



ANALYSIS OF MANAGEMENT CONSULTING METHODS BASED ON EMPIRICAL RESEARCH IN HUNGARY

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Annotation

This publication tries to analyze the consulting methods and provides insights into a specific area and practice of the consulting work as well. The authors analyze characteristics of three typical ways of consulting processes, such as: Process consulting, Advisory consulting and Inquiry consulting. We can say that before the political changes at the end of the 1980's, in most Central and Eastern-European (CEE) countries, consulting service was rendered by sector research institutes controlled by the state or by different ministries. Consulting approaches in these countries were predominant similar to the school of scientific management. Consulting hardly existed at that time. Since changes in the regime's consulting linked to privatization, firm restructuring and development has been developing significantly in all countries. Consulting has become a significant development tool in this region (Poór, Gross, 2003). This topic should be mentioned, since we know and feel that consulting tasks play very important and increasing role in life of companies!

In each segment, the consulting tasks have already been required by effects caused by accelerating processes, changing internal and external conditions.

The market of consultancy is subject to an ever-increasing interest, both among consultants and the boarder professional public as well. The focus is often towards the size of the consultancy market, about which we have contradicting information, as different analysts describe differently the activities belonging under the "roof" of management consultancy (Kipping, Clarck, 2012).

This study consists of two main parts. In first part the authors give an overview on literature of fields of consultancy and on typical consultant methods. In second part, analysis based on the results of the survey of management consulting methodology will be presented.

Today we can say that all three typical ways of consulting processes: Advisory consulting, Process consulting, and Inquiry consulting, may be the key factors for success for effectiveness of companies (Brooks, Edwards, 2014)

It must be clear that management consulting has been changed during decades. This change has been very disruptive after global economic and financial crisis.

KEY WORDS: Consulting, Management Consulting, Human Resources, Process consultant, Inquiry consultant, Advisory consultant.

Introduction

A survey: *"Changing of Management consulting methods in Hungary - 2015"* has been conducted by the Management and HR Research Center of Szent István University in Hungary.

The respondents of the inquiry were only consultants. The research aims: the interviewers focused on the practical application of consultancy models.

Among other things, they tried to find the answer what types of practical methods using by the consultants, during their process of professional consulting work for the installation and successful implementation.

And they also wanted to know, whether the new consulting methods and techniques are, and how and which quality they can be appeared in the consulting practice.

Who is a consultant?

A consultant is "a person who provides remunerated professional help others. They can work in any area". (Biswas, Twitchell, 2006, pp. 6-7).

There is a special consultants group who has outstanding knowledge of some field and they can advice. When clients have entrusted the consultants, their task usually is

not to solve everyday problems (Biswas, Twitchell, 2006, p. 63).

It requires developing new methods and theories to be achieved in practice. The actual work of the consultant begins with the link between the theory and practice.

Customers typically choose those consultants who has already got a "letter of recommendation", which means, they have already solved major tasks successfully, and offered such kind of problem-solutions to their clients, which solutions can not only be used successfully in the shortest period of time but with the highest safety as well. (Biswas, Twitchell, 2006, p. 64)

According to Herbst (1995, p. 48), the competent consultants do not tell the specific solution to their clients, but they elaborate it with them. In fact it is the fastest way to have it learnt by the clients, how to solve either alone similar problem or with less outside-help in the future.

Consultancy as a profession

This profession was not born today. Management consultancy (hereinafter referred to as consultancy) can look back upon nearly hundred years of history. As an independent venture, it was born in the US in the 1910's and 1920's. Today we can hardly find an area of business

life, which cannot be connected to some kind of consultancy business (Kipping, Clarck, 2012).

The modern consulting “has got” almost hundred years of history. But as an independent service industry has been significantly growing for the recent period. There is a strong correlation between the amounts spending on these areas and economic development (Gross, Poór, 2003).

In modern societies, freelance consulting companies have been willingly assigned by major enterprises, banks and some other organizations of the state bureaucracy to explore their problems, waiting for problem-solving solutions as well.

There is a belief about the consultants for a long time that this profession will be living well, when economic recovery occurs, and even then there is no problem in this sector at all, if there is a recession. After all, consultants are always needed. We can say that consulting profession is an integral part of not only the economic trends but business world as well. It is also important to know that there is development in consulting services. (Poór, 2005, p. 9)

In our opinion, on the basis of the character of their work, consultants can basically be put in the following three big groups (Brooks, Edwards, 2014):

- *Resource consultant*, who suggests solutions based on his expertise and experience and persuades clients about the correctness of these solutions and gives assistance in the implementation.
- *Process consultant*, who assists the client in searching for solutions with methods that facilitate and raise creativity of the client’s employees, and therefore the clients themselves will be able to implement solutions.

