energy, then refocus with clarity frameworks like OKRs.

2.5 Game: "The Shadow Strategist"

- **Zoo Archetype:** Raccoon (elusive, cunning, prefers operating unseen)

- **Description:** Real decisions are shaped by unofficial influencers or advisors outside of the governance structure.

- **Payoff:** Maintains control while evading formal accountability.

- **Antidote:** Ask directly, "Who do people really listen to when the meeting ends?" and triangulate influence networks.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Involve the Raccoon in off-record sense-making or confidential advisory roles to harness their insight without allowing them to sabotage alignment.

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2.6   Meta Insight

All these games share a common function: they preserve **identity, safety, and status** by deflecting the consulting focus away from discomfort, decision, and disruption. The role of the consultant is not to judge these games, but to **name them without blame** and **channel the energy they contain** toward productive tension and resolution.

In the jungle of change, sometimes the loudest noise isn't resistance—it's distraction disguised as engagement.

Chapter 3

Externalising Blame

Figure 3.1: This cartoon illustrates the consulting game of externalizing blame. While the consultant calmly prompts reflection, the Lion client instinctively shifts responsibility away from themselves. This behavior often emerges in environments where vulnerability is punished and power is maintained through deflection.

In the consulting engagement zoo, some clients instinctively shift responsibility away from themselves to protect ego, deflect scrutiny, or maintain control without risk. This is not always conscious—it often emerges from an organisational culture

that punishes vulnerability and rewards surface-level certainty.

These consulting games represent strategies of **blame deferral**, where individuals or teams play hot-potato with decisions, commitments, and consequences. By understanding the **archetypal animal behaviors** behind these games, consultants can navigate this terrain with empathy, structure, and firm boundaries.

3.1 Game: "You're the Expert, You Tell Us What We Want"

- **Zoo Type:** Rooster (ego-driven) + Turtle (withdrawing stakeholder)

- **Description:** The client praises your expertise while quietly abdicating ownership of direction, scope, or impact. When results are questioned later, you become the fall guy.

- **Payoff:** Transfers risk and accountability; maintains illusion of openness.

- **Antidote:** Flip the dynamic early: "What will you take responsibility for before we begin?"

- **Zoo Strategy:** Feed the Rooster's need for recognition, then return the microphone. Coax the Turtle into the open with gentle, non-threatening invitations like: "Your perspective would add real value here."

3.2 Game: "The Hidden Agenda Audit"

- **Zoo Type:** Fox (politically cunning)

- **Description:** A consultation is held after a decision is already made. You're called in not to shape the outcome, but to retroactively justify it—or to give stakeholders the illusion of inclusion.

- **Payoff:** Hides decision-making while appearing participative.

- **Antidote:** Ask directly: "Is there anything we're not saying in this room that's influencing this?"

- **Zoo Strategy:** Foxes respond to subtlety. Use strategic framing and trade-off language to pull the hidden agenda into the light, without creating shame or resistance.

3.3 Game: "Boil the Ocean, But Do It by Friday"

- **Zoo Type:** Bull (impatient driver) + Octopus (many-tentacled distractor)

- **Description:** The consultant is handed a massive, undefined brief with urgent delivery pressure. Every time you clarify scope, new elements are added.

- **Payoff:** Diffuses accountability by overloading scope and complexity.

- **Antidote:** Use "stoplight scoping" (Must, Should, Could). Ask: "If we only had one week, what's the red priority?"

- **Zoo Strategy:** Channel the Bull's drive into clearly defined goals. Disentangle the Octopus's distractions into parallel (not critical path) workstreams.

3.4 Game: "The Escalation Bounce"

- **Zoo Type:** Kangaroo (jumpy, reactive, avoids stillness)

- **Description:** Instead of committing or resolving issues, this archetype escalates the issue up the chain—or jumps horizontally to a peer leader—thus dodging decisions.

- **Payoff:** Defers accountability while appearing productive.

- **Antidote:** Anchor in governance: "Is this within your decision scope?" or "Who owns the outcome of this call?"

- **Zoo Strategy:** Slow the Kangaroo down with pre-agreed escalation pathways and reflective frameworks. Require written confirmations to create friction for mindless escalation.

