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Consultant's Role: A Qualitative Inquiry from the Consultant's Perspective

by

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - Many criticisms questioning the role and the efficiency of business consultants have been addressed. However, although a great deal of research has been carried out on business consultancy, little has been written on business consultancy from the consultant's viewpoint. In order to gain a detailed view of the situation from an internal consultant's perspective, an investigation of how business consultants perceive their role and contribution within their clients' organisations was undertaken. Drawing on different perspectives, this study aims to demystify the role of business consultants, and to ascertain how they perceive their role within their clients' organisations.

Design/Methodology/Approach – A series of interviews were conducted, where business consultants were asked to comment on issues related to the nature of the relationship with their clients, the pros and cons of their role and also the amount of control and discretion they exercise over the different projects that they are engaged in. Interview data from 17 business consultants from a variety of fields such as change management, information technology, corporate finance and human resource are analysed using an interpretive frame.

Findings - The research findings reveal that differences exist between the rather pejorative conclusions of previous research and the conclusions of this study. Whereas previous research highlighted the omnipotence and the more or less deontological practice of consultants, the data analysis from this study concludes that business consultants appear very humble in their approach to their relationship with clients, and believe that moving clients forward is their ultimate goal. The findings also enable us to demonstrate that business consultants are conscious of the amount of control and discretion that is passed on to them by clients, and do recognise that criticisms of their role can be at times justified.

Originality/Value - The monograph has value for both consultants and clients. The role determinants model presented in the study highlights the main characteristics of the role of business consultants and helps both clients and consultants to rethink their approach to the consulting process

Keywords - Management consultancy, organisational learning, skills transfer, role determinants, qualitative research

Paper type - Monograph

INTRODUCTION

The publications of government spending on management consultancy has increased the levels of mistrust and doubt about the efficiency and reliability of consultants' expertise (De Burgundy, 1998: 204). It appears that business consultants are a much maligned group and their efficiency is regularly questioned by clients and academics alike. The appearance of anaphors and metaphors suggesting that business consultants are people 'who would borrow your watch to tell you what time it is' (Lindon, 1995: 23) has incited consideration of several issues; are the criticisms of the role of consultants justified?, do clients have to assume part of the responsibility in project failures? An investigation of how business consultants perceive their role and contribution within their clients organisations was undertook in order to gain a detailed view of the situation from an internal consultant perspective.

The first section of this monograph consists of an overview of business consultancy writings and most relevant studies. Results of studies investigating the role of business consultants, the relationship between consultants and clients and the main arguments against business consultancy are presented. The second section highlights the approach and the motivations underpinning this study. The review of the literature has led to the identification of a gap, this one will be presented. Prior to presenting the study results, the methodology section presents the study approach and highlights the data collection and data analysis processes. Finally, the study results section gives an insightful view on how business consultants perceive their role in terms of their relationship with clients, level of control and discretion, and pros and cons of their role. The conclusion discusses the study results in perspective of the literature reviewed in the second section; a model on business consultants role determinants will be presented and recommendations aiming at assisting consultants to rethink their approach to the consulting process will be made.

CONSULTANCY: AN OVERVIEW

Four different sections will compose this overview. The first part of our analysis deals with exploring the role of business consultants. Secondly, an in-depth analysis of the literature intends to provide a clear understanding of the relationship existing between consultants and clients. It will be demonstrated in this particular section that business consultants, if willing to deliver a satisfactory level of service, are required to use a wide range of skills corresponding to the different roles involved in the consultancy process. The third part aims to highlight the most virulent criticisms of business consultants and contrast them with the main arguments in favour of the field. Finally, a theoretical framework on the role theory will be used to ascertain how business consultants may perceive their own role and contribution.

Definition

Throughout this study, the notion of business consultancy will be referred to on a regular basis and it seems judicious at this point to define this concept and agree on what business consultancy actually is. The boundaries between business consultancy and other "customer-related" practices such as mentoring, counselling or coaching appear unclear. It will be demonstrated at a later point that consultants themselves agree on saying that sometimes their role within the client's organisation is unclear. We argue that business consultancy has been hoisted with its own petard and that the confusion towards the role of business consultants is actually the result of their own success. As suggested by McLarty and Robinson (1998: 256), the past decade has seen 'an extraordinary expansion in management consultancy', but it is important that business consultancy is distinguished from "service providers" practices who proclaim themselves to be consultants.

Mentoring is often assimilated to consultancy. This concept is defined by Brown (1990: 18) as a process in which 'an experienced veteran helps to shape or guide a newcomer'. Other academics adopt a rather more pragmatic view of mentoring in assuming that a mentor is someone 'who helps another person become what the person aspires to' (Gladstone, 1988: 1). The literature suggests that mentorship is the relationship existing between a mentor and his "protégé" where the former, via

sharing his experiences, acts as a guide to the newcomer in the organisation. Although there are similar characteristics between mentorship and business consultancy, the former involves the idea of promotion and upward mobility that is lacking in the concept of business consultancy (Appelbaum et al, 1994: 6).

Counselling is another practice often misunderstood and likened to the process of consultancy. Carroll, (1995: 26) confirms that both practices are different when noting that 'counsellors are not usually management consultants, and not usually in a strong position to assess the well-being of an organisation and its effects on its employees'. One could argue that the main differentiator between counselling and consulting stands in the fact that counselling involves a more interpretive rather than analytic approach. Hannabuss (1997) confirms this assumption and points out the psychological dimension underpinning the role of counsellors; 'counselling sets out to discover this inner world and help the client interpret unconscious thoughts, feelings and images' (Hannabuss, 1997: 375). Although, it will be demonstrated later on that business consultants at some point do need to adopt a reflective approach, it can not be considered as a core element of their role. The boundary between consulting and coaching also appears blurred. Although it can be argued that coaching is in fact part of the consulting process, coaching involves a more emotional and relational approach than consulting, which mainly deals with analysing and solving complex issues. Lenhardt, (2004: xv) suggests that coaching aims at 'instigating in each individual an intuitive and relational aptitude to the development of self-esteem, ontological and relational security, the capacity to listen and the capacity to take charge of oneself'.

It is generally accepted that business consultancy first appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Frederic Tailor first published his treatise on Scientific Management in 1911 (Massey, 2003: 304; Pellegrinelli, 2002: 343). Business consultancy due to its numerous forms is a difficult process to define. However, the Institute of Management Consultancy (IMC) tried to agree on an "official" definition of business/management consultancy. According to this institution, 'management consultancy is the service provided to business, public and the other undertakings by an independent and qualified person' (IMC cited in McLarty and Robinson, 1998: 256). Although "official", this definition does not refer to the role played by business/management consultants. Greiner and Metzger's definition (1983: 7) brings

us a step forward and allows us to clearly understand what business consultancy is about. They define business consultancy as 'an advisory service contracted for and provided to organisations by specially trained and qualified persons who assist, in an objective and independent manner, the client organisation to identify management problems, analyse such problems, recommend solutions to these problems and help when requested in the implementation of solutions'. If we carefully study Greiner and Metzger's (1983) definition, a number of points are worth mentioning. According to them, business consultancy requires specific skills and a specific level of knowledge in order to help clients identify the problems encountered.

Business consultancy is about acquiring and sharing knowledge. Berry and Oakley (1993) share this view and refer to the "knowledge industry" when talking about business consultancy. They introduced the notion of *praxis*, defined as the 'task of the fusion of theory and action in the continuing experience of working on serious problems' (Berry and Oakley, 1993: 12). According to them, this function of *praxis* characterises the role of business consultants and acts as 'a bridge and a structure to knowledge creation and knowledge application' (Berry and Oakley, 1993: 13). Clark and Salaman (1998) suggest that business consultancy appears as an 'intangible and difficult service to define' (Clark and Salaman, 1998 in Pellegrinelli, 2002: 347) and if one is willing to understand the role of business consultants, the entire consultancy process and not only bribes must be analysed.

ROLE OF BUSINESS CONSULTANTS

The role of business consultants and the nature of the services they offer is complex and indistinct. Throughout this section, the study intends to provide an answer to the question that has engendered such a polemic: what is the role of business consultants?

The Different Roles of Business Consultants

There is a profusion of information exploring the role of business consultants, but the question of why companies employ the services of external professionals must firstly be tackled. Pellegrinelli (2002: 343) as well as Massey (2003) notes that it is currently common practice for top-level managers to employ the services of business

consultants to assist their organisations in selecting 'the appropriate strategies from the plethora of available choices' (Massey, 2003: 304).

Organisational Uncertainty

It appears from the literature that managers' uncertainty towards the fast changing environment is a core element of the demand for consulting services. Arnaud (1998: 469) suggests that consultancy begins when an organisation decider 'expresses a "client-request" before a professional'. According to Arnaud (1998), this request 'reveals an awareness, more or less vague, of the existence of an organisational situation needing change' and justifying the intervention of a professional. This idea is supported by Wittreich (1966: 130) who notes that 'often a client who wishes to purchase a professional service senses that he has a problem, but is uncertain as to what the specific nature of his problem really is'. This feeling of uncertainty is considered by Blunsdon (2002) to be the root of the demand for consulting services. He suggests that 'the consultancy industry exists because of the presence of persistent organisational and management problems which creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and exerts pressure on managers to be seen to be acting both rationally and innovatively' (Blunsdon, 2002: 5). Sturdy (1997) argues that the very first role of business consultants is to provide clients with a reassuring sense of control aiming to reduce the uncertainty existing within the organisation. In that sense, one could compare business consultants to therapists who would help managers to be relieved of the anxiety that prevents them from doing their job efficiently.

Massey (2003: 307) provides us with a useful set of metaphors aiming to better understand the role of consultants. Three consultants were asked to describe their roles through the use of a metaphor; the first one chose to compare his role to that of a pilot of a ship undertaking a voyage. The second one compared himself to a gardener taking care of an eco-system whereas the third one opted for the role of a guide. This illustration demonstrates the subjectivity of the role of business consultants and in fact helps us to realise how difficult it is to conceptualise and define their role.

Number of Roles

The literature suggests that there are different schools of thought regarding the role of business consultants. Some argue that consultants fulfil mainly a single role whereas others such as Lippitt and Lippitt (1986: 57) consider that the consultant 'fulfils a number of roles that he or she judges to be appropriate for the client, the situation, and his or her own style'. Chapman (1998), seems to agree with Lippitt and Lippitt's argument (1986). Indeed, when investigating the skills of business consultants working with non-profit organisations, Chapman (1998: 212) concluded; 'consultants can fill a variety of roles depending on the demands of the situation'. Other perceive business consultancy as a process in which both clients and consultants benefit and equally participate. Massey and Walker (1999: 38) assume that 'if the consultant selects appropriate roles that are aligned with client expectations, no matter how this process is managed, then the assignment is more likely to be successful in achieving the agreed goal'.

Some academics who have been trying to identify the role of business consultants identified a list of functions and roles played by consultants. Steele's study (1975) for instance demonstrated how broad the role of consultants is. He identified nine roles that a consultant may adopt when working on a project with a client; teacher, student, detective, barbarian, clock, monitor, talisman, advocate and ritual pig. Others such as Kubr (1996) identified two basic roles of business consultants, the "resource role" helping clients with their problems by using consultants' experience and appropriated knowledge and the "process role" consisting of helping the organisation 'to solve its problems by making it aware of organisational process' (Kubr, 1996: 58).

The "Process Consultation" Model

The idea suggesting that consultancy must first been seen in terms of process is attributed to Schein (1988, 1999), who provides us with three different models putting forward assumptions on the role of business consultants. "Process consultation" is pragmatically defined by Schein (1999: 3) as 'what goes on between a helper and the person or group being helped'. The first model developed by Schein (1988) is the expert one in which the consultant's role is to bring alongside with its experience a

particular expertise or skill that is currently lacking in the organisation. Although that there has been evidence that consultants see their role more as a coach than that of an expert (Werr et al, 1997: 298), in Schein's expert model, the consultant acts as an expert telling clients what has to be done to solve their problems. Schein (1988), adapted his second model from the relationship existing between a doctor and his patient. In this particular scenario the role of the consultant is to prescribe a solution aiming to alleviate the pain experienced by the client. The process consultation model is actually much more than making a diagnosis or solving a problem by way of expertise. Process consultation involves a series of different activities aiming to help clients to perceive and to understand their problems in order to solve them by themselves.

Organisational Learning

The idea of transfer of skills underpins the process consultation model. Williams (2004: 184) commenting on Schein's contribution notes that 'the consultant's role is therefore one of helping the client become a sufficiently competent diagnostician. A key part of the process consultant is that the client must see (i.e. learn about) the problems for themselves as well as generate any solution if they are to have ownership and take responsibility'. It appears regularly in the literature and it is confirmed by Schein, that clients not only own the problems but also own the solution. The role of the consultant is not the one of only solving problems but one of helping the client to understand what the issues really are. Turner (1988: 12) notes that the role of business consultants has changed over the years and argues that the new role of business consultants is that of facilitating organisational learning; 'the emphasis of consulting has changed from "solving problems" to building clients' capacity for diagnosing situations on their own and thus managing more effectively…increasingly, management consultants are worth their fees not only because of their ability to analyse client problems and provide sound recommendations, but also because of their skills in conducting a human process that facilitates needed learning and change'. Argyris (1970) identified three pragmatic roles of business consultants. According to him, the first role of consultants when assigned to work on a project is to obtain valid and relevant information. Their second role brings us back to the beginning of this section and the idea that business

consultants must facilitate the choice of options available to managers. Finally, their last role is to make sure that an internal commitment occurs and that everybody within the organisation follow the course of action.

Business consultants, when working on projects with clients, facilitate organisational learning, which appears to be a core element of organisations' survival currently. Many writers stress the importance of learning during the consultation process, Steele for instance (1975: 190) claims that 'learning is the essence of the consulting process'. Burnes et al (2003: 453) argue that with the constantly changing environment that businesses operate in nowadays, an organisation would not survive if it failed to learn at least as fast as its environment changed. In this respect, one could argue that skills transfer is actually a core element of the role of business consultants.

One cannot discuss the importance of organisational learning without mentioning the contribution of Argyris and Schön (1978). These authors suggest that organisational learning occurs when 'individuals within an organisation experience a problematic situation and enquire into it on the organisation's behalf…..that lead them to modify their images of organisational phenomena and to restructure their activities so as to bring outcomes and expectations' (Argyris and Schön, 1978: 16).

Werr et al (1997: 298) support the idea that learning is a central element of the consultancy process. Larwood and Gattiker (1986) go even further in suggesting that the role of business consultants is actually to fill the gap between their own body of knowledge and that of their clients'. It is argued that there is a link between changes taking place within organisations and the learning capacity of them. This is confirmed by Nonaka and Takeouchi (1995) cited in O'Keefe (2002: 132) who suggest that 'the essence of strategic change lies in developing organisational capability to acquire, create, accumulate and exploit the knowledge domain'. Thus, if the role of business consultants is actually to bring new skills and knowledge that will be disseminated within organisations; consultants can therefore be considered as agents of change.

Consultants as Agents of Change

It is argued that faster changes create weaker situations and therefore justify a need for external help. In that sense, the consultant's role is more than simply reassuring managers and alleviating feelings of uncertainty, it is also to facilitate organisational change. As noted by Brown and Eisenhard (1998), the best-performing companies, via the domination of the industry, set the pace and rhythm of change, and one can argue that the role of consultants is not only to transfer their skills to clients but to help them to create the change or catch-up with it.

McKinley and Scherer (2000) investigated the unanticipated consequences of restructuring in organisations. They hypothesised that there is a relationship between the writings of consultants and organisational restructuring. According to them, the writings of consultants on organisational change drives top-executives to restructure organisations, which leads consultants to write even more; thus giving the impression of an endless loop.

To conclude on this section defining the role of business consultants, the ambiguous character of the role of business consultants should be stressed. It has thus far been noted that consultants play different roles, some argue that they are agents of change in transferring some of their skills to clients, others argue that throughout the consultation process their role evolves and changes to adapt to clients' requirements. It will be proved in due course that the business consultant's role is highly controversial and subject to many criticisms, however the difficulty of the role played by consultants hinges in the fact that everything they do for their clients has to be done in a creative and customised way. It is referred to as the "translation process" by Crucini and kipping (2001: 584) and consists of adapting the knowledge of business consultants to specific client needs. The necessity of offering customised solutions to clients is perceived as a basic requirement by Fullerton and West (1996: 45) who suggest that it is important that 'both clients and consultants must find a "tailor-made" solution rather than the consultant simply giving an "off-the-shelf" solution'. Blunsdon (2002) argues that the problems experienced by managers are well known and that therefore the solutions offered by business consultants are always the same. One could therefore argue that the role of business consultants is extremely

paradoxical, in the sense that business consultants must provide their clients with new and creative solutions to problems which are not new and to which solutions are known by everyone.

Table.1 Role of business consultants: Summary

Author	Focus	Relevance to the research
Argyris and Schön (1996)	Consultants as agent of change	Business consultancy is a process through which organisations learn. Business consultants are perceived as agents of change.
Kaarst-Brown (1999)	Role of consultants	There are five symbolic roles of the external consultant External consultants when called in to work on an assignment are actually being manipulated by their client whose agenda has already been set in advance.
Kinsely (1979)	Role performance fluctuation	In business services, one must be aware that employees and managers efficiency fluctuates on a day to day basis.
Kubr (1996)	Role of consultants	Consultants have two basic roles: resource role and process role
Lindon (1995)	Role of consultants	Consultants role is to help managers to understand their problem, whilst not being responsible for solving it.
Lippitt and Lippitt (1986)	Role of consultants	There is no established role in business consultancy. Consultants fulfil a number of roles that they judge to be appropriate for the client's situation.
McKinley and Scherer (2000)	Consultants as agents of change	Consultants' writings on organisational changes drive top-executives to restructure organisations. Consultants are agent of change
Pellegrinelli (2002: 353)	Consultant / client relationship	Investigated the interplay and tensions of consulting interventions.
Schein (1988)	Role of consultants in the consultancy process	There are three types of consultancy: the expert, the doctor/patient relationship and the "process consultation". Schein focused his research the role that "consultation process" on plays on organisational development.
Steele (1975)	The learning process in consulting	'Learning is the essence of consulting' (Steele, 1975: 190)
Walker and Massey (1999)	Skills transfer in consulting	Business consultancy is about transferring skills to both organisations and managers.
Williams (2001)	Client's role in consulting	Consultants' esoteric language gives meaning to concepts and actually help managers to understand better the problems they are facing.

Source: Compiled by the authors

THE CONSULTANT-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

The previous section was mainly dealing with exploring the role of business consultants, this particular section aims to explore the relationship between consultants and their clients. Managerial positions are characterised with a high level of stress and uncertainty. It was argued earlier on that the business consultant's role is to help managers to make decisions in transferring some of their skills. It is argued that the role of business consultants is in fact much more than providing help and more or less judicious advice. The relationship existing between consultants and clients is much more than professional, and involves a psychological dimension that must be taken into account when exploring the relationship existing between both parties.

Emotional Support Providers

According to a study by Covin and Fisher (1991), investigating the key factors of the success or failure of consultancy projects, it appears that the interpersonal fit between consultants and clients is vitally important. Lundberg and Young (2001: 535) who investigated the role of emotions in the consultant/client relationship argue that consultants who are called in to provide expertise and solutions on pragmatic problems i.e. organisational change, are in fact implicitly called in to provide emotional support.

The notion of emotional support comes back on a regular basis in the literature although Lundberg and Young (2001) noted that there is a feeling of taboo about emotions in consultancy, 'emotions are neither written nor talked about in management and consulting' (Lundberg and Young, 2001: 535). Stapley (1996) shares this view and argues that organisational change is not only about dealing with the change but also about dealing with feelings and emotions of the different members involved in the process. Schaffer (1997) argues that the fact that conventional consulting ignores the cultural and psychological dimensions of the relationship between clients and consultants can lead some projects to failure.

Emotions are usually not associated with business consultancy. A plausible explanation could be the fact that business consultants are seen by other members of organisations as the person in charge of the organisational change process and therefore in order to be credible they need to remain professional and doubtless about the solutions they prescribe. Lundberg and Young (2001: 536) observed that business consultants themselves have doubts and uncertainties but 'successful consultants need to be in touch with and have ways of dealings with their own anxiety, their own moods and affective reasons, so as to feel reasonably alert, secure, comfortable and centred to interact with their clients'. Beeby et al (1998: 61) suggest that 'consultancy is normally associated with professional and rational approaches; where "objectivity" is the norm and in which content-oriented expertise is marketed to client organisations'. It is believed that the way business consultants act and react is adapted to clients' expectations of consultants. Although the relationship between client expectations and the role of business consultants will be explored in the role theory section, it can be argued that the reason why there are so few notes on emotions and consultancy is not because business consultants do not have any emotions but simply because their role does not allow them to show any.

When defining the concepts and highlighting the differences between consultant and counsellor, it was argued that the role of counsellor involve a much more interpretive approach than the role of consultants. One could argue that more than providing solutions and emotional support, consultants have to sometimes adapt themselves to the situation and act as therapists. Johanson, (2003: 347) when exploring the relationship existing between consultants and clients, recalls an interview where the consultant was playing the role of a therapist:

"Consultant:	*how do you manage these internal conflicts ? they must take a lot of energy?"*
"Client:	*yes, but this is really why I want to have you as a sounding board, because I have no one in our organisation to sit down and talk with about these things"*

In this particular situation we could argue that there has been a change in both the role played by the consultant and the purpose of his employment. More than simply being the person in charge of helping the client, the consultant's role here is to listen to the

client and in a way he acts as a container. Arnaud (1998) agrees with this view and highlights the psychological aspect of the relationship between consultants and their clients and suggests that 'the consultant should make a special note of anything that apparently has little importance to the actual technical needs expressed, just as the psychoanalyst listens to the alleged nonsense formulated by the patient on the couch' (Arnaud, 1998: 477).

As it is possible to observe the relationship between clients and consultants is much more than a simple professional relationship where the consultant acts as an expert and provides a solution to his client. One can argue that to reach a stage where the client calls in the consultant simply to talk, a relationship based on trust must have first been developed. Chapman (1998: 211) argues that 'consultants are engaged in a helping the relationship with the client, rather than simply being a provider of expertise and little more. According to Pellegrinelli (2002: 353) the consultant's role is to firstly establish a sound relationship with the client and attempt to make him feel 'comfortable with the consultant and the process' before undertaking any changes within the client organisation. Lundberg and Young (2001: 537), go a step further and assume that 'turning emotional distress into positive organisational action, even excitement, after all is what consultants really are all about'.