Inquiry consultant, who builds relationships between consultants and clients which is more personal rather than merely professional. All of these changes in the client’s requirements lead to the Inquiry Model of Consulting which meets the challenges of a more complex and uncertain world. Schein (2016/a) calls this approach as “Humble Consulting”. Through intensive coaching and teamwork, it will be built a strong relationship between consultant and his client (Schein, 2016/b).

Table 1. Consulting models

Consultant Emphasis	The Advice Model	The Process Model	Inquiry Model
What is the Consultant’s task?	Solve problem	Solve problem	Achieve the Client’s desired outcome
What should the relationship between Consultants and Clients be?	Consultant transfers or delivers knowledge to Client	Consultant and Client work together on human relationships and organization dynamics	Consultant and Client are partners on technical and social/ human dimensions of change
Who is the expert?	Consultant is the expert brings knowledge and best practices	Consultant is a „helper” or process expert	Client and Consultant each bring different types of expertise to bear on achieving the outcome
How should the Client’s capacity be increased?	Transfer knowledge in the form of product or service	Help clients learn to more effectively work together	Client and Consultant co-create knowledge needed to achieve the outcome
How much attention should the Consultant give to the uniqueness of each Client organization or community?	Low (knowledge transferable across contexts)	High	High

Source: prepared by the authors according to Brooks, Edwards (2014, p. 19.)

While other practices or professions trace their roots back several centuries, management consulting is less than 150 years old. We can find their early origins at the end of the 19th century. “Advisory practices” began in the 1860s in the United Kingdom.

Generally speaking, consulting is "a knowledge-based service, it can be sold and bought, but it cannot be dropped on your foot, and it cannot be displayed in a shop-window. „The service of consultant is often intangible, hard to store and/or transport, and difficult to demonstrate its advantages to potential clients” (Miles et al., 1999, p. 3).

In this respect of such services we need to highlight four important aspects in the following:

- Human capital and knowledge intensive,
- High degree of intangible activities and services,
- Difficulties in standardization,
- Intensive interaction between consultants and clients.

Typical roles of consulting process

In the consulting process, the consultant can fill two typical roles (Steele, 1975; Maister, 1993; Kubr, 1996; Niedereichholz, 1996; O’Mahoney, 2010; Kipping, Clarck, 2012):

- *Expert Resource Consultant*, who suggests solutions based on his expertise and experience discusses with the clients the correctness of these solutions and gives assistance in the implementation. Expert consultant transfer typically tacit knowledge. This role is very typical in information-benchmarking and design consulting. Drucker (1979) called as knowledge-provider the management consultant in his publication even in a quarter century ago.

Process/People consultant, who assists the client in searching for solutions with methods that facilitate and raise creativity of the client’s employees; and therefore, the clients themselves will be able to implement solutions. The root of this approach goes back to Kurt

Lewin (1935). This role has traditionally been demonstrated by organizational development and change consulting (Schein, 1969 and 1987). The Process Consultant typically transfers tacit knowledge.

Analyzed problems and goals

1. Hypothesis: Based on the survey answers of the consultants, the statements about practical application of consulting models, such as: (Advisory consulting, Process consulting, and Inquiry consulting), can be classified *coherent groups*, which can facilitate to explore common features of consulting models and a summary of useful information obtained via survey analysis. (The H1 hypothesis is checked by the results of the principal component analysis).

2. Hypothesis: Based on expressed opinions of using consulting models, the consultants participating in this survey, can divide into clusters, in which certain advisory activities and tasks can be relatively made out uniform interpretations by the experts. (The H2 hypothesis is checked by the results of the cluster analysis).

3. Hypothesis: There is a significant difference between those respondents who considered the strategic consulting as the most typical consulting activities of their company, and those experts who considered other consulting activities, – in their clusters based on hypothesis H2. (The H3 hypothesis is checked by the result of the chi-square test).

The sample and methods: The questionnaires have been made via Internet. The group of respondents: the consulting companies operating in Hungary. The survey period: (01.15.2015-04.27.2015). The sampling method: random sampling.

The sample: $N = 126$ respondents can be rated, up to 185 persons. Respondents can give their e-mail address, in case they want to receive the results of the research, but normally the questionnaires have been made anonymously. We can see that for example the age can be a distinguishing criteria include, which can have group-forming attribution.

