

Anamarija Delić
Josip Juraj Strossmayer
University of Osijek
Faculty of Economics
and Business in Osijek
31000 Osijek, Croatia
adelic@efos.hr

Mirela Alpeza
Josip Juraj Strossmayer
University of Osijek
Faculty of Economics
and Business in Osijek
31000 Osijek, Croatia
malpeza@efos.hr

JEL: M21, L84
Original scientific article
<https://doi.org/10.51680/ev.36.2.10>

Received: August 10, 2023
Accepted for publishing: October 10, 2023

This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0
International License



CAREER SWITCH: CONSULTANCY SUPPORT FOR NEW ENTREPRENEURS

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper examines the consultancy process in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), focusing on consulting entrepreneurs at the beginning of their entrepreneurial career chosen out of necessity due to a terminated long-term employment contract in a public company.

Methodology: A qualitative study design was adopted to look into the consultancy process with five new entrepreneurs who participated in a program that combined trainings and consultancy sessions. Text analysis of written feedback from consultants was conducted to understand the challenges entrepreneurs faced and progress they made. Evaluation sheets with closed and open questions were analyzed to explore the effects of the program and the entrepreneur satisfaction with the program. Five years after completing the program, semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify the current status of the entrepreneurial ventures.

Results: In this study, the success of the consultancy process was threatened by time constraints and a lack of comprehensive reasoning behind client motivation to become entrepreneurs. These were the most detrimental factors for the client-consultant relationship, which ended up lacking transparency and thoroughness.

Conclusion: Research results indicate the importance of consultant's efforts to contextualize the client's decision to become an entrepreneur. Investing time in building a client-consultant relationship as well as providing long-term follow-up support proved to be crucial to ensuring a positive impact of consultancy support for entrepreneurs starting a new business.

Keywords: Consultancy support, consultancy process, new entrepreneurs, SMEs

1. Introduction

Consultancy started to appear as a research topic in scientific circles in the middle of the 20th century. During the 1940s, in the early stage of development, consultation "was viewed as a direct service to clients or to client systems" (Kurpius & Robinson, 1978, p. 321). In that early stage of consultancy developing into a profession, but also an important research topic, consultancy was associated with solving difficult problems, and there was no effort

put in building a relationship between the consultant and the client. It was believed that a good consultancy job would mean that the client will never need the help of a consultant again. By the end of the 1950s, researchers and practitioners concluded that the client should take an active part in the consultancy process to increase their ability to solve similar problems in the future (Kurpius & Robinson, 1978). During the 1970s, according to Chandler (1973), being a trainer was identified as one of

the important roles of the consultant in a consultancy process. In the early 1980s, consultancy was usually seen as a collaborative process in which a consultant assumes the role of a change catalyst or a change agent. Because of different roles that a consultant can take, there is a continuous “struggle over the definition” (Fincham et al., 2013, p. 5), but most of the researchers agree that consultants should not only react to existing problems but take a more proactive role in shaping a desired future.

O’Mahoney & Markham (2013, p. 11) provide a definition of consultancy as “the creation of value for organizations, through the application of knowledge, techniques and assets to improve business performance”, while Stroh (2019, p. 3) defines a consultant as “someone who either advises a client on the desirability of taking some action, or who assists the client in making a decision and then helps the client in planning or implementing action as determined by the client”.

Recent research results also point to consultancy as a professional service that helps clients in planning and implementing actions that they come up with (Biech, 2019; Stroh, 2019; Cerruti et al., 2019; da Costa et al., 2020). The role of a consultant is to provide guidance and professional knowledge, while a client is responsible for the goals and vision. Hence, the relationship between the consultant and the client affects the anticipated plan of reaching the goals determined by the client. In that sense, the whole consultancy process depends on the relationship built between the consultant and the client, but also on the determination of the client to implement the proposed professional or expert advice.

According to Fincham & Clark (2002), the consultancy industry experienced tremendous growth, but knowledge about this industry was sparse. “To date, detailed conceptual and empirical research into the work of consultants has been slight. Much, therefore, remains to be done if we are to develop a more penetrating and nuanced understanding of this activity” (Fincham & Clark, 2002, p. 3). More recent studies confirm the importance of consultancy but a complete understanding of the industry is still lacking (Cerruti et al., 2019). Most of the literature is focused on Anglo-Saxon experiences, while little is known about the role of consultants in SMEs and emerging markets (Cerruti et al., 2019).