3.5 Game: "I'm Too High-Level for This"

- **Zoo Type:** Eagle (strategic, lofty, detached)

- **Description:** The Eagle floats above the engagement, offering occasional commentary but avoiding commitment to real decisions—especially those with trade-offs.

- **Payoff:** Retains status and influence without risk.

- **Antidote:** Pull the Eagle in early: "We're shaping the foundation now—your perspective is critical to align our direction."

- **Zoo Strategy:** Speak to the future. Engage the Eagle by mapping implications, strategic fit, and long-term effects rather than today's details.

3.6 Meta Insight

In cultures where **accountability feels like vulnerability**, blaming the consultant becomes a survival strategy. These games are not personal—they are **protective reflexes** of organisational systems seeking control without consequence.

To move beyond these dynamics, the consultant must do more than deliver—they must **model mutual ownership**. This means setting up working agreements, contracting clearly on roles, and **not rescuing clients from decisions they need to make**.

Understanding the **zoo animals behind the games** gives consultants a language of compassion and clarity—a way to move from blame to collaboration without triggering shame or ego defenses.

Chapter 4

Maintaining the Illusion of Progress

In complex consulting environments—especially within large organisations—progress often wears a convincing mask. Well-facilitated meetings, polished dashboards, and endless "alignment sessions" can give the impression of momentum. Yet beneath this surface lies a dynamic of avoidance, ambiguity, and unresolved tension.

This section explores the behavioral "games" consultants frequently encounter when clients appear to be moving forward, but are actually **maintaining the status quo**. Drawing inspiration from *The Organisational Zoo* by Arthur Shelley, each game is linked to a zoo archetype that helps illuminate the psychology behind the behavior.

Understanding these patterns allows the consultant not to confront directly, but to **redirect with empathy and structure**—turning passive resistance into authentic engagement.

4.1 Game: "Let's Circle Back Forever"

- **Zoo Type:** Koala (passive resister)

- **Game Description:** Conversations go in circles with enthusiasm but no outcomes. Action is perpetually deferred under the guise of needing "more alignment" or "additional review."

- **Payoff:** Appears engaged while quietly maintaining status quo.

Figure 4.1: This cartoon illustrates the consulting game of maintaining the illusion of progress. The client praises a well-facilitated meeting, while the consultant highlights promising metrics—despite no tangible movement beneath the surface. This dynamic is common in complex consulting environments where busyness replaces change, and polished artifacts conceal unresolved tensions.

- **Antidote:** Use decision deadlines, publish action logs, and frame indecision as a decision to stall.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Escalate gently. Create safe space for accountability. Invite others to respectfully challenge the Koala's delay behavior.

4.2 Game: "The Golden Metric"

- **Zoo Types:** Elephant (legacy loyalist), Bull (metric bulldoser)

- **Game Description:** Team clings to the idea that one all-powerful KPI can solve every problem or justify every action.

- **Payoff:** Oversimplifies complex systems, defers difficult trade-offs, and creates false clarity.

- **Antidote:** Educate on metric ecosystems: leading vs. lagging indicators, triangulated dashboards, and context-aware thresholds.

- **Zoo Strategy:**
  - Speak to the Elephant's reverence for institutional knowledge by connecting new metrics to existing frameworks.

  - Channel the Bull's drive into fast feedback loops that allow learning without rigidity.

4.3 Game: "Executive Hide-and-Seek"

- **Zoo Type:** Tiger (powerful but elusive)

- **Game Description:** Senior leader claims to back the initiative but is never present for key meetings or visible decision-making.

- **Payoff:** Preserves deniability and avoids taking responsibility for failure.

- **Antidote:** Require visible sponsorship. Postpone high-stakes phases until the Tiger is in the room.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Engage the Tiger with respectful escalation. Frame their presence as a sign of strategic importance, not operational meddling.

4.4   Game: "We're All In (Unofficially)"

- **Zoo Type:**   Wolf (loyal but political)

- **Game Description:** Mid-level leader expresses strong private support but refuses to sponsor the initiative publicly.

- **Payoff:** Retains internal alliances and avoids political exposure.

- **Antidote:** Ask for clarity: "Can you support this openly, or would you prefer to stay in the background?" Document responses.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Help the Wolf craft a formal stance that aligns with their pack mentality—allowing them to lead without losing face.

4.5   Game: "Just Between Us"

- **Zoo Type:**   Raccoon (influential shadow operator)

- **Game Description:** Offers insider information, secret support, or soft vetoes off the record. Often whispers agreements no one else can see.

