

# A Business Health Service



# A Business Health Service:

*Can Businesses Rely on  
Professional Specialist  
Advice and Assistance?*

By

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Specialist Advice and Assistance?

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# INTRODUCTION

“Health is life lived in the silence of the organs . . . (and) . . . disease is what irritates men in the normal course of their lives and work, and above all, what makes them suffer” (Leriche)<sup>1</sup>

In his book “The Normal and the Pathological” Georges Canguilhem<sup>1</sup> cited the French philosopher, Leriche, on the meaning and interpretation of states of health and sickness as observed by individuals. While this is likely to be true for living organisms as demonstrated in human society, the theories presented by functionalists on the similarity between human and organisational functioning, proclaim that this should also be applicable to the functioning of a business. Most businesses operate smoothly and successfully with the result that senior management does not have to be concerned with the effort exerted by the functions, and can focus on wider strategic goals rather than on improvements or fixes to internal functions, in other words, they operate ‘in the silence of the organs’.

When symptoms arise to suggest sickness, individuals go to doctors or other health professionals for health diagnoses and treatment. So, where do managers of businesses go for advice and assistance to address operational concerns? The first response could be a self-assessment of operational issues as addressed in C.M. Dean’s book “A Clinical Guide to Organisational Health”<sup>2</sup>. This may be sufficient to diagnose and resolve the issues, but may also highlight the need for specialist input from external sources. Advice and assistance is widely available from the internet, personal contacts, or members of various specialist firms such as management consultancy, auditing, financial, engineering, or technology firms. It is however, still necessary to make the right choice and be able to trust the advice and assistance offered by the consultants and advisors.

The objective of the book is to address three questions, namely: Do businesses actually need external healthcare services? Are these services already available to them? Can the advice and service on offer be acknowledged as trustworthy and professional? Building on the functionalist theory of businesses operating as living entities, these three questions will be addressed by evaluating the possibility of a business healthcare service as compared to a general medical healthcare service available to the public.

Chapters One and Two in Part 1 discuss accepted functional definitions of businesses operating as living entities, and a potential framework of healthcare advice and assistance service required by them.

Chapters Three to Nine in Part 2, explore whether health advice in the different parts of a business healthcare service is already available and whether the advice and assistance can be regarded as trustworthy and professional. Expanding on a healthcare framework proposed in Chapter Two, the best sources for advice are identified and evaluated as: general health advice and common treatment at different life cycle phases of the business (primary care, including general practitioners); specialist advice and assistance to address specific functional concerns (secondary care by clinical specialists, including mental health services); operational and competitive fitness (physical fitness training); disaster recovery (major incident assistance management); and legal and regulatory requirements (preventative health service).

Relevant external advisors and consultants are identified and evaluated in each chapter on the level of trust that can be afforded to them based on their broad knowledge of business functioning together with their expertise in the specific functions being addressed. Their professionalism is furthermore evaluated on their levels of training and membership of professionally accepted institutes, each with a prescribed and enforceable code of conduct. This is relevant since a comparative medical health service expects its members to complete rigorous training courses and be compliant to their institutes' codes of conduct before they are allowed to register and practice as professionals. Business managers need to be able to trust the professionalism of their advisors and be able to take action against harmful advice or assistance.

Part 3 acknowledges the complexity that may differentiate a business healthcare service from a national medical healthcare service. Many business corporations operate at international level as families. Their independent business units – the autonomous members of the family – operate in different countries and therefore have to adhere to local cultural, regulatory and legal requirements. Chapter Ten explores the possibility of an international professional business healthcare service analogous to the World Health Organization, thus encouraging an industry sector for business specialist consultancy which can help businesses worldwide. The book concludes by comparing business advisory services with the medical profession, both nationally and internationally in order to identify whether a business healthcare service is required, available and professional and if not, are there steps that can be taken to improve it.