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to existing knowledge, focusing on identified knowledge gaps. The paper follows the consultancy process and identifies crucial determinants for a successful consultation process for employees dismissed from a public

company who had to change their careers and decided to start their own companies. The paper especially focuses on the roles of consultants and a relationship built during the consultancy process among consultants and new entrepreneurs as clients.

The structure of this paper is as follows: a review of relevant literature on the role of consultants is given in Section 2, while Section 3 provides a review of literature on the consultancy process, which is then followed by Section 4 examining the specific role of consultants in the development of SMEs. The focus then turns to the methodological issues related to the study in Section 5. The empirical results of the research are analyzed in Section 6, where key determinants are identified for a successful consultation process with entrepreneurs at the beginning of their entrepreneurial career. Section 7 concludes the paper, suggesting potential avenues for future research on the consultancy process and support for senior entrepreneurs, and offering some early policy recommendations.

2. The role of a consultant

Previous literature provides a multidimensional overview of the role of consultants in problem-solving and solution-finding situations. Werr & Styhre (2002) argue that clients usually ask for a knowledge-based service from a more objective point (outside of the enterprise). Consultants can, according to Kubr (1996), provide a fresh perspective given that they are not a part of the organization. Consultants bring unique and independent aid aimed at solving problems (Drucker, 1979). Fincham & Clark (2002) highlighted the role of consultants as the role of “expert outsiders” that play a role of “sector specialists”. Da Costa et al. (2020) see the role of consultants as influential and powerful for organizational changes, while Crucini & Kipping (2001) emphasize the role of consultants as global change agents.

Business consultants are expected to improve performance, solve problems, and find new and better ways of doing things in private and public enterprises (Cerruti et al., 2019). Turner (1982) clustered the role of consultants into eight fundamental objectives: (1) provide requested information to a client, (2) provide a solution to a given problem, (3) conduct an investigation that may redefine the problem, (4) provide recommendations, (5) assist with the implementation, (6) build a consensus and commitment, (7) facilitate client learning, and (8) improve organizational effectiveness. Considering that consultants play many roles and help clients

solve major challenges, they are usually presented in a positive light, and portrayed as “wizards” or “agents of stability” (Furusten, 2009). However, some researchers question glorification of the role of consultants. O’Shea & Madigan (1998), Fincham & Clark (2003), Hicks et al. (2009) and Sturdy (2011) see consultants as “shock troops”, “capitalism’s commissars”, “promoters of new management fashions”, “pre-eminent knowledge brokers” and “corporate puppets”. Negative connotations arose mainly from ethical and sensitivity concerns (Sturdy, 2009).

The role of the consultant mainly depends on the client. According to Schein (1978) and Stroh (2019), there are two main roles of consultants – they act as content experts or process facilitators. A content expert provides expert help or advice, without involving clients in the process. That role is explained and described in literature as a “doctor-patient” consultancy process. A process facilitator implies client involvement in the process, where the role of the consultant is to assist the client through the problem-solving process. Research by Werr & Styhre (2002) and da Costa et al. (2020) suggests that the “doctor-patient” type of relationship does not provide the maximum benefit that consultancy could provide to clients.

The relationship between the consultant and the client is a focal issue in consultancy work (Werr & Styhre, 2002). The value of consultancy work is “to a large extent produced in the client-consultant relationship” (Clark, 1995, p. 12). This relationship is the key issue in all consultancy literature, with two opposite streams (Werr & Styhre, 2002).

The first one, called “functionalist” literature, presents the client as a buyer of a knowledge service

where the consultant has superior knowledge and expertise. This stream is focused on how to construct a successful client-consultant relationship (Kubr, 1996; Block, 2000). Their relationship is contractual, and the client controls the relationship and the process. The success of this relationship lies in the ability of the consultant to “understand and accommodate the client’s professional, psychological, and social needs” (Bergholz, 1999, p. 29). The second one, known as “critical” literature, portrays clients as victims of impression management. According to the critical approach, consultants have to convince clients of their value, despite the lack of a formal knowledge base (Clark, 1995). Critical literature is focused on the “impression management” where consultants present the problem in a way that allows the problem to be solved (Bloomfield & Best, 1992). According to Clark & Salaman (1998), consultants, their ideas and techniques play a central role in problem identification and consultancy process implementation by controlling and solving them, thus reinforcing their positive image. In critical literature, the client is a victim of an exploitive relationship, controlled by consultants. This relationship is dependent on repeat sales, the character of inter-firm and managerial structures, but also on the knowledge and expertise of the client (Werr & Styhre, 2002).