- **Payoff:** Gains invisible influence while avoiding scrutiny or responsibility.

- **Antidote:** Institutionalise transparency. Don't act on unrecorded agreements. Use inclusive working sessions and shared logs.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Acknowledge the Raccoon's value quietly but invite them into the light by giving credit when they act publicly.

4.6   Meta Insight:

The illusion of progress is often more seductive than progress itself—especially in political or high-risk environments. These games thrive when teams confuse **activity with effectiveness** or **access with authority**. The Organisational Zoo reminds us: the presence of intelligent, engaged animals doesn't guarantee transformation—only that the habitat is well-decorated. As consultants, our work is to create **environments of truth and traction**: where decision-makers show up, support is visible, and progress is measured in actions—not just slides.

To break the illusion, we must surface the roles, confront the rituals, and respectfully nudge the creatures toward authentic commitment.

Chapter 5

Protecting Identity and Status

In many consulting engagements, resistance doesn't appear as shouting or sabotage—it comes masked in politeness, perfectionism, or intellectual superiority. These games are defenses of **identity, hierarchy, and status**. They're often played by leaders and experts who see your presence as a challenge to their place in the ecosystem. Recognising these games—and the animals behind them—lets you engage with subtlety, respect, and influence.

5.1 "We're Totally Aligned (Except We're Not)"

- **Zoo Types:**   Horse (dutiful performer),   Snake (covert manipulator)

- **Game Description:** Teams smile and nod, yet deep misalignment festers beneath the surface.

- **Payoff:** Appears united while avoiding visible conflict or hard truths.

- **Antidote:** Use anonymous tools like dot voting, alignment surveys, or Likert-scale opinion maps.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Invite the   Horse to gently name potential derailers ("What risks are we underestimating?"). Privately ask the   Snake, "What's not being said here?" and integrate their input through process rather than position.
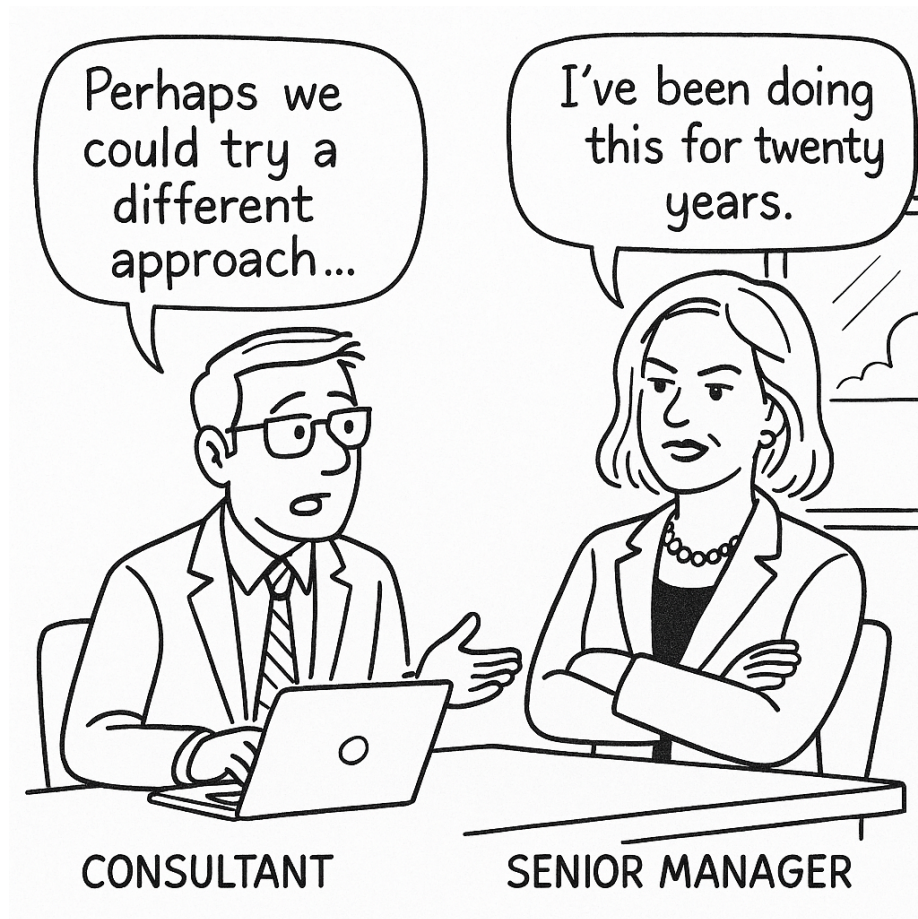
Figure 5.1: This cartoon illustrates the consulting game of protecting identity and status. A consultant tentatively suggests a new approach, while a senior manager defensively asserts their decades of experience. This dynamic is common in consulting when leaders mask resistance with intellectual superiority or polite deflection, preserving hierarchy and ego.

