

UNIVERSITY OF PANNONIA

Doctoral School in Management Sciences and Business Administration



**Attitude-specific consumer behavior in the management
consulting market**

DOCTORAL (PHD) DISSERTATION

THESES SUMMARY

Written by:
Varga-Toldi Katalin

Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Veres Zoltán

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Table of Contents

Research objectives and significance	3
Concept definition	5
Research hypotheses	8
Research methods.....	9
Literature review	11
Research results.....	13
1.1 Qualitative research results	13
1.2 Quantitative research results	18
Research theses	22
Research limitations	23
Practical application value of results.....	24
Relevant publications	25
References	26

Research objectives and significance

Business marketing is one of the most exciting and enticing scope of academic research. In business markets instead of concrete and tangible solutions customers are more likely to seek solutions for their business problems, especially in consulting industry which is a professional service activity by occupation (Nádor, 2007a). One of the most complex interactions considered within the client-service provider interaction is consulting and therefore consultants are considered one of the most important suppliers of new management ideas and practices (Armbrüster, 2006). Management consulting is a professional service of which objective is “to help the organization solve its own problems by making it aware of organizational processes, of their likely consequences, and of intervention techniques for stimulating change” (Kubr, 1996, p70.). However, management consulting is a resolution for a not yet born and basically “only on paper existing” idea provided by a group of experts with assumed competences (Nádor, 2007b). Requirements of clients on consultants are rapidly changing, firms are expecting complex and diverse professional consulting service (Geoffroy and Schulz, 2015). Consumed consulting service may significantly impact the success and reputation of the client organization, thus consulting is a high relationship complexity service, where trust and ethical norms has a fundamental importance (Hakansson and Ford, 2002). Competence is a prerequisite of successful consulting projects, however expertise itself is not sufficient for an effective intervention. In fact, the key factor of successful consulting projects is how the selected consulting team is able to professionally deliver the service customized to the needs of the client organization (Skjølsvik, Perner, and Løwendahl, 2017). In academia the success factors of interventions and client-consultant relationship quality constructs have been discussed by many authors, yet few empirical works can be found on evaluation process of management consulting services. The reason of this phenomenon roots in the circumstances of consulting projects, where project scope is often indefinite, consisting of initial ideas, rather than concrete specifications or requirements (Roodhooft and Van den Abbeele, 2006). The greatest problem of the client organization is that of being able to select and identify the consultant team which fits their needs (Clark and Salaman, 1998). Detailed specifications and requirements are constructed through the intervention process by co-creation of partners (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016), however consultants have superior knowledge compared to the clients and as a result the contractual power of the clients’ shifts (Werr and Styhre, 2002). The capability of customers to form rational decisions when choosing a consulting partner is

limited and due to incomplete information, their utility preferences are unstable and often change through the project lifecycle.

The aim of the dissertation is to advance an empirically grounded approach to the study of utility preferences and perceived quality of management consulting projects by identifying the clients' underlying utility preferences and perceived quality dimensions. Based on the preliminary exploration of academic literature the research problems are defined as follows:

- Responsibility and role of consultants are not definite and well clarified, the nature and complexity of the business problem influence the applied consulting functions and roles.
- Service attributes of management consulting service are hidden, purchasing preferences and quality expectations of clients may vary.
- In academia there are few empirically based studies on the success factors of interventions and there is still no generally accepted quality evaluation model of management consulting services.
- Research papers are mainly focusing on client needs and expectations, yet few papers have confronted research results with the assumed clients' preferences of consultants.

Concept definition

What consulting roles can be defined based on the utility preferences of clients?

In the case of consulting project buyer organizations face need, market, and transaction uncertainty (Ford, 2002). The buyer organization usually is lack of specific knowledge thus unable to articulate precisely and with confidence its problems, consequently, is not aware of what solution would be the most appropriate (need uncertainty). Even if the buyer organization can define the business problem it is extremely problematic to determine whether the client problem was solved appropriately and whether the quality of the consulting service met the expectations of the client (transactional uncertainty). Moreover, the nature of consulting interventions is unique and unrepeatable, executed in a complex business environment. Thus, clients do not have the scientific know-how to confidently evaluate the quality of consulting projects.

To what extent are the preferences context dependent?

The difficulty in evaluating quality comes from the theory of constructed preferences (Bettman, Luce and Payne, 1998), which explains that customers do not possess stable preferences in complex buying situations, their preferences are often created during the purchasing process and perceived as set of values that should be constructed. This leads to the situation where each individual involved in the buying situation and service delivery is motivated by a complex combination of personal achievement motives and risk-reduction aspects which affect not just the buying situation but the perceived quality and satisfaction level of customers (Ehrhardt and Nippa, 2005).

