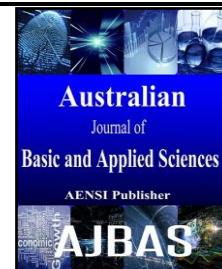




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Consultant-client Interaction: An analysis from the Consultants' Discursive Manifestations

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze the Consultants' discursive manifestations in relation to the three proposed models of interaction by Nikolova and DeVinney (2012): specialist model; social learning model and critical model. Several authors mention that Consulting companies have been increasingly assuming influential position in the destinations of firms. Perceptions of these theorists, however, differ with regard to the effective contribution of these agents in the obtained result and the way of interaction between consultants and clients (interactive dyad between agents). To fulfill the objective of research, qualitative methodology was adopted. Twelve semi-structured interviews with consultants were performed and resorted to the technique of discourse analysis to discuss the results. These elements showed that for the three conceptual models of interaction eventually coexist within the same organizational reality. At all times, the interactions in the dyad are based heavily on technical, social and political elements. It was found that the weight of each of these elements within the interactions (dyad) set varies with the type of organizational problem, the design phase, established objectives and customer profile. There is a consensus that knowledge transferred by Consultancies to the customers raises the level of management maturity of companies and contributes to accelerate their learning process.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that in the face of organizational dynamics, a group has taken on an increasingly prominent position of influence: Consulting companies. In a relatively short period, Consultants came to occupy an important space - social and economic, in modern organizations, becoming frequent in the firms' management (Kipping and Clark, 2012). In the academy, the understanding of the Consulting industry as an important vector of influence of modern organizations (echoing the very evolution of administrative sciences) is somehow consensual. However, perceptions of the theorists differ with regard to the legitimacy of the practices employed in the actual contribution of these agents results obtained and the form of interaction between

consultants and clients (interactive dyad between agents).

Some authors emphasize the importance of customer involvement throughout all stages of the project, emphasizing its active role in achieving the proposed outcomes (Schein, 1977; Argyris, Schön, 1974; Argyris, 1970). Other authors, in turn, report that consultants tend to relate to their clients having as its primary concern the sale of projects and the renewal of contracts, to the detriment of effective problem solving (Alvesson *et al.* 2009). The literature that intends to reveal these aspects characterize Consultancies such as persuasion systems, in which the main role of consultants is managing the impressions of the customers and convincing them about the value of their work.

After a review of different perceptions, DeVinney and Nikolova (2012) proposed a

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framework that synthesizes Consultant-customer (interactional dyad) interaction into three conceptual models: (i) expert model that highlights the role of the Consultant as 'advisor', able to solve the customers' problems due to its managerial expertise; (ii) social learning model, which emphasizes the role of the Consultant as a 'helper', reinforcing the interdependence between consultants and clients; and (iii) critical model, centered on political and symbolic practices of Consultants aspects, describing Consultancies as persuasive systems, as promoters of management fads.

Taking as starting point the three conceptual models of interaction proposed by Nikolova and DeVinney (2012) the following question was sought to be answered: How do the Consultants' discursive manifestations relate to the conceptual models of interaction between consultants and clients? The goal, therefore, is to know which is placement of Consultants on the different approaches. The proposed research aims to analyze the process of intervention, not from functional aspects, guided primarily on financial indicators and other organizational metrics, but from the standpoint of what is relational and subjective, constructed out of social relations with various organizational groups involved.

Importantly, the study of the three approaches has no intention encompassing all the complexity involved in the relationship between consultants and clients. However, the models bring to light some familiar and recurring aspects of Management Consulting, which allows an initial reflection on the subject, considering its main assumptions and impacts. This study therefore aims to contribute to the development of a broader analytical basis about management Consultancies, addressing its relationship with customers, its position face with the criticism and its influence on the process of improving the organizational management.