The Importance of Building a Sound Relationship

The idea of building a sound relationship prior to any change appears to be generally accepted. Stumpf and Longman (2000) for instance observed that 'the lack of team and institutional relationship success is directly related to the failure of the consultants to develop their personal approach to create or connect with team and institutional marketing efforts' (Stumpf and Longman, 2000: 125). They developed an interesting model aiming to understand the evolution of the relationship between consultants and clients. According to them, there are four different stages in the process of building the relationship; the first one is the "development stage" aiming to create a '"ready-receiver" who will be willing to invest time in conversation with the consultant'. The second stage enlarges the scope of the relationship and suggests that through conversations, a common interest between the consultant and his client is developed. This common interest allows the consultant to gain the respect of his client and

appears as even more credible. Stumpf and Longman (2000: 125) suggest that the credibility of the client can be gained via a particularly good understanding of the client's industry or company. The third stage consists of an identification of the real and relevant customer needs that will change client's perception of the consultant. Stumpf and Longman (2000) implicitly highlight the difficulty of the role of business consultants and note that the progression to the next stage requires a great deal of patience and persistence. Arnaud (1998: 472) also investigated the relationship existing between consultants and clients and hypothesised, that in some extreme cases, clients feel so lonely and disarmed to face their problems, see their feelings towards consultants change from trust to "true love".

As previously demonstrated, one of the main tasks of business consultants is to gather data in order to identify and solve problems. Stumpf and Longman (2000: 129) argue that a client's willingness to share information depends on the consultant's ability to build trust and the emotional depth of the relationship. Since the process of gathering data is the key point of the success of a consultancy project, one can argue that the ability of a consultant to build trust and gain the credibility of the client is vital for a consultancy project to succeed.

Stumpf and Longman (2000: 124) suggest that 'a long term relationship must produce a mutually beneficial result'. One can therefore argue that consultants in addition to only being preoccupied with building a short term relationship, should be concerned with building a long-term one. A business consultant interviewed by De Jong and Van Eekelen (1999) confirms this assumption and declared: 'the most important thing in the work of a management consultant is building and maintaining a relation with your client. On that basis you get the trust you need' (De Jong and Van Eekelen, 1999: 187). Since emotions are involved in every phase of the consultancy process, consultants must learn to work smoothly. Consultants must be able to create a climate where clients feel that they can trust the consultant, however in order to reach a such stage, 'the consultant is to provide exclusive and sole attention to the client and his objectives. Consultants should never serve more than one master. Consultants should place the client's interest ahead of theirs' (Shenson, 1990: 19).

The relationship existing between consultants and clients is a complex one, and we can actually consider what kind of skills are needed to be an efficient consultant. The role of a business consultant requires a wide range of skills. As mentioned above, the ability to create a climate favourable to the establishment of a sound relationship is necessary. A consultant interviewed by McLachlin (1999: 399) declared: "climate is critically important…if you find that your thinking and the client's are not on the same wavelength, don't hang around". Stumpf and Tymon Jr. (2001: 49) suggest that the relationship existing between consultants and clients is an "emotional duet", in which the consultant if willing to be effective has to learn to 'recognise, deal with and respond to the client's emotions'.

Werr et al (1997: 300) note that 'consultant and client must be expected to have quite different schemas of the change process at the beginning of the project'. This divergence of opinions forces consultants to learn to deal smoothly with delicate situations; 'one has to develop the skill of telling clients they are wrong in such a way that they thank you for giving helpful advice. One has to learn how to disagree without being disagreeable' (Stumpf and Tymon Jr, 2001: 49). Kubr (1996: 489) argues that the key to a successful relationship between consultants and clients stands in the proactive behaviour of the consultant. According to him, 'being proactive in consulting implies that the consultant thinks even of those needs and requirements of which a client has not been aware, and helps the clients to realize all his or her possibilities, and needs'. Schein (1997: 206), suggests that business consultants must be humble and honest and accept the fact that sometimes they do not know about the client's situation. In behaving in such a way, the trust between the two parties will be increased and enhance the quality of the relationship.

Managing the Consultant – Client Relationship

The first contact between consultant and client appears to be the most important one. Kaplan (1976) argues that the first contact should allow the consultant to assess the gap between client expectations of process consultation and what process consultation actually is. As mentioned earlier, client expectations of business consultancy can be false and if the consultant is willing to develop a long-term relationship, they must

assess the client's level of expectation at the entry stage of the process and correct it accordingly.

A consultant interviewed by Crucini and Kipping (2001) stresses the importance of the first approach and declared 'you have to be careful not to scare them with an uninterrupted flow of words and ideas but rather you have to listen and try to understand what is their main concern before offering anything, and when you do that, always use the simplest way' (Crucini and Kipping, 2001: 583)

Table.2 The Consultant – Client relationship: Summary

Author	Focus	Relevance to the research
Arnaud (1998)	Role of consultants / Demand for consulting services	There is an obscure demand for consulting services ranging from the need for consolation to the search of sadistic pleasure.
Crucini and Kipping (2001)	Consultants as agents of change	Translation process: Business consultants must adapt their knowledge to the specific needs of their clients.
Johansson (2003)	Consultant / client relationship	Consultants and clients are collaborating to the development of a plot
Stumpf and Longman (2000)	Consultant / client relationship	Investigated business consultant's skills to develop a sound relationship with their clients
Wittreich (1966: 130)	Demand for consulting services	'Often a client who wishes to purchase a professional service sense that he has a problem, but is uncertain as to what the specific nature of his problem really is' (Wittreich, 1966: 130)
Lundberg and Young (2001)	Emotions in the consultancy process	There is a feeling of taboo about emotions in consultancy
Ojasalo (2001)	Clients' expectation management	Developed an approach aiming at managing customers' levels of expectation. There are three types of clients expectations; fuzzy, implicit and unrealistic.

Source: Compiled by the authors

BUSINESS CONSULTANCY: A CRITIQUE

Williams (2001: 519) notes that, 'external consulting is never far from criticism'. The role and efficiency of business consultants is subject to numerous criticisms and one cannot write on business consultancy without mentioning the main criticisms overwhelming the role of business consultants. Before starting an exploration of the different criticisms, this short "poem" or "lampoon" (depending on which side you stand) could be used as a way to introduce this section **(**Ramsbottom (1981) cited in De Jong and Van Eekelen, 1999: 181).

The Consultant
Of all the businesses, by far,
Consultancy's the most bizarre.
For, to the penetrating eye,
There is no apparent reason why,
With no more assets than a pen,
This group of personable men,
Can sell to a client more than twice,
The same ridiculous advice,
Or find in such a rich profusion,
Problems to fit their own solution.

This self-explanatory poem shows that business consultancy is subject to virulent criticisms. Before starting the analysis of the different criticisms, one must draw a distinction between the criticisms towards the role of business consultants and the criticisms pointing out the more or less deontological practices of some consultancies. In this particular section, we intend to provide a clear and concise review of the different criticisms overwhelming the role of business consultants and the purpose of consultancy projects.

A Dominant Position

Ormerod (1997) argues that business consultants operate in "opportunistic" mode. Bloch (1999) on the other hand is very sceptical about their efficiency. He suggests that 'as soon as consultants secure one contract, they are thinking about the next one. They want ongoing work from their clients and therefore need to please the people who sign the contracts' (Bloch, 1999: 115). Bloch is actually not the only one to think that consultants are abusing their dominant position, Shapiro et al (1993) suggest that

consultants, once called in to work on a project with a client, always try to extend the length of their assignment. It appears to the client that they are in fact reluctant to leave the company. The role of business consultant as outlined previously is a delicate one. Consultants need to balance the scope and the length of their work between their own or company's needs and their clients' needs. As pointed out by Arnaud (1998: 469), consultants are confronted with a perverse alternative, 'either the client's initial request is answered to the letter (in order to land the contract before the competitors), or an analysis prior to any operational work is proposed, along with an in-depth study of the request itself to open up or recentre the problem initially posed'. Arnaud (1998) implicitly refers to the notion of ethics and integrity in business consultancy; what are consultants supposed to do when their loyalties are divided between their company's needs and their clients' needs?

On the one hand, the consultant can simply answer the demands of the client, even though they may be perfectly aware that the root of the problem does not stand in the client's perceived problem but in fact lies much deeper within the organisation, or they can choose to be truly honest and tell the client that an in-depth analysis of the infrastructure is needed and risk losing the contract, because this would be interpreted as an excuse to extend the length of the contract.

Consultancy: "A Modern Folly"

Other criticisms are even more virulent than those expressed by Bloch (1999) or Shapiro et al (1993). De Burgundy (1998) for instance, when reflecting on the growth of state spending on management consultancy services, refers to a 'modern folly' (De Burgundy, 1998: 204). He argues that the thinking and approach underpinning business consultancy is flawed and that the projects given to business consultants 'perform no real practical role beyond keeping certain groups of men and women employed' (De Burgundy, 1998: 205). In an early article, the same author was already expressing his disagreement against consultant' "self-help" books for which he declared have done 'little to relieve management problems and may, in fact, have compounded them' (De Burgundy, 1995: 51).

Gilbert (1998: 340) developed the concept of 'consultancy fatigue' as a feeling of frustration and weariness about the activities of Western consultants called in to help Eastern European managers with the economic development of countries served by Tacis programmes. The author highlighted the feeling of frustration of some clients who felt that they did not gain anything from their collaboration with Western consultants. Gilbert (1998: 341) relates the experience of a Belorussian manager who declared "EU experts came to study our problems; they asked us many questions, we provided many answers, then they reported back to us which problems we had and made some half-baked recommendations in a report written in English only and the projects were over". Stiglitz (2001) in his pamphlet against the new role of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, highlights the highly controversial practises of some consultants sent to developing countries to provide them with their expertise. According to Stiglitz (2001), consultants and managers do not live on the same planet. This assumption is supported by De Burgundy (1995: 54) who argues that the main problem in the relationship between clients and consultants is that 'rich men and rich women see the world differently from poor men and poor women'. According to De Burgundy, the difference of incomes, living standards between clients and consultants is at the 'root of the problems which bedevil consultancy' (De Burgundy, 1995: 54). Schein (1997: 208) recognises the character arrogant and megalomaniac of some consultants who sometimes 'not only make the recommendations but stick by them even if the client rejects them'. Schein (1997: 208) suggests that this kind of behaviour reveals a great deal of 'ignorance and misconception about human systems'.

Business Consultancy: Setting the Fashion?

Metaphors and analogies are often used when criticising business consultants. Gilbert (1998: 340) for instance makes an analogy between consultants and doctors or therapists. She suggests that consultants are called in to carry out a diagnosis and prescribe a 'more or less painful treatment' to their clients to then go away and deal with their next patient. Kostera (1995), uses a religious metaphor to describe the role and attitude of business consultants. According to him, consultants could be compared to missionaries who would come along with their set of brand new techniques and

methods not to transfer their knowledge but to convert the locals and convince them that they have solutions to all their problems.

Another major criticism of the role of consultants was made by Abrahamson (1991). He suggests that consultants are "fashion setters" in charge of setting the trends and demonstrate the efficiency of their "brand new" tools and techniques to managers perpetually seeking the "Holy Grail" that would allow them to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. Blunsdon (2002: 6), joins Abrahamson and claims that most of the problems occurring within organisations are not new and that solutions are well known. Business consultants' only role is to 'package and repackage as fashionable the solutions' and sell those "pre-conceived" solutions as a remedy to managers in difficulties. According to Collin (2000:9), consultants do not sell anything but "old wine in new bottles". Hilmer and Donaldson (1997:8-9) pointed out that 'management is a fertile field for fads or quick fixes because problems are intractable'. This statement brings us back to the beginning of this section when mentioning the dilemma faced by consultants. The pressure from shareholders, competitors and the environment is such in organisations that managers have to be seen to be doing something. It does not matter what it is as long as something is done in order to get the organisation going. This was confirmed by Arnaud (1998: 472) who concluded that sometimes the situation is such that a 'credulous or dependent client may say to an idealised consultant: "never mind what service you provide, as long as you provide it"'.

Business Consultants' Tools

Uncertainty is one of the reasons why consultancy occurs and some writers such as O'Shea and Madigan (1997) argue that it is actually the uncertainty during the economic slowdown and the market deregulation in the 1980s that created such demands for consulting services. They argue that consultants exploit this uncertainty in order to sell even more of their services and make themselves indispensable. McKinley and Scherer (2000) argue that managers perceive their environment as being particularly turbulent and are in a state of cognitive disorder. According to them, 'consultants will be biased toward portraying it [the environment] as turbulent because this increases their clients' demands for consultancy services with the

turbulence' (McKinley and Scherer, 2000: 739). It can therefore be argued that consultants are aware of the turbulent environment of managers and that instead of relieving them from that feeling of uncertainty, managers are kept in that state of mind in order to sell even more consulting services. Bloch (1999) in his pamphlet against business consultancy suggests that everything is done in order to keep clients under strict control. He draws a comparison between psychobabble; the language used by psychologists and business consultants' esoteric language and develop the notion of "consultobabble". Bloch suggests that consultobabble is by far the most 'fascinating weapon in the consulting arsenal' (Bloch, 1999: 116). According to him, the rhetoric used by business consultants serves only one purpose: mystifying the appearance and enhancing their presence; 'they may give you poor advice, but they will look good while they do it' (Bloch, 1999: 116). Bloch (1999) draws a line upon the light and gullible pep talk of business consultants which, mixed with colourful pie-charts and graphics, helps to keep their clients in a golden jail.

McKinley and Scherer (2000) hypothesised that "consultobabble" reinforces the feelings of uncertainty and creates an even more turbulent environment for managers, and therefore influences them to restructure their organisations; 'once perceptions of environmental turbulence are created by actual environmental turbulence, *consultant's rhetoric*, and business press accounts, these perceptions become a major factor influencing executives to engage in organisational restructuring' (McKinley and Scherer, 2000: 739) [Italic added]. Bloch (1999: 117) claims that consultants are superfluous and that management can sort out their problems by themselves if they know 'what they want and are competent'. Massey (2003: 310) suggests that new business consultants are 'not always aware of the main theoretical frameworks for organisational consulting' and the author argues that this can actually weaken the *praxis* characterising business consultancy. Bloch (1999: 115) supports the idea that junior consultants, due to their lack of experience, are completely unable to 'cater for the specific needs and requirements of clients'. He goes even further in suggesting that both novice and 'redundant and superseded' consultants can do much damage within clients' organisations (Bloch, 1999: 115).

Now that the main criticisms overwhelming the role of business consultants have been identified, it would be judicious and interesting to contrast these criticisms with the

arguments in favour of business consultancy. Business consultants are often criticised for the fact that they are external to the company and therefore do not know anything about the way business is done in a particular industry. Fullerton and West (1996: 40) argue that although internal consultants are very much aware of an organisation's culture, structure or norms, their positions lack objectivity and therefore creates part of the problem. Williams and Rattray (2004: 180), draw the attention on the irony of business consultancy. They find it interesting to conclude that although the demand for consulting services has spectacularly increased in the past decade, business consultants remain to be perceived as a 'much-maligned group'. Numerous articles criticising the role of business consultants have been identified in the literature, most of them lack objectivity, and are backed up with clients testifying that their collaboration with business consultants was a complete fiasco. One possibility could be that business consultants are not the ones to blame in case of project failure.

Business Consultants: "Victims of Organisational Plots"

In many articles, clients are seen as victims of a "big plot" a "big con" as Bloch (1999) would suggest but what if victims are actually the consultants.

Kaarst-Brown (1999) provides us with an insightful hypothesized. External consultants, when called in to work on an assignment, are actually being manipulated by their client whose agenda has already been set in advance. Kaarst-Brown (1999) argues that there are five symbolic roles of the external consultant. The very first role unconsciously played by the consultant sets the atmosphere and activates the 'Fear – Uncertainty – Doubts' factors within the organisation (Williams, 2001: 521). The second role of the external consultants can be qualified as one of a scapegoat. Indeed, external consultants as previously demonstrated are agents of change and therefore may be used by upper management to integrate a new set of values and norms within the organisation. As noted by Williams (2001: 521), 'the outsider is likely to attract less anger than the internal who may be viewed as betraying established norms and values'. According to Kaarst-Brown (1999: 553), the third role of the external consultant is that of 'power redistribution', in which consultants are identified as the people responsible for the redistribution of power. The fourth role is one of the 'wishing well' (Kaarst-Brown, 1999: 555) and consists of using the consultant to deal with the frustrations, hopes and suggestions of members of the organisation left in

uncertainty and doubt. The final role of external consultants stands in the departure of them and marks the 'freezing and stabilisation of changes' (Williams, 2001: 522). The framework developed by Kaarst-Brown (1999) allows us to see a different aspect of the client/consultant relationship in which consultants are manipulated and involved in an organisational change process in which they have no control.

Arnaud (1998) adopts a psychoanalytic approach of the consultant/client relationship and comes up with an unusual but insightful demand for consultancy services. The author suggests that 'the request as demand does not always appear in a positive light' (Arnaud, 1998: 472). According him, the client's motivations to employ the services of consultants are wide and unexpected; from the need for consolation to the search of sadistic pleasure. Arnaud (1998) illustrates the following statement in taking the example of a client challenging a consultant to find a solution to a problem, meanwhile doing everything to 'make the situation inextricable' (Arnaud, 1998: 472). The author notes that the success of a project can be jeopardised by the masochistic tendencies of a client looking for some sort of reprimand and who would deliberately fail to comply with the instructions of the consultant.

Clients' Involvement in the consultancy Process

The idea of the client being at the centre of the success of a project appears on a regular basis in the literature. McLachlin (1999: 396) suggests that 'if a client is not actively involved and ready to change, a consulting engagement is very unlikely to be successful'. This argument is supported by Schein (1990) who notes that the client and only him owns the problem and the solution. If over the consultation process, the consultant leaves the client to distance himself from the project and rejects in his responsibilities, "the war is over". Thus, the client owns a part of the responsibility in the success of a consultancy project. Business consultancy is a two-way process and it is all too simplistic and somewhat inappropriate to always blame the consultant in the case of project failure. Lindon (1995: 21) notes that the process of consultancy is to 'assist clients to solve their problems whilst not being ultimately responsible for solving them'.

Such as for consultants, there are a number of metaphors putting forward the responsibility of the client, Steele (1975) for instance believes that the reciprocity of roles is a major element of the consultation process. Thus a consultant acting as a teacher implies a client willing to be a student and willing to learn and who gets prepared for his lessons (Shenson, 1990). Schank and Abelson (1977) agrees with this idea and assumes that the success of a consultancy project stands in the clients' willingness to learn. Schuyt and Schuijt (1998: 403), argue that everything hinges 'on the manager's belief in the cure. The manager must be prepared to change'.

Massey and Walker (1999: 455) suggest that in some occasions, clients must first 'unlearn past behaviours and processes with which they have to become familiar, in order to change established patterns'. Individuals are generally reluctant to unlearn and change their habits, this phase can therefore become critical if the level of communication and trust between consultants and clients is insufficient.

Most criticisms come from a difference in the perceptions of the role of consultants. This aspect will be analysed more in depth later when exploiting the "role theory framework", but one can argue that clients are often blinded by their idea of business consultants. Arnaud (1998: 478) judiciously notes that clients are sceptical at all times regarding the efficiency of consultants; 'the substantial fees charged prove that the consultant is only interested in money, but if the fee is low, or if the consultant offers the service free of charge, the only possible interpretation is that the consultant is using the client as a guinea-pig'.

Business consultants are often compared to story-makers who "would borrow your watch to tell you what time it is" (Lindon, 1995: 23), but Johansson (2003: 341) argues that the consultancy process can metaphorically be compared to the construction of a plot where instead of having the consultant trying to sell its packages to the client, both participate in the elaboration of a plot. He also argues that 'the making of a story is seen as a mode of pondering management issues so as to stimulate reflection and prepare for action'. Jabri and Pounder (2001: 682) cited in Johansson (2003: 344) on the other hand note that story-telling can have positive impact and can be used to "express the richness and diversity of human experience

and thus challenge simplistic analyses of management issues such as change that can result from adherence to narrow, mechanical models of human nature".

Business Consultants' Rhetoric

Concerning the rhetoric used by business consultants, Williams (2004: 181) argues that 'the idea of a consultant-speak, the so-called consultobabble, as a means of hiding the consultant's inadequacy in terms of expertise is perhaps rather simplistic, albeit a popular view'. Clark and Salaman (1998) unlike Bloch (1999) argue that the consultants' rhetoric is actually a means through which consultants craft symbols helping to alleviate uncertainty. They suggest that business consultants, as well as their clients, produce and consume this rhetoric when working closely together. Williams (2001) agrees with Clark and Salaman (1998) in the idea that consultants through their rhetoric give meaning to concepts and actually help managers to gain a better understanding of the problems they are facing. Williams also adds that if the use of a specific language can be criticised, the simple fact of being 'knowledgeable is critical' (Williams, 2001:520).

One can argue, that the whole idea of business consultants manipulating clients via a specified vocabulary has become a "cheap fad" and can actually be perceived as an insult to the professionalism of clients who would not be able to defend themselves. In addition, there has been evidence that "consultobabble" does not always help consultants. Crucini and Kipping (2001) found out that in Italy for instance, the use of specific vocabulary related to business creates anxiety and mistrust. According to a sole practitioner interviewed, 'sometimes the use of foreign terms, even the names of the best-know practices such as business process reengineering, or JIT, creates confusion and diffidence' (Crucini and Kipping, 2001: 583)

Schuyt and Schuijt's (1998) study comparing consultants to magicians demonstrates that crafting symbols and using a specific vocabulary is not new and is not such a preoccupying practice. Via an anthropological comparison they argue that through rituals and symbols consultants such as magicians seek to make 'anxiety and uncertainty controllable'. Where it was once argued that symbols and rhetoric are the "secret weapons" of business consultants allowing them to create disorder and

uncertainty. Kertzer (1988: 4) in Schuyt and Schuijt's (1998) suggests that 'through symbols we confront the experiential chaos that envelops us and create order'. This hypothesis is supported by McKinley and Scherer (2000: 738) who note that some consultants and practitioners are convinced that 'chaos and cognitive disorder are actually productive for innovation and performance in corporate settings'.

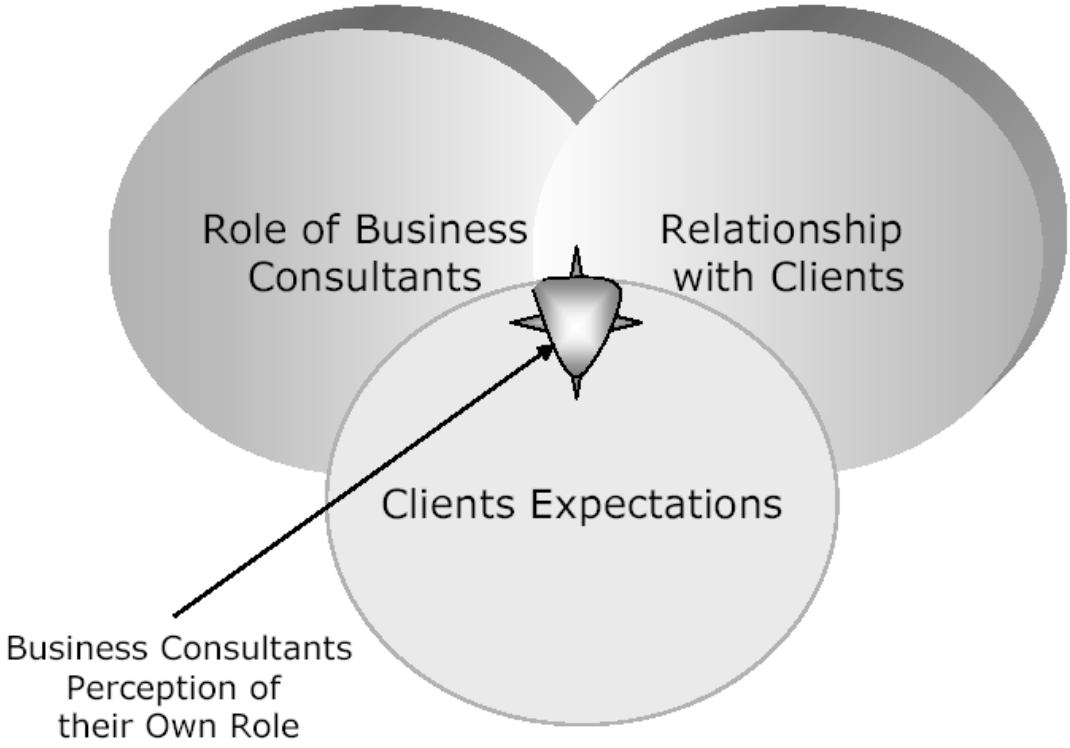
This section put forward both criticisms and arguments in favour of business consultancy. It appears clear now that the consultant's role is ambiguous and Kinsely's view of the service industry appears to be a valid one. Kinsely (1979) suggests that in service businesses, mainly delivered by people, one must be aware that people's performance and efficiency fluctuates on a day to day basis (Kinsely, 1979) cited in Solomon et al (1985: 100,). It therefore appears that the quality of outcomes with knowledge can not be predicted. Whether or not justified, when working on a project with a consultant one must be aware of this fluctuation, and consultants are not machines and therefore can sometimes be subjected to a decrease in productivity and efficiency.