5.2 "Goldilocks Feedback"

- **Zoo Type:** Peacock (perfectionist, image-conscious)

- **Game Description:** Feedback loops endlessly: "too simple," "too complex," "too soon," etc.

- **Payoff:** Maintains control over deliverables and avoids commitment.

- **Antidote:** Co-create definitions of "good enough," "ready," and "done" before feedback begins. Ask, "Are we optimising or avoiding a decision?"

- **Zoo Strategy:** Validate the Peacock's high standards, but introduce delivery thresholds and the value of "minimum lovable product."

5.3 "We Love Your Framework—Ours Is Just Different"

- **Zoo Type:** Owl (custodian of internal logic)

- **Game Description:** Your expertise is appreciated… but must be translated into *their* model.

- **Payoff:** Maintains intellectual ownership and brand equity.

- **Antidote:** Translate your concepts into their language and mental models. "If we called this a 'control insight' rather than a 'recommender,' would that help?"

- **Zoo Strategy:** Treat the Owl with respect. Don't fight their framework—become a friendly interpreter.

5.4 "Strategy, Not Tactics"

- **Zoo Type:** Eagle (visionary, detached)

- **Game Description:** Engages at lofty levels and avoids operational commitments by declaring all else "tactical."

- **Payoff:** Retains strategic status, avoids operational entanglement.

- **Antidote:** Frame your tactical recommendations within a strategic narrative. Use phrases like "enabling agility" or "delivering on intent."

- **Zoo Strategy:** Speak Eagle. Then show how a pilot or dashboard supports the big picture.

5.5   "My Way Is the Only Safe Way"

- **Zoo Type:**   Bear (protective authority figure)

- **Game Description:** Resists new ideas unless they reinforce their authority and protect their people.

- **Payoff:** Maintains trust, control, and reputation.

- **Antidote:** Suggest small experiments where the Bear co-leads. "Let's try a sandbox approach—with you as the sponsor."

- **Zoo Strategy:** Never confront the Bear. Reframe the experiment as legacy enhancement, not challenge.

5.6   Meta Insight: Ego Is a Proxy for Fear

These status-preserving games are not about vanity—they're about protection. The Horse fears blame, the Owl fears irrelevance, the Peacock fears ridicule, the Eagle fears entrapment, and the Bear fears letting others down.
As a consultant, your role is to **lower the stakes**, **mirror the intent**, and **introduce safety through structure**—not confrontation.

> "When you meet resistance, ask not 'How do I win?'—but rather 'What identity is being defended here?'"

Chapter 6

Resistance Disguised as Neediness

While some clients resist change with overt power plays or hidden agendas, others appear compliant—yet stall transformation by positioning themselves as needy, unready, or too dependent on the consultant. These patterns often mask deeper dynamics of avoidance, fear, or identity protection.

In Eric Berne's *Games People Play*, these are "Greenhouse" and "Stupid" games—behaviors that feign helplessness or over-reliance. When mapped onto *The Organisational Zoo*, these show up as loyal Dogs, hesitant Turtles, obedient Sheep, distracted Monkeys, and impulsive Kangaroos. These clients don't shout resistance—they **whimper it**, often disarming consultants in the process.

To navigate these "help me" games, the consultant must respond with structure, accountability, and empathy—not saviorhood.

6.1 Game: "Greenhouse"

- **Zoo Type:** Dog (loyal, approval-seeking)

- **Description:** Eager and affectionate, the client wants the consultant close at all times. They improve only under external attention and wither when left alone.

- **Payoff:** Consultant remains central and indispensable, feeding the client's need for validation.