# **PART 1**

## **DO BUSINESSES REQUIRE HEALTH ASSISTANCE?**

A national medical healthcare service operates in a way which offers help to the citizens in times of health concerns, not only to benefit the individual, but also to the benefit of the country as a whole.

In order to be able to evaluate the existence of an analogous professional healthcare service for businesses, the chapters in Part 1 address the initial core concepts underlying the first question, namely to:

- Clarify what is meant by a business, analogous to a living organism, in need of professional advice and consultancy. This will be explored in Chapter One.
- Identify the parts of a healthcare service that may be relevant to businesses and the level of expertise and professionalism that the business can expect from advisors and consultants. Chapter Two explores and presents the elements of a possible healthcare service for businesses.





# CHAPTER ONE

## BUSINESS AS A LIVING ENTITY

“If we take a holistic approach, there are any number of properties of the whole organism that can be taken to be indicative of life, but three seem to be absolutely universal:

- The need to take in a source of energy to maintain the organism’s integrity
- The ability to reproduce
- The ability to respond to stimuli” (Silver)<sup>1</sup>

Before a healthcare service for businesses can be evaluated, it will be necessary to address the core concepts within the question: Do businesses require healthcare assistance and advice? This will be explored from two perspectives:

- How can businesses be regarded as living entities in need of health advice and assistance for operational concerns, and
- Which are the business functions that are likely to require health advice or assistance.

### **What is meant by a living entity?**

Philosophers and scientists have been debating the meaning and identifiable properties of life and living entities for centuries. Different schools of thought contributed significantly and have been used to help understand whether businesses can be accepted as living entities, thereby requiring health advice and assistance. These schools are the philosophical and scientific theorists in search of properties that can define life within organisms; the systems theory which can be used to apply properties of life to a wider range of organised entities; scientific management and the structural-functional theorists focusing mainly on the functioning and structure of businesses as biological entities.

## Properties of life

In his book “The Ascent of Science”<sup>1</sup> Silver highlighted the most common universal properties for life as the need to obtain and use energy to function as a unique entity; the ability to detect and respond to stimuli, and the ability to reproduce. Before expanding on the common properties, he acknowledged that these properties are required in order for the organism to protect its integrity in its environment. Living organisms range from plants, single cell amoebas, bacteria, to the complex and intelligent life forms known to man. Because of the wide variety, the common properties for life would focus on the ability of the organism to survive and persist with lesser emphasis on reasons for their structural differences. Using this argument, it may even be possible to identify a machine or even a business as a separately identifiable integrated whole, but do they meet the universally accepted properties as living entities?

Organisms require energy and must be able to respond to stimuli in order to function and stay alive. Similar to the variety in size and structure of living organisms, the types and sources of energy also vary. It can range from energy from the sun processed by photosynthesis for plants, to oxygen and a selection of edible food and water required for complex living organisms like man. The need for a source of energy may however also be accepted as essential requirements for machines, organisations or businesses. Machines require a source of energy such as fuel or even manual effort by an operator in order to function. On the same basis, businesses and organisations would not be able to function without a source of funding or means to negotiate or barter for resources in order to allow their members to perform functional tasks.

The ability to respond to stimuli delimits the living organism from the environment in which it can act as a predator in its quest to obtain energy; steer away from other living organisms regarding it as their source of energy; or detect stimuli from external or internal sources requiring suitable responses. This universal property of life could be applicable to businesses, but may already become questionable for most machines. A business will require external information with respect to its target market and competitors to safeguard its source of income. It should also be able to detect and identify trends which may hinder future progress or even survival. However, except for using the latest trends in robotics and artificial intelligence, machines like manually operated cars require a human to respond to stimuli both from its external environment as well as to detect internal malfunctioning.

