

ROLE OF MANAGEMENT CONSULTING IN A PROCESS OF PROFESSIONALIZATION OF SME MANAGEMENT

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Summary

We are witnessing the constant changes in the business world, due to fierce competition, technological innovation and a variety of political, economic and social developments. These changes require effective and timely management of the company which will enable the changing environment and achieving the main long-term goals - to increase profits and the value of the business system.

Although the growth of the consulting industry shows positive effects in all areas of business activities, there still lingers some skepticism versus consulting, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises that are largely using outdated management and business administration techniques where the entrepreneur/owner is at same time the manager who oversees all business processes in the company having, in most cases, no adequate knowledge, expertise and experience.

The problem encountered is insufficiently effective professionalization of management in small and medium-sized enterprises in Croatia. Given that Croatia is dominated by small and medium-sized businesses, and that the accelerated globalization brings challenges which requires faster business model changes and flexible adaptation to the business environment, it is necessary to introduce changes in the education and behavior of entrepreneurs, enabling them to answer those requirements and expectations on more effective and professional manner.

Entrepreneurs generally lack sufficient knowledge about management consulting, they are not aware about standards and processes in providing consulting services, which is one of causes of reluctance in purchasing and using of consulting services.

The primary objective of the research was to determine whether there is a correlation between the use of consulting services and professionalization of management in small and medium enterprises.

The second objective was to examine whether small and medium-sized enterprises that have used the consulting services faster and better have come from the entrepreneurial stage to a professional managerial lead, and how a use of consulting services affected the improvement of professional skills of managers.

This paper presents the results of the research on the role and use of consulting services in the process of professionalization of management in small and medium-sized enterprises in Croatia.

Key words: entrepreneurship, SME management, management consulting, education, knowledge,

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Introduction

Entrepreneurs are the driving force of the revitalization, transformation and development of business activities in the world and entrepreneurship is the core of modern business because it is constantly giving birth and the development of new business ventures fostering the vitality of the market economy. The key change that is taking place in the global economy means changing the essence of competitive advantage and the role of entrepreneurship and management. A balanced combination of entrepreneurial attributes and applied managerial knowledge went to be crucial for competitiveness.

Lack of expertise in planning, the lack of time of business owners to devote more seriously to long-term planning, is one of the main reasons for the stagnation and decline of small businesses. In a number of studies, assistance of consultants is highlighted as essential to the success of small and medium enterprises (Deakins, 2000). SMEs are in most cases formed by experts in a particular industry, which possess a perfect knowledge of their profession in the context of technical competence, but they have a lack of knowledge and experience in management. In this way they run their company into trouble because all the attention is focused on strictly professional technical knowledge and skills, and managerial skills are neglected.

Adoption of new managerial knowledge, skills and competences is important precondition and among key factors for success of entrepreneurial ventures, as well as for development and sustainable growth of SMEs. One of possible ways for entrepreneurs to improve their businesses and in the same time acquire necessary knowledge and skills One of the ways how entrepreneurs, simultaneously with performing ongoing business activities, improve their operations and acquire the necessary additional knowledge and skills is the use of management consulting services. In modern economies, management consulting has proven to be a good form of assistance to entrepreneurs and owners of small businesses.

Management consultancy is essentially a specific activity of advising managers in solving business problems for which they lack expertise, knowledge and experience. Working with consultants entrepreneurs/managers educate themselves and build or improve their managerial skills. In practice, management consulting helps emerging and maturing professional and dynamic manager who successfully manage change and who know the specific management activities and processes. Characteristics of management consulting for small and medium enterprises is arising from the nature of these enterprises and problems encountered in the process of growth and development, and as well as in the transformation process, for which routine solutions cannot be applied (Dukić, Milivojević, 2011).

Management of SMEs

SMEs have a long history, and the development of the sector is marked by occasional expansion and stagnation. The greatest expansion it has experienced 70's of 20th century. Since then, being included in the current globalization of business, they are becoming more competitive and successful against large companies. SMEs specifically demonstrate a high degree of innovation and flexibility in their business environment. (Rae, 2005), (Pavlovic, 2009). Managing a company in a situation of lack of resources affects the definition of the organizational structure of SMEs. Characteristics of SMEs are.