Figure 6.1: This cartoon illustrates the consulting game of resistance disguised as neediness. The client appears helpless—"I really need your help!"—while the consultant gently affirms their capability. Beneath the surface, the client's behavior masks fear, avoidance, or lack of psychological safety.

- **Antidote:** Coach toward autonomy with stretch assignments. Design offboarding milestones.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Reward independence. Introduce "handoff ceremonies" to mark transitions of ownership.

6.2   Game: "Stupid"

- **Zoo Type:**   Turtle +   Sheep

- **Description:** The client defaults to "I don't know" in order to delay decision-making. They appear docile, passive, and low-risk, but frustrate progress.

- **Payoff:** Avoids being blamed for mistakes by avoiding choices altogether.

- **Antidote:** Use flipped authority: "If you *did* know, what would you recommend?"

- **Zoo Strategy:** Build safety through micro-wins. Set confidence-building checkpoints with progressive responsibility.

6.3   Game: "Teach Me, Then Do It for Me"

- **Zoo Type:**   Monkey (inquisitive but noncommittal)

- **Description:** The client constantly asks "how?" without ever applying the answer. They appear engaged and curious, but never operationalize the advice.

- **Payoff:** Gains consultant attention and intellectual stimulation without committing.

- **Antidote:** Convert curiosity into contracts: "What's your next step after learning this?"

- **Zoo Strategy:** Make the Monkey a learning ambassador—create structures for knowledge sharing, not just consumption.

6.4 Game: "It's Urgent—Until It Isn't"

- **Zoo Type:** Kangaroo (jumpy, reactive, easily distracted)

- **Description:** The client launches projects with excitement, disappears mid-sprint, then bounces back claiming urgency again.

- **Payoff:** Maintains control through unpredictability. Consultant becomes emotional timekeeper.

- **Antidote:** Track visible milestones and burn-down charts. Frame urgency as investment.

- **Zoo Strategy:** Use two-week sprints with clear review rituals. Reward consistency, not intensity.

6.5 Meta Insight: Help That Harms

These games reflect a **learned helplessness loop**—the client signals need, the consultant overfunctions, and autonomy erodes. While it's tempting to feel indispensable, the ethical consultant recognizes when their help **disempowers**.

Clients may not consciously intend to trap you. Often, these behaviors emerge from **poor psychological safety**, **prior project trauma**, or **reward structures that discourage initiative**. Your goal isn't to expose the game—it's to **create new scripts** for growth and accountability.

When you stop feeding the Dog, slow the Monkey, ground the Kangaroo, and nudge the Turtle, you move from therapist to **ecosystem designer**—cultivating conditions where trust, learning, and courage can thrive.

Part II

Consultant's Toolkit

Chapter 7

How to Navigate Zoo Games

In the consulting zoo, you are not merely solving technical problems—you are navigating behavioral ecosystems. The games clients play are rarely malicious; they are adaptive responses to complexity, power, fear, and change. Below is an expanded guide for identifying and working with common patterns that emerge in these environments.

Pattern	Recommended Approach
Pace Mismatch	Introduce "rhythm contracts" that align **tempo and depth**. Decide together whether you're building sprints or root systems. Ask: "Would you prefer fast and visible progress, or slower but lasting transformation?"
Shadow Influence	Use **stakeholder maps and visibility matrices** to detect informal power. Ask: "Who influences outcomes, even if they're not in the room?" Engage shadow players early—Raccoons, Snakes, and Foxes prefer backchannel trust.

Pattern	Recommended Approach
Emotional Derailment	Translate emotion into business relevance. Name feelings, then link them to organizational risk: "You seem frustrated—what outcome might be in danger here?" Let emotional energy fuel, not derail, the work.
Power Dynamics	Secure permission to explore **"unspoken contracts."** Use phrases like: "Would it be helpful to explore what we're *not* saying that might shape this work?" This brings Snakes and Tigers into the light.
Conflict Avoidance	Use metaphor and safe proxies. Ask, "What would the Owl say?" or "If we were being completely honest like a Giraffe, what might we name?" Create narrative distance so truth can emerge safely.
Dependency Framing	Beware of excessive gratitude and requests for hand-holding. Say, "It's great you trust the process—now where would you like to start taking the lead?" Frame independence as a milestone.
Facade of Agreement	Detect false harmony by watching body language and what *isn't* said. Ask: "Are we nodding yes, or meaning yes?" or "If there were an unspoken no in the room, what would it be?"
Ambiguity Weaponized	When ambiguity is used to delay, defer, or protect turf, bring contrast. Use polarity questions like: "On a scale from clarity to confusion, where are we?" or "What would total clarity look like right now?"
Data as Armor	When clients hide behind dashboards, charts, or "just one more analysis," return to purpose: "What decision are we avoiding by analyzing this again?" Ask: "Is this helping us choose, or helping us postpone?"