Table 3 Criticisms of Business consultancy: Summary

Author	Focus	Relevance to the research
Abrahamson (1991)	Role of business consultants	Consultants are "fashion setters" , setting the trends and demonstrate the efficiency of their "brand new" tools and techniques to managers.
Bloch (1999)	Lack of objectivity	Business consultants are not objectives and only seek to secure their next piece of work.
Blunsdon (2002)	Lack of innovation	There are four organisational problems, in which business consultants 'expertise can be needed: Scarcity, Uncertainty, Instability and Conflict. Business consultant's sell re-packaged solutions known by everyone.
De Burgundy (1995)	Uncertainty and Ambiguity in consulting	The difference in living standards between clients and consultants is at the 'root of the problems which bedevil consultancy' (De Burgundy, 1995: 54)
Fullerton and West (1996)	Relationship consultant / client	Although internal consultants are very much aware of the organisation's cultures, structure or norms, their positions lack objectivity and this is therefore part of the problem
Kostera (1995)	Metaphor	Compares consultants to missionary. Consultants try to convince managers that they have solutions to all their problems
Schuyt and Schijt (1998)	Metaphor	Consultants are compared to magicians. Through a mystic vocabulary and rituals, they keep control of uncertainty and anxiety within the organisation
Shapiro et al (1993)	Opportunism	Consultants always try to extend the length of their assignment

Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 1. Literature Review Model



Source: Compiled by the authors

It was demonstrated in the literature review that there are three issues that must be addressed when reflecting upon the consultancy process, and more particularly reflecting upon how business consultants might perceive their role and contribution within client organisations. As represented in figure 2, the relationship with clients has a direct impact on how business consultants perceive their role. Indeed, as suggested by Arnaud (1998) there is an obscure demand for consulting services, ranging from the need for consolidation to the search of sarcastic pleasure. We hypothesised that the relationship and the degree of emotions between consultant and client strongly influence the way that the consultant perceives his role. The role of the consultant itself is believed to play an important part in consultants' self perception of their role. There is a confusion about the role of the business consultant. Lippitt and Lippitt (1986: 57) share this view and suggest that a consultant 'fulfils a number of roles that he or she judges to be appropriate for the client, the situation, and his or her own style'. We believe that the lack of clarity and lack of role definition surrounding

consultants is an influencing factors in terms of role perception. Since the role of business consultants is to be investigated, role expectations will be a core element. We believe that clients' expectations and preconceived ideas about how consultants should be can have a serious impact on business consultants perception of their own role. The study results presented in this monograph confirm this assumption.

BUSINESS CONSULTANTS ROLE: A SELF PERCEPTION ANALYSIS

It has been argued on several occasions throughout this review that identifying and managing client expectations is an important factor when working as a business consultant. The first expectation that business consultants have to be aware of is the client expectations of the outcomes of the collaboration. Ojasalo (2001) developed an approach to manage customer expectations in order to achieve long-term relationships. This insightful study provides us with three types of expectations typical of the "knowledge industry". Ojasalo (2001) stresses the importance of efficiently managing client expectations. According to this later, 'service quality and satisfaction result from how well the actual service performance, in other words the service process and outcome, matches the expectations' (Ojasalo, 2001: 200).

Clients' Expectations

Ojasalo (2001), identified three types of client expectations; fuzzy, implicit and unrealistic. As discussed in the section dealing with the relationship between consultants and clients, consultants must assess from the first meeting with their client the level of expectation. Fuzzy expectations reflect a blurred idea about the outcome of the consultancy project, clients do not have a precise idea of what the change should be. The confusion of clients regarding their expectations from a consultancy project appears on a regular basis in the literature; Stumpf and Longman (2000: 128) noted that 'unlike the customer, the client is not always right, what they say they want is not necessarily what they really want'. They also pointed out that although clients are somewhat unclear about what they want, 'they are amazingly clear about what they do not want'. The second type of client expectation is referred to as "implicit expectations". In this particular scenario, 'elements of the service are so self-evident that customers do not actively or consciously even think about them, or about the

possibility that they will not materialise' (Ojasalo, 2000: 203). As suggested by Kubr (1996), consultants need therefore to adopt a proactive approach and think further ahead than their clients. The last expectation is likely to be the most relevant to the role of business consultants; unrealistic expectations. As it has been implicitly noted in this review, consultants are not magicians who can resolve all problems by waving their magic wands and on some occasions client expectations are so unrealistic that consultants cannot be held responsible for the failure of the project. As noted by Winch and Schneider (1992) in Berry and Oakley (1993: 13) 'the knowledge industry does not sell a product; it sells a "capacity to produce"'.

The link between the level of expectation and the role of business consultants should be considered. In certain cases, client expectations of business consultants lead them to generate an idea of consultants based on beliefs or assumptions that can potentially influence the outcome of the relationship. Solomon et al (1985: 102) suggests that 'people are often defined by the service role they play. When an individual is labelled nurse, clerk or cab driver, one is able to generate a profile of this person based on the characteristics which are believed to covary with this title'. Solomon's practical illustration refers to the notion of "role perception" or "role identification".

Client' Identification

It is always assumed that the client is easily identifiable, but Schein (1997: 202) argues that 'the question of who actually is the client can be ambiguous and problematical'. Schein (1997) argues that not being able to identify who the client is can potentially generate goals and role conflicts that might damage the relationship between the process consultant and the client, and therefore jeopardise the project. Schein (1997) identified six basic types of clients: contacts, intermediate, primary, unwitting, indirect and ultimate clients. According to him, the needs of clients and the role that they play can evolve throughout the consultation process. This change can therefore affect the consultant's perception of his client's needs and expectations. As noted by Schein (1997: 203), 'the helper is always dealing with more than one part of the client system, and some parts may not have the same needs or expectations as do others'. When talking about role perceptions, it is possible to adopt two different views. The first one as previously demonstrated puts forward consultants' perceptions

of their direct environment regarding who the client is, however it is also interesting to investigate what the business consultants' perception of their own role is.

At this point, the use of a theoretical framework has become a necessity to explore such an issue. Since we are to investigate how business consultants perceive their role and contribution within their client's organisations, the role theory appears to be the most relevant framework as it provides 'a potentially useful theoretical framework for advancing research on managerial jobs' (Hale, 1986) cited in Fondas and Stewart (1994: 86). It was argued by Johansson (2003) in the previous section, that consultants and clients were developing a plot together, the role theory allows us to move a step forward in suggesting that both clients and consultants, in the same way as actors, are playing roles in which they interact with each other. Role theory is referred to by Solomon et al (1985: 102) as a 'dramaturgical metaphor' in which each role that one play is learned. Biddle (1986: 68) suggests that 'most versions of role theory presume that expectations are the major generators of roles, that expectations are learned through experience, and that persons are aware of the expectations they hold. This means that the role theory presumes a thoughtful, socially aware human actor'.

Fondas and Stewart's study (1994) investigating the expectations held by individuals towards managers, demonstrated that 'managers face an environment of role senders who hold expectations about appropriate behaviour, send signals to communicate these expectations about appropriate behaviour, and react to the manager's behaviour with rewards and punishments' (Fondas and Stewart, 1994: 87). A simplistic way of linking the role theory to the role of consultants would be to assume that consultants interact with different people in their environment (what Merton (1957) calls "role set"). Every person that the consultant is in contact with, holds an expectations from this interaction. The role theory suggests that in this case, consultants react to people's expectations and adapt their behaviours accordingly. Szilagyi (1997: 376) notes that 'individuals in organisations are continually exposed to a variety of expectations from their work environment that may affect the perceptions of their organisational roles'.

Using the above theoretical framework, a deeper analysis into the role of consultants will be conducted, in order to ascertain how they perceive their own role. As

discussed in the previous sections, the turbulent environment that managers operate in puts them in an uncertain state of mind, Arnaud (1998) even argues that managers abandon themselves completely to the fate of consultants. One could argue that business consultants are characterised with a high level of control over not only their environment, but also over the people they interact with. Since no evidence of such research was found, previous research investigating the perceived locus of control of managers to consultancy has been adapted.

Locus of Control

Rotter (1966) first introduced the notion of locus of control, and developed a theoretical framework distinguishing two types of individuals. He hypotheses that individuals differ in their perception of the way things happen. “External” individuals tend to think that outcomes are determined by fate, chance or destiny, they believe in such a way that their fate is beyond their control. “Internal” individuals on the other hand are convinced that they have total control over their environment, and therefore are the only ones responsible for the quality of the outcomes. Carpenter and Golden (1997) suggest that the perceived locus of control of individuals’ environments is generally accompanied by a perceived sense of discretion over the role that they play.

Managerial Discretion

The notion of managerial discretion was developed by Hambrick and Finkelsein (1987) and is defined as the ‘executives’ ability to affect important organisational outcomes’ (Carpenter and Golden, 1997: 187). Magnan and St-Onge (1996: 573) on the other hand argue that managerial discretion is characterised by ‘four attributes of a firm’s strategic orientation and environmental uncertainty’; the range of options available to executives, the programmability of their behaviour, the ambiguity of the relationship between cause and effect and the uncertainty surrounding the outcome. An investigation to which extent business consultants are aware of the level of control and discretion that they have over their direct environment will be conducted.

Managerial Power

Carpenter and Golden, (1997: 191) when exploring managers' perceived locus of control, noted that 'while internals may tend to perceive more discretion in all settings than do externals, they may be more likely to adjust their assessments according to differences among situations. In contrast, we expect externals to both exhibit constancy in perceived managerial discretion and to perceive relatively little discretion regardless of context'.

Carpenter and Golden (1997: 192) have found evidence that individuals' perceived power results from their own ability to reduce or alleviate organisational uncertainty. It was demonstrated in the previous sections of this review that consultants are called in to help managers to reduce uncertainty. We could therefore argue that business consultants must be aware of the power and control that they hold over their environment. The following assumption must however be qualified. Indeed, when linking managers' perceived control and discretion with role expectations, Carpenter and Golden (1997: 191) found out that 'managerial power is an interperson phenomenon, whereas perceived managerial discretion is an intraperson phenomenon'. In other words, consultants may well be perceiving themselves as having lot of control or power, but if they are not perceived as so by others, they are not powerful and do not have any control.

The role theory allowed us to consider the role of business consultants through different angles. It was argued that not only clients but most generally individuals hold expectations from others. Those perceived expectations unconsciously force the "receiver" to adapt his behaviour to respond and act accordingly. The role theory on the other hand was used as a tool enabling the researchers to probe deeper into the perceived role of business consultants. Through this interpretivist theoretical framework, it was hypothesized that business consultants are characterised by a high level of control, power and managerial discretion. Business consultants' perceived locus of control and discretion combined with clients' perception of the role of business consultants could well be a source of the criticisms faced by consultants.

The relationship between consultants and clients can be compared to that between managers and practitioners. It is interesting to note that the criticisms overwhelming the role of professionals [managers] in a managerial context are similar to the criticisms of managers in a professional context [scientists]. McAuley et al (2000) were curious to find out whether professionals could create a 'relationship with business and management such as they felt they preserved their integrity as professionals' (McAuley et al, 2000: 90). In this particular study, the roles are reversed, that is to say it is no longer the professionals that work in a managerial context but the inverse. McAuley et al's study (2000) revealed that the relationship between professionals and business managers is hostile and characterised with a general misunderstanding towards each others' roles. A senior manager interviewed declared : "I see business people acting as advisors and the core business run by scientists. We need business people who can speak our language" (McAuley et al, 2000: 102). It is surprising that even in the field of science, language barriers occur. There appears to be, generally speaking, a problem of language between professionals and business people and that the case of clients suffering from "consultobabble" is not isolated.

Williams (2003) also used the role theory to explain to a certain extent some of the criticisms overwhelming the role of business consultants. He based his study on the research of Goffman (1959). Williams (2003: 136) suggests that consultancy is about 'generating an impression of a sense of knowing'. Adapting the role theory to the role played by both business consultants and clients, Williams (2003: 138) concluded that 'consultobabble is a part of the role played out that conforms to the expectations of the audience (client)….Managers consume consulting and "consulto-speak" because of its symbolic value, its aesthetic value, rather than its value in use presents another "defence" against consulting rhetoric being empty rhetoric'. The role theory and its dramaturgical dimension enables us to see the criticisms differently. In this case, consultobabble is no longer used as a weapon but as the accessory of a play.

Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity

One can argue that the criticisms of the role of business consultants do not come only from expectation discrepancies, but also from role conflicts and role ambiguities.

Kahn et al (1961) developed the notion of role ambiguity and role conflict and suggest that such a state occurs when the behaviours expected of an individual are inconsistent. Consequently, individuals can experience stress, dissatisfaction and to a certain extent uncertainty towards one's direct environment. When discussing role conflicts or ambiguity, one assumes that the client is in the majority of cases the victim of false expectations, but consultants can experience role conflicts too. This could occur, for example, in the case of a discrepancy between business consultants' expected role on a particular project and the role that he is asked to play by the client. Role ambiguity could occur in cases when consultants realise that they are in fact being manipulated by their client. Fondas and Stewart (1994: 89) mention another situation that could lead junior consultants to a situation of role ambiguity; 'the newcomer experiences role ambiguity and conflict upon entering an organisation and discovering a discrepancy between his expectations about the job and work situation and those communicated to him by the role set, especially his boss'. In this scenario, it is not the consultant's expectations of his assignment but the consultant's expectations of his own environment that creates the conflict.

Table 4 Role Theory: Summary

Author	Focus	Relevance to the research
Carpenter and Golden (1997)	Managerial discretion	Business consultancy is characterised by a high level of managerial discretion. This managerial discretion is perceived as an element of power
Kahn et al (1961)	Role ambiguity / Role conflict	Developed the notion of role ambiguity and role conflict and suggest that such a state occurs when the behaviours expected of an individual are inconsistent
Rotter (1966)	Control	Locus of control: there are two types of individuals, "the externals" and the "internals"
Solomon et al (1985)	Role expectation	'People are often defined by the service role they play', (Solomon et al, 1985: 102)
Szilagyi (1997: 376)	Role expectation	'Individuals in organisations are continually exposed to a variety of expectations from their work environment that may affect the perceptions of their organisational roles' (Szilagyi, 1997: 376).

Source: Compiled by the authors

SUMMARY

The role of business consultants has emerged as diverse and complex. As demonstrated throughout this review, there are various school of thought, each of them having a different opinion on what the exact role of business consultants is. Some academics would say that consultants have various roles, ranging from helping clients in identifying their problems to facilitating the learning process by transferring necessary skills to managers. On the other hand, there are numerous criticisms suggesting that clients are conned by consultants who are only interested in billing hours and abuse of their power. At this point, the best way to gain an understanding of what the role of business consultants is really about would be to consult directly with consultants themselves. This reflective approach is believed to enable people outside the business consultancy "world" to understand precisely how business consultants perceive their role and contribution.

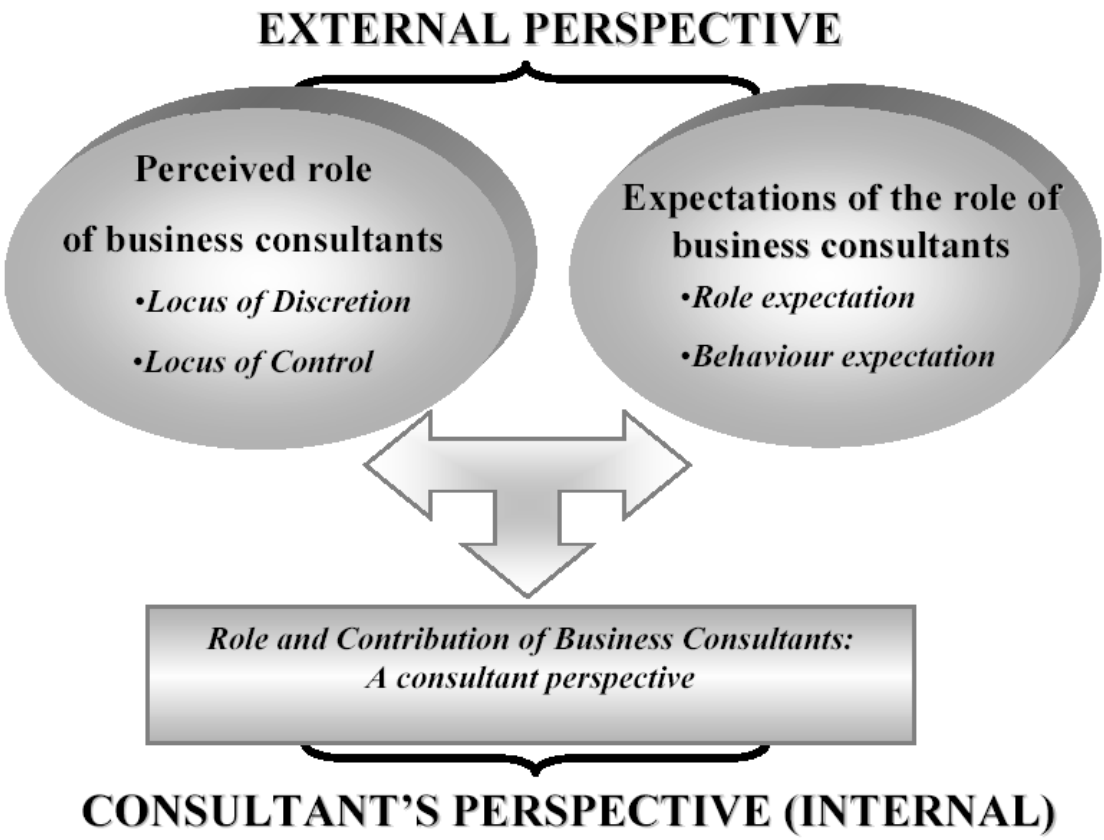
RESEARCH RATIONALE

From the available literature it seems that most criticisms directed towards consultants come from either disappointed clients or academics, and this particular field of expertise has been at the centre of a heated polemic for some time now. Some writers such as Abrahamson (1991) or Blunsdon (2002) have used a number of anaphors .i.e. story-tellers, fashion setters to describe the "shameful" job of business consultants, whereas others see a bright collaboration between consultants and managers in the consultancy process.

In order to provide an objective study, it is important that the research conducted remain neutral in this debate, and to remain somewhat distanced from the world of business and management consultancy. The purpose of the research project is not to support either clients who feel that they have not received good levels of service or business consultants who wish to defend their position, but rather to ascertain how business consultants perceive their role and contribution within their clients' organisations.

Figure 2 represents the research scope and shows the approach taken throughout this study. In previous studies, an external approach was often adopted. In other words, clients were given the opportunity to discuss their collaboration with business consultants in terms of relationship management, efficiency, discretion and control. As one can expect, clients who are deeply involved in the consulting process might find difficult to step back and "take a fresh look" at their collaboration with business consultants. One can also argue that well before the consulting process has started, clients opinion has already been influenced by two factors: the perceived role and expectations of the role of business consultants. The differentiator in this study stands in the approach adopted. As illustrated in figure 2, business consultants are requested to reflect on their collaboration with clients. In doing so, a new insight into the way business consultants perceive their role and the consulting process is gained.

Figure. 2 Research Scope



Source: Compiled by the authors

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

It could be considered that this study is nothing more than asking a certain category of people how they feel about their job role. However, the main differentiator of this study stands in the fact that more than simply asking people how they feel about their job, roles are actually reversed and business consultants are required to reflect upon their own perception of their role. As previously discussed, substantial research has been carried out on business consultancy, but little documentation has emerged on business consultancy from an internal viewpoint. This reflective approach is believed to enhance our understanding of the role of business consultants; who can better comment on the role of business consultants than the people concerned themselves?

The research study aims to analyse how business consultants perceive their relationship with their clients and how important role expectations are in this relationship. It is hypothesised in the review of the literature that business consultants have a high level of discretion and control, not only over the relationship with their client, but over the whole consultancy process. This study therefore aims at gauging to which extent business consultants are aware of this control and to which extent they are exercising it.

INQUIRY QUESTION

In order to reach the objectives outlined above, the following *inquiry question* is posed:

How do business consultants perceive their role and contribution within clients' organisations?

In order to draw the most accurate picture, the following issues will be examined:

- How do business consultants perceive their role?
- How do business consultants perceive their relationship with their clients?

- To which extent are business consultants aware of the control and discretion that they hold over consultancy projects?

- Is role expectation a plausible explanation of the discrepancy existing between the perception of consultants and their clients?

METHODOLOGY

Business consultants were requested to adopt a reflective approach throughout the research project, and the importance of the data gathering and analysis stages in the research cannot be stressed enough. This methodology section therefore deals with the methods and procedures that have been put in place, and highlights the difficulties faced when conducting this research project. Kaplan (1973: 93) in Clough and Nutbrown (2002: 29) argues that the major aim of the methodology section of a research project is to 'describe and analyse methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their suppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge'.

Therefore, the first part of the methodology section deals with the study design and research approach; the opportunity is taken to outline the type of research, the characteristics of the participants, in addition to the method used to collect the data. Secondly, ethical considerations are addressed. The importance of ethics and the different techniques used in order to assure the anonymity of participants are outlined. In the final section, the different methods used to analyse the data are discussed. The subjectivity of the research will be acknowledged and an explanation is given on how this was limited.