The ability to reproduce would relate more to the continuation of the species and can be in different formats, either bisexual reproduction,

unisexual division, or even the formation of a new species as a result of the evolutionary structuring of the cell components in order to adapt to changing environmental circumstances. Again, this universal property could possibly be applicable to businesses, but unlikely to machines. Business start-ups are common, and can be either due to an evolutionary need for products or services to society as a result of changing trends, or the formation of subsidiary business units within a corporate conglomerate to operate as independent members of the corporate family. Machines, except in the case of advanced robotics with artificial intelligence, are unable to wilfully reproduce copies unless programmed to do so.

Although not directly addressed in a scientific search for living organisms, it may be possible to consider businesses and wider organised groups as living entities, and this concept was further explored and addressed by supporters of the systems theory, scientific management and structural-functional theorists.

### Systems theory

Theoretical debates and research went wider than only to focus on living organisms. Properties of life were also explored for organised groups of individuals operating in social structures or organisations. If these organised groups are accepted as living entities, individuals would participate as the cells or members of their societies, organisations or businesses. During the twentieth century the systems theory offered a basis for this approach of study by stating that systems can be identified at various levels, provided that they consist of component elements performing functions in relation to each other towards the survival of the system<sup>2</sup>.

Theorists like Radcliffe-Brown during the early part of the twentieth century and Maturana and Varela during the latter part, proposed the use of variations of the systems theory in their study of societies or organisations as living entities<sup>3</sup>. One of their initial observations was that it must be possible to identify or delimit an organised social or living system as a separate entity, for instance, a known ethnic society or a named organisation or business. This separation is accepted as the study of wholeness within the general systems theory.

The functional and behavioural relationships of the members of this delimited entity can then be evaluated for life as identified by Radcliffe-Brown in his study of societies as living entities<sup>4</sup>. Social relations were regarded as the essential open relationships amongst members required for the functioning and persistence of the living society. This open relational structure formed by members of a living entity can and do change without

significantly affecting the essential functioning and identity of the entity as a whole. The parts of machines, on the other hand, have to operate in a closed or fixed relationship to each other in order for it to function when required. Although individual damaged parts are replaced, the interrelationships of their functioning are fixed.

By following systems theory concepts, societies, organisations and businesses could be acknowledged as living independent entities with self-structuring control over members and their functional interrelationships towards survival.

### Scientific management and the structural-functional theory

More than a century ago, theorists like Fayol and Taylor proposed that businesses can improve their performance by applying the scientific management concepts of division of labour between management and workers<sup>5</sup>. In addition, they maintained that a limitation and specialisation of tasks at functional level could result in higher efficiency.

This concept of specialisation was opposed by behavioural and functionalist theorists as a rigid comparison between business organisations as open and changeable systems and machines as rigid closed systems. They proposed an alternative which is less stringent. Functional and task division was still accepted but together with an awareness of, and attention to, the essential needs of the employees as the cellular members performing the functional tasks of the entity. Structural-functional theorists support a more biological view of independently operating businesses as living entities responsible for their own identity and the self-maintenance of their structure and functional performance.

A business was accepted as a living entity relying on the healthy functioning of its biological or physiological functions to survive. The members performing the functions may be operating in recognisable structures, although the structures may vary for different types of business. This is analogous to the common life functions which can be identified in different anatomical structures for different species of living organisms.

.....

Based on the philosophical and scientific studies of the properties which define a living entity, it will be possible to accept businesses as living entities requiring health advice and assistance, if they adhere to the following requirements:

- It must be possible to recognise the business as an independently existing entity
- Members operate and interrelate in the essential functional activities and interrelationships in order to ensure effective functioning of the business. Their personal and functional needs are important
- The entity must be able to obtain sufficient sources of energy in order to survive and strive
- The entity must be able to observe and respond to stimuli from external and internal sources
- The entity must be open and flexible to adapt to changing circumstances. This may include the formation of new business units as part of expansion (reproduction) or evolutionary changes to its own structure and functioning.