Pattern	Recommended Approach
Premature Solutioning	When clients jump to tech or process before framing the real problem, slow them down with a question: "If this works exactly as planned, what deeper issue might remain untouched?"
Savior Seeking	When the consultant is cast as the rescuer, redirect the energy: "I can partner with you, but not do it for you. Where are you already strong, and where do you need reinforcement?"
Saboteur in Sheep's Clothing	+ When a participant nods politely but blocks subtly, name the behavior neutrally: "You've raised some great questions—are they rooted in curiosity, concern, or challenge?" This invites honest repositioning.
Busyness Theater	When output trumps outcome, create a pause: "If we paused all effort for 2 weeks, what would break?" or "What's the difference between movement and momentum here?" Highlight purpose over productivity.

7.1 Common Tools Across Patterns

- **Metaphoric Detours**: Animal archetypes, storytelling, polarity mapping

- **Micro-contracting**: Explicitly agree on tone, ownership, and rhythm in real-time

- **Power + Safety Balancing**: Create space for challenge *and* compassion

- **Feedback Surfacing**: Regularly ask: "What's not working that we haven't said yet?"

Figure 7.1: This cartoon sketch illustrates how consultants can approach client games not with judgment, but with understanding. In the Consulting Zoo, resistance is often a form of adaptation—not defiance. Effective consulting requires empathy, not just analysis.

7.2 Key Mindsets for the Consultant

- **Curiosity over Control** – Watch the game without trying to stop it immediately.

- **Invitation over Imposition** – Ask if the group is ready to name or shift something.

- **Structure over Emotion** – Don't suppress emotion—wrap it in ritual and reflection.

- **Shared Ownership over Heroism** – You are not there to fix. You are there to **enable**.

7.3 Final Thought: The Zoo Doesn't Lie

Behavior is never random. Every game, every pause, every smile-that-avoids is an artifact of something deeper. The most powerful move you can make as a consultant is not to resist the game—but to understand its **function**, name its **pattern**, and gently offer a more courageous alternative.

Let the Zoo teach you. Then help it evolve.

Part III

Appendix

Understanding Games People Play

Based on *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships by author Dr. Eric Berne (1910–1970)*
Founder of Transactional Analysis

Summary

Games People Play is a groundbreaking book by **Dr. Eric Berne**, the founder of **Transactional Analysis (TA)**, a psychological framework that maps interpersonal communication using three ego states:

- **Child** – emotional, impulsive
- **Adult** – rational, objective
- **Parent** – judgmental or nurturing

Berne defined **"games"** as **repetitive, unconscious interaction patterns** with a hidden payoff. While appearing socially appropriate, these games often conceal emotional needs, power dynamics, or defenses.

For consultants, leaders, and facilitators, understanding these **interactional scripts** is vital. Games arise in meetings, workshops, change programs, and stakeholder management—often derailing progress without anyone naming what's happening.

Table of Games – Categorised Summary

Cate-gory	Game Name	Description	Typical Roles	Psychological Payoff
Life Games	Kick Me	Seeks rejection or criticism to validate self-image	Victim, Critic	Confirms unworthiness