What role do the personal preferences of individuals play during the purchase of management consulting services?

Consulting has an intangible, multifaceted nature and it is delivered by qualified professionals with very specific knowledge. Judging the quality of consulting service prior to the delivery (ex-ante), and the sufficiency of the service after it has been delivered (ex-post) is very problematic (Bennett and Smith, 2004) moreover, due to the high number of credence qualities of consulting service, performance cannot be evaluated even after the consumption of the service (Gallaouj, 1996). Consequently, it is extremely problematic to determine whether the client problem was solved appropriately and whether the quality of the consulting service met the expectations of the client. These circumstances increase the uncertainty in the buyer's decision and makes it difficult to evaluate service quality (Haverila, Bateman and Naumann 2011; Benett, Charmine and McColl-Kennedy, 2005; Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

How are consulting assignments evaluated by the client organizations?

“There is rarely a correct or incorrect solution” (Mitchell, 1994, p.335) and for solving the business problems of the customer there is no one ultimate solution, several alternatives and methods can be demonstrated. Furthermore, it is undoubtedly challenging to isolate factors that precisely describe the additional value of consultants’ performance and provide quantifiable system for evaluating results of consulting intervention. Academic sources emphasize how essential it is to obtain a clear agreement with precisely defined requirements and expectations in order to provide successful consulting engagement (Appelbaum and Steed, 2005; Gable, 1996a & 1996b; McLachlin, 1999 & 2000; Nees and Greiner, 1985). Buyer organizations are getting more and more professional and determined while consuming consulting services, yet evaluation of consulting projects remains unprofessional (Höner and Mohe, 2009).

What are the success dimensions of consulting assignments?

Quality of relationship covers such “soft” competences as understanding of client needs and ambition for building successful partnership and win-win environment. Stump and Longman (2009, p131.) calls these “requirement of feeling comfortable”. What clients can depend on during the assignment is trust and relationship quality (Wünderlich, Wangenheim and Bitner, 2013). Schaffer (2002) describes the existence of an “implementation gap”, that is the difference between all that the client would have to do to benefit from the consultant’s recommendations and what the client is able of doing. Therefore, final solution is not only the responsibility of the supplier, but suppliers and customers co-create it (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016). Preliminary literature research highlighted that adaption requirements such as appropriate consulting style, methods and processes aligned with the culture of the buying organization can be found in the expectations of clients.

In consulting service quality evaluation which relationship quality components regard clients the most important?

A company's most precious asset is its relationships with its customers (Levitt, 1983). Service quality and satisfaction can be experienced both at an episode and at a relationship level (Storbacka, Strandvik and Grönroos, 1994; Ulaga and Chacour, 2001). In b2b services personal connections are particularly important because they are “vital elements” of buyer-supplier relationships (Cuningham and Homse, 1984). Evolution of relationship marketing has proven that in business markets without conscious management and quality development of relationships a partnership cannot be successful (Mandják et al., 2016), since these relationships are not just administrative, legal, economical, technical, technological but social bonds between the partners (Stone, Woodcock and Wilson 1996; Veres 2009). Accordingly, business partners

are forming a community where interactions are not limited to transactional episodes but influenced by persistent change and conformation (Elo, 2003). In relationship quality papers the most frequently used quality constructs are: (1) perceived service/product quality; (2) satisfaction; (3) trust; (4) commitment; (5) fairness; (6) loyalty.

<p><i>Is that any difference in the quality perception of individuals in different level of organizational hierarchy?</i></p>
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Clients do not all regard the value of consultancy services equally; rather, their evaluation of the utility provided depends upon the learning and developing background and organizational level at which the service is applied (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016). Ehrhardt and Nippa (2005) emphasize, that evaluation process of the consulting service may depend on the person who is carrying out the evaluation, since experience, autonomy and position of the evaluator(s) significantly impact the form and quality evaluation process.

Research hypotheses

Table 1 demonstrates the research hypotheses and methods used for testing these hypotheses.