Research approach and study design

Research Philosophy

Saunders et al (2003: 83) define the research philosophy as 'the way that you think about the development of knowledge'. When considering the research philosophy and research approach, a dilemma was faced. Since this research stands in the perception

of a particular group of people (business consultants) of their own contribution and impact on a third party's environment (clients), a positivist approach was adopted. Remenyi et al (1998: 33) in Saunders et al (1998: 83) compare positivism to the role of natural scientists. According to them, researchers adopting a positivism approach prefer 'working with an observable social reality and that the end product of such research can be law-like generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists'. Remenyi et al (1998: 33) also suggest that when using a positivist approach, 'the researcher is independent of and neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research'. It appears that a positivist approach was adopted, however due to the nature of the aim of the research project, it could be argued that an interpretive/reflective approach was requested from consultants. Saunders et al (2003: 84) suggests that the role of the interpretivist is to 'seek to understand the subjective reality of those that they study in order to be able to make sense of and understand their motives, actions and intentions in a way that is meaningful for these research participants'. To conclude on this section, on the one hand it is argued that the overall thinking and philosophy behind the research is positivist, but on the other hand the approach to the research question and participants' approach to the protocol is interpretivist.

Research Approach and Strategy

Research Approach

Saunders et al (2003 : 85) suggests that research can be qualified as inductive when the researcher collects data and develops a theory as a result of the data analysis. The study results presents a model designed from the different data analyses conducted. In this respect new knowledge about the role of business consultants was gained, justifying the inductive approach of the research.

Research Strategy

Saunders et al (2003: 90) suggests that a research strategy is a 'general plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research question that was set'. It was agreed that a survey was the most appropriate research strategy. Although the data collection method will be discussed further in this section, as judiciously pointed out by Saunders et al (2003: 90), a survey research strategy encompasses a wide range of

data collection methods. In this particular case, semi-structured interviews were utilised.

Study Design

When browsing the literature about business consultancy, it was noted that the vast majority of criticisms were actually written by either academics or clients (articles written by consultants and practitioners deliver a more positive message) but very few studies focus on how business consultants perceive their own role.

Since this research project involves a reflective approach, it was felt that a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 17) define qualitative research as 'any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification'.

To successfully carry out such a study, a number of fundamental skills had to be developed. Strauss and Corbin (1990) agree with this statement and suggest that the researcher must be able to 'step back and critically analyse situations, to recognise and avoid bias, to obtain valid and reliable data, and to think abstractly' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 18)

Qualitative research can increase the level of interaction with respondents and therefore can help in developing the trust needed to obtain valid information. This belief is shared by Gummesson (1991: 2) who suggests that 'in using qualitative methods the borderline between the *academic researcher* and the *management consultant* becomes blurred, particularly as the role of the consultant provides opportunities for intensified inquiry into the behaviour of business firms and other organisation' [italic added].

Primary data was therefore collected largely via face-to-face interviews, whereas secondary data (mainly journal articles of academics and professionals) was used in the literature review. Secondary data appeared to be useful in the discussion and research results section as they enabled a comparison of business consultants' views and the views of academics and other practitioners to be conducted.

Negotiation of Access

Letters and e-mails were sent to major consultancies in order to gain contacts, and to arrange for meetings to take place. This method proved to be effective, although only two consultants out of the fifteen asked agreed to participate in the research. Interviews were also arranged via existing contacts within the industry. This method was much more rapid, and it was noted that it was easier to build a relationship with these consultants, since their level of mistrust was much lower. Having overcome the issue of gaining access to consultants willing to participate in the study, a new issue was faced; finding a convenient time for the meetings. As previously discussed, business consultancy is a highly challenging area where consultants are assigned projects involving interviews, meetings, writing proposals, and the role is often conducted on client sites and therefore involves considerable amounts of travel. Although all the consultants interviewed seemed enthusiastic to help, it could often take several weeks before consultants could find a convenient time to meet for the interview. Interviews were conducted at either consultant's offices or homes, always at a time and a day agreed between both parties to ensure that the interviewees would be able to fully concentrate on their answers.

Participant Selection

Regarding the selection of the participants, the first thing that had to be done was to consider which categories of jobs could actually be considered as business or management consulting. As highlighted in the consultancy overview, the field of consultancy has been hoisted with its own petard and the situation nowadays is such that anyone who pretends to be able to give advice in a particular field may proclaim himself to be a consultant. Therefore the inclusion of "advisors" in the study was avoided, as this would have biased the whole study and jeopardised the relevance of the results. Consultancy is a very broad field and there are numerous types of consultants each specialised in specific areas. It was agreed that the scope of consultants had to be large and include a wide range of business consultants in order to validate the study and provide an unbiased set of results.

Interviews of business consultants specialised in field as varied as Management, Information Technology, Organisational Change and Corporate Finance were conducted. In addition, interviews with coaches involved in personal development

were conducted. The sample also includes interviews of academics working as business consultants and freelance consultants. In order to widen the scope of consultants interviewed, it was decided that the sample should include business consultants operating at different levels within organisations, and also those working for different types of company. Therefore, the sample includes partners and senior consultants, functional and operational consultants, freelance consultants as well as people intervening in the strategic decision process at the upper management levels of multinational corporations.

Regarding the size of the sample, Strauss and Corbin (1990: 179) suggests that 'decisions regarding the number of sites and observations or interviews depend also upon access, available resources, research goals, plus time and energy. Later, these decisions may be modified according to the evolving theory'. Since a qualitative research approach was adopted, the quality rather than the quantity of interviews was taken into consideration. After 17 in-depth interviews, data saturation was reached. We firmly believe that this number is high enough to accurately reflect how business consultants perceive their role. Guest et al (2006: 59) found that 'saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews, although basic elements for metathemes were present as early as six interviews.'

Methods for Data Collection

As noted by Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 66), 'the respondent's answers constitute the raw data analysed at a later point in time by the researcher'. Although face-to-face interviews was the preferred method to collect data, in a number of cases, when consultants were either living abroad or unavailable for face-to-face interviews, the interview protocol was e-mailed. Although this method had its limitations, some relevant primary data was collected in this way.

McCracken (1988: 65) suggests that a face to face interview allows the researcher 'to capture how the respondent sees and experiences the world'. As judiciously suggested by Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 72) 'each type of interview is designed to achieve a particular research task'. Thus, when talking to previous masters' students who have conducted similar research projects, it was suggested that semi-structured interviews allow more interactions between the researcher and the interviewee and allow the

researcher to probe beyond specific questions. Although semi-structured, wherever possible questions were asked in the same order during the interviews, in order to gain some level of consistency in the answers provided. Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 71) justify such a practice in assuming that it allows the researcher to get an effect of 'standardising stimuli'.

Beeby and al (1998) as well as Rodham (2000) opted for the same method when conducting interviews. Rodham (2000: 76) argues that 'a degree of structure and direction can be given to the interview; while at the same time; this approach is sufficiently flexible to allow respondents to make contributions that they considered to be important'. In order to facilitate the process and the transcript of the data, each interview was recorded. This practice is said to allow the researcher to 'take part in the conversation in a natural way' since they do not have to take notes. (Burns, 2000: 429)

Protocol Design

During the design of the protocol, three major issues had to be borne in mind. As mentioned earlier, the research project involved different types of consultants operating at different levels within the organisation and dealing with different types of customers. The major difficulty in designing the protocol was to ensure it was feasible for every kind of consultant. In other words, the protocol had to be designed in a way that questions were applicable and could be answered by management, finance or freelance consultants. The second issue concerned the quality and the level of relevance of the protocol. The quality of the protocol of a qualitative research project is critical, but was even more so in this particular case, since business consultants were requested to adopt a reflective approach and think in terms of their own role and contribution. The final issue concerned the progressivism of the questionnaire. Since particularly sensitive issues were tackled (i.e. the different criticisms of the role of business consultants, and discussions regarding business ethics and business integrity), it was agreed that the protocol had to be designed in a way that would not threaten consultants.

The importance of setting up the atmosphere and taking the time to talk about the research project before asking questions to business consultants was stressed earlier. This is the reason for the interview protocol (Appendix 1) to start with a few

background questions, which are aimed at setting up the atmosphere, before then moving smoothly towards addressing real issues.

Ethical considerations

Confidentiality and ethics is an important issue when conducting a research project. Kallman and Grillo (1996: 3) provide a pragmatic definition of ethics in suggesting that 'ethics has to do with making a principle-based choice between competing alternatives. In the simplest ethical dilemmas, this choice is between right and wrong'. This section aims to stress the importance of ethics in the research project. As pointed out by Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 77), 'the task of the interviewer is to obtain information, often of a highly personal and private nature, from a respondent who is a stranger and has a little time and effort answering questions'. Business consultants are extremely busy people and it was felt that the least that could be done to express gratitude was to ensure that the anonymity of participants was guaranteed.

Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 78), stressed out the importance of building a sound relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, 'the interviewer must communicate trust, reassurance, and likeableness to the respondent in order to maintain his or her interest and motivation in the continuance of the interview. Interviewer should never threaten respondents or destroy their confidence in the relationship'. It is firmly believed that this trust-based relationship can only exist if the researcher adopts an irreproachable ethical behaviour. Fritzsche (1997: 22) shares the same view and confirms that a correct ethical behaviour develops trust amongst people. Therefore prior to commencing the interview, interviewees were asked for their permission to be recorded. The repercussions that a breach in confidentiality could have on interviewees' careers was very clear, and therefore assurances to the interviewees that their identity, the company they are working for or the names of clients would not be mentioned in the research. Consequently, it is possible to observe in the chapter dedicated to the research results and discussion that interviewees are referred to as interviewee "A", "B", "C", etc. Burns (2000) when discussing the importance of adopting an ethical behaviour made a point worth exploring. He developed the notion of "informed content" and suggested that 'participants must understand the nature and purpose of the research and must consent to participate

without coercion' (Burns, 2000: 18). Ethical behaviour goes further than simply assuring the confidentiality of the data and involves a mutual understanding of the reasons and the expected outcomes driving the research project. Therefore, at the time of contacting business consultants, a copy of the research proposal was included to ensure that those who agreed to participate in the study were aware of the aims of the study and the expected outcome.

As pointed out by Burns (2000: 21), researchers are tied to interviewees by several implicit contracts. Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 77) suggest that, 'a respondent is free to refuse to give an interview or break off at any moment'. In order to try to minimise the risk of this before commencing interviews, basic introductions and an explanation of the rationale behind the research project was given. At the end of the interview, respondents were given the opportunity to obtain a copy of the transcript to assure themselves that no names or organisations had been mentioned. In addition, respondents were offered a copy of the results once the research project was completed.

Methods for data analysis

Sapsford and Jupp (1996) suggests that the most difficult part of a qualitative research study stands in the analysis process; 'the most common question asked by researchers carrying out qualitative data analysis for the first time, and the one that is the most difficult to answer is: now I've got the data, what do I do with it?' (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996: 286)

Although there are no sets of rules, there is almost universal agreement in the way that the data must be analysed. It appeared from the relevant literature that the data analysis in qualitative research is a two step process.

Interview Transcription

The first task consists of transcribing the data recorded during the interviews. As judiciously mentioned earlier on by Ackroyd and Hughes (1981), respondents' answers constitute the raw material of the analysis. Therefore, researchers must

carefully select those pieces of information that are relevant to their analysis. To do so, the interview transcribing appears to be a necessary process.

Burns (2000: 429) suggests that 'transcribing the data from a tape recording is a laborious and time-consuming task'. Although highly time-consuming, the transcription appeared to have facilitated the categorisation of information. As pointed out by Becker (1970) in Sapsford and Jupp (1996: 290), data analysis is a continuous process carried out by the researcher; 'analysis is carried out on sequentially, important parts of the analysis being made while the researcher is still gathering his data' (Becker, 1970: 26-7). As soon as an interview had been conducted, it was transcribed. This proved a successful method of working, because it was much more simple to transcribe interviews whilst small details and reactions to particular questions were still fresh in the memory.

The Categorisation Process

Burns (2000: 414), argues that data categorisation is the first step in the analysis process; 'often there are "natural" breaks in the material which can be used to break it up into chunks that can then be allocated to particular categories'. Once transcribed, the relevant information was put into categories and these categories were allocated names. This method allowed a clear identification of which information had to be used and contrasted with the secondary data appearing in the literature review section. Categories were taken from the literature and from the collected data itself (Glaser and Strass, 1976). The categorisation process was done manually, following the guideline of Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that although researchers on some occasions may come across 'prototypical cases that fits the pattern exactly', there is usually no perfect fit; 'one tries to place cases in the most appropriate context, using the criterion of best rather exact fit. But one doesn't force a match. There are cases that do not seem to belong anywhere. There are apparent reasons for that' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 139)

Research Validity

One cannot conduct qualitative research without acknowledging the potential bias of the research project. As pointed out by Sapsford and Jupp (1996: 283), 'with interviewing data, it is necessary to remember that the questions asked are likely to have influenced the answers given'. In the case of this research project, the adoption of a neutral position during interviews has been attempted as much as possible. Potential biases have also been limited by the fact that questions in the majority of cases have not been sent to respondents before interviews, thus enabling a degree of spontaneity in the answers given. This has only being possible when contact was established via a recommendation from another consultant, therefore there was an existing established level of trust.

Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 81) argue that it is known that people can lie or 'say things intended to maximise their self-esteem', but as consultants did not perceive the interviewer as a threat, the sincerity and honesty in the answers received were surprising. As also suggested by Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 80), 'the interviewer is giving the respondent a chance to talk anonymously without fear of contradiction, signs of boredom, disagreement, disapproval, and so on, often about deeply personal matters; a temptation that few of us would not be able to resist'. In that respect it was clear during the interviews that consultants were enjoying talking about their role and appreciated the fact that a neutral position in the debate had been adopted. The rewarding side of this research came from several consultants who thanked the researchers for letting them express themselves freely.

The subjectivity of the research project constitutes a potential bias. As pointed out by Burns (2000: 414), 'it is too easy for the prejudices and attitudes of the researcher to bias the data. Particularly when the data must go through the researcher's mind before it is put on paper, the worry about subjectivity arises'. This aspect is one of the most important downsides of qualitative research and although a neutral approach has been attempted, any personal influence on the findings can never be totally guaranteed.

SUMMARY

Throughout this section, the importance of establishing a clear method when conducting qualitative research was discussed. It was observed that business ethics in addition to data confidentiality is a core element of any research. This section also gave the opportunity to discuss the different methods used to approach business consultants. The complexity of the protocol led to the consideration of different approaches at the time of conducting the interviews and a two-way relationship with the respondent was finally decided upon. It could be considered that only the researchers stood to gain from the discussions with business consultants, but this research project was also an opportunity for business consultants to talk freely and anonymously about their role and their perceived impact on their clients' organisations. This often appeared to provide some form of counselling and relief to consultants, giving them an opportunity to discuss their job whereas the contrary is normally the case.

STUDY RESULTS

Emerging themes

As explained in the methodology section, data was collected via semi-structured interviews with business consultants specialised in fields as varied as IT, Change Management and Corporate Finance.
The data analysis process enabled us to identify four main themes that will be addressed individually throughout this section.

The four majors themes are as follows:

- Consultants' Role and Contribution.
- Consultant-Client Relationship.
- Consultants' Skills and Responsibilities.
- Pros and Cons of the Consultant's Role.

CONSULTANT ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION

This particular section constitutes the main body of this research results section. It aims to understand how business consultants *themselves* perceive their role and their contribution within client organisations.

Three sub-themes emerged from the analysis regarding the business consultants role:

- Contribution
- Level of control
- Level of discretion

When business consultants were asked how they perceive their role, it was expected that a wide variety of answers would be collected. Researchers such as Lippitt and Lippitt (1986) have argued that business consultants adopt a variety of roles depending on clients' specific situations. Interviewee "A" for instance declares that he never really reflected upon how business consultants should behave. Interviewee "A" suggests that he acts in a number of ways that help him to reach an expected outcome. In this respect, business consultants fulfil mainly one role: Providing their client with expertise and experience, but there are different ways to help clients.

> *"…my role as a business consultant is to help to resolve an organisational issue and achieve objectives and in doing that one plays I think a number of parts. There is a necessity to act in a number of different ways depending on the circumstances…"*
>
> *Interviewee A*

Contribution

The first sub-theme that will be analysed in this section deals with business consultants' views of their contribution within client organisations. The data analysis process revealed that business consultants see their role in terms of two different aspects:

- Adding value for clients
- Move clients forward

Adding-Value for Clients

Interviewee "L" claims that business consultants have only one role: adding-value for the clients. However, he agrees with interviewee "A" in saying that there is more than

one way "to skin a cat". Interviewee "L" provides us with a practical example illustrating this assumption.

> *"…We only have one role: it's adding value for our clients, however, adding value could be taking cost out of business, identifying business opportunities through mergers and acquisitions, re-engineering supply chain. It is all about adding value…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

It is fascinating that in the controversial role of business consultants, clients are actually placed above all else and helping them is perceived to be the ultimate objective. It was argued in the section dealing with the criticisms in the literature review that consultants take advantage of clients and abuse their dominant position. Interviewee "E" for instance is particularly honest towards his role and admits that ultimately his role is to earn money for the company that he is working for, but he also stresses the importance of constantly being aware that consultants are working *for* their clients. They must therefore be able to offer advice in the best interests of clients or, if it is the case, to admit that they do not have the answer.

> *"…ultimately it would be to earn money for the company but you are working with the customer, so it is a question of understanding what they are about, then being able to offer advice. Or, if it is appropriate to say that you can't…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

Moving Clients Forward

Interviewee "I", a niche consultant argues that he does not know what his role is going to be until he has met the client and identified the reasons why he is called in. He also expresses the will to "help moving the client" forward.

> *"…it is an eclectic role. I don't know what help means for that client until I go in there…my ambition is to help moving the client forward, they will determine what moving forward means but in a positive way…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

Interviewee "O" also feels that his role as a consultant is to help in moving the client forward. He suggests that the role of consultants is similar to that of a marketing

campaign. Interviewee "O" argues that his role is to facilitate the movement of his clients from where they are to where they aim to be.

> *"…As a facilitator, my role would be to move someone from where they are today to where they want to be tomorrow…"*
>
> *Interviewee O*

As demonstrated in the literature review, metaphors and different anaphors are used (most of the time in a pejorative way, i.e. "story-tellers, fashion-setters") in order to define and characterise the role of business consultants. It was surprising that on two occasions, when asked to reflect upon their own role, business consultants came up with their own set of metaphors. Thus, interviewee "H" would compare herself to a trouble-shooter. Interviewee "F" on the other hand came up with a more "extreme" metaphor. According to him, the role of business consultants is to explore the fear and uncertainty of managers, and in that respect they can be compared to parasites.

> *"…To be honest, consultants are parasites who explore the fear and inability of management to make decisions…"*
>
> *Interviewee F*

It appears that business consultants share a common goal: moving clients forward in helping them to solve organisational issues. As argued earlier on, business consultants have been criticised for taking advantage of clients, but in this research, business consultants have shown an interesting degree of professionalism and humility.

Project Control: Locus of Control

Many complaints were directed towards the amount of control that business consultants have over projects, but as suggested by Carpenter and Golden (1997), consultants may well be thinking that they have lot of control, but if they are not perceived as so by others, their control is actually minimal. In this research project, business consultants were asked whether they exercise this control or not. This exercise enabled us to assess whether the consultants interviewed had an internal or external locus of control (Rotter, 1966).

The Table 5 below illustrates the findings of this exercise. As explained in the literature review, there are two types of personality: people having an internal locus of control, or people having an external locus of control. The main differentiator

regarding these two perceptions stands in an individual's perceived level of control. Whereas externals would tend to think that outcomes are determined by fate, chance or destiny, internals see themselves as having full control over their direct environment. In the case of this research, it is interesting to note that most of the business consultants interviewed feel that they have a good deal of control over their collaboration with managers, and perceive themselves as being able to control and influence the outcome of the consulting process.

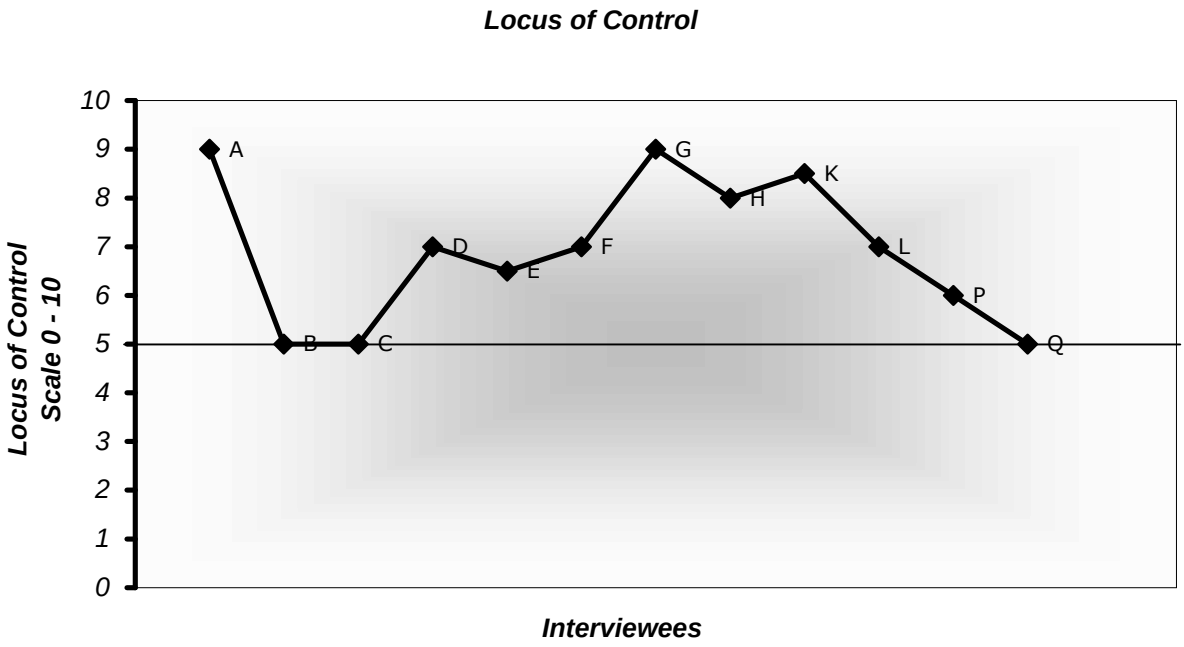
The reason underpinning such an exercise stands in the fact that much of the criticism has been directed towards the level of control that some consultants have. Business consultants were asked to rank on a scale of 0 to 10 (0 being low external locus of control, 10 being high internal locus of control), the amount of control they think they have over projects. In table 5, we can see that the vast majority of consultants are internals, with a level of control ranging from 7 to 10.

Table 5. Locus of Control Table

Interviewee	Field of specialisation	Locus of control	Locus of Control Ratio Scale 0-10
Interviewee A	Change Management & Strategy	Internal	**9**
Interviewee B	Human Resources	Internal	**5**
Interviewee C	Finance / Fiscality	Internal	**5**
Interviewee D	Knowledge Management	Internal	**7**
Interviewee E	Knowledge Management	Depends on Project	**3-10**
Interviewee F	Strategy Consulting & Corporate Finance	Internal	**7**
Interviewee G	Finance	Internal	**9**
Interviewee H	Human Resources	Internal	**8**
Interviewee I	Strategy / Governance Leadership	External	**0**
Interviewee J	Knowledge Management	Data not captured	**-**
Interviewee K	Knowledge Management	Internal	**8-9**
Interviewee L	Finance & SAP	Internal	**7**
Interviewee M	Business Transformation & Change Consulting	Depends on size of the company	**0-12**
Interviewee N	Executive coaching	Depends on degree of involvement	**-**
Interviewee O	Career management & coaching & outplacement	External	**0**
Interviewee P	Strategic Change Management, Corporate & Executive coaching, Leadership development	Depends on Project	**3-9**
Interviewee Q	Leadership Development	Depends on the relationship with the client	**5**

Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 3. Locus of Control Graph



Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 3. This is a graphic representation of table 5. There are several instances where data is not presented. This is the case for interviewees "I", "J", "M" and "N" where data has either not been captured or when graphic representation was not possible.

