Watch the Version Control

Idea In Short

Treat version control as quality control. Agree on goals, clarify questions up front, divide work cleanly and let one person finalize. Trust underpins the entire process.

Consulting Is a Team Sport

Consultants work in teams. Consultants work in packs. Clients hire teams to tackle messy problems that are complex, ambiguous, political and time-sensitive. The volume of work must fit into a shorter window than a single person could manage, so collaboration is not optional. A team that coordinates well multiplies its output, while a team that stumbles on coordination wastes the very time it was assembled to save.

Version control sits at the heart of that coordination. The term sounds technical, but it describes a human challenge first and a technical one second. Teams fail not because their software is inadequate but because their communication breaks down. The tools matter, but the disciplines around them matter more.

Version Control Equals Quality Control

Version control is just what it sounds like: tracking v1, v2, v3 through to the final version. For those who grew up before Google Docs and Microsoft OneDrive, saving copies of files was a survival instinct. You protected your work because losing it meant starting over. 1 changed the mechanics, but the underlying discipline of knowing which version is current remains unchanged.

As a junior consultant, one of the easiest ways to drive your manager crazy is to lose version control. It is the metaphorical equivalent of dog-sitting for your boss and losing their dog for a few hours. They will lose their mind. The damage is not just inconvenience but a breach of trust that lingers across the engagement. Clients expect a polished, single version

of the truth, and a team that cannot manage its own files will struggle to manage a client's confidence.

When Collaboration Works

It helps to picture the process like watching hockey, with a puck getting passed from person to person. It is critical to know who is doing what at every moment. Communication is both the easiest and the hardest thing for a team to do, and humans are funny that way. When collaboration works, it is a beautiful thing.

One team once co-created a demanding client proposal in a short timeframe with a United States-based lead and an India-based counterpart. The result was a continuous flow of writing, editing, reviewing and publishing that spanned time zones. If that proposal had been a machine, it would have run red hot and probably overheated. The team achieved round-the-clock productivity because each person knew exactly what they owned and when to hand off.

When Collaboration Fails

The opposite experience is painful. Early in one manager's career, they delegated work to a direct report only to discover two problems. First, they did a poor job explaining what they wanted. Second, they were unclear about how the work was divided. The net result was that two people simultaneously worked on section A while no one touched section B. That is a failure of version control at its most basic level, and it happens when managers skip the setup conversation.

Consultants are always revising their documents. The smartest way to co-create a document is to treat version control as a process that begins at the very start of the team effort, not at the end. It gets to the heart of the key questions every team must answer before drafting begins.

Agree on the Goal

As a manager, spell it out. Make sure everyone knows what to do and what a good result looks like. Share an example of a previous deliverable. Contextualize the current effort: this is the second executive status report, therefore it follows a specific format. Sketch the

dependency chain, noting that after one analyst finishes the gross margin analysis, the team will build three specific slides. Clarity at the top prevents confusion downstream.

Encourage clarifying questions. Get as many latent questions answered as early as possible. As a manager, you do not want to be answering individual questions randomly at night by email at the last minute. Get in front of it instead. Ask team members to repeat back their understanding of the task. Ask what questions they have at this stage. Ask how far they think they can get by a specific deadline. Ask whether they know the first few steps and how they feel about the assignment.

Format, Granularity and Division

It is better to clarify formatting details up front. This seems trivial, but if you have four or five different workstreams, you do not want people bringing back five different flavors of the same deliverable. It becomes a formatting nightmare. Have a shared PowerPoint template with consistent fonts, bullet styles and layouts. 2 provides one platform where teams can house documents, manage nomenclature and coordinate handoffs. Sketch out what will appear on each page and how detailed it should be. Bring out an example from another project to level-set everyone on what the output should look like and how it should read.

Think of it like building a railroad from California and New York. You will meet in Chicago, but the railroad width must match or the tracks will not link up. Consistency of format is the gauge that lets separate workstreams connect cleanly.

Divide and conquer. Piece the work out and set up review cycles for junior people so they do not go too far down the wrong path. As a manager, the more the work is partitioned along MECE lines, the less duplication there will be. 3 stands for mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, meaning no overlaps and no gaps. Some workstreams will have interdependencies, so watch for double-counting savings across streams. Agree on where to house the documents, whether a shared drive or a collaboration platform, and establish the file naming convention with date, time and status. There should be zero confusion about who is working on what or who controls the combined document.

Check In, Finalize and Trust

Do not micromanage, yet make sure the team is tracking. Drop in, ask if they have questions

and probe gently. Create a culture where it is okay to show work in progress. Think of yourself as an executive chef checking on the sous chefs. Taste the food as you go, because catching a problem early costs a fraction of fixing it at the end.

In the final days and hours of a presentation, editing becomes a one-person job. All the words, shapes, colors and fonts need standardizing and smoothing. It is massive accountability, and one person brings it home. That person owns the final polish and the coherence of the entire document.

Underlying all of this is trust. If you do not trust the person you are working with, ignore everything above. It is better to do all the work yourself. That is why consulting becomes tribal. It is not that a partner does not want to give you a chance. It is that she would rather work with people she knows, trusts and can flow with easily. She knows that a particular colleague will have no issues with version control, and that confidence is worth more than any process document.

- 1Google Docs And Cloud-Based Collaborative Editing
- 2Microsoft Teams As A Shared Workspace For Document Collaboration
- 3The MECE Principle, Developed At McKinsey By Barbara Minto

Summary

Version control is not just file naming. It is a discipline of clear goals, early check-ins, clean division of work and one final editor. Trust makes it flow. Without trust, do the work yourself.