Table 1: Research hypotheses

Used primary research methos	ID	Hypothesis	Data collection method	Data evaluation method
Explorative qualitative research (QH = Quasi hypothesis)	QH1	Based on utility dimensions of consulting services classification of consulting roles and functions can be formed.	Interview	Content analysis of manuscripts of interviews with open, axial and selective coding of grounded theory method.
	QH2	New purchasing situation strongly influences buying preferences.		
	QH3	In the course of uniqueness of project, the first phase of the consulting process is considered as co-learning (competence exchange).		
	QH4	Personal preferences of participants in the buying process significantly influence the final purchasing decision and selection of consultants.		
	QH5	Assessment of utility of the consulting service is materialized in the post transactional process.		
	QH6	The dimension structure of quality evaluation of management consulting projects is hierarchical (conceptual model can be formed).		
Quantitative research	H1	The most frequently mentioned utility dimensions by clients are lack of special resources, project management, organizational stimulation.	Multiple choice questionnaire	Wilcoxon signed-rank test
	H2	There is a significant difference in the importance of success dimensions (conceptual model).		
	H3	Importance of attributes of relationship quality are significantly differ.		
	H4	There is a significant difference between the importance of success dimensions based on the organizational hierarchy.		Paired-Sample T Test

Source: own construct

Research methods

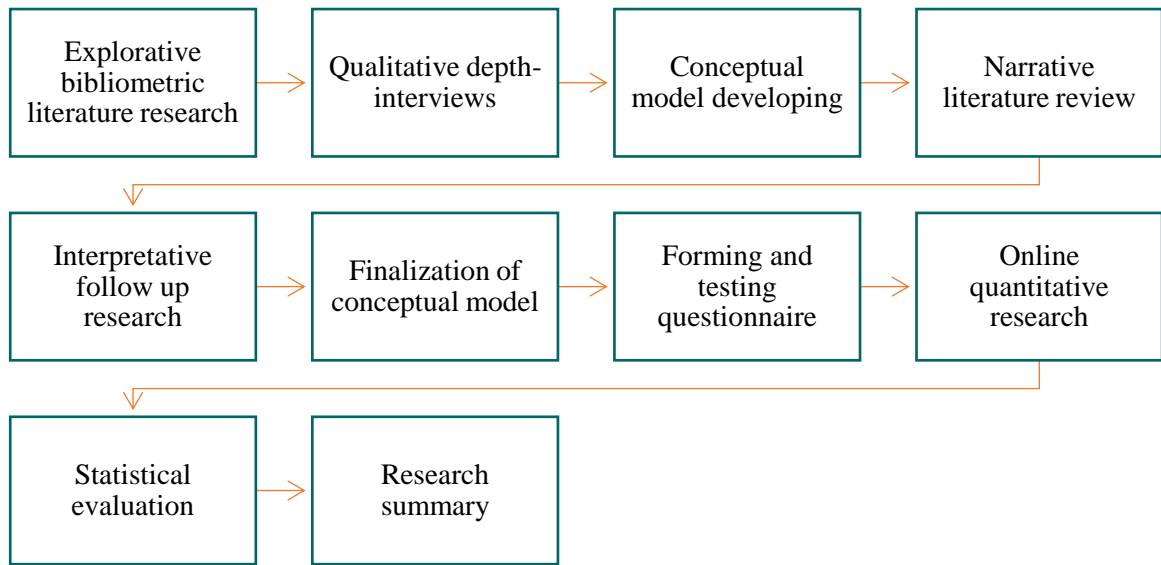
To be able to explore the scientific literature of consulting research domain I applied both *bibliometric (meta-analysis)* and narrative literature research method. Narrative literature review method may suffer from researchers' subjective evaluations and judgments, while bibliometric analysis is able to define dominant patterns and latent intellectual structures of a certain discipline and provide a well-established technique by measuring the influence and scientific contribution of each academic article involved to the research (Borgman and Furner, 2002; Diodato, 1994; Schneider and Borlund, 2004). Based on articles' metadata collected from scientific databases bibliometric analysis provide a statistical examination of publications in order to reveal some patterns in documents (Diodato, 1994) and make measuring, mapping of scientific domains and disciplines available (Tabah, 2001). Application of bibliometric research method would complement narrative literature reviews and support future literature studies with quantitative results.

The results of the primary research are provided by empirical studies, using hybrid research methodology: combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Based on *empirical qualitative data from 22 in-depth interviews*, qualitative research advances an empirically grounded approach to the study of utility preferences and perceived quality of management consulting projects by identifying the clients' underlying utility preferences and perceived quality dimensions, describing utility attributes at each organizational level, and demonstrates a conceptual model of perceived quality dimensions (ERIP model).

Conceptual model was fine-tuned based on *interpretative follow up research* with experts and targeted, manual *narrative literature research* of consulting service quality papers. Based on findings of literature review and interpretative follow up research the conceptual model was finalized.