- a small number of employees,
- the employees perform multiple functions in the company,
- often an owner performs multiple functions

For SMEs to operate successfully, it is necessary to engage experts and convey to them a significant volume of decision making processes. The fact that most business owners are reluctant to delegate important decisions to employed managers is a significant limiting factor in their successful development. Managers of small and medium-sized enterprises play a key role in creating the strategy but the strategy must always reflect the personal goals of entrepreneurs. Management task in SMEs is to initiate and direct the overall operations of the enterprise in order to achieve its objectives. In this context, within the scope of their functions and the existing organizational model, managers perform all necessary arranging and administering all the available resources. Key resources for creating added value are people, so that one of the basic functions of management is to make human and material resources as productive.

Bearing all this in mind we can point out the most important characteristics of management of SMEs

- Work through (with) other people
- Caring for the achievement of company goals
- Striving for balance between efficiency and effectiveness
- Relatively limited resources
- Variable conditions of business

Although an entrepreneur at the same time must perform the function of managers, there are several characteristics that distinguish managers from business owners, as well as differences in the responsibilities, activities and the way in which the manage company. Unlike the manager who is a specialist in his work, an entrepreneur can be universal. This means that entrepreneurs include all aspects of the business and have a wider range of activities compared to managers.

Internal and external challenges are forcing entrepreneurs and managers of small and medium-sized businesses to establish the structure and develop competencies related to company management and continuously synchronize them with their own system of values (Fincham, Rhodes, 1999).

The most significant differences between the entrepreneurial and managerial approach, extracted from the research conducted, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.: Differences between entrepreneurs and managers

Source: Barisic, Bozicevic

ENTREPRENEUR	MANAGER
Focus on work	Focus on process
Personal approach	Professional manager's attitude
Creative destruction	Creative organisation
Responsive to challenges	Reserved to challenges
Innovations	Administration
Business development	Managing and maintaining business
Time insensitive	Time sensitive

Management consulting

Although management practice is as old as society itself, management theory and management consulting are of more recent origin. In that sense, management consulting is less than 150 years old, but real growth has been exercised in the 20th century. In general, consulting is a knowledge-based service that can be sold and bought, but because being often intangible, it is difficult to demonstrate its advantages to potential clients. Miles (1999) highlights four aspects of consultancy as important:

- human capital and knowledge intensive,
- high degree of intangible activities and services,
- difficulties in standardization of the consulting process and procedures
- intensive interaction between consultants and clients.

According to Schein, (1996), consultancy is considered as a helping with an aim. Therefore, besides recognizing the problem of the client, it is also important to recognize the interaction between consultant and client. Fincham and Clark (2002), notes that management consultancy has an impact on the developing character of modern organisations and "contribute to millions of people having to adjust to new ways of working". The management consultancy also influenced the new ways of thinking about management and its role in modern business (O'Mahoney, 2010). Supporters also identify more qualitative outcomes such as helping to develop creativity and achieve radical organizational innovation. Management consulting is basically delivery of services and independent consulting about problems in organizations' management (McKenna, 2006.).

In providing those services, management consultants are seen as knowledge workers conveying knowledge to the clients. In offering and proposing their advices, management consultants are asked to cover a range of topics, making the perishable facets of their services tangible and lasting (Barisic, 2012). The major management consultancy service categories are traditionally divided into four groups:

- strategy,
- human resources,
- operations, and
- information technology

The last two categories have become dominant in the past 10 years worldwide. Further development has expanded the scope of services to customer relations, finance, strategy, supply chain management. (Gross, Poor, 2008). In consulting the knowledge, experience and personality of a consultant is more important than any procedure or technical instrument, and that can be assured with adequate training and experience

Role of Management Consultants

Consultants are considered as core agents in the dissemination of business knowledge because of their relative expertise and knowledge of management practices. However, relatively few studies focus specifically on their role in projects with client organisations. According to Meister (1993) and Poór-Gross, (2003) in terms of the consulting process, in general, the consultant can act in three roles