The questionnaires: There are 30+5 questions: 10 questions to Advisory consulting, 10 questions to Inquiry consulting, and another 10 questions to Inquiry consulting. +5 questions : how many years is he/she in this profession, the origin of his/her company ownership, number of the staff, how many consultants are there, what are the most typical consultant activities in their companies? The respondents answered to 30 questions by 5 grade *Likert scale* (from 1-absolutely disagree to 5-absolutely agree). There were multiple choice options in +5 questions. As an introduction, there were two questions is: gender and age interval.

The database: The Excel database has been introduced. However, these data we had to be "clean", because these ones were not all evaluable responses. For example there were some of the respondents who did not select the gender, the age, and what is more there were who did not sign the grade of the scale. That is why these ones have been removed from the database. Thus there

are 126 evaluable questionnaires, which were worth working with them.

The methods: The SPSS statistical software package has been used for analyzes. The univariate statistical methods were not used, because these methods are good to examine one factor taken into context only. However, these methods are not suitable, when we want to examine number of factors can effect on one-another. The system context can analyze and describe by the multivariate methods.

It is considered to be a problem system-based approach.

In general the social phenomena are characterized by a large number of different correlated interrelated factors. During the examination of processes, in this case during the consulting processes, we have question about, whether there is a relationship of the manifestation of the processes and their characteristics. The multivariate analysis methods are more important among the procedures.

To explore the relationships, large number of sample must be analyzed.

The Principal Component Analysis model

When we use the Principal Component Analysis model (Szelényi, 2002), we examined the interaction between all the observational variables, with the assumption that the reason why we perceive close relationship between them or between certain groups of them, because these variables, or those ones pertaining to the same groups, do depend on varying but common (mostly fictitious) facts or causes. These are called *causative or background variables*.

Depending on the method used, the common background variables are called *principal components* (main factors) or simply *factors*. And we generally assume that these variables being already uncorrelated (independent), - compared to observational ones.

The investigation aimed at determining the main components or main factors is called *analysis of the principal components*.

In this case we suppose that the variance of the observational variables (the variability of their values) are fully explained by same number of background variables or principal components namely in such a way that a number $q < p$ of them can be chosen, which on the whole determine most of the variability in the observational variables (their variance), while the effect of the other variables keeps getting smaller and consequently they are negligible. (Szelényi, 2002)

The cluster analysis

When we use the cluster analysis, for example we examine, whether there are professional separated well-characterized groups of respondents, based on answers relating the consulting methods and techniques.

No sooner had we identified these groups, we concretize the hypotheses of the cross-tabbing analysis (1-3). For example, if the "customer-centric", the "process-oriented" and the "creative thinking" groups are well separated aspect to the gender / age groups / etc. The

groups formed the basis on investigative statement of the characteristics of the consulting models.

1. Hypothesis: verify the results of the principal component analysis.
2. Hypothesis: check the relevance of the results of the cluster analysis.
3. Hypothesis: was tested by the result of the chi-square test

Statistical results

The results: “*If one does not know what he/she wants to achieve, not to be surprised, if he/she achieves something else.*” (Herbst, 1995, p. 76)

Output and analysis: Now let us have a look at the details of the output. Analyze the results obtained, and check the correctness of the hypothesis.

Result (H1):

According to the KMO (0.588) and Bartlett's test results ($p < 0.01$) the data are adequate to run the principal component analysis.

The results of principal component analysis: The first nine principal components considered to be significant, cumulative explaining ratio: 63.00%, which is said to be sufficient.

According to the respondents of the technical experts and based on the result of the principal component analysis, we can say that the typical statements of different consulting model have been formed mixed groups (Table 2.).

Table 2. Nine significant principal components (PCs) and their professional compositions