Despite different approaches to the client-consultant relationship, both streams of literature and researchers agree on the importance of that relationship for a successful consultancy process and results. Regardless of the position of the client in the client-consultant relationship (the leader or the victim), determinants that will decide on a successful relationship and project results are the same (Table 1).

Table 1 Most important determinants of the client-consultant relationship

Source	Determinant of a successful client-consultant relationship
Kubr, 1996	rational and competent buyer (client)
Schein, 2002	doubt about consultants’ work
Kubr, 1996; Schein, 2002; Werr & Styhre, 2002; Connely et al., 2012; Salvador et al., 2019	trust
Fincham, 1999; Fincham, 2010; Schein, 2002	professional, psychological, and social needs of the client
Clark & Salaman, 1998; Fincham, 1999	competence and self-confidence of the client
Maister, 1993; Kubr, 1996	fear of dependence
Kipping, 2002	cultural context (norms)
Karantinou & Hogg, 2001; Nikolova et al., 2015	empathy and honesty of the consultant
Sartain, 1998; Newton, 2019	characteristics of the consultant
Curran, 2000; Damanpour & Schneider, 2009	lack of understanding of client needs and requirements

Source: Authors

Czerniawska (2004) noted the following determinants of good consultancy work: clients want consultants to do what they said they will do, when they said they will do and according to the budget. According to Czerniawska (2004), the best consultants will bring wealth of experience, have the courage of their convictions and a good reputation, and build strong relationships with the client.

3. The consultancy process

The consultancy process is usually seen as “a sequence of typical activities from the beginning of the consultancy project to the end” (Haslam, 2017, p. 33) or “a chain of intangible activities” (Christensen & Klyver, 2006, p. 309) that lead the consultancy project from the beginning to the end. Although literature revealed limited knowledge of understanding the consultancy process and a lack of understanding of the key determinants in the process, most researchers define the process similarly and have a unified view of the process activities.

Haslam (2017) identified the following six phases of the consultancy project: new business, agree contract, diagnosis/problem definition, development of the solution/insight, delivery of objectives, and exit and debrief. Stroh (2019) defines the process similarly, but emphasizes the first step in which she proposes setting goals and expectations. Kurpius et al. (1993, p. 601) provide the most comprehensive approach to the consultancy process. According to them, the consultancy process requires a multidimensional approach, stressing “high-quality process skills”.

The consultancy process commonly occurs in six phases (Kurpius et al., 1993), i.e. preentry; entry, problem exploration and contracting; information gathering, problem confirmation and goal setting; solution searching and intervention selection; and evaluation and termination. The preentry phase is explained as regular self-assessment of the consultant and their ability to solve the problem. This phase is seen as a critical aspect in a consultant’s approach toward clients’ personal beliefs and creation of a conceptual framework for solving the problem. The entry phase, i.e. the phase in which the problem is explored and the process is contracted, is crucial to the success of the consultancy process. This is the phase in which, according to Czerniawska (2006), promises are made. Promises are the basis for a

successful client-consultant relationship, client satisfaction and a good reputation of the consultant (Czerniawska, 2006). Without a clear purpose and goals, the consulting project will fail (Werr & Styhre, 2002). The entry phase should provide a better understanding of the problem and the culture around the problem. Every stage of change (development, maintenance, decline and crisis) requires a different approach, but also an understanding of the clients’ readiness to embrace change. If the client does not accept change, Kurpius et al. (1993) suggest not to accept the project, since there is little opportunity for making some changes and the end results will not satisfy either the client or the consultant. The consultancy process continues with information gathering and solution searching. The last phase, evaluation and termination, provides further development of the relationship between the client and the consultant, but also building a good reputation for consultants.

According to Kurpius et al. (1993), determinants of the successful consultancy process are: a system or a client open to change, an effective working relationship, good data, supportive change culture, accurate problem definition and accurate implementation of the solutions. A successful consultancy process will ensure optimal results for both parties, clients and consultants.

4. Consultancy process in SMEs

The consultancy process is rarely seen as an important topic among researchers, especially those researching SMEs (Sturdy, 2011; Glodek et al., 2016). According to Sim & Rogers (2008), despite the importance of SMEs, there has been scant research on their demand for external advice that would increase their competitiveness. Furthermore, there is a lack of theory about SMEs and their requirements in the consultancy process (Curran, 2000).