### **Broad definition of a living business unit**

Who can therefore be identified as living entities with the potential to require health advice and assistance during their lifetime? Societies, organisations, institutes, businesses, charities are all likely to comply with above requirements. They are known by registered or accepted names with individual members performing the functions necessary to survive and persist. These entities are all reliant on funding, resources and supplies required as energy sources in order to operate. Funding can be financial loans, sales income, sponsor or shareholder funding, taxation income or donations in order to enable them to purchase or barter for supplies and resources to maintain their ability to operate and fulfil their goals and objectives. All of the entities need to be able to detect and respond to internal or external information as a requirement for successful persistence in their environments, and finally new similar entities can be created by the existing entities or from other sources in an attempt to continue with the species and/or to adapt to changing circumstances.

The terms business, organisation, institution and charity are used interchangeably above. In order to reduce the level of complexity in the book, it was felt necessary to delimit the scope to independent businesses or business units. Health advice assistance required by government institutions, for-profit businesses and charitable organisations is likely to be similar, but there may be differences in the types of advice required and the consultants specialising in the sectors which could cause unnecessary distractions to the arguments and conclusions.

Recognising businesses as independent living entities requires further clarification with respect to their identity. These entities can refer to a start-

up business; a stand-alone business whether small, medium or large; or an autonomous strategic business unit within a corporate conglomerate – all operating with full independent control over how they structure their internal functions and operations to meet their own or imposed objectives. It is important to be able to delimit the scope and boundaries since the terms ‘unit’ and ‘family’ of businesses are widely used. An independent business unit, or a unit operating as a member of a corporate family of businesses, may receive funding, resources and guidance from its sponsor or corporate management body, and is therefore obliged to deliver on the objectives expected by the sponsor. It will however have freedom on how to structure itself in order to meet these objectives.

In most cases a stand-alone business or business unit functions well and does not require additional external advice. There are however times when advice can be beneficial with respect to the internal functioning or to its external performance. It is under these circumstances that it becomes necessary for the business to seek advice or assistance from external consulting advisors and must be able to rely on their professional integrity to offer objective and quality assistance.

### **Functional structure of a living business unit**

By accepting the concept of businesses as independent living entities, responsible for the self-maintenance of their functions towards survival, it becomes possible to learn from living organisms. The first two books in this series built on the theme of living entities. Research conducted for the book “Physiology of Organisations”<sup>6</sup> found that there is a closer similarity in the physiological functioning of living organisms and organisations than in their anatomical structures. The anatomical structure of living organisms, and therefore also businesses, may differ by type or species of the entity – however, the basic functions required for life remain the same for all. Building on this concept, the second book: “A Clinical Guide to Organisational Health”<sup>7</sup> offered a model, referred to as the SPOILS model of the operational functions of organisations and businesses with a self-diagnostic checklist to assist management to determine the health of their business. Since a self-diagnosis is likely to identify concerns requiring advice and assistance from external professionals, this model is presented again as an indication of the type of health assistance which may be required by businesses.

In living organisms, cells are accepted as the building blocks or base members of the organism. A cell contains an allocated and activated task list; the necessary tools in the format of small components to assist in the

functional processes; and the need for the necessary oxygen and nutrients to generate energy in order to fulfil its tasks. The focus is not only on the effective operation of a functional task list, but starts with the wellbeing and support of each individual cell in an integrated effort towards the healthy functioning of the living organism as a whole. The functional categories to ensure the wellbeing of a business unit are demonstrated in the SPOILS model presented in Figure 1.1 and summarised in Appendix 1.