The *quantitative research* goal was to test results of qualitative research. Questionnaire was designed based on the previous related scientific papers and manuscripts of interviews. Final version of the questionnaire was tested by experts and were aligned with the developed conceptual model of service quality. Used research methods are illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1: Applied research methods



Source: own construct

Literature review

Engwall and Kipping (2013) summarize the findings from the existing literature and highlight that management consulting literature has been influenced by three other fields of management: (1) practice, (2) education and (3) publishing, pointing out how their interaction furthers the diffusion of management ideas. Besides flows of ideas and people between the fields “there is also a gradual blurring of the boundaries among them” (p.86). In the last decades several number of literature reviews have been conducted with different classification logic (Varga-Toldi and Veres, 2020). One of the most cited classification model comes from Nikolova and Devinney (2012) work who defined three main perspectives of the management consulting literature:

1) *Expert/functionalist perspective* put client-consultant interaction into context by relating it to a contractual, time-limited temporary helping and problem-solving relationship, where consultants are seen as independent and objective experts of knowledge with specific functions and roles. The most important aspect within the client-consultant interaction is how clients gain, transform and apply the required knowledge. Some authors believe that roles of consultants can be well defined or categorized based on different aspects such as customer need, level of interaction or basic business functions of consultants (Massey and Walker, 1999; Nees and Grenier, 1985).

2) *Social learning perspective* defines client-consultant relationship a participative learning process (Lilja and Poulfelt, 2001), in which „both clients and consultants contribute valuable knowledge and ideas to a project” (Nikolova, Reihlen and Schlapfner 2009, p.289). Schein (1999) highlights that consultants should help clients understand their own problems better, thus clients can be more active in the problem-solving process.

3) *Critical perspective* draws attention to power, politics and conflicts in client-consultant interactions (Pellegrini, 2002), where clients become victims of consultant’s rhetorical skills and impression management techniques (Fincham and Clark, 2002; Werr and Styhre, 2002) while consultants are also victims of pressure and emphasize anxieties of consultancy work (Sturdy, 1997).

Czarniawska and Mazza (2012) introduced the *social constructivist perspective* which concept describer consultants as “merchant of meaning” metaphor which refers to a situation where consultants reconstruct clients’ managerial tasks and roles by reframing them with the help of images, labels, or metaphors (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2012, p.433).

Bibliometric research revealed that b2b relationship marketing concepts had an influence on consulting literature, the most common research theme in this research domain is client-consultant relationship (Varga-Toldi, Veres, and Rékasi, 2019). Number of articles with client-consultant relationship dominates in academia and little attention has been paid for the key marketing aspects of consulting, especially purchasing preferences of clients, procurement, selection and evaluation process of consultants which are regarded a very important b2b marketing topics.

Research papers on *evaluation and service quality of consulting projects* perceived success from different aspects. Some studies perceive successful assignments from the perspective of client-consultant relationship (Appelbaum and Steed, 2005; Fincham, 1999; Fullerton and West, 1996), while others reflect success as quality of collaboration quality of partners (Roodhooft and Van den Abbeele 2006; Sweem, 2009; Wang, Shieh and Hsiao, 2005). Some authors put perceived commitment and added value of consultants into the focus of successful consulting projects (Gable, 1996; McLachlin, 2000; O'Driscoll and Eubanks, 1993; Soriano 2001;), and few researchers believe that the key success factor is client experience (Bronnenmayer, Wirtz and Göttel, 2016a,b; Williams and Plouffe, 2007; Wright and Kitay, 2002;). Only few empirical works can be found which try to describe the quality of consulting services with performance indicators (Kumar and Simon, 2001; Kumar, Simon and Kimberley 2000; Philips, 2000). Recent studies provide new contributions and complement existing management consulting knowledge. Today, we know a lot about client-consultant relationships and its dynamics, roles of each parties yet we still know little about what makes management consulting assignments successful and how quality of such a service can be measured.

The *intellectual structure of the management consulting* research domain shows that management consulting studies are published principally in management science journals, management consulting as a research domain has no privilege, specific mother journals. Results indicates that management consulting studies are published most of the time in top-ranked management science journals, thus, traditional b2b marketing and industrial marketing research journals are losing their influence in this area. However, the total number of publications in the research field of management consulting has grown significantly yet empirical results do not seem to be connected to each other and management consulting knowledge is still fragmented and not structured into a common intellectual repository.

Research results

1.1 Qualitative research results

QH1: Based on utility dimensions of consulting services classification of consulting roles and functions can be formed.

Purpose of purchased consulting service is perceived in terms of the motivation, utility concerns of the client. Consulting firms should detect what the main motivation of the customer is and consultants are supposed to recognize where customer' uncertainty is coming from since these circumstances will determine the consulting style. Explored consulting roles are demonstrated in Table 2. Research results are harmonized with previous consulting role studies (Kakabadse, Louchart and Kakabadse, 2006; Kubr, 2002; Nees and Grenier, 1985; Schein, 1989; Steele, 1975), however qualitative research results complete these existing studies with the perspective of motivation and perceived uncertainty of clients.