- *Expert/Resource consultant*, preparing and suggesting solutions based on his very expertise and experience, convincing clients about the effectiveness of proposed solutions and, if required, assisting in the implementation. (Polanyi, 1967)
- *Process/People consultant*, assisting the client in searching for solutions with techniques and methods that facilitate and increase the creativity of the client, enabling the clients themselves to implement solutions. (Schein, 2002).
- *Mix consultant*, combining both, the tacit and explicit knowledge for the success of consulting intervention with client

Barisic (2004, 2007), suggests that business consulting is useful because it:

- *Gives access to specialized knowledge and industry best practice.*
- *Facilitate the process of change.*
- *Gives an unbiased opinion from outside observers.*
- *Learning through the process of business consulting.*

During the execution of business activities, entrepreneurs often have a need for specific advice in very different ways. Studies analysing the sources from which the entrepreneurs receive business advices show that the advices are mostly requested from family members and the business environment in the form of informal recommendations and suggestions, while the advices from professional consultants are demanded occasionally (Mihajlovic 2009). Results of the research conducted in Croatia shows significant compliance with results from studies dealing with same topic. The table below shows the sources of business advices and their usefulness to the entrepreneurs.

Table 2 :Sources of business advices

Source: Barisic, Bozicevic

Source of advice	Frequency of consultation	Usefulness of advices from 0 to 5
Informal advices:		
Friends	Often	2,1
Family members	Often	2,6
Similar enterprise owners	Periodically	3,0
Suppliers	Rarely	2,7
Employees	Periodically	2,9
Expert advices:		
Accountants	Often	2,4
Bank clerks	Periodically	2,6
Lawyers	Rarely	2,8
Professional consultants	Occasionally – often	3,6
Other sources:		
Media	Occasionally – often	2,5
Expert literature	Periodically	2,9
Professional and other associations	Rarely	3,4
Universities, schools	Occasionally - often	3,6

Although in practice the most common business consultants are accounting firms, entrepreneurs do not benefit from them very much. Over 40% of entrepreneurs look for advice from friends and family members with moderate benefits. It may be noted that entrepreneurs and owner / managers of SMEs occasionally till often look for advices from professional consultants and academia, and usefulness of these advices is marked as relatively high valuable ones. The relatively small number of entrepreneurs is searching for advices from these sources which indicate the existence of certain barriers in accessing these sources.

The overall conclusion from the survey is that there is enough resources regarding the business advices, but they are not readily available or considered as useful. The cause for that is relatively low entrepreneurs' absorption capacity and the ability to apply the delivered professional business advices, so that as the result advices largely can not be adequately utilized.

Model business consulting for entrepreneurs and SMEs

The aim of this research was to determine whether there is a correlation between the use of consulting services and professionalism of management in small and medium-sized enterprises, Second goal was to find an evidence that the entrepreneurs who have used the consulting services have faster and better come from entrepreneurial to managerial stage, and whether usage of consulting services influenced the improvement of professional competence managers to quickly achieve their growth and development. The exploratory research and in-depth interview has been conducted in a relatively small but compact sample that has included six owners and managers of small and medium enterprises and six consultants who are actively engaged in providing consultancy services. The six different main research questions were developed for both entrepreneurs and consultants including a set of sub-questions that give a clear view on the attitudes, opinions of entrepreneurs and consultants

Main research questions were:

- What are the causes of discrepancies between the use of consulting services and the degree of professionalization of management of small and medium-sized enterprises?
- Is the access to and usage of consultancy services appropriate to the stage of SME development and absorption capability of its management?
- What problems experience the management of SMEs in the process of using the consulting services?
- What are the possible strategies to increase usability of consulting services?