According to Bennett & Robson (1999), SMEs have a greater need for external advice than larger enterprises, but they are also more reluctant to ask for advice. Because of that reluctance to seek external advice, there are a considerable number of government initiatives and business support institutions aimed at encouraging SME demand for consultancy services (Bennett & Robson, 1999; Gibb, 2000; Delić & Alpeza, 2017).

In SMEs, researchers have found evidence that consultancy enables “a closer link between the business

and technical part, better use of skills, knowledge and accountability of people” (da Costa et al., 2020, p. 672). Consultants’ work is closely related to high productivity, a higher level of performance and improved knowledge flow through client-consultant connections (Fincham, 2010). Consultants are associated with shaping new perspectives, enabling changes, but also, according to Bergh & Gibbons (2011), with increased profitability. Research results suggest the necessity of training owners/managers while providing advice (Soriano et al., 2002; Salvador et al., 2019).

Interactive processes between consultants and clients in the SMEs are poorly understood (Engwall & Kipping, 2006). Although the consultancy process in SMEs will follow the same phases as the one in big enterprises, the relationship between the client and the consultant is more emphasized. Clark (1995) argues that this relationship should be very close, personal and trustful, and allow exchange of information on problems to be solved between the client and the consultant. Berry and Sweeting (2006) proved that among the determinants in the consultancy process for SMEs, the key roles are played by the “soft” ones: trust, relationships and professional ethics in the provision of business advice. Trust and reputation of the consultant can reduce information asymmetry (Clark, 1993). However, building reputation and trust is a process that takes time and requires repeated interactions (Salvador et al., 2019).

Although relationship appears to be the most important determinant in the consultancy processes, a critical view of consultants reveals one more “bottleneck” in the process, which is especially important for SMEs. Haas & Hansen (2005) argue that knowledge transfer should be thoroughly

designed, since using knowledge can reduce task performance. Their findings suggest that in certain situations advice can increase the chances of losing projects, while the experience of the team increases them. Their conclusion was that knowledge utilization has an inverted U-shape specification, where effective design of knowledge transfer, together with carefully tailored promises, can bridge major bottlenecks in the consulting process.

5. Methodology

This paper is focused on the identification of the key determinants of a successful consultancy process when advising new entrepreneurs who started their business after being laid off from long-term employment in a public company. Considering the nature of the research topic, the study relies on qualitative research in attempt to understand the social and cultural context of the researched phenomenon (Silverman, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). A layoff in this case was a consequence of a large restructuring process of the company. Through contracting an external company, as part of the layoff support scheme, the company provided different kinds of support for employees who lost their jobs. Those who opted for self-employment were supported through training and consultancy in the first phase of their new venture creation. Consultants were contracted based on their previous experience of working with entrepreneurs, especially in terms of supporting processes of starting new businesses.

This research follows the training and consultancy process of five entrepreneurs in Eastern Croatia, which began in 2018 (Table 2). The most recent follow-up of their businesses was conducted in 2023, and is included in this paper.

Table 2 Main characteristics of entrepreneurs who participated as clients in the consultancy process

Code	Age	Work experience (years)	Business idea	Key competencies
C1	59	40	transportation service	willing to learn, conscientious
C2	51	33	transportation of firewood	willing to learn
C3	51	34	dried meat production	persistent, willing to work
C4	56	35	handyman services	good communication skills
C5	50	35	retirement home	experience in the sector and industry

Source: Authors

All clients were over the age of 50, with more than 30 years of work experience. Clients participated in 3 workshops, lasting for 4 hours each, on entrepreneurial process, strategy and planning, small business management, financial planning, negotiation skills and marketing. After completing the training, the consultancy process started with each of the five entrepreneurs choosing one of the trainers to work with in the consultancy process. The consultancy process lasted for three sessions during a two-month period.

Information on the progress made during the consultancy process was documented in the form of a questionnaire, where consultants described in detail the progress and challenges their client faced, as well as recommendations for the client and next steps in the consultancy process. In this research project, written observations of consultants were analyzed by using the interpretative approach where researcher focused on the wider context of the analyzed text (Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

In addition to data collected in the form of questionnaires filled in by the consultants, data were also collected from the five entrepreneurs who

participated in the training and consultancy process. They filled in an evaluation sheet about their satisfaction with the training and consultancy process they participated in. The evaluation sheet combined both open-ended questions and numeric evaluation. Numeric evaluation provided an insight into the most and least successful aspects of the training and consultancy process.