2 Literature Revision:

According to Hirschle and Siqueira (2006) conceptualizing and discussing Consulting is a complex task due to the fact that this industry has expanded in a transnational and multifaceted way. Kipping and Clark (2012) argue that the Consulting's nature is highly dynamic and that there were significant changes in the composition of the Consulting industry over time. The next topics were written in an attempt to briefly present the state of the art discussion of this issue, without however, intending to exhaust the debate.

2.1. Management Consulting: concepts and context:

Kubr (2002) understands the Consulting as a method of providing practical advice to clients, with a focus on improving not only management practices but also individual and organizational performance.

Accordingly, Management Consulting can be understood as a professional service performed by people trained and experienced in order to assist in the identification and resolution of problems of various institutions (Kipping and Clark, 2012, p. 2).

According to this perspective, the Consultant is understood as an expert able to solve their clients' problems. Such an approach echoed in many subsequent definitions related to the term. Study *et al.* (2009) also highlight the important role of consultants as a source of information, ie, as mediators and promoters of knowledge inside the organizations.

Another widespread approach in the literature discusses Consulting from the procedural relationship established between consultants and clients. The focus moves from the image of the Consultant as an expert / advisor for interaction and mutual learning between consultants and clients.

According to Sturdy *et al.* (2009), Consultants are seen as modern organizations key players, symbols of social change because of its generation and dissemination of knowledge. The authors state that, according to Thrift (2005), Consulting is a vital part of the new capitalism prevailing culture (Sturdy *et al.*, 2009) and although the Consulting industry has developed throughout the twentieth century, the Consulting's large growth occurred from the beginning of the eighties (Oliveira, 1999, p.29). Over the last thirty years, the sector had a notorious and continuous growth, with a permanent place among the fastest growing activities in the economy (Donadone, 2003).

Among the reasons driving the growth of the consulting industry, we have: increasing demand for services related to mergers and acquisitions in the private sector, the broad movement of privatization of public organizations and especially the instability of the economic environment leading organizations to seek external help (Paula and Wood JR., 2008). In response to the growing demand, supply management packs proliferated in Consultancies, guided mainly in information technology by the Japanese model of management and reengineering and downsizing practices.

Between the beginning of the eighties and nineties, the sales of the Consulting business grew by 630%, from \$ 3 billion to approximately \$ 22 billion. In 1995, this value had already doubled, reaching \$ 40 billion. In 2000, it is estimated that the sector had already surpassed the \$ 100 billion (Donadone, 2010). Kipping and Clark (2012) point out that in 2010 the global market Consulting generated about \$ 150 billion, considering only the slice of a marketplace to management Consultancies.

The influence of Consultants extrapolates the work they do within firms and organizations. With constant presence in the media, celebrated Consultants occupy often place of evidence in corporate events, websites, magazines and books

aimed at management executives (Kipping and Clark, 2012). According to Paula and Wood Jr. (2008), the number of columns and articles in business magazines in which members of Consulting companies expose their ideas is increasing. Many management books have also been written by consultants, and many even among the best-selling category. At the governmental level, reflecting its growing influence, the term consultocracy has emerged (Saint-Martin, 2000 apud Sturdy, 2011).

Despite the substantial importance in the economic and organizational setting, from a theoretical point of view, the interest of the academy by the various management Consulting nuances is relatively recent (Kipping and Clark, 2012; Sturdy *et al.*, 2009; Alvesson *et al.*, 2009; Appelbaum; Steed, 2005; Donadone, 2003; Kipping, 2002). The volume of scholar studies has intensified, especially after the nineties, following the movement of notorious growth and visibility acquired by the sector.

According to Kipping and Clark (2012), three main reasons ensure the merit of Consulting management as an important research topic: (i) the fact that the industry's revenue has grown at rates higher than the indexes of the economy, increasing even in periods of crisis; (ii) the fact that the Consulting industry has strengthened, increasingly, among the large employers of skilled labor and egress of the best undergraduate and graduate in the world; (iii) the fact that their activities have impacted a growing number of organizations and even society as a whole.