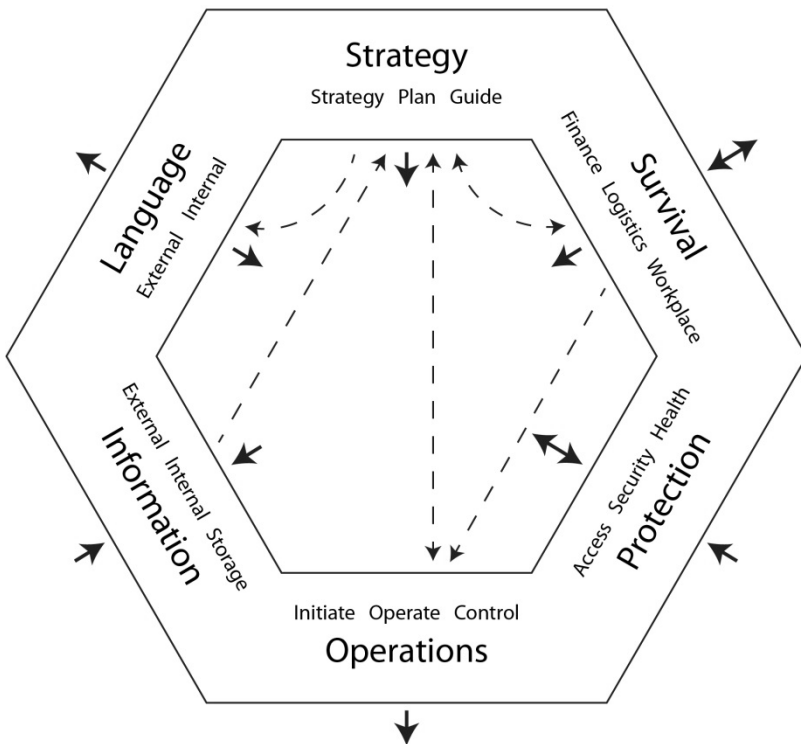


Figure 1.1 Functional interrelationships – the SPOILS model<sup>7</sup>

The survival functions focus on the wellbeing of the individual members of the business, and therefore the business as a whole. They include the finance and accounting function covering income, procurement, and expenses (finance), supported by internal distribution (logistics) of essential supplies and resources, and the facilities (workplace) management functions. They are all important to ensure that each employee is provided with a

suitable work environment and all personal and work resources required for effective performance. These functions can be compared to the essential internal organs and functions of living organisms, namely the respiratory and digestive systems for intake of oxygen and food as energy sources; the circulatory system for internal distribution; and the liver, bowel and urinary systems to dispose of waste and ensure a balanced cellular environment.

The protection functions can be compared to the protective skin and skeletal systems and the internal protection provided by the immune system of a living organism. Businesses as living entities are reliant on the access control and security functions to prevent damage or losses. Health concerns for the business furthermore need to ensure regulatory compliance and attention to the health and safety issues that may affect individual employees as members of the business.

The operations function enables sustainable and competitive participation of the business within its environment as guided by the strategic management decisions. Although the management team may decide on the product or service to be designed, developed and presented to the external market, the operating units need to be effective in the execution of the operational tasks. This can be compared to the use of limbs and facial muscle units by individuals in their effort to operate in a competitive or hostile environment.

Businesses as living entities, however, rely on both internal and external information to guide their decision-making processes. Effective observation of both internal and external information is essential in order to be able to detect and interpret stimuli requiring suitable responses. Internal information addresses morale and concern issues and the need to recruit staff for vacant positions. This can be compared to the peripheral nervous system picking up signals of pain, pressure or temperature from within the body. External information is essential in order to identify opportunities, trends or danger signals to be addressed. Comparative functions will be the use of eyes, ears, nose and throat as sources of input data to individuals. Memory of past information is also included in this functional area, especially to learn from past experience and interpret future trends.

Living entities also require a language as a means to communicate both internally to all parts of the business as well as to parties in its external environment. Marketing and public relations form parts of the language section for external communication, while internal communications analogous to the hormonal system in a body, address culture, motivation and training of staff.

The brain, analogous to the senior management team, responds to stimuli by initiating instructions and guidance with respect to normal or



responsive action. In living businesses this can be compared to the establishment of future strategic directions, supported by plans and guidance towards the achievement of the plans. As indicated in Figure 1.1, the strategy function forms interrelationship links to all the other functions, even though some of the links may be indirect.