Personal Internal Locus of Control

- **Control Given by the Client**

It appears that the vast majority of consultants see themselves as having a fairly high level of control. Interviewee "H" justifies this assumption in suggesting that she is given the permission to take control of some aspects of the project *by the client*. She suggests that some consultants have for instance, the control and the discretion of interviewing, monitoring who they want, virtually whenever they want.

> *"…the client is giving you permission to take control of certain things…some of the consultants because they have to go in to interview people, to watch people have a level of control…"*
>
> *Interviewee H*

Interviewees "K" and "L" agree with the above statement, they both feel that they have a good deal of control over the different projects. Interviewee "L" argues that he has a high level of control and that some clients are actually quite happy with that

situation. He suggests that clients want projects to be delivered on time and within a specific budget, and as long as they understand what he does, the control is given to him. He therefore becomes the person who decides who needs to be interviewed, what has to be done, when meetings should take place and what will be discussed.

> *"…as long as the client understands what you are doing, you actually have a lot of control. It is in fact passed on to you by the client. I run it and I say to the guy who signs up, we'll have those meetings and we'll raise those issues…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

- **Control Due to Client's Uncertain Environment**

Interviewee "P" suggests that the level of control given to him varies during the consulting process. According to him there are times in the process when he can have a large amount of control .i.e. when clients experience uncertainty

> *"…It can also be higher when client are in a confusion or crisis stage, and need an external source to help them out, by structuring, providing steps and control. However I try to make this not last, by providing feedback to encourage, and push for autonomy…."*
>
> *Interviewee P*

- **Control Due to Client's Lack of Expertise**

Interviewee "M" argues that the level of control over projects depends on two factors; the client's level of experience in a particular field and the size of the organisation. According to him, with single country clients, his level of control is enormous because the organisation has little experience. On can argue that there is a link between the company's level of expertise and the amount of control given to consultants. Interviewee "M" declared that in some situations, consultants have such a level of control that they can end up making decisions for clients. On the other hand, when working with larger organisations, interviewee "M" feels that it is much more difficult to influence clients; his level of control can actually be down to nothing.

> *"…with single country Clients, having a single corporate centre/HQ, the degree of influence can get past 10, to 11 and even 12, because the consultant can be an expert in an area where the client has little or no experience at all…Clients with multiple operating units are very hard to influence, their internal competing agenda will prevent external influence. At this point, you can get down to zero…"*
>
> *Interviewee M*

Interviewee "D", although feeling like she has a good degree of control argues that it is not possible for consultants to have full control of projects nor should they. Interviewee "D" justifies her high level of control by the fact that she is working in a much specialised area where not so many people have expertise, and in fact *her level of expertise gives her some control*. Interviewee "D" suggests that nobody ever has 100% control, because having full control would mean that consultants do not have to answer to anyone, not even clients.

> *"…I do not think that anybody would ever get a full control and nor should they…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Interviewee "E" on the other hand argues that the level of control given to consultants depends on clients' perception of which type of consultant is needed to solve the problem. For example, interviewee "E" explains that if the client sees him only as a contractor, he would have no control. Alternatively, if he is perceived as a "principal knowledge engineer", the client would put his employees or the information team under his control to assist him. In that scenario, the level of control held would be very high. However, interviewee "E" fully agrees with interviewee "D" and suggests that consultants can never have full control over projects simply because ultimately clients pay the bills.

> *"…it is down to your role as they perceive it, not as you perceive it but as they perceive it. That's the critical thing, it does not matter who you are…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

- **Control Due to Level of Involvement**

Interviewee "N" argues that her level of control fluctuates in accordance with her level of involvement. According to her, she has much more control when working as an independent consultant rather than when working on behalf of her current organisation.

> *"…It depends to what degree I am involved because in an organisation like this, someone else has usually talk to the organisation before I see the person, I have got less control. If I am working in my own right as an independent consultant I will have more control…"*
>
> *Interviewee N*

Personal External Locus of Control

According to interviewee "E", the level of control depends on the client's perception of the role of the consultant. In this case, it could be argued that the further up in the organisation the consultant operates, the more control is passed on to him. Interviewee "I", a niche consultant operating at top management level does not feel as though he has any control at all, but is very much aware of the amount of control that some consultants do have. Interviewee "I" condemns the behaviour of some consultants working with chief executives who act as "soldiers". According to him, at times, some consultants can become more powerful than the chief executives themselves.

> *"…I have got no control… some consultants only work with clients like chief executive or general manager and in reality they do not act as consultants at all. They act as the soldiers of the CE and that is for me not consulting but dictating, bringing in, guns from outside to shoot people…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

Interviewee "O" also possess an external locus of control. As a career management consultant, interviewee "O" argues that his clients are in control of their career. Although his role is to help move them forward, they are ultimately responsible for the outcome.

> *"…No I don't think you can control it, individuals are going to do what they are going to do, you are trying to know where those individuals are heading and can you go at least along side with them. Sometimes you feel that you can nudge them on way or another but it has to come from within them, they have to take on board the changes that there are experiencing…"*
>
> *Interviewee O*

To conclude on this section, it can be argued that consultants are very much aware of the control that they have over their different assignments. Some consultants argue that the control that is passed on to them is due to the client's lack of a particular skill in their organisation.

As highlighted in the criticisms section of the literature review and confirmed by interviewee "I", there is a potential danger for clients when they give out so much power and control to external consultants. Clients might not have the chance to

collaborate with consultants who behave ethically and who do not see them as potential "cash cows".

Level of Discretion

It was argued earlier on that business consultants, when working in a client organisation, are given to them by the client the discretion that they need to change the way they approach problems, and the way in which they run the consulting process. In this research, Carpenter and Golden's (1997) definition of discretion was adopted. They define managerial discretion as 'executives' ability to affect important organisational outcomes' (Carpenter and Golden, 1997: 187)

Business consultants for the purpose of this research project were asked to comment on their level of discretion. Two majors sub-themes emerged from the data gathering stage.

- Need for unlimited discretion
- Balancing between needs

Unlimited Discretion

Interviewee "L" has the feeling of exercising his discretion to a great length and feels that he is left to run the project as he sees fit. He confirmed the link existing between discretion and the level at which the consultant operates. As a senior consultant, interviewee "L" has the discretion to change the approach of a project, but not everybody in his team has this privilege. According to him the further down you go, the more discretion is limited and the more people have to stick to rules.

> *"…I am pretty much left to run the project as I want to run it, as long as I stick to certain rules, I can change the approach….the more you go down the level, the more the amount of discretion is restricted…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

More than having the feeling of exercising this discretion, interviewee "I" argues that discretion is essential in his role. He argues that if he senses that the client is limiting the amount of discretion that is given to him, he leaves the project, as a limitation of discretion would damage the efficiency of his intervention. According to interviewee "I" the level of discretion given to consultants is critical since they must have the

freedom to conduct initial research; and the only way to do so effectively is by having unlimited discretion.

> *"...When my discretion is limited I tend to say, I don't want to work…it is critical, I must be able to challenge the view points that I will gain. The only way I can challenge them is by doing initial research, investigations and interviews. I need to have that discretion to roam about the organisation to actually do my job..."*
>
> *Interviewee I*

Unlike the level of control that was clearly perceived by business consultants, the level of discretion and the extent to which it is exercised tends to differ according to the field of expertise of the consultants and the level at which they operate. As mentioned by interviewee "L", the further up consultants operate, the more discretion will be given to them.

Balancing Between Needs

Business consultants have not only the discretion to change the way they operate, but also have the discretion to balance their company's needs and the client needs. This amount of discretion has raised an issue regarding the fee involved in the consulting process. Shapiro et al (1993) argued that business consultants always try to extend the length of contracts in order to get extra income. Interviewees "E" and "G" stress the importance of being open and behaving ethically. Interviewee "E" suggests that there must be consultants out there who would not adopt this approach and condemn this behaviour as it emphasis the image of bad-boys that business consultants already suffer from.

> *"…I know that there are some consultants that would take that deal as well, it is simply wrong. We are invariably engaged in time basis, so we are engaged for an estimated for an X number of days, if it takes 8 days instead of 10 we only charge 8 days…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

> *"…a consultant must be able to lead a project with absolute openness and being very ethical in his job…"*
>
> *Interviewee G*

Interviewee "L" compares consultancy projects with gambling, you always take a risk and balancing needs is always complicated. He suggests that consultants and clients

have two different needs, clients want a solution that works within a budget, whereas consultants want the client's business and to make profit for doing the job. Consultants have to balance between these two needs and it can go either way.

> *"…so it is constantly trying to balance those two things and it is not easy, sometimes you get it wrong and you make loose on projects and sometimes you get it right and you make an enormous profit…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Business consultants all stress the importance of behaving ethically and always put their clients first. Interviewee "D" admits that it is difficult to balance these needs but she suggests that if the client is happy, her organisation will get repeated work. She also made a important point, suggesting that if the project comes in under budget, the consultant should make sure that the clients are made aware of this fact. As interviewee "D" argues, it is not when the project is coming in under budget that problem arise, but when it comes in over budget.

> *"…it can be difficult, however the clients' needs would almost always come on top. If your client is happy, you are more likely to get repeat work, if your project come under budget, do not lie about it, but shout about the fact that it is coming under budget…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Interviewee "K" fully agrees with interviewee "D" and also suggests that clients' interests must come first.

> *"…I think you always have to remember who pays for your wages, but you are there to do a job for a client…"*
>
> *Interviewee K*

Finally interviewee "I", recognises that it is a difficult situation for business consultants working for organisations driven by billing hours. Interviewee "I" stresses the importance of balancing well between company needs and consultant needs because under-charging can be as damaging as over-charging.

> *"…I am not driven by billing hours, those organisations are driven by billing hours, the consultants they have a hard time, they do….under-charging client is almost as damaging as over-charging because if you under-charge an expectation may arise that you are cheap and hence they will not listen…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

To conclude on this section, it was demonstrated that consultants operating at top management level have the perception that they are exercising a high level of discretion. Concerning the question of fees, all the consultants interviewed stressed the importance of behaving ethically and always put clients' interests first.

CONSULTANT - CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

As demonstrated, business consultants see their role differently but share a common goal: moving the client forward. However, one can argue that in order to gain a better understanding and to draw a more accurate picture, business consultants' perceptions of their relationship with their clients must be taken into consideration.

It was argued that the relationship between the consultant and his client is a crucial element of the consulting process and one can question how business consultants perceive this relationship. It was suggested in the literature review that business consultants when called in by clients can adopt different approaches. Academics such as Schein (1988) have argued that the consultant/client relationship is similar to the one existing between a doctor and his patient or that the approach is the same one as the relationship existing between a teacher and his students with transferring knowledge being at the centre of this relationship (Schein, 1988).

From the different interviews, it appears that business consultants have different views of the relationship they have with their clients.

The above six sub-themes have emerged from the research:

- Consultants as service providers
- Mentor/protégé relationship
- Consultants as partners and supports
- Establishing a two-way relationship
- Building-up trust
- Dynamics of the consultant-client relationship

Consulting Service Provider

Interviewee "A" feels that the approach he has to his clients does not fall into any single category. He has never considered himself as a doctor being called to find a cure to "organisational pains" or a lecturer whose main role is to transfer some sort of knowledge. Interviewee "A" has always had a client/provider relationship in mind, and simply sees himself as a provider of consulting services.

> *"…I have always had a client/provider in mind. There are the clients I am the provider and I am just providing a consultancy service…"*
>
> *Interviewee A*

When asked to comment on the nature of his relationship with his client, interviewee "K" suggests that it often starts off with a sort of doctor/patient relationship in which he can feel the pain of the client. However interviewee "K" stresses the importance of having to transfer some skills during the consultancy process. According to him, if clients are only given solutions to their problems and not taught how to solve their problems by themselves, they will desperately need consultant's help and could become "addicted" to consulting services. Interviewee "K" in fact suggests that the relationship existing between consultants and clients stands somewhere in between the doctor/patient and the teacher/student relationship.

> *"…It is probably a little bit of both, it starts off with the doctor / patients scenario where you can feel the pain of the client and give them the tablet to save them but if you give them the tablets, they are just going to come back…"*
>
> *Interviewee K*

Mentor/Protégé Relationship

Some consultants do not perceive their relationship with their clients as doctor/patient or teacher/student. Interviewee "H" for instance would see herself as a mentor more than a doctor or a teacher. One must admit that the requirements analysis stage of any consulting project is similar to the diagnostic approach of the doctor but as pointed out by interviewee "H", the doctor/patient relationship involves the consultant knowing better than the client and therefore not evolving on the same level. Although skills are supposed to be transferred in the teacher/student relationship, it also involves a sort of imbalance between both parties. According to interviewee "H", the

relationship between the mentor and his "protégé" appears closer to the consultant/client relationship.

> *"…you may start with that doctor/patient relationship where you are doing some diagnosis…perhaps as the project emerges and you are working together it can change to be a little bit more like a student/teacher but it is more about taking an equal approach…it is more like a mentor relationship …"*
>
> *Interviewee H*

To probe deeper on what was suggested by interviewees "H" and "K", the relationship existing between consultants and clients is ambiguous. On the one hand, consultants hold a specific knowledge that lacks in the client's organisation and consultants can in fact being assimilated to experts or doctors. On the other hand, if some sort of relevant skills are not transferred during the consultancy process, as suggested by interviewee "K", clients will come back on a regular basis "to get their drug" and will can left at the mercy of the consultant. It appears that business consultants stress the importance of building an equal relationship with at the centre of this relationship: knowledge transfer.

Consultants As Partners and Supports

Interviewee "I" sees himself as having support relationship with his clients. He highlights the degree of hierarchy existing in both teacher/student and doctor/patient relationships. Although, interviewee "I" recognises that he may possess skills lacking in the client's organisation, he confesses that the client has an understanding of the situation that he does not have.

> *"…I would see myself as support, advisor, facilitative but I would hope the relationship is equal. I do not try to put myself as a status above….the client has an understanding of their own problems that I do not have, so I definitely try to see myself as a partner…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

Interviewees "D" and "J", also share the same view and see themselves as partners or team members. When asked to comment on her vision of this partnership, interviewee "D" made a point worth exploring in suggesting that depending on the project, the relationship can go either way. According to her, during training programmes for instance, the relationship is similar to that of a teacher/student, because consultants

hold a specific knowledge. However, when consultants are requested to talk to clients during the evaluation processes, clients hold specific knowledge in this case, or at least an understanding of what is going on inside the organisation. The relationship is in fact reversed; consultants become students. Although interviewees "D" and "I" work in completely different fields, they show an interesting degree of humility in their relationship with their clients that makes an unexpected change from the rather pejorative description made in past research.

> *"…I would say it is more of a partnership… certainly during training programs, there is a lot of a teacher / student relationship, but during evaluation, it is almost the other way round, they are almost teaching us…overall it is more a partnership; at times it is probably 70/30, at other times 30/70…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Two-way Relationship

Consultants interviewed agreed in saying that the relationship has to be two-way. In fact, some consultants suggested that the success of any consultancy project stands on the ability to create a climate of trust; a way to reach such a situation is to have for a start a two-way relationship.

Interviewee "F", confirms that a two-way relationship is a core element of the success of a consultancy project, however he argues that in his experience, his relationship was too often one-way. According to interviewee "L" any consulting project would fail if the relationship is only one way. Although the consultant possesses a certain experience and certain level of expertise, the consultant and his client are working *together* to solve an issue that the *client is* facing. If the client does not make any suggestions or does not express himself, two problems may arise. First, the consultant might be in a position in which he is forced to make decisions instead of the client. Alternatively, consultants can get into a situation where the client agrees with the procedure that is being put in place although he or she has not fully understood it; what interviewee "L" calls a "nodding dog symptom".

> *"…if it is not a two-way relationship, the project will fail…if it's one-way traffic, you get what we call a nodding dog symptom. You get meetings with people who just nod and say yes and then you get to sign on and they say, no that is not what we want at all !..."*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Interviewee "I" suggests that if he senses that the relationship becomes one way, he would advise his client to work with another consultant. According to him, feedback helps him to understand the issues that the organisation is facing, it is therefore completely impossible to move the client forward if that one lays back and does not get involved in the process.

> *"…I constantly need feedback about am I helping, am I making the right impact on the assumption that I have made about the client's situation …When I begin to sense that the relationship is one way, I often advise the clients that they may need a different kind of consultant…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

Interviewee "P" also suggests that to be successful the relationship must be two-way. Interviewee "P" perceives the relationship between clients and consultants in terms of a journey where both parties learn from each other.

> *"…both client and business consultant should be in a kind of "journey together", and accepting to be in a co-learning mode (which is and should be demanding and challenging for both)…"*
>
> *Interviewee P*

The Notion of Trust

To complete the analysis of business consultants' perception of their relationship with their clients, interviewee "M" suggests that the success of a project stands in the consultant's ability to build a relationship based on trust with his clients. According to him, the consultant must be perceived by his clients neither as a doctor nor a teacher but as a trusted advisor.

> *"…the relationship required for success is that of trusted advisor. If the consultant cannot build trust with his/her Client, then all other relationships adopted will fail to deliver appropriate results…"*
>
> *Interviewee M*

Interviewee "K" has a very pragmatic view of the reason underpinning the necessity to build a trusting relationship with his clients. According to him, especially when working internationally, once the trust of his clients is gained, he can be less preoccupied with formalities. Interviewee "K" recalls a project with a client based in Hong Kong that could have been jeopardised by the time difference, but because he gained the trust of the client, they were both able to smoothly run the project from

home without having to be preoccupied with formalities. Interviewee "K" provides us with a simple but practical example of how trust can enhance international collaborations.

> *"….if I can get up in the morning at home, go downstairs and turn my PC on and ring people up, they appreciate that my kids are running around getting their breakfast….Yet I am home and I do not have to worry about formality….I have a client in Hong Kong, I was on the phone at 02.30pm and it is 09.30pm their time, so they went back home, they put the kids to bed and then they rung me back….".*
>
> *Interviewee K*

Interviewee "E" for instance highlights the connection between trust and getting repeated work. He relates a situation where a client insisted that he or a colleague of his was put in charge of implementing a particular system in the client's organisation simply because the client trusted them.

> *"…P…. and I worked with a client from the beginning of last year and we virtually found out that they insisted that it was one of us who did it because they had a level of trust…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

Interviewee "L" agrees with interviewee "E" on the necessity for the consultant to gain the trust of clients. According to him client's trust is extremely hard to gain but amazingly easy to lose. Interviewee "L" also argues that there is a link between the level of trust between the client and the consultant, and the level of control given to the consultant. Interviewee "L" argues that the more the client trusts the consultant, the more the consultant will be left in charge of the project and be able to run it the way he wants.

> *"…if you have the client's trust, they will let you being in charge within boundaries. As long as you respect those, you pass on decisions when they need to be passed on…."*
>
> *Interviewee L*

This assumption is confirmed by interviewee "A" who argues that he has an "enormous" level of control over the assignment and in fact over the whole consultancy project, once the trust of the client is gained.

> *"….the client is in control of course but in my experience providing you've got their trust, they just want you to go there and do it, "tell us what to do" or "tell us when it is done". So I think we have enormous control"*
>
> *Interviewee A*

Dynamics of The Consultant – Client Relationship

Interviewee "L" made an interesting point. According to him, there are no right or wrong answers, the relationship existing between consultants and clients is deeply influenced by clients' organisational culture. He suggests that on some occasions, the client only wants the consultant to tell him what has to be done. The consultant is therefore pushed to take the role of a lecturer. On other occasions, interview "L" acts as the facilitator. In this scenario, the client is using the consultant to facilitate the change. Interviewee "L" provides us with an insightful example aiming at assessing the relationship existing between consultants and clients. He argues that in every successful project he was involved in, his relationship with his client was so close that a third party from outside would not have been able to distinguish the client from the consultant.

> *"…some clients just want you to come in and basically tell them what to do, you are therefore taking the role of a lecturer….if somebody would come from the outside, they would not know who the client is and who the consultant is. It has to be that close…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Whereas interviewee "L" suggests that the relationship between consultant and client is greatly influenced by the culture of the client's organisation, interviewee "E" argues that the relationship would tend to change in accordance with the clients' needs and the client's perception of the importance of the problem. Depending on the client's situation, the relationship and the level of closeness between the consultant and the client would fluctuate. Interviewee "E" argues that on some occasions when the client believes that the consultant possesses a certain level of expertise in a particular field, they would be perceived almost as "a respected professor". It could be argued that since there is a perceived level of expertise, the relationship is more likely to be not only unequally in favour of the consultant but also that the client's perception influences the consultant/client relationship. Interviewee "E" introduces here the notion of role expectations that will be discussed later. In other situations, as

argued by interviewee "E", the consultant may possess a skill that the organisation does not have, but that he is simply perceived *as another employee*. The organisation requests the help of a consultant as it would request the help of a plumber to fix a pipe.

> *"…where I was yesterday, I was there as the expert. So as a professor almost respected they want my advice… For the customer I am working for at the moment I am simply another employee, I am a consultant contractor, I could be an electrician or a plumber..."*
>
> *Interviewee E*

To conclude on this section, the relationship existing between consultants and clients appears difficult to define, but it can be argued that business consultants urge the importance of establishing an equal relationship with their clients. It was also demonstrated that business consultants perceive themselves as partners or mentors and stress the importance of building a sound and trusting relationship with clients.

CONSULTANTS SKILLS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section aims at ascertaining the level of responsibility that business consultants think that they have over the consultancy process. Business consultants also comment on how much they believe their clients also have responsibilities. This section also provides the opportunity to highlight what the most important skills to work in consulting are according to business consultants.

The following four sub-themes emerged from the responses and will be discussed in more detail below:

- Consultant skills
- Business consultant responsibilities
- Client responsibilities
- Managing client expectations

Consultant Skills

The literature review suggests that the fundamental skill to be an efficient consultant is problem analysis. Although consultants do not undervalue the importance of analytical skills, most of them suggest that possessing solid analytical skills is not

sufficient, experience as well as a certain ability to listen to and understand problems in their context is necessary.

Business consultants suggest that the following five skills are necessary to become an efficient consultant:

- Experience
- Functional skills
- Ability to listen and question
- Objectivity
- Self-Awareness

Experience

Interviewees "D" and "L" suggest that experience primes over technical skills. They both stress the importance of having experience and expertise in a particular field. According to them, experience combined with a solid knowledge of a particular industry is what gives credibility to the eyes of their clients.