2.2. Management Consultancies Criticisms:

Parallel to the reputation acquired by Consultancies in recent decades, concerns and questions emerged concerning the legitimacy and value of their practices. Driven by academic literature and by the popular business media, criticism about consulting activities has grown remarkably.

Among the main criticisms to the sector are those that address the effectiveness of the results and the standardization of the proposed solutions, as well as questioning the dependency relationship between consultants and clients. Caldas (1999) supports this view and argues that consultants tend to stimulate the sale of managerial packages, which, soon after, will be replaced by new panaceas in order to generate a lasting and continuous demand for their services. In allusion made by Caldas (1999), the Consultants would standardize the "medicine" of its customers even before its administrative diagnoses pathologies.

Another important point made by Gonçalves (1991) is that the industry still lacks conceptual sedimentation. Many of the practices of Consultants occur in the field of experimentation. Thus, the results appear at the bottom of the test-error adjustment. Sturdy (2011) adds the difficulty of

isolating the effect of Consulting service of other variables that also influence the organizational result.

Another problematic issue pointed out by the literature concerns the hiring of consultants in order to legitimize internal organizational practices. As noted in Sturdy (2011) and Sturdy *et al.* (2009), there are cases where consultants are hired, not to bring new knowledge to their customers, but only to confirm or legitimize existing internally understandings defended by certain group, usually linked to the levels of the middle and upper management. According to the author, in these cases, the Consultant assumes the scapegoat role.

Skepticism and criticism to the practices of Consultants are present not only in the literature (whether academic or business), but also within the organizational context and according to Sturdy (2011) there is a significant niche of organizations that choose not to hire Consultants.

2.3 Consultant – Client Interaction (interactional dyad):

The Consulting, in its essence, is the provision of service activity and, therefore, requires the interaction and customer engagement (Fincham, 2012; Appelbaum; Steed, 2005). To Kubr (2002), it is established by the interaction with their customers that the Consultants reinforce one of its great advantages: the knowledge gained from accumulation of organizational practice. "They [Consultants] learn from lived experience and the know-how accumulated by the Consultancy companies. However, experience and know-how in the field of management and business practices emerge mainly from the work alongside customers" (KUBR, 2002, p. 5).

The relationship established between consultants and clients (interactional dyad) becomes a two-way street: while the Consultants deploy improvements and transfer knowledge to their clients, they also learn from the experienced practices and thus strengthen their own knowledge and ability to advise clients (Kubr, 2002).

Sturdy (1997) argues that it is important to pay attention to the interactive nature of Consulting process and, in particular, the active role of customers. Once the Consultant has no authority to implement the proposed changes, the client becomes more and more involved in the projects. It has been common, including the formation of mixed teams between consultants and clients with results and shared responsibilities (Paula and Wood JR, 2008).

However, as evidenced by the same authors, the increased customer involvement in consulting projects can trigger a series of conflicts between the actors involved. To the extent that the Consultant is beyond the advisory role and shall be called to participate in the actual process of implementing changes, it is necessary to increasingly enter the social sphere and political organizations.

In addition, it is noteworthy that in analyzing the Consultant-client interaction (interactional dyad) the customer approach is usually emphasized as a single unchanging entity, which Alvesson *et al.* (2009) define as the perspective of the monolithic client. The big problem with this approach is that it tends to neglect important aspects of the relationship between consultants and clients. A more detailed analysis reveals a heterogeneous group of clients with different interests and inclinations and playing different roles within the Consulting projects (Fincham, 2012; Alvesson *et al.*, 2011; Sturdy *et al.*, 2009; Schein, 1977).

2.3.1 Models of interaction between consultants and clients (interactional dyad):

Nikolova and DeVinney (2012), to revisit the main points of the theoretical framework on Consultancy, indicate that despite the plurality of approaches, it is possible to identify two opposing poles on which the literature is founded: functionalist approach versus critical approach.