Data collection also included telephone interviews conducted in July 2023 with trained entrepreneurs, where researchers identified the current state of their ventures. The information was double-checked by researching the database of the active companies and crafts in Eastern Croatia in July 2023.

6. Results

Prior to consultancy sessions and trainings, consultants were familiarized with the socio-demographic data of the five new entrepreneurs who participated in the program. The consultancy process followed the five-phase cycle (Kurpius et al., 1993) adjusted to the peculiarities of SMEs (Table 3).

Table 3 Phases of the consultancy process tailored to new entrepreneurs who have decided to start their businesses

Phase	Activities
Preentry	In this phase, consultants were contacted and chosen according to their experience in consulting SMEs, especially start-ups. Based on the socio-demographic data of participants shared with consultants prior to the initiation of the training program, consultants prepared a personalized plan for training. Consultants agreed to provide written reports (questionnaires) with their observations after each consulting session for the purpose of analyzing the progress of the participants and effects of the consultancy process.
Entry	The entry phase was a first contact between clients and consultants. All clients presented their business idea and explained why they have decided to start pursuing a career as entrepreneurs instead of trying to find a job, which was an alternative option they could opt for and get support. Clients were introduced with the training schedule, which was the first part of the consulting process. The training program consisting of 3 workshops was implemented during a two-month period.
Information gathering, problem confirmation and goal setting	After the training program was completed, consultancy sessions started, with the idea to work one-on-one on developing client's business ideas. The main task of this phase was to collect all information and data that could affect development of their business ideas. Clients also explained their goals and together with consultants they prepared an oral agreement on their deliveries (promises). Clients needed help in early development phases of their ventures where they secured the initial capital from their previous employer (severance pay). During the consultancy process it became apparent that all five program participants opted to become entrepreneurs, while their family members were already involved in entrepreneurial activity, in most cases in the informal market.

Phase	Activities
Solution searching and intervention selection	Consultants provided advice regarding strategy, marketing, and financial management. After completing the training and consultancy process that lasted for four months, entrepreneurs were left on their own. Since that was not part of the contract, consultants did not monitor future venture development.
Evaluation and termination	After completing the training and consultancy program, clients completed evaluation sheets to provide feedback on the usefulness of the training and consultancy support. Five years after completing the program, clients were contacted again to check if their enterprises were still operating and to which extent the program was helpful.

Source: Authors' research

Consultants' observations on the consultancy process
 Preentry and entry phases in the consultancy process were carried according to the recommendations and results of previous research. The information gathering and problem definition phase revealed that four out of five clients are already helping their family enterprises. That phase helped

consultants better understand professional, psychological, and social needs of the clients. Based on the analysis of the consultants' questionnaires, motivation for starting a business of new entrepreneurs was identified, as well as key challenges new entrepreneurs faced at the beginning of their entrepreneurial journey (Table 4).

Table 4 Client needs and problem identification

Code	Age	Motivation to start a business	Client challenges
C1	59	Working together with their son, who already has experience in the transport industry	How to formalize the ownership and management structure with their son? How to reach financial sustainability?
C2	51	Previous education on a topic relevant to the business idea	How to reach financial sustainability? How to find customers? How to research a low-budget market?
C3	51	Developed quality product	Pricing strategy How to reach the break-even point and how to calculate it?
C4	56	Helping their son in the realization of his business idea in managing his own business	How to find a niche? How to ensure consistency in product quality?
C5	50	Being one's own boss	What are the key regulations that need to be followed in the industry? How to become financially sustainable? What is my competitive advantage?

Source: Authors

The process of finding solutions was done through individual consultancy sessions with consultants in the fields identified as the weak points of aspiring entrepreneurs. Consultants served as facilitators, but, according to consultants' observations, clients did not want to be involved actively in the process - they expected fully formed solutions to their problems. All clients were aware that they had to change their career paths but were not willing to make radical changes.

Client satisfaction with training and consultancy process

The termination phase of the consultancy process revealed client satisfaction with the training and a change in the clients' level of knowledge about key subjects (marketing, finance and business idea evaluation), the consultancy process and consultants (Graph 1). On a scale from 1 (indicating the lowest level of satisfaction) to 5 (indicating the highest level of satisfaction), the participants gave the consultants the highest rating, and the business idea development workshop the lowest.