Table 2: Generic purposes and main consultant roles of management consulting

Purpose	Motivation	Uncertainty	Tendency	Consultant role
Lack of special resources	Human resource	Delivery questions	Decreasing	THE EXPERT
	Special expertise			
Access to network	Information	Inquiry questions	Constant	THE INFORMANT
	New relationships			
Defining new opportunities	Providing guidelines	Inquiry questions	Constant	THE GUIDE
Project management	Bringing appropriate methodology	Delivery questions	Increasing	THE MANAGER
	Managing complex projects and programs	Delivery questions	Increasing	
Facilitating	Easing internal political debate	Delivery questions	Constant	THE MEDIATOR
Supervising	Risk reduction (internal mistrust)	Affirmation questions	Constant	THE JUDGE
	Expectation of parent company (external mistrust)			
Validation	Confirmation and completion of existing ideas	Affirmation questions	Increasing	THE SUPPORTER
Stimulation (Paradigm shifting)	Implementing changes	Delivery questions	Increasing	THE CATALYST

Source: Own construct

QH2: New purchasing situation strongly influences buying preferences.

Research results indicates that the greater the project complexity, the greater the quality evaluation uncertainty. The greater the uncertainty in evaluating quality, the greater the personal impressions of client-consultant interaction. Participants explained that most of the time the scope is “moving” and defining requirements at the design phase is almost impossible. The evaluation of fix price consulting projects therefore is principally based on assumptions and impressions. The continuous fine-tuning of scope does not enable customers to set quality criteria in advance. Instead, customers construct their requirements and quality expectations during the consulting process and view quality as a perceived value that should be constructed throughout the collaboration and not as a phenomenon that can be described beforehand.

QH3: In the course of uniqueness of project, the first phase of the consulting process is considered as co-learning (competence exchange).

Fixed price consulting projects are often established to solve such business problems that customers cannot handle alone or have never met or managed before; consequently, these projects are regarded as new purchase situations with high transactional uncertainty. Most of the time request for information process (RFI) only includes preliminary requirements for the required service and neither RFP nor the consulting contract cover the scope properly. Consequently, no traditional quality management plan is produced. Participants explained that the more time the consultant spends with the customer, the clearer picture the consultants will have about the problem of the customer, and the more definable the deliverable solution will be and in view of this, the exact scope of the project changes continuously. The first phase of the consulting process is considered as co-learning.

QH4: Personal preferences of participants in the buying process significantly influence the final purchasing decision and selection of consultants.

Our research has revealed that clients do not all regard the value of consultancy services equally; rather, their evaluation of the utility provided depends upon the organizational level at which the service is applied (Table 3). Higher tiers of management hierarchy tend to be more sensitive to the personal and unit-specific benefits on offer and place a substantial premium on the perceived efficacy of their teams within the organizational structure. In turn, little or no emphasis may be placed on specific project deliverables, and successful management consultants must modulate their approaches accordingly.

Table 3: Utility dimensions of management consulting by different hierarchical levels of the buying organization

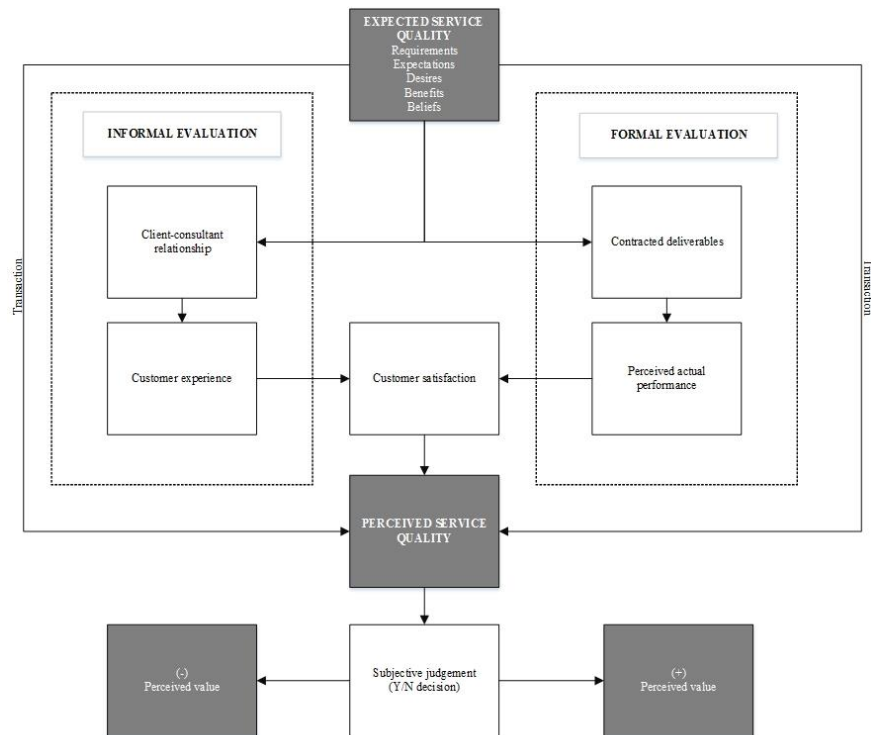
Level	Focus	Benefits	Time dimension
Operational	Atmosphere & Learning	Less work	Short-term
		More interesting work	
		Pleasant working environment	
		Career development	
		Receiving attention	
		Access to information	
		Feedback from immediate supervisor	
Functional manager	Ideas & Team work	Acquiring new information	Short-term
		Having new ideas	
		Usable solutions	
		Task assignment	
		Acceptance and positive image of unit	
		Well-functioning team	
Executive directors	Position & Power	Strengthening own position	Mid-term
		Growing organizational power	
		Self-certification	
		Reaching targets	
		Receiving concrete action plans and decision supporting materials	
Top management	Change & Transformation	Take to market (“make it happen”)	Long-term
		Implementing change	
		Improving employee engagement	
		Strategic support for vision and long-term objectives	
Procurement	Budget & Relationships	Quantifiable and secure purchasing process	Short/Mid-term
		Staying within budget	
		Development of supplier relationships	