On the one hand, Consultants are exalted as important agents of change who generate knowledge and introduce new perspectives in client organizations. The relationship between consultants and clients is seen in a pragmatic and linear optics. On the other hand, from a more critical perspective, an increasing number of studies that propose to question management practices and call into question the real value of the work of consultants. Factors relating to social issues (focus on Consultant-client interaction) and policies (focus on impression management, power relations) that permeate the relationship between consultants and clients (dyad) is relevant and take center stage in the analysis (Cornelissen, 2013; Nikolova and DeVinney, 2012).

Having a focal point for analyzing the interaction between consultants and clients, Nikolova and DeVinney (2012) propose three conceptual models that summarize the types of interaction: (i) expert model, (ii) social learning model and (iii) critical model, shown in CHART 1.

The expert model refers to concepts and approaches insurgents in the management Consulting's first phase. Possibly, it proposes the most stereotypical view about the activity. In this model, we understand the Consultant as an advisor and it is understood that their primary role is to impart technical knowledge for organizational clients. With regard to power relations, the model argues that consultants are holders of autonomy and power due to the accumulated knowledge and experience. According to this approach, customers are understood as dependent on the credibility and knowledge that the consultants' experience and work provide.

According to Nikolova and DeVinney (2012), this model tends to be more successful in well-

defined / specific routine projects, in which the solution is already clearly known and the client does not have the expertise and / or structure needed to operationalize it. Most of the problems with which the Consulting deals, however, is complex order, and the specialist model is shown bound to treat such issues, since it neglects the role and knowledge of customers.

In turn, the model of social learning emphasizes customer involvement as critical for the success of Consultancy projects. The rise occurred in the model since the traditional approach is no longer showed more efficient to respond complex demands, which appeared on the market. According to this perspective, the process of Consulting presupposes interdependent Consultants and customers, since knowledge of both complement each other. In solving problems, the Consultants work from their vast experience and managerial expertise and customers contribute through their deep knowledge of the processes and organizational relationships (NIKOLOVA and DeVinney, 2012; Schein, 1977). In this sense, customers have an active role in the process that is established, among other reasons, because they know well the intangible aspects of the organization, such as cultural and political elements.

However, just like the previous model, the social learning approach also has limitations. There is a danger that the focus on the Consultant-client relationship (interactional dyad) overlapping, for example, the need to research the problems and analysis of facts / data. Another point highlighted by Nikolova and DeVinney (2012) refers to the fact that the model does not provide an answer to the cases where there are differences between the positions and understandings of Consultants and customers.

Contrary to what the previous models assume, the critical approach adopts the premise that customers do not automatically notice the value of services provided by Consulting. Thereby "[...] Consultants need to persuade and impress their clients about the value of their work. In other words, is not the transferred knowledge but the impression management which is at the heart of Consultancy "(Nikolova and DeVinney, 2012, p.399). The impression management aims to bring legitimacy to acts performed by social actors and thereby help them to achieve the required facilities (Oliveira *et al.*, 2012). This approach has its origin in social constructivism and emphasizes the ambiguous and metaphorical nature, and the dependent knowledge context. More important than the aggregate knowledge is the generation of images and impressions and acts of rhetoric. Stories, symbols and metaphors are valuable tools that help consultants to engage in control and manipulate in interpretations and solve problems (Nikolova and DeVinney, 2012).

CHART 1: Models of the Client-Consulting Relationship: a summary of their main assumptions.