Graph 1 Client evaluation of the training and consultancy process



Source: Authors

In the narrative part of their evaluation, the clients emphasized the usefulness of the consultancy process, but also suggested alternative ways of support that might better meet their needs (C3). Clients complained that the training started too late (they were unemployed for one year before the process started), and that the training process was too fast (C1, C4). It was challenging for them to cope with so many new terms in such short timeframe. Although they were satisfied with the amount of new knowledge, they felt a little bit confused with all the tasks before them (C2). They all emphasized that they would benefit more if this consultancy support continued for a longer period. The clients were satisfied with the professionalism of the consultants. Consultants were available throughout the process and always willing to help (C5).

The evaluation process revealed the bottlenecks already identified in previous research, but it also indicated that expectations and objectives of the client play an important role. A successful consultancy process in SMEs requires a close relationship, a closely designed learning process, and promises that can be fulfilled. In the entry phase, which was done by the contracting organization, the information that four clients had already worked in their family businesses was neglected, but that information was crucial to the consultancy process.

Evaluation of the process after a five-year period through semi-structured telephone interviews showed that only one client/entrepreneur that participated in the program is still running their business, thanks to strong support of their family members. Other clients, although very grateful for the knowledge and experience, continued working for their established family businesses as employees.

Prior to the initiation of the consultancy process, no evaluation of the entrepreneurial characteristics of clients was conducted. Such data could have been very useful for the consultants while designing training activities, but also for individual consultancy sessions with the clients.

7. Conclusion

The main contribution of this paper is the examination of the consultancy process for new entrepreneurs. A detailed analysis of the consultancy process revealed not only crucial determinants but also bottlenecks that can be avoided in the future.

The research results revealed different roles of the consultants while providing advice for new entrepreneurs or SMEs. The consultants had to provide necessary information, advice, and solutions, but also facilitate the learning process of clients. Suc-

cess of the consultancy process depends on the characteristics of the consultants and entrepreneurs, problem identification, client goals, but also on the ability of the consultant to build a trustful and close relationship with the client. When the consultants overlook crucial information, there is a danger that the entire consulting process becomes too vague. The consultancy process observed in this project has been conducted under special circumstances since the clients did not have to pay for consultants' work and advice. The consultants were contracted by the former employer, with the idea that this could encourage clients to use consultants' advice in their career change. Therefore, the clients can be seen neither as victims nor as controllers of the process. Nevertheless, since the clients had the opportunity to seek specific advice or expertise, they could decide whether to implement consultants' advice or not.

Although open to take part in the consultancy process, the clients had their own agendas - joining family businesses or helping family members with knowledge and advice rather than starting their own enterprises. These agendas were revealed only later in the consultancy process. The consultants could have provided better and more suitable training and advice if the client goals had been revealed in the preentry phase.

During the process, the consultants aimed to provide all the information the clients needed within

the timeframe predetermined by the contractor. This created a situation in which the clients received too much information and data in a short period of time, which prevented them from effectively internalizing it. On the other hand, the consultants did not have enough time to focus on the creation of a close and trustful relationship with the clients. Since the consultancy process was contracted before the consultants had the opportunity to meet the clients and identify problems that needed to be solved, the process itself was steered in a different direction. The consultants had to complete the whole process in four months, which was not enough for training, advice and relationship building.

Research results in this paper are limited by a small sample consisting of five new entrepreneurs, providing an overview of the consultancy process on the emerging market, with clients that had to change their career paths. Despite its limitations, the paper provides an insight into the typical consultancy process with new entrepreneurs. Most government supported consultancy programs are designed similarly to the one described in this paper, with the goal to encourage entrepreneurs to seek help from a consultant more often. Identifying bottlenecks in the process could help practitioners and policy makers create more effective approaches. Future research should focus on the characteristics of senior entrepreneurs as clients in the consultancy process.