The equivalent of reproduction in living businesses can be described as the emergence of start-ups, and new business units. This, similar to the human reproductive function, relies on deliberate decisions and may subsequently require additional advice and support in the formation and set-up of the new unit.

. . . . .

Businesses can therefore be accepted as living entities and might require external advice and assistance from professionals as part of a business healthcare service to address operational and functional concerns. The next area to consider is whether a healthcare service can be identified for businesses in the format of a generic medical healthcare service. This will be addressed in Chapter Two.



## CHAPTER TWO

### A HEALTHCARE SERVICE FOR BUSINESSES

“Healthcare is the maintenance or improvements of health via the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of disease, illness, injury and other physical and mental impairments in human beings” (Wikipedia Free Encyclopaedia)<sup>1</sup>.

A medical healthcare service is essential for the health of the citizens of a country. This service can be defined and offered differently depending on the country, although the core elements would be the same as stated in the generic definition, namely to address elements of prevention, diagnosis and treatment at different levels of access and specialisation<sup>1</sup>. The objective of a medical healthcare service is to ensure that citizens have access to services when they have medical concerns or require advice on healthy living.

The elements within this service can be divided into at least two levels, referred to as primary and secondary healthcare services. A primary or general community service should include advice and assistance at affordable costs to all citizens to ensure a healthy lifestyle and to address common and easily treatable concerns. More complex concerns or illnesses can then be referred to and addressed in a secondary service by medical specialists in hospitals or advanced facilities for treatment – often invasive treatments. Different levels of medical assistance are required, including fully trained specialist consultants, doctors, general practitioners, nurses, paramedics, first aiders and general medical assistants. The key is that they all need to be professionals in their own field, based on targeted and accredited training and formal registration as professionals.

The acceptance of businesses as living identifiable entities confirms the potential need for a healthcare service for businesses. Businesses can and do experience occasional functional concerns requiring corrective external advice or assistance. In order to address the first question, it is necessary in this chapter to explore the elements within a business healthcare service which may be required. Based on the elements identifiable in a generic medical healthcare service, a similar service for businesses may have to cover:

- General or primary care service available to all

- Specialist or secondary care service to address serious and specific concerns
- Optional fitness care service to sustain and improve health
- Accident and emergency care during and after a major incident or disaster
- Legal and regulatory preventative intervention by governments and regulatory bodies.

### **General or primary business healthcare**

A general healthcare service for businesses can be compared to a primary service of community medicine and general practitioners. The objective of community healthcare<sup>2</sup> is to offer an advisory, care, diagnostic and basic treatment service, available and affordable to members of the community. The advisory and care element of the community healthcare service is offered to relevant groups such as mothers and childcare; advice, checks and inoculations to members of the public as a preventative measure against serious contagious diseases; and care to the vulnerable and elderly. This advisory and basic treatment service is offered by midwives, district nurses and carers, each with detailed knowledge of their field of competence.

Chapter Three explores the need for a primary advisory and preventative treatment service to businesses at relevant intervals during their lifecycle: advice to start-up businesses analogous to the medical healthcare support provided to mothers, infants and young children; preparatory advice offered to young and growing businesses; and advice and assistance during the folding stages of a business. Start-up consultancy advice is important to ensure that new businesses can survive the first five to ten years of their existence by ensuring that the survival and operational functions are healthy. This area is becoming more important because of the increase in entrepreneurial effort to explore new ventures for individuals who lost their employment; innovative opportunities in the unfolding digital world; and the dominance of global enterprises relying on the expansion of their local business units as members of their growing families. It is also a sector of businesses with up to forty percent failure within their first three years<sup>3</sup> of existence and therefore in need of advice and assistance during the final period of folding, analogous to a palliative care service.