- What is at the moment the best possible solution and how it can be realized?
- What are the possibilities to improve the use of consulting services by SMEs and how thdue to the fact that Croatia is EU member and what way conditions, criteria and the possibility of using consultants are influenced by that fact

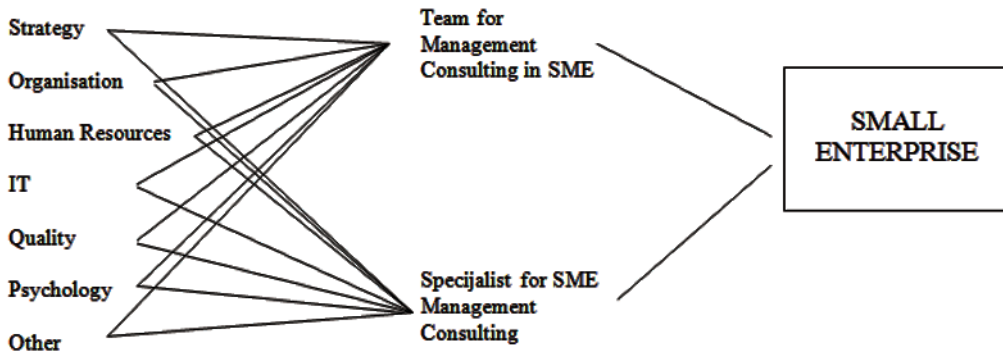
It is clear that during the professionalization of management in small companies the system of management of large enterprises cannot be copied, and can not be equalysed roles and tasks of managers in small and large enterprises. Although is alongside with growth and developpment of the enterprises establishing and formalizing of the management structure is needed, nevertheless, especially in smaller companies, leading/managing a company continues to take place under the great influence of the owner in person. This results in the fact that, there is relatively limited capacity for implementation and application of professional management system. Therefore, for effective management consulting, it is necessary to study in detail the characteristics and leadership style of each particular company. A comprehensive assessment of the needs of the client, in order to avoid that proposed particular solution or approach does not fit to the specific needs of SME enterprises. Because of the high degree of personalization in the top management of companies, the establishment of a management system depends on the thinking, feeling, acting and self-definition of owners of a company.

Because SMEs are different from big businesses and their management mode, so the managers of SMEs largely differ from managers of large enterprises. These consultants should have in mind when providing advisory services, as consequently, task and content of advisory services are different for owners of small and medium enterprises, compared to managers of large enterprises.

Management consulting gradually acquire distinguish and important role in SME enterprises, and that role is accomplished on very individual and specific way. Consultant in SME sector is considered by entrepreneurs as confidential "personal business adviser," which is extremely demanding and specific task. SMEs are characterized by a culture that depends on the personality of entrepreneurs and therefore through personalized management style. This reflects to the consultant, who is also an expert consultant, educator and consultant for personal development. Entrepreneurs' personality, function and organization of SMEs are interdependent categories and need to be observed both individually and correlated. It also means that due to the strong influence of personality of entrepreneur, classic, narrowly specialized consultant can not work efficiently in SME businesses, primarily due to the client's understanding of the management and enterprise management mode. The proposed multidisciplinary management consulting model for SMEs as a result of the surveyconducted is shown on figure 1 below;

Figure 1 Management consulting for SMEs

Source: Barisic, Bozicevic



This approach eliminates most of the gaps and barriers to hiring consultants to SMEs, as follows:

- Provides a comprehensive review of the problem of small and medium enterprises
- Allows for better communication and understanding between the consultants and entrepreneurs / owners of small and medium enterprises
- Allows consultant to combine a number of activities and information that are essential for SME
- Work with multiple clients simultaneously, lowers consulting price for a small company
- Increases the practical applicability of the solutions
- Creates a new higher mutual trust and responsibility for the resulting advisory services
- Simplifying administrative procedures and the process of providing advisory services

In the case of SMEs, it is best to hire a consultant who is specialized in SME consulting. However, in practice it is quite difficult to get all this different knowledge integrated at a satisfactory level in a person. Therefore, teamwork is just a solution in every demanding engagement of consultants.

Given the characteristics and challenges faced by entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs, we can consider the general topic of business consulting as follows:

- Define the functions and tasks of the owners of small and medium enterprises, in line with current and future business challenges, while also limiting the direct involvement of entrepreneurs / owners of other tasks and functions in the company. Therefore, the consultant must first examine the specificity of the situation in the company from different perspectives. In this way he can help the client to come up with new concepts, to formulate and to start looking at their own business from various perspectives.
- Develop understanding of management, which is on the one hand adequately to external challenges, and on the other hand corresponds to the inner reality of companies. Thus, the development of such an understanding of management, which is in line with microeconomic, macroeconomic, social and other factors in the business environment.
- Alignment of managerial and professional tasks
- Develop or expand the necessary managerial skills of the client coordinating the training program and recommending institutions for further education
- Creating a balance between personalized and structured leadership, which corresponds to the company and the owner
- Construction and development of managerial competencies and their application in practice. This is primarily related to the development of operational management skills and abilities of the owner as well as his willingness to share the responsibilities delegated to other members of the company. Here a consultant is looking like a person who works on personal development
- Recognition and extraction of function of owner / managers within and outside the company
- Establishment of the strategic decisions
- Design of the necessary process of change in the company, their location and its implementation

Management Consulting for SMEs includes a complete and comprehensive approach, in which they can identify the functional elements of consulting, professional (vocational) counseling and consultation in order to develop a personality (Barisic, 2004, (Bellman, 2008):

- *Functional business consulting* - refers to the fulfillment of managerial functions in a particular company. The focus function of consulting is adequate implementation of tasks and roles of managers, as well as his managerial skills.
- *Professional (vocational) counseling* - in the forefront of the business solutions and models related to a particular activity.
- *Advising personal development* - the focus is personal development entrepreneur / owner or manager of SMEs, improving its access business and its business relationships within and outside the company.

The purpose of management consulting services to SMEs is to clarify the relationship and combining and integrating all three aspects of the action of the owner companies. Consultant for owners of small and medium enterprises is actually a specialist for the integration of the personal perspective into the management system. In the focus of the functional business consulting is a development of managerial action, as a condition that the function of management to small and medium-sized businesses will be understood and realized on a more effective way. Given that the managerial function in SMEs depends largely on the personal characteristics of entrepreneurs / owners, it must be taken into account that personal aspects, such as the issue of lifestyle and satisfaction, maintaining interpersonal relationships, motivation, moral values, life goals and others, as these factors can have a significant impact on performing management activities. Accordingly, management consulting for entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises implies adequate combination of personality and functional consulting and professional advisory services.

Depending on the complexity of the task, the consultant puts the spotlight on a certain person and his ability, especially his model of thinking, problem solving and applying styles, and the way in which the person is related to strategic tasks, organizational tasks or decision-making tasks. The goal of business consulting is to make client ready and effective to act in relation to internal and external circumstances, and that the decisions that are within his responsibility, are followed by quality of implementation and results. Consultant seeks to support systemic and managerial action of a client or to ensure in best sense the improvement of the client's position in the process of perception, judgment and decision. As a specialist in spotting and solving management problems, information processing and decision making, the consultant should have a high level of knowledge in these areas, as well as the ability to function in complex dynamic systems.

In the consulting to entrepreneurs / owners of small and medium-sized businesses the consultant has to answer different multidisciplinary questions and requests. So, in addition to the expertise for specific topics and issues, their knowledge and their abilities, they have gained through training and experience, they have to spread to other systemic issues.

Under the systemic issues are implied psychosocial aspects of enterprise management consolidating the knowledge in the areas of psychology, sociology, economy, management, organization, law and various professional knowledge and expertise.

In a consulting process the consultant has to consider entirely the specificity of small and medium enterprise, taking into account the personality of the owner, management system and the business environment. In order for that to be successful, it is necessary to possess a multi-disciplinary knowledge, with the higher level of trust between consultant and the client.

Optimal model of management consulting for small and medium enterprises should meet the following requirements

- A comprehensive approach to the advisory process in accordance with the European standards for the provision of consultancy services EN16114
- Possessing a multi-disciplinary knowledge and skills as a consultant or a consulting team
- Focus on individual business owners / entrepreneurs, functional topics and you easy control
- Covering the general requirements of management function
- Respect ethical principles and sustain mutual trust between consultant and the client (business owners);
- Set clear goals and achieve measurable results
- Consultant assumes responsibility for the results of consulting;
- Ensure the monitoring and implementation of modern trends in business
- Define acceptable price of consulting services

Conclusion

It is indicative that entrepreneurs and small businesses in Croatia use the services of professional management consultants in a small volume. There are several reasons for this; the most important is the underdevelopment of that specific kind of consulting service, lack of awareness of entrepreneurs about this type of service, high prices, etc.