> *"…it is not so much technical knowledge, it is much more about business knowledge and actually being there and done it… you have to have a sound business grounding or technical grounding in your field of expertise otherwise people say, why shall I believe you…."*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Interviewee "O", a career management consultant also believes that business consultants should possess a combination of both soft and industry knowledge. Similarly to interviewee "L", interviewee "O" argues that industry knowledge gives credibility to the consultant. He suggests that in order to be credible, consultants should possess a solid understanding of the client's businesses and understand the language that clients use.

> *"…I think industry knowledge and function knowledge is very valuable to be credible….being credible in terms of understanding the business, you certainly have to understand the language they use, what are the key issues, who are the key players, where these businesses are going, where they come from…."*
>
> *Interviewee O*

Functional skills

Interviewee "I" fully agrees with interviewee "L" and confirms that technical skills are important but not crucial. Interviewee "I" stresses the importance of being aware of one's own functional skills. He provides us once again with an insightful perspective in suggesting that business consultants must have the ability to adapt themselves to their client's situation and be able to understand problems in their context.

> *"…the most important skill is not only your technical skills, it is your ability to understand or appreciate what is happening in that context, in that client's situation…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

Listening and Questioning

Interviewee "A" and "H" have different opinions. According to them, questioning and listening are the vital functions of the consultancy process. Since working in fields such as Change Management and Personal Development and having to interview people to "extract" a specific knowledge from them, it appears logical that the ability to talk and listen to people is a core element of their role. Interviewee "H" relates an anecdote in which her lack of attention during an initial meeting led to a misunderstanding.

> *".. It is about listening and being able to answer right questions... I had an initial meeting with a client where I have gone away thinking that I had a clear idea, so I did a presentation and gave some ideas and it was totally wrong… Listening is really important... "*
>
> *Interviewee H*

Objectivity

Interviewee "E" and "P" argue that the most important skill when working as a business consultant would be the ability to remain objective, even if in some cases being objective means going against one's company interests. Interviewee "E" for instance has had the opportunity to be involved in a wide range of projects and tends to criticise consultants who are focused on recommending solutions that fit into their field of competence, or consultants who simply please clients in telling them exactly what they want to hear.

"…you need to be able to set aside your company, set aside their company, take in the information, process it and make the best recommendations. I have recommended solutions that are not things that I do, I have recommended solutions in the past that we as a company do not do because it is the right thing to do for the customer…"

Interviewee E

"…I sometimes clearly state that I will not be able to match some named expectations, because I either feel that I am not the most competent for these, in those cases I offer to link with other colleagues, or with external consultants I know…"

Interviewee P

Interviewee "O" on the other hand stresses the importance of knowing one's limitation and remaining objective regarding one's scope of intervention.

"…you've got to have a good working knowledge but also to know what your limitations are and you need to know when to pull up your hand; this is beyond my expertise…."

Interviewee O

Self-awareness

Interviewee "P" suggests that being able to self-question is an important skill that business consultants must possess in order to succeed. Interviewee "N", an executive coach fully agrees and argues that before asking clients to reflect upon their role, consultants must have gone through a deep study of themselves.

"…You also need a lot of self-awareness you need to study yourself at a deeper level. If you ask people to look inside themselves and you have not, it's not going to work..."

Interviewee N

The following statements confirmed what was argued in the literature review, business consultancy is a very complex role to define. Business consultancy is a wide field and there are numerous different types of consultants. Although there are similarities across the different fields, one could argue that the skills needed might not be the same when working as an IT consultant compared to a finance consultant. In addition, the level of expertise and the mastering of certain skills fluctuates in comparison to the level at which consultants operate. Interviewee "L" mentioned an element of information that is worth exploring. According to him, there are a variety

of skills that must be grasped in order to become an efficient consultant, but he goes as far as mentioning the existence of a specific skill, a sort of "gift" specific to the consulting industry; a "natural consulting skill".

> *"...you have to have what I call natural consulting skills, natural selling skills almost like a theatrical post because you are selling all the time… it is like being a musician, most people can play badly but it is the people who are good who can become excellent who are very interesting…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Business Consultants' Responsibilities

It appears from our analysis that business consultants are very much aware of the level of control and discretion they have in their role. They have also been given the opportunity to comment on their vision of the relationship that they have with their clients. However, one cannot draw an accurate picture about how business consultants perceive their role if they are not asked to express their perception of the responsibilities that they have towards their clients.

Confidentiality

Business consultants have different responsibilities towards their clients. First of all, they have the responsibility to assure a total confidentiality during the data gathering stage. Interviewee "D" suggests that the consultant has a responsibility not to lie to clients when trying to acquire a particular piece of information. The consultant must assure that the anonymity of the interviewee is respected.

> *"…we have a responsibility that if you tell your client that this information is not going to get back to their boss, then it does not get back to their boss…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Interviewee "D" also suggests that a failure to do this would not only affect the relationship existing between the consultant and his clients or clients' employees, but also increase the "bad guy" image that consultants already suffer from. When asked the same question, interviewee "F" made exactly the same comment and stressed the importance of getting a message across to the employees of clients' organisations: consultants are not axe men.

> *"…you are dealing with people, knowledge that they often think is their advantage in the business, they do not always want to give you that knowledge because that is what keeping them in the job…. "*
>
> *Interviewee D*

> *"…from my experience, we always tried to show that we are not job-killers, we are not the spin doctors, and we are not know-everything-the best machines…"*
>
> *Interviewee F*

Interviewee "H" on the other hand suggests that consultants must be cautious about whom they share information with. Business consultants have a responsibility to assure a total confidentiality to employees on the client site but also to their clients.

> *"….When you are working with senior people, they are talking about things that can have an impact on people within the organisation and of course you can't divulge on that kind of information, so you have to be cautious about who you share the information with…"*
>
> *Interviewee H*

Transfer of Skills Consultants to Clients

It was argued in the literature review that one of the responsibilities when working as a business consultant is to transfer skills to clients during the consultancy process. The aim of this section is to ascertain whether business consultants believe that they transfer some of their skills during the consultancy process.

Interviewee "A" suggests that when projects run smoothly, he can definitely feel that some of his skills are transferred to his clients. This assumption is confirmed by interviewee "D", who argues that transferring skills is the major aim of the consultancy process. She suggests that consulting is not "doing something to somebody but with somebody", skills must be transferred throughout the project. It is not good enough to implement or develop a new system if clients are not able to run it by themselves. Business consultants have in fact the responsibility to teach their clients how to get the best benefits from the system that have been put in place. However, interviewee "D" confesses that she obviously does not teach her clients everything she knows, for copyright reasons first of all but also because she would not get hired anymore by the client.

> *"....transferring the skills is the major aim… It is not doing something to somebody, it is doing it with them…you need to show how to get the best benefit from it…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Interviewee "L" also feels that skills are transferred to clients especially when technical solutions are delivered, i.e. SAP type projects. As mentioned by interviewee "L", it is crucial that clients are able to run the system, otherwise they will end-up calling the consultant every week and become as argued earlier on "addicted to consulting services". In transferring skills clients also feel that they getting more value and in fact get to trust the consultant more easily.

> *"…if you don't do that skill transfer they are going to come to you every weeks… you are giving them more value and because they have that trust in you, when they have a real problem, they are going to ask you about the real problem…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Interviewee "I" gives another perspective on the nature of the skills transfer. According to him, transferring skills is not only transferring technical skills, it can also mean helping the client to adopt a different approach or rethink the way they operate. Interviewee "I" highlights the frustration of such a process in suggesting that it does not happen very quickly.

> *"…the frustration is that it does not happen very quickly. It is a very slow progressive process…the transfer may be in skills, but also just in new ways of thinking…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

Managing Clients' Expectations

Meeting Clients' Expectations

Business consultants feel that they are fulfilling client's expectations. Interviewee "F", for instance insists on the fact that consulting companies are also brand names. To survive within such a competitive environment consulting organisations have to retain their customers. Interviewee "F" who worked for a major consultancy company suggests that the well established consultancies usually fulfil the expectations of their clients

> *"…Consulting companies are also brand names. That is why when a client goes to xxx, or xxx he expects a good quality of advice. The well-established consultancies usually fulfil a client's expectations…"*
>
> *Interviewee F*

Interviewee "N" argues that it is her responsibility to set the expectations. If at the beginning of the process, she senses that clients have completely unrealistic expectations, she feels that it is her responsibility to re-assess those expectations.
However, since working as an executive coach, interviewee "N" suggests that client disappointment can occur when the expectations have not been set properly or are completely unrealistic.

> *"…It's my role to set the expectations, so If I set them properly there are no problems. There are times where organisations can be disappointed, people often expect in coaching that you can create a new personality…."*
>
> *Interviewee N*

Interviewee "A" also feels that he fulfils his clients' expectations. According to him, the consultant and the client go through a process of listening and talking during which they agree on what the expectations are and what the outcomes should be. Interviewee "A" argues that in addition to doing a quality assurance survey with his client, the fact that that he gets repeated business shows that he has fulfilled the expectations. Interviewee "L" ironically suggests that consultants rapidly find out if they have not fulfilled clients' expectations.

> *"…you very quickly find out if things are not going right… the client would tell you or the client would tell your boss and your boss will definitely tell you…(laugh)"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

On a more serious tone, interviewee "L" explained that in order to fulfil clients' expectations and to successfully carry out assignments, consulting staff's objectives are aligned with the client's team objectives, in other words they share the same goals. Both consulting team and client team are also appraised on the same basis to make sure that both teams are committed to success.

Interviewee "D" stresses the importance of trying to determine up front what exactly the client wants to achieve and what they can realistically expect to achieve.

Interviewee "J" argues that clients should always be happy with the outcome of a project. Interviewee "D" recalls a particular project that did not run quite as smoothly as it could have done, the project ran over-budget and several employees have had to join the consulting team to finish off the job. Although, the project did not go as well as planned, the client appreciated the fact that she and her team have worked hard to successfully complete the project. The client called them several months later to do another piece of work for the same organisation.

> *"… we finished off over-budget and we had to put some extra men in the end to finish the project….however the client came back to us to do a major piece of work. The fact to have managed the expectations, finished off the job and not stabbed them in the back for it, paid off …"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

As demonstrated in the literature review, management of expectations is crucial in business consultancy and consultants feel that sometimes clients can be responsible for project failures because of their inability to articulate their expectations clearly.

- **Unrealistic Expectations**

Interviewees "A" and "D" both suggest that sometimes clients have completely unrealistic expectations and are not willing to accept that there is nothing that consultants can do in this case. Interviewee "D" remembers a client who unhappy about the system that was being put in place and was blaming her team. Interviewee "D" tried to get the client to understand that there was nothing wrong with the system but with the data.

> *"…I am working with a client at the minute, that had some really unrealistic expectations of a system that has just been implemented and is not happy at all with the system, but there is nothing wrong with the system, it is their data which is wrong and we can't do anything about that…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Interviewees "E" and "L" both feel that it is their responsibility to make sure that client expectations are always realistic. Interviewee "L" argues that poor expectations management is what creates conflicts between consultants and clients. He suggests that clients often have unrealistic expectations concerning time-scales, but it is the

consultant's job to re-adjust those expectations even if the go-live date has to be pushed back.

> *"…What cause the discord between consultants and clients is that they expect everything to be delivered in an unrealistic time scale and the worst thing you can do is not to push back …"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

- **Unclear idea of what is wanted**

Interviewee "E" suggests that on some occasions, clients do not know what they want from the consultant and sometimes ask for something but finish wanting something else. On some occasions, because the client's environment has changed or their strategy has changed, their expectations have also changed but the consultant has not been advised.

> *"….the trouble arises when they ask for one thing and get a confirmation that it was what they wanted and not only they end up wanting something else but claiming that they wanted something else…and the reason for this is that things have changed in their business but they do not tell you…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

Business consultants agree on saying that most of the time clients do not have a clear idea of what the role of business consultants is, or even why they need the help of a consultant. Interviewee "D" suggests that on countless occasions, clients did not know why they wanted that particular IT system, not even clear on what they wanted to achieve. It begs the question how someone can expect achieve a certain result if they do not know precisely what they want.

> *"…Often they do not even have a clear idea of what it is they are asking you to implement for them, why they need it or what are the benefits….the number of people that have come to me and said, I want this !! Why do you want it ? My boss told me or that company which is our competitor they've got it, so we should have it !!…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Interviewees "K" and "B" confirmed the point made by interviewee "D"; clients often do not have a clear idea of the role of business consultants. They both suggested that clients sometimes think that business consultants are "little fairies" who can solve organisational issues simply by waving their magic wands.

"…half of them always suspect for you to walk in and wave your magic wand and everything will be OK…"

Interviewee K

- **Clients' unclear idea: the first step of the consultancy process**

Interviewee "I" on the other hand tends to disagree with the above statements and expects clients to have different views of his role. He suggests that those different views reflect the tensions in the organisation and actually help him to start his analysis and help in moving the client forward. Interviewee "I" sees that lack of clarity as a first step.

"…I would tend to criticise many consultants who say that their clients do not have a clear role of them, my view would be that your clients should not have a clear role because all they want you to do is to help and what you begin to do is identify the various tensions. .. I don't see that as a problem, I simply see it as the first step to help…"

Interviewee I

Managing Clients' Hidden Agendas

Business consultants argue that clients' hidden agendas can serve various purposes. On some occasions business consultants can be used or manipulated.

Three sub-themes emerged from the data analysis.

- Clients using business consultants as tools
- Clients using business consultants as scapegoats
- Client manipulation of consultants

- **Clients Using Consultants As "Tools"**

Interviewee "M" suggests that sometimes consultants are the perfect scapegoats and can be perceived by clients as "tools".

"…Consultants can be engaged as a tool for furthering inappropriate aims, rather than objectively helping with an assignment/initiative…"

Interviewee M

When interviewing interviewee "P", he made a comment about the change of current assessment. According to him there is currently a tendency from managing directors or chief executives to use consultants as an alibi. Interviewee's "A" experiences confirm this assumption.

"…there is a willingness of some CEOs and managing directors to "use" Business consultants as an alibi , as a cosmetic short term use…"

Interviewee P

- **Clients Using Consultants As Scapegoats**

Interviewee "A" recalls an assignment where he was hired by a Human Resources Department to produce a report stating that a particular employee had to be dismissed. In this particular anecdote, the consultant was used to carry out the task which was required by some of the higher management of the organisation.

"…in my experience and at least one occasion, a very significant reason why I was taking on to a job was so that they could get rid of somebody. I do not think that was 100% of it, but it was clearly one of their objective of hiring any consultants…"

Interviewee A

- **Manipulation: A Common Practice**

When talking about such practices with interviewee "I", he suggested that it is in fact common practice. Interviewee "I" confessed that every situation he has gone into had a political side. However, he argues that he does not see political agendas as a problem but as a normal element of the consulting process. Since interviewee "I" deals with strategic issues at top-management level, he always comes across political issues.

"…every situation I've gone into has a politic side. The CE brings you in, says there is a team problem, actually he may have a problem with somebody. It is my job to discover that. I don't see the political agenda as a problem, I see it as a normal element of the way I operate…"

Interviewee I

When asked for the reasons underpinning such a phenomenon, no matter what their field of competence and their level of experience, consultants have heard anecdotal stories about such practices or even found themselves in such a situation. Interviewee "L" confesses that he has already been in a situation where his client played him off against other departments in order to get him to solve their internal dispute. Even worse, some clients have tried to play him off against members of his own team in order to catch him out and check if the consulting team was working towards the same goal.

> *"…clients sometimes are playing you off against each other…they will call maybe the project manager and express their opinion, they will then call in the project team, ask them the same question, they might give a different answer… So they are trying to catch you out… sometimes the client's team play you off differently, so the IT director might play you off against the Finance director and you end-up managing their internal dispute…."*
>
> *Interviewee L*

To conclude on consultants' views of clients' hidden agendas, interviewee "E" also has several anecdotes. He was once asked to do some knowledge management investigations in a organisation, but later found out that he had actually been hired to introduce the company's new knowledge management project. The organisation knew that there would have been resistance from employees and that is the reason why they wanted someone external to do it for them.

> *"…the whole purpose of why they wanted us to do the knowledge investigation was to introduce their knowledge management project, they already knew what they wanted to do but they did not want to be seen….they simply knew that there would be resistance in the organisation…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

As demonstrated, clients can on some occasions try to manipulate business consultants, but interviewee "N" mentioned an element of information that is worth exploring. Although she does not deny clients' manipulation attempts, her experience proved to her that it is not intended in the majority of cases. Interviewee "N" argues that sometimes manipulation attempts are the result of group dynamics.

> *"…Manipulation implies that it is conscious but in my experience it happened that unconsciously, it's just group dynamic….a lot of it, it is not intended, it's not meant to cause harm…."*
>
> *Interviewee N*

Client Responsibilities

Throughout this section, we have tried to determine what is, according to business consultants, their part of responsibility over consultancy projects. It appears from the criticisms that project failure is systematically attributed to business consultants but one can question whether clients also play an important part in the success of consultancy projects.

Business consultants suggest that clients do have at least one responsibility:

- Complying with consultants' requirements

Common Sense Responsibilities

Interviewee "E" argues that of course business consultants have responsibilities towards their clients, but clients also have responsibilities and must comply with the different procedural requirements. Interviewee "E" suggests that if the procedure requires interviews of key people within the organisation, it is their responsibility to arrange the interviews and make sure that interviewees will *willingly* participate. Interviewee "E" recalls several projects when time and money was wasted because of the client's lack of organisation. On one particular occasion, interviewee "E" drove to his client's site to find out that he did not have a desk or access to the IT system, although this meeting had been planned well in advance and the requirements made clear. Interviewee "E" also recalls a particular project where his morning meeting with a manager had been cancelled a few days in advance but nobody in the client's site had bothered telling him. The following day, he had a meeting with the plant manager, who had not been briefed about the project and did not know that he was supposed to be interviewed.

> *"….They have to make the team available for interviewing and they have to be made available in a willing sense…I did not have a desk, I didn't have an ID for the IT system and there was nothing I could do…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

ROLE PROS AND CONS

Role Pros

Since business consultants are perceived as a much maligned group of people, we were keen to discover what business consultants like and dislike in such a polemical role. As expected in any situation involving the expression of a preference or an opinion, consultants have different views on what they like and dislike about their role.

When talking to business consultants about what makes their role interesting, the following five sub-themes emerged from the discussion:

- Lack of routine and boredom
- Contact with clients
- Contribution to organisational welfare
- Intellectual challenge
- Transfer of knowledge clients / consultants

Lack of Routine and Boredom

Interviewees "L" and "F" agree on saying that it is the absence of routine that makes the role of a business consultant interesting. Interviewee "L" expresses himself on this matter and referred to his own experience. Prior to becoming a business consultant, he used to work as a line manager, a role that he left because of the "day-to-day routine" and repetitiveness. Interviewee "L" particularly enjoys the fact that since working as a business consultant he gets to work on different projects, with different teams on a regular basis.

> *"...I got bored with the day-to-day routine….what I find in consulting is that the longest you are with a client is at the maximum 2 years…so you always see different clients, different people and that is the exciting part of the role.... you are not chained to déjà vu tasks…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Contact With Clients

Interviewee "D", an IT consultant has a different view on what she likes in her role and considers herself lucky. She suggests that in the kind of consultancy that she is doing she gets to work with clients right from the beginning through to the finished product. Her role enables her to be in contact with different clients on different sites.

> *"…I get to see people right from the pre-sale opportunity through to the finished piece of work which is good. And I like to have contact with customers as well. I cannot imagine anything worse than being stuck in the back office…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Contribution to Organisation's Welfare

Having completed a major piece of work and having actually helped a client solving an organisational issue provides a certain feeling of satisfaction for consultants.

Interviewee "A" for example suggests that what he likes the most is realising that he actually contributed to an organisation's welfare.

> *"...what turns me on is doing something that makes a difference and as a result of doing that, the organisation is better…"*
>
> *Interviewee A*

Intellectual Challenge

Interviewee "E" likes to feel that the consultancy had a positive impact on the client's organisation. He goes even as far as suggesting that he gets a slight feeling of pride when a project has run smoothly. Coming from a scientific background, interviewee "E" ultimately enjoys solving complicated issues, what interviewee "J" calls the "intellectual challenge". According to interviewee "E", it is not so much about clients asking him to be part of the implementation process but the fact that his advice gets followed up that procures him with a feeling of satisfaction.

> *"…I guess it is about problems solving ultimately…it is about the analysis and then resolution of problems….I guess the good part of that being when people take your recommendations with you or not….it is nice to be able to say that you can say for certain that some benefits were done…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

Transfer of Knowledge Clients to Consultants

Business consultant recognise that transferring skills is an important factor in the consultancy process. However, they all recognise that the consultancy process is not a one way process where only the consultant brings in new skills to clients. Consultants have the feeling of gaining not so much skills, but valuable knowledge from their clients.

Interviewee "P" argues that if he does not feel as though he is gaining any knowledge from his clients, he would be tempted to question the efficiency of intervention. According to him, not learning during the consulting process would simply mean that he is not being challenged and becomes "disconnected" from client's situation.

> *"…not learning would mean that I am duplicating/repeating things I have already done in the past. If so, it would mean that I am getting disconnected from the very specific reality of the client in front of me…"*
>
> *Interviewee P*

Interviewee "A" does not feel as though he gains specific skills from working with clients, on the other hand, clients enable him to increase his knowledge of a particular industry and therefore contributes to his personal development.

> *"…I think I get a lot of knowledge from working with some clients…you might pick up a bit, but I mainly get knowledge rather than skills…"*
>
> *Interviewee A*

Interviewee "O", feels that he is constantly learning from his clients and suggests that the knowledge he gains from working with clients is part of a 'recycling of knowledge and information'. According to him, the gain can be of various types, it could well be in new techniques or new insights.

> *"…All the time and in fact it is part of our recycling of knowledge and information. I am constantly extracting it from clients, the recycling can come in different forms. It may be insights that we gain, techniques that they use, literature that they read…"*
>
> *Interviewee O*

- **Personal Development**

Interviewee "H" also argues that working with different people and projects not only increases her knowledge of how organisations operate but also contributes to her personal development.

> *"…you can't help to be slightly different at the end of a project because you have been working with different people and there is something about learning about yourself as well..."*
>
> *Interviewee H*

- **Technical Skills**

Interviewee "D", because of her role as an IT consultant, works mainly between managers and technical staff. This position allows her to improve both her management and negotiation skills and also enables her to become familiar with systems that she has not come across with in the past that she can potentially develop for other clients.

> *"…not every single project goes 100% smoothly and you learn how to do things better…because I am working for an IT consultancy, you are often learning technical skills as well..."*
>
> *Interviewee D*

The very pragmatic interviewee "E" suggests that consultants are called in, in the majority of cases because clients discovered how not to do something. Therefore it can be argued that consultants do not only learn how to do things better, but also learn how not to do things. Interviewee "L" on the other hand suggests that learning about a particular industry or sector is useful again to gain the credibility of other clients. He also suggests that consultants can also learn best practices because not all clients do things badly.

> *"…and frequently you are in there because they have discovered how not to do it. there is always something that you are going to learn, even if it is how not to do it…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

> *"…not all of the clients do things badly actually, some clients do things very well and you can take that and apply to other people…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Role Cons

It seems that there is a variety of aspects that makes the role of business consultant an exciting one. Variety in both projects and type of clients also in addition to personal development, however as one can expect, as in any role, business consultancy has its downsides.