References

1. Bennett, R. J. & Robson, P. J. A. (1999). Intensity of Interaction in Supply of Business Advice and Client Impact: A Comparison of Consultancy, Business Associations and Government Support Initiatives for SMEs. *British Journal of Management*, 10(4), 351-369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00144>
2. Bergh, D. D. & Gibbons, P. (2011). The stock market reactions to the hiring of management consultants: a signaling theory approach. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(3), 544-567. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00957.x>
3. Bergholz, H. (1999). Do More Than Fix My Company. *Journal of Management Consulting*, 10(4), 29-33.
4. Berry, A. J. & Sweeting, R. (2006). The effect of business advisers on the performance of SMEs. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 13(1), 33-47. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14626000610645298>
5. Biech, E. (2019). *The New Business of Consulting: The Basics and Beyond*. John Wiley & Sons.
6. Block, P. (2000). *Flawless Consulting*. Jossey-Bass Pfeifer.
7. Bloomfield, B. & Best, A. (1992). Management Consultants: System Developments, Power and the Translation of Problems. *The Sociological Review*, 40(3), 567-576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1992.tb00401.x>
8. Cerruti, C., Tavoletti, E. & Grieco, C. (2019). Management consulting: a review of fifty years of scholarly research. *Management Research Review*, 42(8), 902-925. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-03-2018-0100>
9. Chandler, G. (1973). Providing training in behavior modification techniques for school personnel. In Claiborn, W. L. & Cohen, R. (Eds.), *School Interventions*. Behavioral Publications.
10. Clark, T. (1993). The market provision of management services, information asymmetries and service quality - some market solutions: An empirical example. *British Journal of Management*, 4(4), 235-251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.1993.tb00061.x>
11. Clark, T. (1995). *Managing Consultants: Consultancy as the Management of Impressions*. Open University Press.
12. Clark, T. & Salaman, G. (1998). Telling Tales: Management Gurus Narratives and the Construction of Managerial Identity. *Journal of Management Studies*, 35(2), 137-161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00088>
13. Connely, B. L., Miller, T. & Devers, C. E. (2012). Under a cloud of suspicion: Trust, distrust, and their interactive effect in interorganizational contracting. *Strategic Management Journal*, 33(7), 820-833. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.974>
14. Christensen, P. R. & Klyver, K. (2006). Management consultancy in small firms: how does interaction work?. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 13(3), 299-313. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14626000610680217>
15. Crucini, C. & Kipping, M. (2001). Management consultancies as global change agents? Evidence from Italy. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 11(6), 570-588. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000006143>
16. Curran, J. (2000). What is small business policy in the UK for? Evaluation and assessing small business policies. *International Small Business Journal*, 18(3), 36-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242600183002>
17. Czerniawska, F. (2004). What Sets Excellent Consulting Apart? *Consulting to Management*, 15(3), 47-49.
18. Czerniawska, F. (2006). Consultant: good consulting firm: bad. *Consulting to Management*, 17(2), 3-5.
19. da Costa, R. J. L., Dias, A. L., Pereira, L., Santos, J. & Miguel, I. (2020). The basis for a constructive relationship between management consultants and clients (SMEs). *Business: Theory and Practice*, 21(2), 666-674. <https://doi.org/10.3846/btp.2020.11872>
20. Damanpour, F. & Schneider, M. (2009). Characteristics of Innovation and Innovation Adoption in Public Organizations: Assessing the Role of Managers. *Journal of Public Administrations Research & Theory*, 19(3), 495-522. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mun021>