Category	Game Name	Description	Typical Roles	Psychological Payoff
	Now I've Got You, You SOB	Waits to catch others in a mistake, then attacks	Accuser, Rulebreaker	Moral superiority
	See What You Made Me Do	Blames others for personal reactions or breakdowns	Accuser, Provoker	Evades responsibility
	Martyr	Seeks sympathy through self-sacrifice	Selfsacrificer, Observers	Gains moral leverage
	Frigid Woman	Rejects intimacy while provoking desire	Withholder, Pursuer	Maintains control
	Look How Hard I've Tried	Makes a show of effort while ensuring failure	Resigned Actor, Judge	Avoids blame
	Schlemiel	Makes social blunders then expects forgiveness	Offender, Forgiver	Gains attention + resets guilt
Marital Games	If It Weren't for You	Blames partner for life dissatisfaction	Victim, Suppressor	Avoids self-directed change
	Sweetheart	Plays cooperative, then acts out passive-aggressively	Passive Actor, Angry Responder	Indirect expression of resentment
	Courtroom	Third party is dragged into couple's argument	Plaintiff, Defendant, Judge	Transfers emotional tension externally
	Harried	Uses busyness to avoid intimacy or responsibility	Overloaded Actor, Bystander	Excuse for emotional distance
Party Games	Ain't It Awful	Group bonding over shared negativity	Complainers	Emotional validation
	Blemish	Points out others' flaws to feel superior	Critic, Target	Preserves self-esteem
	Why Don't You – Yes But	Seeks advice, dismisses every suggestion	Helpseeker, Advicegiver	Maintains helpless persona

Cate-gory	Game Name	Description	Typical Roles	Psychological Payoff
	Uproar	Escalates conflict for stimulation	Instigator, Reactor	Releases tension, stirs drama
	Schlemiel (also a Party Game)	Repeats faux pas under guise of innocence	Clumsy Actor, Group	Gains attention or resets guilt
Sexual Games	Rapo	Provokes flirtation, then accuses the other	Flirt, Accuser	Asserts power/control
	Let's You and Him Fight	Provokes two others into conflict	Instigator, Combat-ants	Drama + third-party power
	Perversion	Engages in abnormal sexual behavior framed as joke or rebellion	Deviant, Enabler	Releases suppressed tension
	The Stocking Game	Uses sexual signals to manipulate others	Signal-giver, Observer	Attention, control
Un-der-world Games	Cops and Robbers	Justifies deviance by accusing authority	Rebel, Authority	Externalizes guilt
	How Do You Get Out of Here?	Habitual prisoner mentality; sabotages release	Institution-alized, Rescuer	Maintains identity in confinement
	Let's Pull a Fast One on Joey	Group cons another individual or system	Conspira-tors, Target	Team bonding over deception
Con-sult-ing Room	Stupid	Plays dumb to avoid responsibility	Helpless Patient, Therapist	Escapes challenge
	Wooden Leg	Uses disability or flaw to avoid effort	Justifier, Helper	Excuse to underperform
	Green-house	Functions well in therapy but not in real life	Client, Therapist	Dependency without change
	I'm Only Trying to Help You	Helper creates dependency; helpee resists	Rescuer, Resistor	Mutual validation of roles

Cate-gory	Game Name	Description	Typical Roles	Psychological Payoff
	Peasant	Avoids higher-functioning behavior by playing low-status	Inferior Actor, Superior Actor	Avoids expectations
	Indigence	Uses poverty to manipulate therapist or system	Pleader, System	Gains sympathy or handouts
	Psychiatry	Uses therapy setting to act superior or mock therapist	Pretender, Target	Asserts control or intellect
Good Games	Happy to Help	Genuine assistance with mutual respect	Helper, Recipient	Builds healthy relationships
	They'll Be Glad They Knew Me	Strives to leave a meaningful legacy	Contribu-tor, Benefi-ciary	Long-term value to others
	A Good Sport	Maintains grace under pressure or failure	Player, Observer	Builds resilience and social trust
	Busman's Holiday	Uses leisure to do enjoyable work with others	Collabora-tors	Shared enthusiasm and fun

How to Spot a Game

Games differ from healthy interactions by featuring:

- Repetition: The same result, different players
- Role-play: Fixed roles (Victim, Persecutor, Rescuer)
- Switches: Players swap roles during conflict
- Payoff: Emotional satisfaction at a hidden cost
- Outcome: Tension, disempowerment, or confusion

Use Berne's framework as a **diagnostic lens** to avoid getting caught in the triangle—and to liberate teams from cycles of conflict, passivity, or over-control.

Consulting Application

Transactional Analysis + **Consulting Skills** = Deep Impact

Tool	Use Case
Ego State Model	Understand where the client is speaking from
Game Analysis	Uncover recurring emotional patterns in meetings
Adult-to-Adult Reframe	Restore productive dialogue
Contracting	Clarify expectations and psychological "terms"
Observation	Spot hidden roles and role-swaps

Final Word

Dr. Berne's work reminds us that **behind every polished slide and sharp question is a human**—playing out fears, desires, and defenses.
The work of a consultant is not just technical; it is relational, ethical, and often, deeply psychological.