Number of principal component	The professional meaning of PCs	The composition of principal components	Explained variance (%)
1.	The necessity of process consulting and client's involvement	1. The growth can be achieved by continuous learning and ability for changing and being renewed. 2. The client can learn how he thinks about the problem and how he processes available data. <u>3. The common knowledge of the consultant and client are necessary for achieving goals.</u> 4. The consultant and client work together with issues of human resources and company operation 5. The consultation process is characterized by cooperation, interaction, agreements for real problem solving. <u>6. It is advantageous if the consultant and client collect and process information together.</u> 7. The growth can be achieved by continuous learning and ability for changing and being renewed.	11,66
2.	The role of consultant in moderation	<i>1. The client gets the value of growth via products or services.</i> <i>2. The consultant assists the process of solution in every case.</i> <i>3. In every case the clients accept the advice of consultant, concerning for changing, and they also want to realize it.</i> 4. The consultant accompanies the clients throughout all the process.	8,44
3.	Dynamical knowledge and creativity	<u>1. In this changeable and uncertain business environment the dynamic knowledge needed rather than static knowledge.</u> <u>2. It is a creative construction process, where new knowledge has been generated by for companies.</u>	7,41
4.	Problem orientation	<i>1. In case of advisory consulting, the main task of the consultant is solving the problem.</i> <i>2. There is hierarchical link between the consultant and the client.</i> 3. The problem solving is in the centre of the process consulting.	6,74
5.	Common diagnosis of the problem and application of advisory consulting	1. Advisory consultant diagnoses the problem with his client. <i>2. The 5-steps model of advisory consulting can be used for each customer as well.</i>	6,36
6.	Client orientation	1. Services to clients is unique, and customized. <u>2. The consultant's task is achieving the results/goals wanted by the clients.</u>	6,30
7.	The cooperation of the consultant and client, and universal specificity of solutions of advisory consulting	1. The consultant and client make together the steps of process and conditions. <u>2. The consultant and client work as partners together, during the consulting process.</u> <i>3. The solution is made by the advisory consultant, can be used in case in other problems as well.</i>	5,64
8.	The mediation of professional knowledge and good practice	<i>1. The consultant mediates his professional knowledge and good practice for clients.</i>	5,47
9.	Assistant-, or expert consultant	1. The consultant plays helper or expert role during consulting process.	4,98

Note: **Bold** = statements of process consulting model; *italic* = statements of advisory consulting model; underlined = statements of inquiry consulting model.

Source: Authors' calculations based on survey: „CONSULTING MODELS IN PRACTICE” (2015)

The conclusion is that the consulting activities are not based on a specific consultancy model by the consultants, but they apply mixed the different consulting techniques as well.

It is interesting that the statement of two different models (the process and inquiry consulting) give the professional information content of the example 6th principal component, these allegations have clearly

similar professional connotations, which means to focus on the clients' needs.

Result (H2):

Based on consultants' opinions of the function of the consulting models, the K-means clustering method has

been chosen. The principal component coordinates were used to the cluster analysis (Table 3).

There were 127 respondents in the survey and 88 respondents fully completed and rated the consulting models. From the remaining 39 ones could not formed the principal component coordinates, so these experts were not included in the present study.

Table 3. The cluster averages (centroids) for standardized principal component coordinates using K-means clustering method for grouping respondents by their opinions for operation of consulting models

Number of the principal components	The professional compositions of principal components	Clusters		
		1	2	3
1.	The necessity of process consulting and client's involvement	-,0018	-,0684	,3241
2.	The role of consultant in moderation	,0662	,0097	-,2077
3.	Dynamical knowledge and creativity	,1578	,4913	-,9296
4.	Problem orientation	,6082	-,3796	-,0024
5.	Common diagnosis of the problem and application of advisory consulting	-,7167	,2939	,2428
6.	Client orientation	,2420	-,1523	,0260
7.	The cooperation of the consultant and client, and universal specificity of solutions of advisory consulting	,4137	,0037	-,5095
8.	The mediation of professional knowledge and good practice	,5847	-,2286	-,3831
9.	Assistant- or expert consultant	-,1607	,5669	-,6697
The number of elements of clusters		26	38	23

Source: Authors' calculations based on survey: „CONSULTING MODELS IN PRACTICE” (2015)

In case of the standardized principal component coordinates, the positive average value within a cluster indicate that the consultants of a certain cluster, agreed more with statements defining the professional information content of the examined principal component, compared to the other clusters. Opposite characteristics are being typical to clusters with negative centroid values.

The zero cluster centroid is approximately indicates that the consultants of that cluster gave an average rate to the statements via the main component, (which is not the

same as the neutral, and indifferent). Based on the K-means cluster analysis formed as a result of three clusters can be characterized as follows (Figure 1):

Cluster 1: consultants being problem and customer-oriented, having professional knowledge and appreciating good practice;

Cluster 2: consultants having dynamic knowledge and importance of creativity, being helpful and advisory consultants;

Cluster 3: consultants being process consultants do not pay attention to dynamic knowledge and creativity.