21. Delic, A. & Alpeza, M. (2017). Consultancy Services Market for Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Croatia. *Economic Review: Journal of Economics and Business*, 15(2), 53-61.
22. Drucker, P. F. (1979). Why management consultants? In Melvin. Z. & Greenwood, R. G. (Eds.), *The Evolving Science of Management*. AMACOM.
23. Engwall, L. & Kipping, M. (2006). Management education, media and consulting and the creation of European management practice. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences Research*, 19(1), 95-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610600607973>
24. Fincham, R. (1999). The consultant-client relationship: Critical perspectives on the management of organizational change. *Journal of Management Studies*, 36(3), 335-352. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00139>
25. Fincham, R. & Clark, T. (2002). Preface: Management Consultancy: Issues, Perspectives, and Agendas. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 32(4), 3-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2002.11043673>
26. Fincham, R. (2010). The client in the client-consultant relationship. In Clark, M. & Kipping, T. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Management Consultancy*. Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199235049.013.0020>
27. Fincham, R., Mohe, M. & Seidl, D. (2013). Management Consulting and Uncertainty: Mapping the Territory. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 43(3), 3-10. <https://doi.org/10.2753/IMO0020-8825430300>
28. Furusten, S. (2009). Management consultants as improvising agents on stability, *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 25(3), 264-274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2009.05.009>
29. Gibb, A. (2000). SME policy, academic research and the growth of ignorance, mythical concepts, myths, assumptions, rituals and confusions. *International Small Business Journal*, 18(3), 13-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242600183001>
30. Glodek, P., Stawasz, E., Lobacz, K. & Niedzielski, P. (2016). Development of competitive advantage of small innovative firm - the role of use and utilisation of business advice. *Business & Management Review*, 8(3), 67-78.
31. Haas, M. R. & Hansen, M. T. (2005). When using knowledge can hurt performance: The value of organizational capabilities in a management consulting company. *Strategic Management Journal*, 26(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.429>
32. Haslam, S. (2017). *Consulting Skills for Social Researchers*. Policy Press. <https://doi.org/10.56687/9781447333876>
33. Hicks, J., Nair, P. & Wilderom, C. P. M. (2009). What if we shifted the basis of consulting from knowledge to knowing?. *Management Learning*, 40(3), 289-310. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507609104341>
34. Johnson, P. & Duberley, J. (2000). *Understanding Management Research: An Introduction to Epistemology*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020185>
35. Karantinou, K. & Hogg, M. (2001). Exploring relationship management in professional services - A study of management consultancy. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 17(3-4), 263-286.
36. Kipping, M. (2002). Trapped in Their Wave: The Evolution of Management Consultancies. In Clark, T. & Fincham, R. (Eds.), *Critical Consulting: New Perspectives on the Management Advice Industry*. Blackwell.
37. Kubr, M. (1996). *Management Consulting: A Guide to the Profession*. International Labour Organization.
38. Kurpius, D. J., Fuqua, D. R. & Rozecki, T. (1993). The Consulting Process: A Multidimensional Approach. *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 71(6), 601-606. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1993.tb02249.x>
39. Kurpius, D. J. & Robinson, S. E. (1978). An Overview of Consultation. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 56(6), 321-323. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1978.tb04637.x>

40. Maister, D. (1993). *Managing the Professional Service Firm*. Free Press.
41. Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (3rd ed). SAGE.
42. Newton, R. (2019). *The Management Consultant: Mastering the Art of Consultancy* (2nd ed). Financial Times Publishing.
43. Nikolova, N., Mollering, G. & Reihlen, M. (2015). Trusting as a “leap of faith”: Trust-building practices in client-consultant relationships. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 31(2), 232-245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2014.09.007>
44. O’Mahoney, J. & Markham, C. (2013). *Management Consultancy* (2nd ed). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hebz/9780199645473.001.0001>
45. O’Shea, J. & Madigan, C. (1998). *Dangerous Company*. Penguin Books.
46. Salvador, E., El Asraoui, H. & Akbaraly, M. (2019). The difficult relationship between the consultancy market and SMEs: inspiring insights from the case of Drome. *Revue de l’Entrepreneurial*, 18(4), 127-157. <https://doi.org/10.3917/entre.183.0133>
47. Sartain, L. (1998). Why and How Southwest Airlines Uses Consultants. *Journal of Management Consulting*, 10(2), 12-17.
48. Schein, E. H. (1978). The Role of the Consultant: Content Expert or Process Facilitator? *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 56(6), 339-343. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1978.tb04644.x>
49. Sim, K. L. & Rogers, J. W. (2008). Implementing lean production systems: barriers to change. *Management Research News*, 32(1), 37-49. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01409170910922014>
50. Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*. SAGE.
51. Soriano, D., Roig, S., Sanchis, J. R. & Torcal, R. (2002). The role of consultants in SMEs: The use of services by Spanish industry. *International Small Business Journal*, 20(1), 95-103. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242602201007>
52. Stroh, L. K. (2019). *The Basic Principles of Effective Consulting*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351007849>
53. Sturdy, A. (2009). Popular critiques of consultancy and a politics of management learning?. *Management Learning*, 40(4), 457-463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507609339686>
54. Sturdy, A. (2011). Consultancy’s consequences? A critical assessment of management consultancy’s impact on management. *British Journal of Management*, 22(3), 517-530. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2011.00750.x>
55. Turner, A. N. (1982). Consulting Is More Than Giving Advice. *Harvard Business Review*, 60(5), 120-129.
56. Werr, A. & Styhre, A. (2002). Management Consultants - Friend or Foe? Understanding the Ambiguous Client-Consultant Relationship. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 32(4), 43-66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2002.11043670>