

The logo for Humantech, featuring the word "humantech" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The "h" is yellow, and the rest of the letters are blue. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the top right of the word.

The 30-Inch View®

## Hiring an Ergonomics Consultant

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Thousands of companies, large and small, have benefited from the outside expertise of ergonomics consultants. Yet, many other companies have been able to implement effective ergonomics programs using internal resources. To decide if your company should seek outside help, it is important to understand what ergonomics consultants can do for you and what types of consultants are available to help you.

**This white paper discusses why companies enlist the help of ergonomics consultants, the different types of consultants, and what to look for when making your selection.**

Keep in mind that, for all types of consultants, the best measure of effectiveness is feedback from current and former clients who have contracted for services similar to those you are seeking.

## Why Companies Engage Ergonomics Consultants

A company may engage ergonomics consultants if it is seeking

- the expertise of trained professionals to establish or improve its ergonomics program
- the experience of a seasoned professional to solve complex organizational or technical problems, or
- skilled manpower for a short period to evaluate jobs, develop solutions, or train personnel in ergonomics.

For each of these situations, the criteria for a good ergonomics consultant are different. Following is a discussion of the traits of a good ergonomics consultant, along with tips to help you select an appropriate consultant for your needs.

## To Establish or Improve an Ergonomics Program

Ergonomics program management requires expertise in both the technical issues in ergonomics and the organizational issues in program management. Expertise in both areas can be gained through formal education, but most ergonomics consultants have formal training in only one area. Therefore, experience in implementing ergonomics programs is critical. When selecting a consultant to establish or improve your ergonomics program, consider the following:

- Does the consultant have an advanced degree in technical ergonomics and certification as a CPE (Certified Professional Ergonomist) or CIE (Certified Industrial Ergonomist)?
- Does the consultant have an advanced degree in business and extensive experience establishing and maintaining management programs?
- Does the consultant have at least three professional references for establishing or improving ergonomics programs?



## To Solve Complex Organizational or Technical Problems

Experienced ergonomics consultants often can find simple solutions to complex problems. The exposure to thousands of technical challenges in many different industries can be invaluable in identifying low-cost solutions to your workplace challenges. Complex organizational challenges such as getting management buy-in to the ergonomics program or assigning accountability for tasks may be easily overcome by bringing in an outside expert. Here, experience counts as much as expertise.

When selecting a consultant to solve complex organizational or technical problems, consider the following:

- For complex technical challenges, does the consultant have extensive experience analyzing and fixing problem jobs in many different industries?
- For complex technical challenges, does the consultant have at least some experience analyzing and fixing problem jobs in your industry?
- For complex organizational challenges, does the consultant have sufficient experience and credentials to gain your management's attention?
- Does the consultant have at least three professional references for solving complex technical and/or organizational problems?

## To Evaluate Jobs, Develop Solutions, or Deliver Training

To deliver specific elements of your ergonomics program, the ergonomics consultants must have the skills to do the work. For example, many student interns who are studying ergonomics have the skills to evaluate jobs and offer simple solutions, but most do not have the experience to develop complex solutions. Health professionals may have the skills to train employees in ergonomics awareness, but typically cannot effectively train engineers in job improvement.

When selecting a consultant to evaluate jobs, develop solutions, or deliver training, consider the following:

- Does the consultant have formal training or work experience in the tasks to be completed (job evaluation, solution development, training delivery)?
- Does the consultant have experience analyzing and fixing problem jobs in your industry?
- Does the consultant have at least three professional references for the tasks to be completed (job evaluation, solution development, training delivery)?

## Types of Consultants

Thousands of people call themselves ergonomics consultants, ranging from college professors who do a little consulting work in their spare time to Certified Professional Ergonomists who have decades of full-time experience applying ergonomics to solve challenges in industry. Cost and abilities vary widely. Ergonomics consultants can be categorized as follows:

- **Ergonomics consulting firms** offer full-time ergonomists supported by other professional staff. They typically have highly trained individuals and can draw on the resources of a larger firm.
- **Full-time, professional ergonomics specialists** operate either regionally or nationally and vary in their level of training and expertise.
- **Ergonomics specialists in generalist firms** also vary in their level of training and expertise, but can draw on the larger resources of a parent firm.
- **Professionals in another field** who do some work in ergonomics consulting (medical doctors, chiropractors, college professors, loss prevention consultants, physical therapists, safety professionals, industrial hygienists, and others) typically have expertise in some areas of ergonomics, but can be quite limited in their ability to deal with complex issues.

## Selecting the Right Consultant

Companies should follow a three-step approach when seeking an ergonomics consultant:

1. Determine **why** you want to engage an ergonomics consultant. (What do you want to achieve with the consultant?)
2. Target the **appropriate type** of consultant from the four categories previously described.
3. Evaluate the candidates according to the **criteria for expertise and experience**, as well as for cost, flexibility, and service level.



## Mistakes to Avoid When Hiring an Ergonomics Consultant

Why are some projects more difficult than others?

**“As ergonomics consultants, we get involved in some projects that are smooth from start to finish, and others that struggle toward success,” explains James Mallon, Vice President at Humantech.**

Consider the following list of common mistakes companies make when hiring ergonomics consultants.

- **Asking for a solution when you don't know what the problem is.** At the most basic level, ergonomics is about three things: recognizing ergonomic issues in the workplace, performing ergonomic assessments to identify root causes, and implementing solutions to the identified causes. Sometimes consultants are directed to improve situations that are merely symptoms of a larger problem. Only after we begin working do we realize that the project will not make the anticipated impact. Be sure to select improvement projects that really represent the problems you are experiencing.
- **Conducting ergonomics awareness training when you don't have the capacity in place to resolve issues.** We learned long ago that ergonomics awareness training is counterproductive as a first step. Training people to recognize problems when you don't have trained people to follow through with solutions doesn't work in any field, especially ergonomics. Be sure to establish an infrastructure of "problem solvers" before you create an army of "problem identifiers."
- **Asking for recommendations without preparing the organization to follow through on them.** Even the best ideas are worthless if nobody follows through on them. After all the rightsizing and outsourcing of the past decade, no one is sitting around waiting to be assigned ergonomics projects. Responsibility for implementing improvements must be established as normal job duties, or the task will fall to the bottom of someone's list. Be sure to negotiate time for engineers and maintenance people to work on ergonomic improvements before you hire the consultant to create a list of solutions.
- **Focusing on assessments rather than solutions.** Ergonomic assessments are an important step, especially when you don't know the root cause of your ergonomic issues. However, too many companies think that ergonomics is about assessments, when it's really about solutions. Establish up front with your ergonomics consultants that assessments are a means to an end, and improvements are the real deliverable.

## About Humantech

For over 30 years, global companies have relied on Humantech for workplace improvements. By combining the science of ergonomics and our unique 30-Inch View<sup>®</sup>—where people, work, and environment intersect—we deliver practical solutions that impact safety, quality, and productivity. At Humantech, we believe people make productivity happen.

Our clients look to us for the tools and knowledge necessary to create a bridge between humans and their work environments. By furthering an understanding of the capabilities and limitations that people have, Humantech strives to improve the safety and productivity of workers in all environments while, at the same time, enabling these workers to produce the highest quality products and services.

Companies that make the move from a reactive approach to injuries to a proactive and/or advanced approach to workplace design, find that ergonomics is central to executing at the highest levels. Humantech helps companies identify and quantify injury risk in the workplace, provides training and consulting aimed at removing that risk, and delivers management systems that embed these processes into a corporate culture.

To learn more about how Humantech can optimize the capabilities of your workforce, please contact us:

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