	The Expert Model	The Social Learning Model	The Critical Model
Key Works	Aharoni (1997); Gallessich (1982); Greiner and Metzger (1997); Wilkinson (1995).	Blake and Mouton (1983); McGivern (1983); McGivern and Fineman (1983); Schein (1987, 1988, 1999, 2002); Schön (1983, 1987).	Alvesson (1993, 1995, 2001); Clark (1995); Clark and Salaman (1996a, 1996b, 1998a, 1998b); Jackson (2001); Kieser (1997, 2002).
Metaphors	The consultant as 'seller of expertise' (Aharoni 1997) and a 'doctor' (Gallessich 1982).	The consultant as 'helper' (Schein 1999) and 'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983, 1987).	The consultant as rhetorician (Alvesson 1993, 1995); impression manager and storyteller (Clark 1995; Clark and Salaman 1996b); creator of management fads (Jackson 2001; Kieser 1997, 2002); and management's ally (Jackall 1988).
Nature of Consulting	Consulting is about solving clients' problems by transferring consultant's knowledge to the client organization.	Consulting is about assisting clients to solve their own problems by combining consultant's expertise with client's deep knowledge of their company in a process of framing and negotiating different perspectives and views.	Consulting is about creating the impression that clients are buying something of value; it also involves the creation and dissemination of management fads and fashions.
Nature of Knowledge	Consulting knowledge is decontextualized, objective, and rational.	Consulting knowledge is constructed through client's and consultant's action and interactions and is embedded in a client-specific context.	Consulting knowledge is ambiguous and idiosyncratic; images, stories, and symbols serve as 'rationality-surrogates'.
Nature of Asymmetry	Consultants as experts have the capacity to solve client's problems; the client is a lay persona and is more or less excluded from the problem-solving process (unidirectional knowledge asymmetry).	Client and consultant both possess knowledge important for the problem solution (mutual knowledge asymmetry).	Due to the intangible and interactive character of the consulting work, clients have difficulties in evaluating consultant's knowledge and the provided service prior and after it has been delivered (unidirectional knowledge asymmetry).
Nature of Interaction	The interaction consists of the transfer of information from client to consultant and the reciprocal transfer of solutions; the nature of communications channels, characteristics of message, and motivation and absorptive capacity of the involved individuals determine its success.	Client-consultant interaction is a joint learning process; it is the reciprocal, exploration, testing, and negotiation of client's and consultant's positions, interpretations, and experiences.	The interaction consists in consultants creating impressions, images, and stories whereas clients act as the audience; rhetorical skills and acts are important aspects of the interaction process.
Power Relations	Consultants as experts determine the problem solution on the basis of their expertise and professional judgement. The client is dependent on the knowledge of the expert and accepts consultant's authority (consulting-centric view).	Both consultant and client are powerful and interdependent because both parties possess relevant knowledge and make important contributions to the problem-solving process (a balanced relationship).	Consultants are powerful and persuasive actors; they use rhetoric, stories, and symbols to impress clients and sell management fads. The client is dependent on consultants and the management fads they create (consulting-centric view); the consultant's power is seen as an extension of top management's hierarchical power.

Source: Adaptation based on Nikolova and Devinney, 2012, p.391-392.

Taking a critical approach implies that all knowledge of Consulting is ambiguous and idiosyncratic, and therefore forms of knowledge that are less tangible and more pragmatic are ignored, such as technical expertise (Nikolova and DeVinney, 2012). The model also analyzes the management tooling implemented by consultants from the point of view of its symbolic function, disregarding its applicability and its ability to leverage operational and financial improvements for organizations.

Even though the approach of the models is comprehensive, the same authors conclude that the three perspectives do not exhaust all the complexity

of the relationship established between consultants and clients. A broader investigation would be required on the nature of the relationship, which could lead even to the creation of a fourth more complete model. Cornelissen (2013) adds that since all the complexity involved is framed in just three perspectives it is common for overlapping to occur between models.

Although it does not exhaust all the nuances surrounding the topic, the proposed models permeate the main points addressed in the literature and provide a rich debate about the various analyzes and

reflections on the Consultant-client relationship (interactional dyad).

3 Methodology:

This study is characterized as descriptive qualitative. According to Gonçalves and Meirelles (2004), qualitative research proves to be most appropriate when flexibility and depth in exploring ideas of the analysis units is wanted. The objective of this research was to investigate the values, experiences, practices and perceptions of Consultants in their relations and interactions with customers.