The service offered by general practitioners, as part of a primary care service, is a diagnostic service and the treatment of common and easily treatable health concerns. This potential element of a business healthcare service is evaluated in Chapter Four. General practitioners have to be fully

qualified as doctors with an advanced understanding of the human body both in times of health and sickness. If a health concern which cannot readily be treated is diagnosed, the patient will be referred to hospital or other specialist medical consultants for advanced treatment. As a general primary service, it should be available and affordable to all, but may be requested as a private service for individuals who can afford it.

General business consultants could be regarded as the general practitioners available to businesses in need of advice on how to handle common functional concerns. Advice could either be for general self-improvements, or recommendations to contact specialists that can help to resolve complex issues. Analogous to general medical practitioners, this can be a difficult area for consultancy since it focuses on diagnostics in any functional or structural part of the business, followed by a decision about the extent to which the consultant's advice can effectively address the concerns of the business or whether they should refer to or involve other specialists. Government sponsored websites or business advice bureaus may be available to respond to common queries and would therefore be affordable, but businesses will have to be able to self-fund any general business consultancy effort.

## **Specialist or secondary business healthcare**

Specialist treatment of diseases, injuries or physical impairments as secondary care is usually offered by specialist medical consultants together with a team of supporting anaesthetists, nurses and technicians in hospitals<sup>2</sup>. The objective is to be able to address serious medical concerns in specific functions, organs or systems, for example internists focusing on internal organs and systems; cardiovascular specialists for the heart and circulatory system; ophthalmologists specialising in vision and eye conditions; or psychiatrists for mental health conditions. The specialists have to complete a basic medical degree, followed by intensive training and experience in their field of specialty before they can be registered to operate as professional specialists. This ensures that they do not only have detailed knowledge of their field of specialty, but will be able to determine potential consequences that their treatment or surgery may have on the rest of the body, and be able to minimise the impact. Especially in the case of invasive surgery, the specialist will also rely on a team of expert technicians and nurses to help with the procedure. They address specific specialist concerns and can be funded through a national insurance plan; private health insurance cover or direct payment by the patient.

Management consultancy is discussed in Chapter Five and can be compared to the mental health area within a medical healthcare service. In the medical sense this service is regarded as wider than a secondary service, since it may include a primary advice and care aspect as well. Mental health assistance can be offered by psychologists, treating the more common concerns of depression while serious mental concerns will have to be referred to and treated by psychiatrists or neurologists in a hospital setting if required<sup>2</sup>. The role of the psychologist can therefore be compared to that of a general practitioner, including the ability to diagnose the symptoms of serious physical, mental or neurological conditions. Management consultancy mainly focuses on offering consultancy advice, reassurance and assistance to the senior management group as the brain of the business. It is however important for these consultants also to be able to diagnose serious operational trends and concerns that can be harmful to the business or any of its stakeholders.

Members of specialist and consultancy firms analogous to clinical specialists in hospitals should be qualified to offer specific advice and assistance in their functional areas of expertise. Examples include customised assignments in the fields of information processing, engineering, law, finance, human resource management or other functions. The assistance is likely to correct or change the way in which the function is processed, offered and implemented by an external team or at least under the guidance and supervision of the external expert. This arm of a business healthcare service will be evaluated in Chapter Six and can in principle be accepted as required as well as available. Most businesses, at some stage, will require external assistance from specialist firms or consultants on specific projects to improve, implement or correct poorly performing functions. It is more a question of whether these specialists can be regarded as offering a professional service rather than whether the service is required or available.

### **Competitive fitness**

Competitive sport, health and fitness advice offers a different service, which is usually requested by healthy individuals to help them to improve their health and fitness in order to participate and compete effectively in their selected profession or sport. Healthcare and fitness support, however, needs to be viewed differently for the different types of professional or competitive application by the individuals. Singers and entertainers, for instance, would be more interested in the development and healthy operation of their senses and expressive abilities in order to perform and respond to audience feedback; manual labourers would focus on strength