The research clearly showed that there is not enough mutual understanding between the consultant and the owner of a small business. As the biggest problem, common to most of the answers received apart of a lack of complete and holistic approach to the issues of small business by the (potential) consultants. Managers of small enterprises would appreciate to have a management consultant as a trustfull personal adviser, with whom they can openly discuss all the problems and issues that are assigned to the role and task of manager.

The challenges in consulting SMEs are connected with nature and characteristics of SMEs:

- Limited access to finance
- Not experienced buyers of Consultants
- Not experienced in managing Consultants
- Often too focussed on fixing a symptom ahead of identifying and correcting the cause
- See the need for external help but not sure where to look for a trusted source
- Haven't necessarily experienced the value of working with consultants before
- Often too busy running the business to 'work-on' the business
- SMEs usually don't come with large budgets
- SMEs don't understand the consulting process
- Consultants are reluctant to impart knowledge

In order to establish a trustful and successful cooperation with client coming from SME sector and ensure that consulting to SMEs works, it is needed following to consider.

- Pre-qualifying - the need and that the client is truly ready for help
- Build a process to service SMEs out of consultant's core consulting competencies

- Outline a well defined process to the client in language they can relate to
- Put forward a fixed fee against the defined process
- Get payment in small regular amounts
- Reduce time of consulting (the client budget) spent on areas of data collection and basic analysis - have the client do that component under your guidance
- Avoid travel - its lost time and time the SME cannot afford to pay you to do
- Avoid subsidy work - where agencies fund all of the process (client must have investment in process)

From a consultant, in addition to a multi-disciplinary knowledge, are expected maturity, holistic approach, prediction and empathy, rather than large administrative procedures. Bearing in mind the degree of misunderstanding of management consulting, distrust of consultants, it is extremely important that entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises will be provided with knowledge, skills and information provided by management consultant, that is strengthening their own position and the position of their organizations on the market. This implies that the goals and methods of business consulting are clearly defined, and as well as its evaluation is enabled.

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ULOGA MANAGEMENT KONZALTINGA U PROCESU PROFESIONALIZACIJE MANAGEMENTA MALIH I SREDNJIH PODUZEĆA

Sažetak

Problem kojim se bavi ovaj rad je nedovoljno učinkovita profesionalizacija managementa u malim i srednjim poduzećima u Hrvatskoj. S obzirom da u Hrvatskoj dominiraju mala i srednja poduzeća, te da ubrzana globalizacija donosi izazove koji zahtjevaju brže promjene poslovnog modela i fleksibilnu prilagodbu poslovnom okruženju, potrebno je uvesti promjene u obrazovanju i ponašanju poduzetnika, što će im omogućiti da na te zahtjeve i očekivanja odgovore na učinkovit i profesionalan način.

Osnovni cilj istraživanja bio je utvrditi postoji li povezanost između korištenja konzultantskih usluga i profesionalizacije upravljanja u malim i srednjim poduzećima.

Drugi cilj bio je ispitati da li su mali i srednji poduzetnici koji su koristili usluge savjetovanja brže i bolje prelaze iz poduzetničke faze u profesionalne menadžerske vode, i kako korištenje konzultantskih usluga utječe na poboljšanje profesionalnih vještina menadžera.

Pitanja obrađena ovim istraživanjem su:

- Koji su uzroci neusklađenosti između korištenja konzultantskih usluga i stupnja profesionalizacije managementa malih i srednjim poduzeća?
- Jesu li pristup i način korištenja konzultantskih usluga primjereni stupnju razvitka i mogućnostima malih i srednjih poduzeća?
- Koji problemi nastaju u procesu korištenja konzultantskih usluga od strane menadžmenta malih i srednjih poduzeća?

Istraživanje upućuje na zaključak da poduzetnicima općenito nedostaje dovoljno znanja o management konzaltingu, da nisu upoznati sa standardima i procesima u pružanju savjetodavnih usluga, te, konačno, da nisu upoznati s kompetencijama, vještinama i znanjem konzultanata što je jedan od uzroka nevoljkosti za kupnju i korištenje konzultantskih usluga.