Source: Own construct

QH5: Assessment of utility of the consulting service is materialized in the post transactional process.

The quality assessment of consultants is based on qualitative metrics rather than direct impact on the quantifiable measurement of the contracted deliverables. The first level of quality evaluation is formal and best defined as the quality of project deliverables and performance of the project team, while second level refers to an informal and the less tangible evaluation based on personal impressions (Figure 2). The evaluation can be best described as the level of customer experience and directly affects the ultimate judgement of the customers regarding the quality of the consulting service. Most of the participants reported that “real-time” transactional evaluation (during project and at project closing) unhelpful since the value of delivered solutions and documents may increase as time goes by and more and more tangible and quantifiable results of the intervention emerge.

Figure 2: Quality evaluation process of management consulting projects

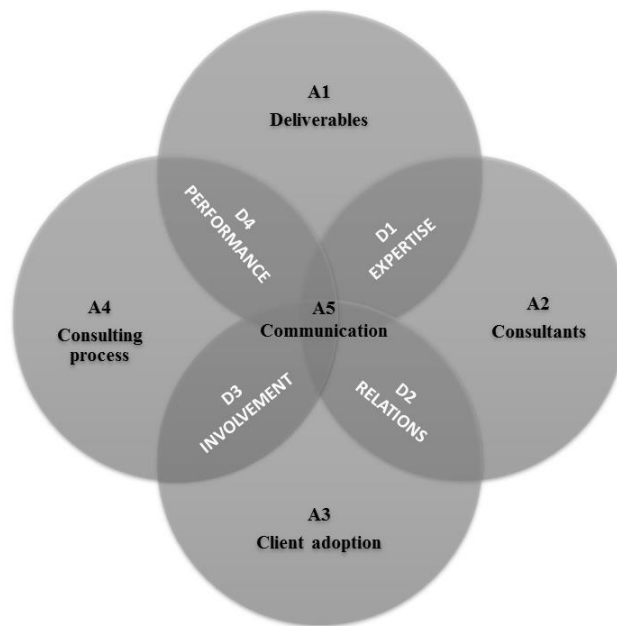


Source: own construct

QH6: The dimension structure of quality evaluation of management consulting projects is hierarchical (conceptual model can be formed).

Based on content analysis we found that customers construct their judgements on consulting service quality through 5 main attributes: (1) deliverables, (2) consultants, (3) client adaption, (4) consulting process, (5) communication. A 5-element but four-pronged model has been defined and communication as a fifth attribute was placed in the center of the model as the other four attributes are connected through this attribute and communication is in a close relation with the other four attributes as well. From this 5-element structure four, relatively separable quality dimensions emerged: (1) Expertise, (2) Relations, (3) Involvement, and (4) Performance (ERIP model, Varga-Toldi and Veres 2021), as demonstrated in Figure 3. Dimensions are not distinct, they all had a connection with each other as overlapping sections show; however, these four dimensions effectively illustrates how customers construct their quality judgments.