By learning to name the game, you help clients change the script.

Understanding The Organisational Zoo

Based on *The Organisational Zoo: A Survival Guide for Working with Humans by Dr. Arthur Shelley*

Summary

The Organisational Zoo is a behavioural metaphor framework developed by **Dr. Arthur Shelley**, an Australian knowledge management and organisational behaviour expert. The book invites readers to explore corporate environments as ecosystems where people adopt **archetypal "animal" behaviours** to navigate politics, power, and collaboration.

Each animal represents a **distinct behavioural style**—from strategic and sly Foxes to dependable Dogs or dominant Bulls. The model is not meant to label individuals permanently, but rather to highlight **how people behave under pressure, in teams, and in leadership contexts**.

Dr. Shelley's approach is playful yet diagnostic, offering a rich vocabulary to discuss cultural alignment, team composition, influence dynamics, and transformation risks.

In the context of consulting, these archetypes help **decode client behaviour**, anticipate resistance, and design more effective interventions. When combined with psychodynamic frameworks like those found in *Games People Play*, they provide a multi-dimensional view of human systems at work.

Organisational Zoo Animal Archetypes Summary

Animal	Core Traits	Strengths	Watchouts	Common Consulting Game Roles
Elephant	Institutional memory, slow to change	Wise, consistent, holds history	Resistant to innovation, stuck in past	"We Tried That in 1997"
Fox	Political, cunning, strategic	Sees systems, plans ahead	Manipulative, avoids transparency	"The Hidden Agenda Audit"
Snake	Subtle, influential, manipulative	Navigates power quietly	Undermines trust	"I Know What's Best"
Tiger	Commanding, powerful, top of hierarchy	Decisive, bold	Distant, intimidating	"Executive Hide-and-Seek"
Peacock	Flashy, appearance-driven	Charismatic, engaging	Superficial, style > substance	"Make It Pretty So We Don't Use It"
Monkey	Energetic, disruptive, playful	Creative, spontaneous	Distracting, avoids depth	"Look Over There!"
Bear	Protective, dominant, loyal	Stabilizes teams, ensures safety	Overcontrolling, paternalistic	"I Protect So I Control"
Bull	Aggressive, driven, results-focused	Action-oriented, direct	Intolerant, bulldozes people	"Move It or Lose It"
Dog	Loyal, approval-seeking	Dependable, team-focused	Needs validation, avoids conflict	"Look at Me"
Owl	Wise, methodical, principled	Expert, structured, knowledge-driven	Pedantic, rigid	"Theory vs. Wisdom"
Koala	Gentle, passive, comfort-oriented	Stable, calming	Avoids conflict, delays action	"No Means Maybe Later"
Turtle	Withdrawn, cautious, avoids conflict	Observant, calm under pressure	Defensive, disengaged	"Move It or Lose It" (resisting)
Rooster	Boastful, competitive, status-seeking	Visible leadership, confidence	Egotistical, demands attention	"Goldilocks Feedback"
Sheep	Follower, group-aligned, compliant	Cooperative, adaptable	Lacks initiative, needs direction	"I Know What's Best"

Animal	Core Traits	Strengths	Watchouts	Common Consulting Game Roles
Eagle	Visionary, high-level, strategic thinker	Big-picture, future-oriented	Disconnected from detail	"I'm Too High-Level for This"
Wolf	Independent, loyal to tribe, protective	Tactical, team-bonded, resilient	Rogue, hard to align	"The Lone Wolf Justified"
Raccoon	Clever, subtle, lurks in background	Resourceful, adaptive	Evasive, avoids responsibility	"Just Between Us"
Kangaroo	Reactive, bouncy, attention-shifting	Fast starter, adaptable	Inconsistent, avoidant under pressure	"It's Urgent—Until It Isn't"

Integration Note

This appendix serves as a **reference companion** to the consulting games and team dynamics explored in this book. As a consultant, coach, or change leader, using the Organisational Zoo can help you:

- Decode resistance without judgment
- Align teams based on complementary behaviours
- Design more humane, productive interventions

Let the animals speak—and more importantly, let them **be seen**.