Seven main downsides in the role of business consultants have been identified from the data analysis process:

- Long Hours
- Uncertainty
- Bureaucracy
- Lack of top-management support
- Current trend of "assessment"
- Role ambiguity
- Dealing with criticisms

Long Hours

The role of business consultant appears to be extremely intense in terms of hours worked. Interviewee "F", although enjoying certain aspect of the life of a business consultant suggests that working between 60 and 70 hours per week does not leave

him much time for his private life. Interviewee "L" dislikes being away from home most of the time and not being able to spend more time with his young family. He also suggests that being away from home so much prevents him from building a social life. He frankly admits that most of his "social network" is through work.

> *"My job involves me being away from home probably most of the time…most of my social networks is through work….that's the bit you can suffer when doing this job and you have to be prepared to do it, it is quite a big thing"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Uncertainty

Interviewee "J" on the other hand, does not mind so much working late but dislikes the uncertainty of the role of a business consultant. According to him, consultants are constantly judged by how busy they appear to be. Also the fact of working for a large multinational organisation that can potentially make redundancies at any time creates a climate of uncertainty. It was argued earlier on, that uncertainty is a major aspect of the life of managers, but it seems that this feeling is also shared by business consultants.

> *"…I dislikes the fact that consultants are always judged by how busy they are…"*
>
> *Interviewee J*

Interviewee "B" a freelance coach also particularly dislikes the uncertainty of her role. She suggests that even after several years of experience, she is still uncertain regarding the demand for coaching services. She argues that her role does not enable her to plan her workload more than six months ahead since she does not know whether the organisations that she is currently working with will still need her expertise in the next few months.

> *"…even after four years, I can't yet say, I've got enough work to keep me going for the next three or four years. Within six months or one years, everything can change. Sometimes you've got good contacts with some organisations and suddenly they might not be willing to work with you anymore, or the organisation stops its activity or simply they just don't need you anymore…."*
>
> *Interviewee B*

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy, both within consultant and client organisations, as well as getting approvals from different lines of management is a particular aspect of the role of a business consultant that is most disliked by interviewee "D". She argues that bureaucracy acts as a barrier and slows processes down and can even sometimes stop projects from going ahead.

> *"…bureaucracy within organisations is always a barrier, both within your own organisation and your client's organisation. It is the kind of thing that stops projects from going ahead, slows projects down. And I do think that too many lines of management can be a real pain to both the consultant and business people…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Interviewees "D" and "K" both converge to the same conclusion, bureaucracy slows projects down, but Interviewee "K" adopts a more pragmatic approach to these barriers and argues that bureaucracy is a phenomenon that is not particular to the consulting industry. What he dislikes the most of all is to do with "people not pulling their weight" rather than things specific to the role of business consultant.

> *"…I dislike the same things that you tend to get in any role, the kind of bureaucracy, people not pulling their weight. It is all the things that has to do with people not especially with the role…"*
>
> *Interviewee K*

Lack of Top Management Support

Interviewee "A" dislikes that on some occasions, he does not get the top-management support needed to address the real issues. According to him, clients are not willing to face up to their problems and address the real issues and as a result of this, his recommendations are not taken into account.

> *"…sometimes in my experience, the client does not want to address the real issues, sometimes although they are addressing the real issues, you don't really get top level support, that means whatever is proposed is not going to actually happen…"*
>
> *Interviewee A*

Current Trend of Assessment

Interviewee "P", particularly dislikes what he refers to as "the current trend of assessment". According to him, there are more and more requests of "standardization" versus building on diversity from organisations. Interviewee "P" also dislikes the fact that nowadays more and more organisations have too strong a concern to please mainly the shareholders versus considering creating value for multiple stakeholders. Interviewee "P" argues that nowadays the organisational environment changes so quickly that organisation are more preoccupied with better short term results rather than developing people for long term gain.

> *"…organisations want more and more to quickly assess their people, their teams, their organisations, to promote, select, downsize for better short term results. Versus developing people, building with a longer term and sustainable approach, and focused to a broader set of results…"*
>
> *Interviewee P*

Role Ambiguity

Interviewee "I", although adopting a relativistic approach to the consulting process agrees with interviewee "A" and has also experienced situations in which clients were afraid to face up to their problems. He also highlights the ambiguous character of the role of business consultants, who when investigating a particular issue can discover another one that clients might not be prepared to face. In addition, interviewee "I" dislikes being blamed for internal problems that are beyond his scope of intervention.

> *"…The work is ambiguous because you can have a client who comes to you with on need, then you discover another need and they may not want to face up to that….the only thing I do not like that much is when the client blames for problems inside and it is not your fault….but again that's relatively normal…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

Dealing With Criticisms

Before commencement of this research, it was assumed that having to deal with criticisms and other pejorative ideas must be an important downside of the role of a business consultant, but it appears that consultants are very much aware of these criticisms and do not deny them at all. Business consultants recognise that some practices of some consultants are not very ethical and agree by saying that to a certain extent some criticisms can be justified.

The following six sub-themes emerged from the interviews:

- Lack of experience
- Standardised solutions
- Package
- Arrogance
- Lack of innovation
- Esoteric language

Since interviewee "E" worked on both client and consulting sides, his views are particularly relevant to our analysis. Prior to become an IT consultant, interviewee "E" worked as a chemist in the laboratories of a large multinational. He recalls that when working as a scientist he had a very low opinion of some of the consultants he had to deal with.

> *"…I can certainly understand why some customers have a low opinion of consultants. I have been on the customer's side and I had a very low opinion of some consultants…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

- **Lack of Experience**

One of the main criticism concerns the lack of experience of some consultants who are thrown into the arena selling advice with relatively little experience. As most of the consultants interviewed had been in the consulting business for several years and had the opportunity to deal with big projects, it was interesting to hear their comments about younger consultants.

When talking about the fundamental skills to become an efficient business consultant, interviewee "D" made a point about experience. She believes that experience is what gives credibility in the eyes of clients, but also is what makes a good consultant. Interviewee "D" tends to slightly criticise young consultants who have just come out of university and never worked in industry.

> *"…you can't really advise people what to do or understand how business works unless you have worked in business… there are lots of consultants out there who have not actually carried out business roles and who get directly into business consultancy and it makes me wonder how they carry out their jobs…"*
>
> *Interviewee D*

Interviewee "A" fully agrees with the point made by interviewee "D". It was argued in the introduction section that there are more and more people who currently proclaim themselves as consultants. Interviewee "A" agrees with the idea that there has been a tarnishing of the term consultant, but suggests that criticisms also arise from the fact that some consulting companies charge a great deal of money to send people with relatively little experience.

> *"…it is partly the expansion but a lot of people charge a lot of money for what they produce and send people with relatively little experience….you get basically kids who come out of University with a MBA telling people what to do at £5,000 a day…"*
>
> *Interviewee A*

- **Standardised Solutions**

Throughout this research, it was demonstrated that anaphors and metaphors are used to describe the role of business consultants. One of them reflects the scepticism about consultants and what they do; business consultants are perceived as people who 'borrow your watch to tell you what time it is' (Lindon, 1995: 23). This famous anaphor reflects the frustration experienced by clients who have the impression that consultants told them what their problems were, things that they already knew but did not get any relevant answers or solutions.

> *"…I think there is a lot of scepticism about consultants and what they do: A man who borrows your watch to tell you the time is widely held to be true…"*
>
> *Interviewee A*

Interviewee "I" argues that this assumption is partly due to the fact that in most consulting projects, the amount of time is limited and billing hours is a critical consideration. In fact, consultants have a restricted amount of time (restricted by both consulting companies and clients) to understand problems inside the organisation. Interviewee "I" argues that in any situation, the people who can talk better about the problems are those who are at the heart of the problem. If a consultant is willing to understand organisational issues from the inside, he will have to spend a long time talking to people before being able to objectively make recommendations, but because of time constraints, consultants only restrict their analysis to what they know.

> *"…If you look at the problems existing in your family, how come a doctor from outside understand a problem better than you? They will have to spend a lot of time with you to understand it…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

- **Package**

It was argued in the literature review that business consultants are "fashion-setters" who sell and re-sell the same packages (Abrahamson, 1991). Interviewee "I" agrees with this criticism and argues that large consulting organisations are now experiencing the pressure of competition that a mature market brings. In fact, large organisations cannot afford to be flexible in their income streams and must adopt a more rigid structure in order to assure the same level of income. A way to become more rigid is to offer "packaged solutions" because it is faster to implement. The idea of the consultant who gave to the client what he was about to give in any case is in fact widely held to be true.

> *"…You do not know when the client is going to come, you do not know how the job is going to be, you can not afford to be more flexible and you must have a more structured income stream…"*
>
> *Interviewee I*

- **Arrogance**

Interviewee "L" confesses that sometimes, consultants can be perceived as arrogant, not because their role made them arrogant, but because they are experts in their field and they know best practices and might have done similar things dozens of times. The idea of consultants being "know-it-all" comes from the fact that experienced consultants do know how to implement numerous systems and can sometimes not explain clearly or simply why a particular methodology rather than another was adopted.

> *"….when you are bringing best practises, experience to the table, you are saying we should do the deal this way and they say why do you do that; because it is the best way to do it and they thing you are arrogant. You are not arrogant; you are trying to convince them that it is the best way to do it…"*
>
> *Interviewee L*

- **Lack of Innovation**

The lack of innovation is another major criticism. Interviewee "H" for example suggests that it can be relatively easy for consultants to be drowned in a client's organisation and become part of the problem. The consultant who has build up a good relationship with his client can feel too comfortable and might not be willing to challenge his client or even himself. In that situation, client expectations are not met because there is a lack of innovation and motivation.

> *"…I heard anecdotal stories of where perhaps clients' expectations of the consultants were not being made because the consultants are getting too cosy, the relationship is becoming too cosy, therefore the consultants are not challenged…"*
>
> *Interviewee H*

- **Esoteric Language**

Bloch (1999) argued that consultant's esoteric language confuses clients and increases the uncertainty in their environment. Interviewee "C" confessed that when he was younger on one occasion, he and his managing director went to talk to people in steel factories. After talking to them for a few minutes, the clients stopped them and told them frankly that they did not understand a word of what they were saying. Interviewee "C" recognises that it is a difficult exercise to get rid of a particular piece of jargon since he is constantly surrounded with people who speak the same language as him. Interviewee "C" argues that it is easy for consultants to forget that clients are not necessarily familiar with different concepts.

> *"…we organised a conference with xxxx and we invited clients. So the managing director and I started talking to clients, for us it sounded so simple, but clients did not understand a thing…"*
>
> *Interviewee C*

When discussing this matter with interviewee "E", it was interesting to discover that the esoteric language is also something that consultants suffer from, even amongst themselves. Interviewee "E" recalls internal meetings with senior consultants where phrases were virtually made up on the spot.

> *"…the more senior business consultants I can recall virtually make up phrases on the spot. They do it in internal meetings as well and we know they are talking rubbish…"*
>
> *Interviewee E*

- **Established Methodologies**

Business consultants accept that some criticisms are justified i.e. esoteric language, a certain form of arrogance. On the other hand, there are a couple of instances, when talking to business consultants about a certain lack of innovation in the solutions proposed, some of them made an important point: not every client is willing to take risks and develop brand new solutions. Interviewee "J" suggests that having a set of tools or an established methodology can be useful because not all clients want to be "guinea-pigs" and test new solutions. Interviewee "L" agrees with interviewee "J" and argues that using a certain methodology has two main advantages; it saves times and reduces risks for both clients and consultants.

> *"…the benefit of having that sort of methodology is that it is well proven, tested and it definitely save time and costs. We guaranty delivering the projects. The methodology will definitely deliver the project on time within the costs..."*
>
> *Interviewee L*

Interviewee "K" also made a point worth mentioning. Business consultancy was mainly criticised for the fact that most of the consultancies offer the same advice, and just "re-package" them according to clients' needs. Interviewee "K" argues that it is not because everybody provides the same solutions that there are not good and unreliable.

> *"…you are bringing somebody who is an expert in business to give you some consultancy; just because they are giving you the answer that everybody else gives you does mean that it is the wrong one…"*
>
> *Interviewee K*

From the different interviews of business consultants, it can be concluded that business consultants enjoy several aspects of their role. The variety in the type of projects and the intellectual challenge are two factors that came up on a regular basis. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that answers fluctuates depending on the level at which consultants intervene in organisations. For instance, long hours and heavy workload is an aspect of the role of business consultants that is not really

enjoyed by senior consultants or partners, whereas more specialised consultants solving mainly technical problems seem to be more annoyed by things like bureaucracy or people not committed to their function.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Throughout this research results section it was demonstrated that the business consultant's perception of their own role is far from the pejorative description from previous research. Business consultants appear very much focused on helping clients and moving them forward rather than taking advantage of a dominant position and increasing uncertainty in managers' environments. The perception of business consultants' relationship with their clients appears surprising. It was demonstrated that business consultants stress the importance of always putting themselves on the same level as managers and see this relationship in terms of a partnership where the major aim is to transfer essential skills to clients. In this respect, business consultants have shown an amazing degree of humility.

The second issue concerns project control. Business consultants appear very conscious of the amount of control that they have over the consulting process. It was argued that this level of control must be put in perspective with two factors: the level of trust between consultants and clients and the level of expertise or experience of the client in a particular field. The research results also suggest that there is a link between the level of control given to consultants and the perception of the role of the consultant. It was argued at some point that the level of control given to business consultants fluctuates whether clients think they need a "consultant–expert" or a simple "consultant-contractor" to solve the problems that the organisation is facing.

Discretion or the freedom to change the approach to the consulting process is a particular aspect of the role that is much needed by business consultants. As argued, business consultants believe that they are exercising a certain amount of discretion when working with clients. The research results shown that this discretion fluctuates in accordance with the level at which business consultants intervene within organisations. The further up the organisation consultants operate, the more likely they are to exercise their discretion.

When asked to comment on delicate issues such as the criticisms overwhelming their role, business consultants appeared very much aware of the different criticisms and agree on saying that to a certain extent they are justified. As suggested by interviewee "D", business consultancy is no exception to the rule and as in any industry there are people who do their job professionally, in a very ethical way, but there are also charlatans, people who over-charge and who take advantage of clients. The research results also highlighted the part of responsibility played by clients. Whereas project failures are constantly attributed to business consultants, they strongly disagree and prove that on some occasions time and money was wasted because of the client's lack of organisation or inability to express clearly what has to be achieved.

Finally, most consultants interviewed appear dubious about the reasons underpinning the choice of hiring a consultant and it was proved that occasionally consultants are used as tools to do clients' "dirty work".

Table 6. below illustrates the research results. The four themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented.

Table 6. Research Result Summary

Themes	Sub-Themes	Summary
Role of business consultants	- **Contribution** - **Control** - **Discretion**	Business consultants argued that their ultimate role is to help the client moving forward and add value. They believe that they are exercising to a great extent their control. With regards to the discretion, it appears that there is a relationship between the discretion and the level at which consultants operate. The further up consultants are, the more discretion they will require.
Relationship	- *Service providers* - *Mentor* - *Partners* - *Two-ways relationship* - *Building up trust* - *Dynamics of the consultant-client relationship*	Business consultants appeared very humble in their relationship with clients. They stressed the importance of building a sound relationship with their clients based on trust. Business consultants would tend to see themselves more as partners than teachers or doctors since they argued that the relationship must be equal.
Consultant skills and responsibilities	- **Fundamental skills** ▪ *Experience* ▪ *Functional skills* ▪ *Listening and Questioning* ▪ *Objectivity* - **Consultants' responsibilities** ▪ *Confidentiality* ▪ *Transfer of skills* ▪ *Managing client's expectations* ▪ *Managing clients' hidden agendas*	There are five fundamental skills according to business consultants. Experience and objectivity appears to be the most important. With regards to their responsibilities, business consultants suggest that they have the responsibility of assuring the confidentiality of information to their clients but also have the responsibility to teach clients how to get the best benefits from the consulting process.
Role Pros and Cons	- **Pros** ▪ *Lack of routine* ▪ *Contact with clients* ▪ *Contribution to organisational welfare* ▪ *Intellectual challenge* ▪ *Transfer of knowledge* - **Cons** ▪ *Long Hours* ▪ *Uncertainty* ▪ *Bureaucracy* ▪ *Lack of top-management support* ▪ *Role ambiguity* ▪ *Dealing with criticisms*	There are a variety of aspects that makes the role of a business consultant an interesting one, lack of routine as well as the intellectual challenge is much appreciated by business consultants. On the other hand, they tend to dislike things such as the heavy workload, bureaucracy and a certain uncertainty.

Source: Compiled by the authors

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

With regards to the role of business consultants, it was argued on several occasions that metaphors and other anaphors are often used to define the role of business consultants. It is interesting to note that when Massey (2003: 307) asked three business consultants to compare their role, they compared themselves to a gardener, a pilot and a guide. In this study, business consultants came up with a more extreme view in comparing themselves to trouble-shooters and parasites. This little anecdote illustrates the subjectivity of business consultants' perception of their own role.

Regarding the number of roles played by business consultants, Lippitt and Lippitt (1986: 57) argued that business consultants play a number of roles that they judge necessary to reach an expected outcome. The research results confirmed this assumption. When discussing this matter with interviewee "A", he stressed the importance of adapting himself to the client's situation and therefore playing a number of different roles depending on the client's situation. As suggested by interviewee "I", the role of the business consultant is eclectic and one could argue that business consultants play several roles but share one common goal: helping the client moving forward. Business consultants are described in the literature review in a rather pejorative way, authors such as Bloch (1999) or Shapiro et al (1993) argue that business consultants abuse their dominant position and take advantage of their clients but the research results draw a completely different picture. Thus, business consultants see helping clients and moving them forward as the ultimate goal. They also show a real degree of humility in their relationship with clients. As suggested by Schein (1997), business consultants must be humble and accept the fact that sometimes they cannot help clients because they do not know the answer to a particular organisational issue. Interviewee "E" appeared extremely humble in confessing that sometimes he does not have a solution to his clients' problems, 'that is another thing about some consultants is how about they need to have an answer, sometimes there are no answers, sometimes there is no way of solving customers' problems' (interviewee "E").

With regard to the level of control and discretion, it was demonstrated that the majority of business consultants who have taken part in this research are very much

aware of their level of control. Rotter (1966) developed a framework aiming to distinguish people regarding their perceived locus of control. In this research, apart from a couple of interviewees, business consultants appear to have a internal locus of control meaning that they believe they have a total control over their direct environment. It is interesting to note that although most of the business consultants interviewed possess an internal locus of control they suggested that clients also share a part of responsibility in the success of the collaboration between clients and consultants.

Concerning the level of discretion, it was argued by Carpenter and Golden (1997: 191) that people having an external locus of control are more likely to perceive relatively little discretion. In the case of interviewee "I", he believes that he has no control at all, but on the other hand feels that he needs a limitless amount of discretion for his intervention to be efficient. In that respect, the role perception of interviewee "I" contradicts Carpenter and Golden's views.

Concerning the nature of the client – consultant relationship, Werr et al (1997: 298) had found evidence that consultants see their role more as coaches than experts. The research results have confirmed this view, most consultants interviewed would perceive themselves as support or partners rather than experts: 'I would see myself as support' (interviewee "I"). They also all stressed the importance of keeping the relationship with their clients on the same equal footing. A study by Covin and Fisher (1991) revealed that interpersonal fit between consultants and clients is the key of a successful collaboration. It was shown that all the consultants agreed in saying that trust must be at the centre of the relationship. Interviewee "M" for instance argues that 'the relationship required for success is that of trusted advisor'. Interviewee "L" goes as far as suggesting that the relationship between clients and consultants must be so close that someone external would not be able to differentiate the consultant from the client. Once again, from the research it appears that business consultants do not try to put themselves in a superior position and stressed the importance of creating a two-way relationship were both parties gain from the collaboration.

Stumpf and Longman (2000) observed that the lack of team work and institutional relationship is what leads projects to failure. This research demonstrated that creating

a climate enabling both clients and consultants to express themselves and stating their opinions freely is the key element to the success of a collaboration. Stumpf and Longman (2000: 129) argued that clients' willingness to share information with external consultants depends a great deal on the consultant's ability to build trust. Interviewee "D" confirmed this hypothesis. She suggested that trust is crucial in her role since she deals with people who have a particular knowledge in organisations, to be able to extract that knowledge she must first establish a climate of trust.

Arnaud (1998) argued that there is a psychological aspect in the client-consultant relationship that consultants must not neglect. Interviewees "H" and "D" confirmed this and declared that sometimes in order to get a particular answer to a question, they must listen to half-hour complaints about the organisation and steer the discussion towards issues that are relevant to their intervention; 'often to get an answer to a particular question, we need to sit back and listen to half an hour complaining about things within the organisation and you need to steer them in the right direction' (interviewee "D")

Lundberg and Young (2001) on the other hand have argued that consultants, when called in to provide their clients with expertise, or in reality implicitly called in to provide emotional support. The research results and particularly interviewee "H" 's experience revealed that the role of a business consultant is about giving clients a certain confidence and support with the decisions they make, 'So it is about giving the client a certain confidence. "Actually yeah, that exactly what you have to do"' (interviewee "H").

To conclude on the client-consultant relationship, it was demonstrated in the research results that there is a connection between the client-consultant relationship and organisational culture. Schaffer (1997) shares the same view and confirmed what was suggested by interviewee "L", if business consultants ignore or neglect organisational culture, projects will automatically fail.

Regarding the skills to be an efficient business consultant, Beeby et al (1998: 61) suggested that objectivity is the norm in consulting. This was confirmed by interviewees "E" and "O" who argue that the business must always remain objective

in their recommendations. It was argued in the research results that business consultants must be able to set aside their company's as well as their clients' companies aims and make recommendations in the best interests of clients. Stumpf and Longman (2000: 125) argued that the credibility of the client can be gained via a particularly good understanding of the client's industry or company. Interviewee "L" and "O" agree with this assumptions; 'I think industry knowledge and function knowledge is very valuable to be credible' (interviewee "O").

Steele (1975: 190) claims that 'learning is the essence of the consulting process'. The research demonstrated that business consultants are very much aware of this responsibility and stress the importance of transferring some of their skills to clients. Interviewee "D" agrees with Steele (1975) and claims that 'transferring skills is the major aim in consulting'. Interviewee "L" also feels that transferring skills gives more value to clients and helps developing trust. This approach confirmed Turner's assumption (1988: 12); there has been a change of the role of business consultants over the years; 'the emphasis of consulting has changed from "solving problems" to building clients' capacity for diagnosing situations'.

The research results also put forward the necessity of managing clients' expectations. Ojasalo (2001) argued that sometimes in customer service, clients have unrealistic expectations. Interviewee "D" confirms this in declaring that often clients do not have a clear idea of what they want; 'Often they do not even have a clear idea of what it is they are asking you to implement for them, why they need it or what are the benefits' (interviewee "D").