Figure 3: Perceived attributes (A1-A5) of quality dimensions (D1-D4) in management consulting projects – The ERIP model



Source: Own construct

1.2 Quantitative research results

The research aim of quantitative research was to validate and test research results of qualitative research. Questionnaire was designed based on the previous related scientific papers, manuscripts of interviews and was aligned with the framework of ERIP conceptional model. The used quantitative conceptual model is illustrated by Table 4.

Table 4: Quantitative conceptual model

Attribute	Sub-dimension	Dimension	Number of attitude statements
Junior and senior ratio	Expertise	Right project team structure	1
Availability of senior consultants			1
Expertise		Competence	1
Experience			1
Knowledge transformation			1
Applicability		Strategic fit	1
Sustainability			1
Vision setting			1
Adaption skills	Relations	Empathy	2
Tranquility			1
Enforcement		Assertiveness	2
Appropriate consulting communication			1
Cooperation			1
Commitment		Commitment	2
Information sharing		Management support	1
Transparency			1
Competence development			1
Responsibility		Ethical norms	2
Discretion			1
Objectivity			1
Preparedness	Involvement	Efficient (client) resource use	1
Efficient resource allocation			1
Assertion of interests		Change management	1
Acceleration			2
Internal conflict resolution			1
Knowledge sharing		Organizational learning	1
Constraint management			1
Quick wins	Performance	Productivity	1
Budget			1
Deadline			1
Scope			1
Flexibility		Excellent delivery	3
Thoughtfulness			1
Additional value		Supplementary benefits	1
Additional benefits			1
Visibility		Organizational buy-in	3
Demonstrability			2
Attendance		Availability	3
Availability of professional contents			1

Source: own construct

H1: The most frequently mentioned utility dimensions by clients are lack of special resources, project management, organizational stimulation.

Research results show that the most frequent utility dimensions of buying organizations are lack of special resources, project management, organizational stimulation. Important to highlight that defining new opportunities statistically as important as organizational stimulation, thus this utility dimension has its place in the top utility dimensions. Results are harmonized with qualitative research and findings of relevant literature.

H2: There is a significant difference in the importance of success dimensions (conceptual model).

The four dimensions' index distribution significantly differ from the other and their importance also significantly shows variance (Table 5). The most important dimension of successful consulting service is expertise, which is followed by relations and performance. The least important dimension is involvement.

Table 5: Index distribution of dimensions

Dimensions (ERIP)	Mean	Median
Expertise	3,90	3,88
Relations	3,76	3,75
Performance	3,70	3,68
Involvement	3,58	3,63

Source: own construct

There is a significant difference how consultants and clients regard the importance of each dimension. Research results show (Table 6) that consultants view the importance of involvement dimension less than clients (at significance level of 0,1).

Table 6: Index distribution of dimensions of consultants and clients

Dimensions (ERIP)	Consultant/Client				Significant difference?	Significant difference?
	Client		Consultant		0,05	0,1
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median		
Expertise	3,93	4,00	3,85	3,88	No	No
Relations	3,75	3,75	3,77	3,81	No	No
Performance	3,60	3,75	3,54	3,50	No	Yes
Involvement	3,70	3,68	3,70	3,74	No	No

Source: own construct

Attitude statement can be grouped based on their importance into three category which classification provides a practical and managerial perspective for interpretation of results. There are so called „must have” requirements which are critical factors of successful consulting interventions (14 preferences). „Should have” requirements are important but not crucial, participants regard these requirements moderately important (23 preferences). Finally, there are some „nice to have” requirements which are not expected in consulting projects however customers are delighted if consultants may provide these (14 preferences). Table 7 demonstrates the top preferences of successful consulting interventions.

Table 7: Top preferences

Attitude statement	Mean	Dimension	Sub-dimension
ERIP23: Consultants working on the project arrive well prepared	4,33	Involvement	Efficient (client) resource use
ERIP21: Consultants meet ethical standards and act responsible, handle information with greatest secrecy.	4,31	Relations	Ethical norms
ERIP39: Consultants understand the actual motivation of buying organization.	4,30	Relations	Commitment
ERIP34: Consultant meet legal and contractual measures with the highest proficiency.	4,21	Performance	Productivity
ERIP4: Consultant possess the relevant industry-specific experience, will not learn it “on the job”.	4,18	Expertise	Competence
ERIP8: Consultants deliver solutions which fit the organizational strategic goals.	4,15	Expertise	Strategic fit
ERIP15: Consultants are committed to the client and project goals.	4,15	Relations	Commitment
ERIP36: Consultants besides using standard methods deeply investigate to find other solution alternatives.	4,13	Performance	Excellent delivery
ERIP5: Consultants are able to share and transform their knowledge.	4,08	Expertise	Competence
ERIP13: Consultants can and dare to say no to client if they assume that its needed in favor of the successful project.	4,06	Relations	Assertivness
ERIP3: Consultant are aware of the latest best practices.	4,05	Expertise	Comptence
ERIP33: Consultants meet delivery deadlines.	4,04	Performance	Productivity
ERIP45: Consultants communication is consistent, transparent about the progress of the project, inform and manage their stakeholders.	4,18	Performance	Organizational buy-in
ERIP46: Consultants are available and answer promptly.	4,04	Performance	Availability

Source: own construct

H3: Importance of attributes of relationship quality are significantly differ.