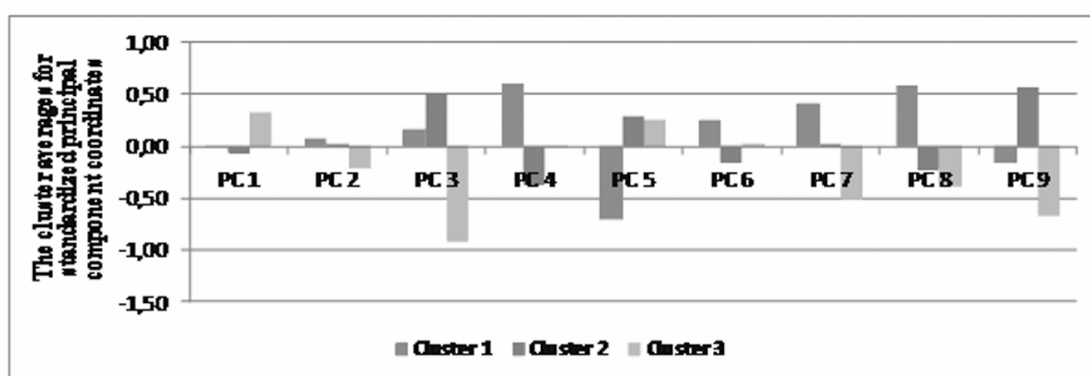


Fig. 1. The cluster averages for standardized principal component coordinates

Source: Authors' calculations based on survey: „CONSULTING MODELS IN PRACTICE” (2015)

It is interesting that based on the results of the cluster analysis we cannot speak about "distinct" problem-, and

client-oriented consultants. The first cluster is a combination of both types of them.

Result (H3):

Based on the results of the chi-square test ($p < 0.01$) significant difference has been justified among those respondents that the strategic consulting of their company is considered as the most typical consultant activities and among experts checking other consulting activities in clusters (Figure 2).

Those consultants of enterprises who utilizing the possibilities of strategic consulting, can be significantly found in higher proportion in the first cluster and considerably in smaller proportion of the third cluster. Summarizing the typical things of theirs, we can say that these consultants are both problem- and customer-oriented, appreciating professional knowledge and good practice. There are relatively few ones among them preferring the process consulting.

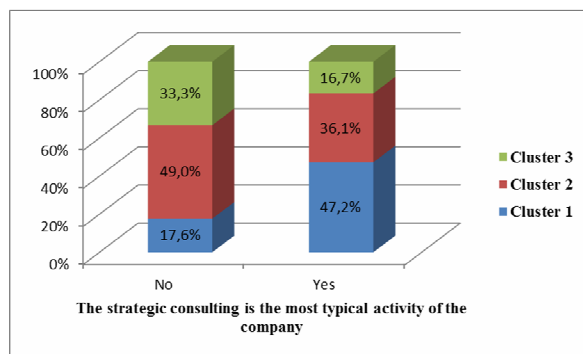


Fig. 2. The distribution of respondents by cluster affiliation for two groups of experts: who considered the strategic consulting as the most typical consulting activities of their company, and who considered other consulting activities

Source: Authors' calculations based on survey: „CONSULTING MODELS IN PRACTICE” (2015)

Conclusions

Based on the ratings given by the consultants, we can say that features of the operation of the consulting models in consultancy activities in practice, the consulting model types, - defined in theory-, are mixed.

Mostly the strategic consulting consultants are both problem- and customer-oriented; they appreciate better the professional knowledge and good practice.

Now the relationship between consultant and client has changed significantly. The consultants have to know much more about the methods and processes, than ever before!

The outlook is good for the growth of the consultancy business. In the future, management consultancy is going to be an integral part of such service offerings with consulting opportunities in information technology and outsourcing followed by operations, strategy, and human resources as well. Consultancy will remain a significant practice as asserting itself and more as a profession.

This analysis tried to highlight the major trends in consulting profession based on Survey in Hungary. The limitations of the present investigation include the following:

- The sample is large enough from a statistical point of view, although disparities were found in the stratification of the organisations investigated. By this way, we mean that, within the whole sample, the number of respondents is not distributed as evenly as the consulting companies in the different sectors of this business activities.
- One of the biggest problems facing management research in emerging and transition countries lies in the difficulty of accessing respondents. Our efforts to use the web-survey method have not been very successful in these countries (Budhwar et al. 2010).
- This is an initial presentation of what promises to be an interesting long-term research project. More packaged comparisons of combinations of practices and executive perspectives, both across nations within the region and in comparison to other countries (such as Eastern, Western Europe and North America) are also potentially useful areas for further analysis.

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