Solomon et al (1985) suggested that individuals are identified by the role they play, in that case, clients who perceive business consultants as individuals who solve organisational issues, might have a false or unrealistic expectation of the role of consultants. This was confirmed by interviewee "K" who suggested that sometimes clients idealised the role and the competence of the consultants and are therefore disappointed when they realise that business consultants are here to *help* clients to identify and solve their problems, not being responsible for solving them. As argued by interviewees "K" and "A", sometimes clients expect consultants to solve issues simply by waving a magic wand.

As discussed in the literature review consultants' poor management of client expectations might well be the source of the criticisms. Interviewee "L" confirmed this and stressed the importance of constantly re-assessing client expectations. Werr et al (1997) had already argued that consultants and clients must expect to have different schemas at the beginning of a project. Interviewee "I" agrees with this difference of expectations and does not see that as a problem but as a first step to help. In that respect, interviewee "I" tends to differentiate himself from other interviewees.

Arnaud (1998: 469) suggested that business consultants are confronted with a perverse alternative when balancing their organisations' and clients' needs. It appeared from the research results that as suggested by Shenson (1990: 19) business consultants are very ethical in their behaviour and always put clients on top; 'the clients' needs would almost always come on top' (interviewee "D")

Collin (2000: 9) argued that consultants do not sell anything but "old wine in new bottles". This idea of constantly innovating is also shared by Fullerton and West (1996: 45) who suggest that consultants and clients must find a tailor-made solution to clients' organisational issues. Although consultants agree with the idea of tailoring solutions to clients' specific needs, the fact of having an established methodology helps both clients and consultants to deliver the project on time and most importantly within a specific budget. As pointed out by interviewee "J", not every client is prepared to take risks, some of them much prefer it when consultants deliver a solution that was previously tested; 'some clients do not want to be the "guinea-pigs" and feel more comfortable using a methodology that has already been used with other companies' (interviewee "J").

It seems that business consultants and clients have a common point: they can both face uncertainty in their environment. O'Shea and Madigan (1997) as well as Shapiro et al (1993) argued that consultants exploit manager's uncertainties in order to sell even more of their services and make themselves indispensable, but business consultants also believe that they evolving within an uncertain environment. The feeling of uncertainty is much more a characteristic of the size of the organisation rather than a characteristic of a particular role. Business consultants who work for

large consulting organisations also feel as though they are evolving in an insecure environment.

Abrahamson (1991) and Blunsdon (2002) made a severe complaint about the use of established methodologies and the consistency in the solutions offered. Interviewee "K" tends to disagree with this criticism and suggests that the fact that business consultants deliver the same solutions to everybody does not necessarily prove that those solutions are the wrong ones. Another major criticism concerned the use of esoteric language; the consultobabble (Bloch, 1999). Crucini and Kipping (2001) stress the importance of making sure that consultants and clients are on the same wavelength when discussing issues together. Business consultants recognise that there is a necessity to bear in mind that clients are not experts and therefore not necessarily aware of different concepts. Interviewee "C" confessed that it can be quite difficult for business consultants to change the way that they express themselves. It was rather interesting and unexpected to note that business consultants can also suffer from esoteric language, even amongst themselves. Bloch (1999) drew a line upon the light and gullible pep talk of business consultants; he suggests that although consultants give poor advice; they look convincing when they do so. That particular aspect that is much criticised by Bloch (1999) is actually the "natural consulting skill" mentioned by interviewee "L" in the research results section. Bloch (1999) also criticised the lack of experience of junior consultants. The research proved that business consultants tend to agree with Bloch (1999) on the fact that experience is what gives credibility to clients, and one can question how to advise people on what to do if one has never done it before; 'there are lots of consultants out there that have not actually carried out business role and who get directly in business consultancy and it makes me wonder how they carry out their jobs, how can you advise somebody on how to run a business if you never worked in one' (interviewee "D"). Kaarst-Brown (1999) argued that on some occasions business consultants can be the victims of clients who use them as scapegoats. Interviewees "I", "A" and "L" confirmed that hidden political agendas mentioned by Kaarst-Brown (1999) are part of the consulting process.

Finally regarding the fees charged to clients, interviewee "I" confirmed what was suggested by Arnaud (1998: 478), clients are sceptical at all times. If the fee is too high, clients might think that the consultant is interested only in money, on the other

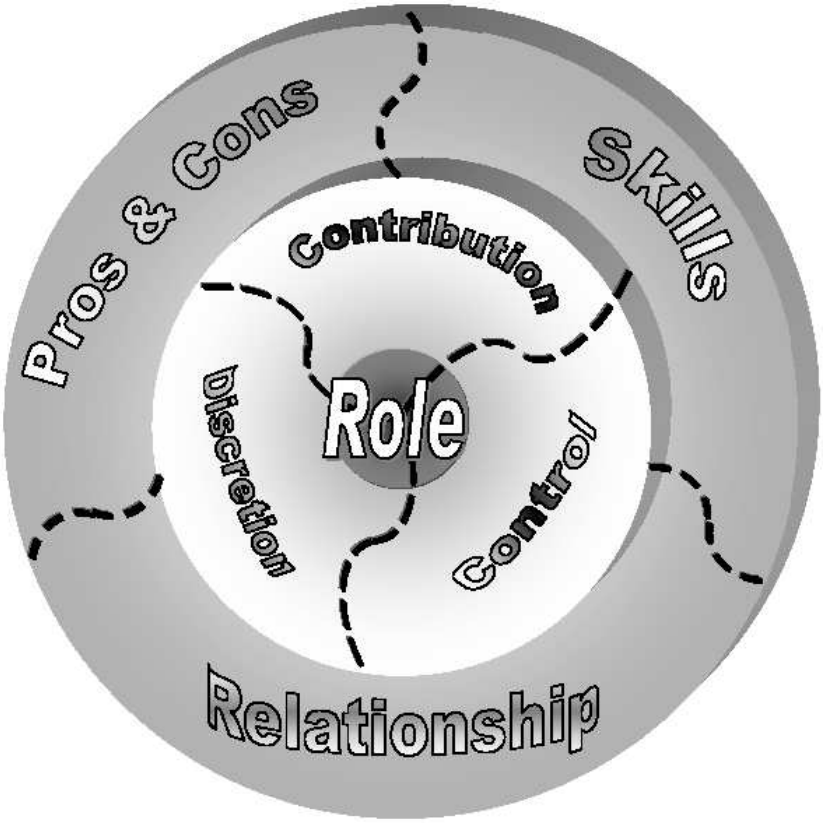
hand if the fee charged is too low, clients might not listen. Shapiro et al (1993) suggested that once called in business consultants always try to extend the length of the contract, but as pointed out by some consultants, there is a tendency nowadays in consulting to sign on to “fixed priced” contracts. The consulting process become therefore a gamble, where most of the risks are taken by consultants.

ROLE DETERMINANTS MODEL

The role determinants model presented in figure 4. illustrates the research findings of this study. As previously demonstrated four major themes have emerged from the data analysis:

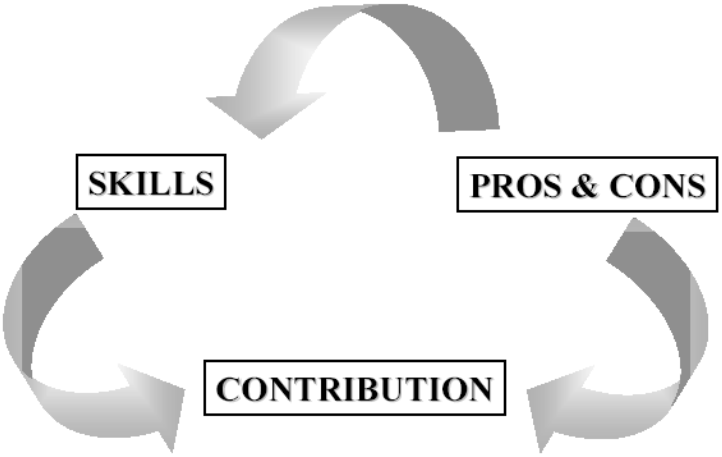
This model represents a combination of different factors inextricably linked to each other; at the centre the role of business consultants. Three major elements constitute business consultants’ perception of their role; contribution, discretion and control. These three core elements are themselves directly influenced by external factors such as client–consultant relationship, the pros and cons of the role and consultant skills. The particularity of the role determinants model presented in figure 4. is that the all the factors are linked together and in fact, a change in any factor would have repercussions on business consultants’ perception of their role. The model will be now decomposed and each of the three elements of the role of business consultants will be addressed separately.

Figure 4.Role Determinants Model



Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 5. Skills / Pros & Cons / Contribution Model

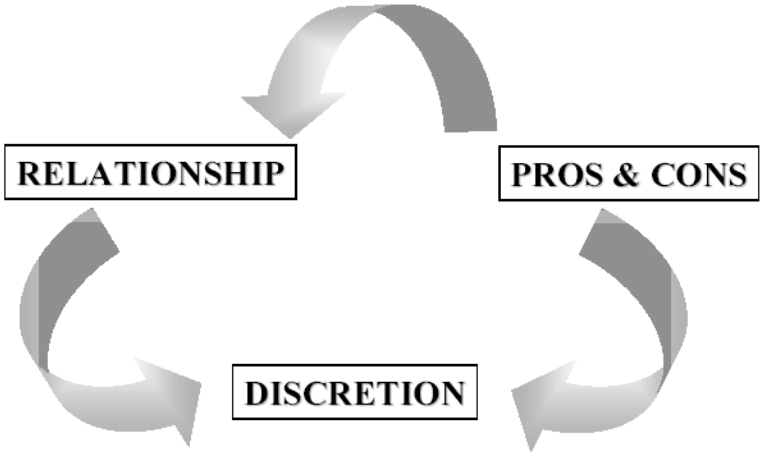


Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 5. shows that business consultants' contribution is directly influenced by the pros & cons of their role and the skills they possess. As previously demonstrated there are a number of skills (i.e. objectivity, communication skills etc.) that business consultants judge as fundamental for their contribution to have a positive impact on the client's organisation. Consultant skills and the quality of the contribution are therefore inextricably linked. On the other hand, business consultants' contribution is also affected by the pros and cons of their role; it was suggested that one of the major advantages of working as a business consultant is the possibility of gaining valuable knowledge from working closely with clients. An increase in consultants' knowledge or experience can potentially lead to an improvement of the contribution. The same principle applies to the cons of the role, a high level of bureaucracy prevents business consultants from doing their job efficiently and in fact limits their contribution.

Figure 6. illustrates the link between the client–consultant relationship and the level of discretion of consultants. It was argued by interviewee "L" that the more the client trusts the consultant, the more likely the consultant will be left to run the project the way he / she wants and therefore enables them to exercise a high level of discretion. It was also demonstrated that one of the pros of working as a business consultant is the fact that they can work closely with clients. Pros and Cons of the role are in fact also linked with the client-consultant relationship. Business consultants also suggested that the fact of collaborating with a wide range of clients allows them to keep a high level of motivation and decreases the risk of getting bored.

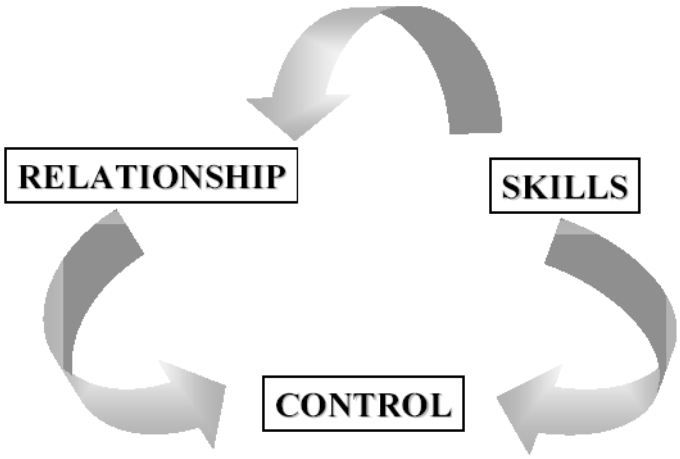
Figure 6. Relationship / Pros & Cons / Discretion Model



Source: Compiled by the authors

Finally, figure 7. illustrates the link existing between control, skills and relationships. Regarding discretion, it was suggested by consultants that there is a strong link between the level of trust and the level of control; 'if you have the client's trust, they will let you being in charge within boundaries' (interviewee "L"). Interviewee "E" also pointed out the relationship between skills and control. He suggested that the amount of control given to business consultants fluctuates depending on the client's perception of the type of skills that the business consultant should possess to solve their problem. It was suggested at some point that the more skilled the consultant is, the more credible he appears to be in the eyes of his clients.

Figure 7. Relationship / Skills / Control Model



Source: Compiled by the authors

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research results enable us to gain a better understanding of how business consultants perceive their role and contribution. This section contains several recommendations which aim to assist consultants in rethinking their approach to the consulting process.

Involvement Within Consulting Associations

When talking to interviewee "B", she mentioned a very interesting point in suggesting that consultants should always work in teams. Since interviewee "B" has worked as a coach, she has always tried to share her experiences with other colleagues working for other organisations via a French association for the practice of coaching. Interviewee "B" explained that it is necessary for consultants to challenge themselves, and ensure that they are constantly re-training and broadening their skills set, otherwise they may end up narrowing their field of specialisation, giving the "so controversial" impression of always giving the same advice. A way to overcome this over-specialisation may be to get involved in associations where different types of consultants can meet up in order to compare viewpoints and share experiences.

Being involved within these specialised associations, not only enables consultants to share their views and benefit from the experiences of other consultants who might have been through similar situations, but also enables them to share their feelings with people who are able to give constructive advice. It was argued in the literature review and confirmed by interviewee "H" that on occasion, consultants adopt the role of coach or therapist in providing clients with emotional support, but one must bear in mind that consultants, due to their role and responsibility, must have a different approach to dealing with emotions. We argue that consultants should consider getting involved with professional consulting associations mainly for three reasons:

- It would broaden their skills set.
- It would provide them with emotional support.
- It would enable them to share experiences with their peers.

Self-awareness of One's Capabilities

The concept of self-awareness was highlighted by interviewee "N". Interviewee "N" suggested that before being able to understand client issues, the consultant must be

aware of his own abilities and therefore assess his own strengths and weaknesses. As demonstrated in the research results, objectivity is seen by business consultants as one of their fundamental skills, and it is argued that business consultants must identify their own strengths and weaknesses in order to define their scope of intervention. We believe that if consultants have not been through that stage of in-depth analysis of their own capabilities, there is a risk that they will be influenced by the culture of the organisation they are working for or by the dynamics of their team, and start working on projects that they should never have been put on in the first place because of their lack of experience or simply their lack of skills. Numerous studies have demonstrated the power of group dynamics and we believe that it takes a great deal of control and experience to become a good consultant. One must be aware of one's own capabilities and be objective enough to admit that maybe the client needs someone else's experience. It is interesting to note that this view is shared by a number of experienced consultants that have taken part in this study. According to interviewee "E" for instance, consultants must be able to step back and admit that sometimes they do not have the answer to a particular organisational issue.

Importance of Managing Client Emotions

The vast majority of the consultants interviewed recognised the importance of managing client emotions. Interviewee "M", describe his role as that of a trusted advisor. Business consultants should always remember that when they are called in to solve an organisational issue, the management environment is often chaotic and uncertain. Business consultants should not neglect this aspect and ensure that when leaving the organisations that they have been working for, managers feel relieved from this uncertainty. As demonstrated in the research results, there is a real need to manage expectations and manage emotions. Business consultants, more particularly the younger or more inexperienced ones, could find themselves in situations where, although a good piece of consultancy was delivered, because emotions and expectations have not been managed carefully, clients end up disappointed.

Managing the workload

Interviewees "L" and "F" when asked about the downsides of the role of consultants, suggested that the role of consultant is a very challenging one where often consultants have to work late and can at times prioritise their career over their personal needs.

Interviewee “J” argues that consultants are “often judged by how busy they are”. Once again group dynamics can have a very negative influence on consultants and one must be aware of one’s own limits in terms of workload. We all have heard anecdotal stories about people who sacrificed their personal life in order to have a successful career. We argue that the barrier between private life and personal achievement can at time be blurred, but it is important that the consultant’s commitment to their clients does not take over their whole life, and that the issue of “work-life balance” is a very real one which needs to be given the necessary level of attention in organisations. Interviewee “L”, since being away from home most of the time, admits that his role as a consultant does not enable him to create his own social network, “when you are away from home a lot, you don’t tend to build a social environment. Most of my social network is through work, you don’t tend to build a social network at home, outside your wife’s network. That’s the bit you can suffer when doing this job and you have to be prepared to do it, it is quite a big thing” (interviewee “L”).

We recommend that business consultants should find an activity that they enjoy practising on a regular basis and attempt to maintain this even when the workload is heavy. We believe that meeting people from a different environment can help consultants to improve the balance of their professional and private life.

SUMMARY

The business consultant’s role and contribution has been examined from different perspectives and it has been demonstrated in the concluding comments section that there is an important gap between the conclusions drawn from previous research and the conclusions of this research. The model compiled from the data analysis and presented in this chapter highlights the link existing between business consultants’ perception of their role and external factors. It is hoped that business consultants and clients alike will find this model useful to reflect upon their own role and their approach to the consulting process.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

Throughout this research project, knowledge was gained on a number of different levels. Firstly, it is firmly believed that potential clients of consulting services can benefit from this research since it demystifies the controversial role of business consultants.

Contribution to Knowledge

This research gives another perspective and enables us to understand the business consultants approach to their relationship with clients, their views on the different criticisms of their role as well as what is liked and disliked when working as a business consultant. Although more and more organisations currently use business consultants, there is still a strong skepticism about their efficiency and more importantly, there is still a lack of clarity in what a business consultant's role is. As highlighted, clients often do not have a clear idea of what the role of a consultant is. Throughout this study, the role theory was used to ascertain how business consultants perceive their role within clients' organisations. The research results contribute to the development of the role theory in putting forward consultants' perception of their own role.

Contribution to Practice

The research also contributes to the development of the practice of business consulting. Potential clients could find in this research not only the resources necessary to develop a sound relationship with their consultants, but it may also provide them with a clearer idea about how to make the most of their collaboration with business consultants. Existing clients, on the other hand, can reflect upon the results of this research and possibly rethink their approach to working with business consultants.

The model built from the output of interviews with business consultants presented in the research results enables clients of consulting services to better prepare their collaboration with consultants.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research project and most specifically the research findings have opened the door to a number of interesting studies that could be undertaken within the field of business consulting. As mentioned by consultants during interviews, there is a real necessity to constantly review client expectations. The importance of effectively managing client expectations in consulting is a particular aspect of the consultant-client relationship that is thought to be worth exploring in more depth. Throughout this research we referred to clients and business consultants' behaviour. It was demonstrated that both clients and consultants can behave in ways that are not ethical. The research findings conclude that the success of a collaboration between clients and business consultants depends to a great extent on ethics and professionalism of both parties and one can assume that analysing ethical practices in consulting would be a challenging and interesting study.

The research result models presented might also provide researchers with an opportunity to test and develop these models (i.e. in taking a different approach to the consulting process). Indeed, one of the aspect that has not been touched in this study is the contract specification of a consultancy project. As, it was demonstrated, the role of business consultants appear blurred and one can argue that since clients do not have a clear idea of the role of consultants, project could easily be doomed from the start. We believe that a research project demonstrating the importance of contract specification in consulting would benefit to both clients and business consultants.

Finally, as suggested by Lundberg and Young (2001), little has been done to research emotion in consultancy, however when talking to Human Resources or Human Capital Investment consultants, they all highlighted the role that emotions play in the consulting process. Analysing the importance that emotions play in the consultant-client relationship and subsequent development of a model would assist consultants, more particularly junior ones, to ensure that this important aspect of the consulting process is not neglected.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. This interview is carried out in order to contribute to the MA research project of Eddy Louchart at the University / College Northampton.

The aim of this research is to ascertain how business consultants in general perceive their role and contribution within their clients' organisations. It has been noted from the literature that most of the research aiming to ascertain the efficiency of business consultants was carried from an external point of view i.e. clients or academics. This research project aims to provide consultants with the opportunity to comment on their role and contribution.

This interview will be semi-structured and you may feel free to give any additional details or examples to illustrate your answers.

In order to facilitate the data analysis, the interview will be recorded on cassette. You can be assured that all interviews will remain confidential. Your name, the name of the organisation you are working for or the name of clients you have been dealing with will not revealed.
If however, you do not wish this interview to be recorded, with your permission, notes shall be taken.

Background details

Before proceeding, some background information is required.

1. Name
2. Field of specialisation
3. Time spent working as a business consultant

Study Questions

1. What do you like in your role as a business consultant?
2. What do you dislike in your role as a business consultant?
3. What are the most important skills when working as a business consultant in your opinion?
4. How do you perceive the role of business consultants?
5. When working with a client on a project, how would you describe your relationship with your client?
    - ✓ Would you describe this relationship as a one-way or two-way relationship?
6. Do you feel that you are actually learning from your clients? Do you think that you are transferring some of your skills to your clients when working closely together on a project?
7. Do you think that your role is clearly perceived by your clients?
8. Do you think that you are fulfilling your client's expectations of business consultants?
9. How do you manage this expectation?
10. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much control do you think you have when working on a project with a client?
11. When working on a project requiring interviewing different people of different levels in the organisation, do you feel that sometimes you have problems identifying who your client actually is?
12. Would you say that there is a part of discretion in your role?
    If Yes: To which extent?
13. How do you balance your clients' needs and your company's needs?
14. Do you think that some of the criticisms of the role and efficiency of business consultants are to a certain extent justified?
15. Do you sometimes feel manipulated by your clients in the sense that clients could have already set their own agenda?

The previous question marked the end of the interview, thank you once again for your time and for participating in this research project.

Appendix 2. Participants' Characteristics

Interviewee	Sex	Specialisation	Size of the Organisation
Interviewee A	M	Change Management & Strategy	Strategy Consultant for a medium-sized consultancy
Interviewee B	F	Human Resources	Coach / Self-employed
Interviewee C	M	Finance / Fiscality	Tax Consultant for a large consultancy multinational
Interviewee D	F	Knowledge Management	IT Consultant for a large consultancy multinational
Interviewee E	M	Knowledge Management	IT Consultant for a large consultancy multinational
Interviewee F	M	Strategy Consulting/Corporate Finance	Strategy Consultant for a large consultancy multinational
Interviewee G	M	Finance	Finance Consultant for a large consultancy multinational
Interviewee H	F	Human Resources	HR Consultant for a medium sized consultancy
Interviewee I	M	Strategy / Governance / Leadership	"Niche Consultant" Freelance
Interviewee J	M	Knowledge Management	"Niche Consultant" for a large multinational consultancy
Interviewee K	M	Knowledge Management	IT Consultant for a large multinational consultancy
Interviewee L	M	Finance and SAP	Finance Consultant for a large multinational consultancy
Interviewee M	M	Business Transformation & Change Consulting	Change Consultant for a large consultancy
Interviewee N	F	Executive coaching	HR consultant for a large multinational consultancy
Interviewee O	M	Carrier management & coaching	HR consultant for a large multinational consultancy
Interviewee P	M	Strategic Change Management, Corporate & Executive coaching, Leadership development	Management Consultant for a large multinational consultancy
Interviewee Q	F	Leadership development	Management Consultant for a large multinational consultancy

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