Based on relationship quality academic works it has been assumed that interpretation of relationship quality between consultants and clients can be subjective, and participants view importance of sub-dimensions differently. Research results indicates that there is a significant difference between the importance of sub-dimensions of relationship dimension. The most important sub-dimension is commitment, followed by ethical norms and assertiveness (at significance level of 1,0).

Table 8: Importance of relationship dimension components (sub-dimensions)

Sub-dimensions of RELATIONS dimension	Mean	Median
Commitment	4,23	4,50
Ethical norms	3,83	4,00
Assertiveness	3,76	3,75
Management support	3,64	3,67
Empathy	3,42	3,33

Source: own construct

H4: There is a significant difference between the importance of success dimensions based on the organizational hierarchy.

Research has not found any significant difference between consultants and clients based on the importance of dimensions. Small variance can be found between mid and top leaders yet nor at significance level of 0,05 nor 0,1 this gap cannot be statistically proved. However, in case of two attitude statements there were a significant difference by position level in organizational hierarchy. Higher tiers of management hierarchy tend to be more sensitive to the competence and expertise of consultants, yet little or less emphasis may be placed on specific project deliverables. These findings accord with results of explorative qualitative research.

Research theses

Results of hypothesis evaluation are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9: Research theses

Used primary research methos	ID	Thesis	Scientific novelty
Explorative qualitative research (QH = Quasi hypothesis)	QT1	Based on utility dimensions of consulting services classification of consulting roles and functions can be formed.	New
	QT2	New purchasing situation strongly influences buying preferences.	New
	QT3	In the course of uniqueness of project, the first phase of the consulting process is considered as co-learning (competence exchange).	New
	QT4	Personal preferences of participants in the buying process significantly influence the final purchasing decision and selection of consultants.	New
	QT5	Assessment of utility of the consulting service is materialized in the post transactional process.	New
	QT6	The dimension structure of quality evaluation of management consulting projects is hierarchical (conceptual model can be formed).	Novel
Quantitative research	T1	The most frequently mentioned utility dimensions by clients are lack of special resources, project management, organizational stimulation.	New
	T2	There is a significant difference in the importance of success dimensions (conceptual model).	Novel
	T3	Importance of attributes of relationship quality are significantly differ.	New

Source: own construct

Research limitations

This dissertation can be regarded as fieldwork which may provide basis for further research. The qualitative study relied on interviews from 22 participants from 14 different organizations results reflect participant's subjective perceptions about the quality of consulting projects. Qualitative research indicates opinions of 167 professionals. These circumstances limit the generalizability of interpretation. As a key criterion for approaching a suitable sample I focused on financial service provider sector, since "financial services has historically been by far the largest market for consulting firms, accounting for one-third of the total in some countries" (Czerniawska and Toppin 2005, pp. 23). The fact that interviewed and surveyed clients have broad industry experience and extensive business practice with consultants from various field suggests that results in other service dominant industries might not be too different. Based on my research identified consulting roles, proposed consulting service quality model can be generalized as it fits and is in line with the previous b2b service quality and relationship quality models. For further and deeper analysis of proposed conceptual model data collection can be extended to a more heterogenous, comprehensive sample with wider industry scope. These methodological refinements allow to execute factor or cluster analysis of dimensions of ERIP model. Gap between consultants and clients in point of perceived quality dimensions may hold great and interesting research results in future.

Practical application value of results

There is a wide-range of literature with focus on client-consultant relationships, factors of successful engagements, contracting and selection criteria of consultants but most of the papers in this field study perceived quality in relation with specific types of consulting in different markets and not with a universal approach. Novelty of my research roots in the perspective I applied to discover hierarchy structure of buying organizations when interacting with consultants. I created such a scientifically valuable work which provides practical and businesslike results and framework to understand success factors of management consulting service. Results support development of management, b2b marketing and project marketing knowledge and complete existing theories and methods by providing an easy-to-use, practical framework for new generation of marketing and management students and professionals.

Relevant publications

- Varga-Toldi, K., Veres, Z., 2018. Utility attributes and quality dimensions of management consulting projects – theoretical considerations and empirical results, *34th Annual Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Conference Volume*, 1-15.
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