According to Godoy (1995), in qualitative research, events, factual elements of interaction, can be seen and understood in the context in which they occur, seeking to 'capture' the phenomenon under study from the perspective of those involved. So for the field research the technique of semi-structured interviews was chosen. The research subjects who comprised the data collection stage were Management Consultants that operate in consulting companies with head-offices in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte/MG–Brazil. Companies where the twelve consultants work here will be referred to as: Consulting A, Consulting B and Consulting C.

To analyze the results, we used the speech analysis technique, which Godoi (2006) stresses that the use of this technique allows incorporating the cognitive analysis as well as the agents' cultural and social aspects by language (predominantly oral verbal).

According to Oliveira *et al.* (2012), the speech is not only a form of communication, but also the space where social and interpersonal relationships occur. According to the author, the use of the technique has been increasingly broad in studies that focus on the social processes as signs of the production. According to Cabral (1999) the great technical contribution is due to the fact that it allows pluralizing understanding of the subject matter by including silenced aspects, socio-cognitive, not always explicit and easily understood in the statements of individuals. The focus is, therefore, the interpretation of the judgment underlying the literal, semantic and immediately in search of understanding beyond headlines and in a more deeply way. So Charaudeau (1996) points out that one must transcend the analysis beyond what is said (explicit). That is, understanding (almost) full of meaning will also require the involvement of implicit elements of language, expressions, and emotions.

Thus, through the analysis of the discursive manifestations of interviewed Consultants a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Consulting work was sought and the relationships established between consultants and clients (interactional dyad), considering said, the non-sayings and interdicts in the presented speeches.

4 Results and Conclusions:

Three Consulting firms composed the units of analysis. The Consulting was founded over twenty years ago and can be characterized as a large Consulting. Its major customers are large national and multinational companies and also government agencies. The B Consulting was founded over fifteen years ago and its target audience midsize businesses. The C Consulting has been operating for eight years on the market and consists of eight Consultants. Much of its clients are small and medium companies.

Semi-structured interviews with consultants of these three companies were performed and the twelve research subjects were classified according to the time of experiment and their role in the company where they work. CHART 2 summarizes the respondents' profile.

To present the results three categories were established to analyze statements that include the perspectives of interaction Consultant-client proposals by Nikolova and DeVinney (2012): specialist model; social learning model and critical model. From the analysis of the speeches, some subcategories emerged from these categories, covering the main characteristics of each model and also its limitations. As a result of data analysis three categories are presented and fourteen subcategories as CHART 3 shows.

It is noteworthy that for the analysis of the data there were not previously defined subcategories. There was, therefore, analysis of the speeches' outcome that appears organized here into thematic units. These cores reveal how individuals were positioned on the research topic.

4.1 Discursive manifestations of the expert model - technical knowledge, management expertise and the solution to organizational problems:

A- Consultant as Counselor and focus on managerial expertise:

For subjects of research, knowledge and experience of Consultants facilitate the organizational environment analysis process. Therefore, would be able to quickly identify the weaknesses of companies and offer its customers solutions that are in line with their real needs. The knowledge (and, ultimately, the very power) of the Consultant is legitimized by organizational experience gained over the years.

This approach reinforces the view Sturdy *et al.* (2009), for which the Consultants are configured as one of the main facilitators and promoters of knowledge management in organizations. Starting from the assumption that companies cannot absorb knowledge at the same rate that the Consultancy companies, the consultants see that by working in partnership with consultancies, organizations have the advantage of shortening their managerial knowledge acquisition process (Cornelissen, 2013).

The Consultancies enable businesses to acquire management expertise in a faster and more efficient

way, based on the Consultants' previous experiences.

CHART 2: Profile of Interviewed Consultants.

CONSULTANCY	CONSULTANTS' CATEGORY	EXPERIENCE LENGHT	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
A	Consultant-Partner	10 to 15 years	1
	Consultant-Senior	5 to 10 years	6
	Consultant-Junior	0 to 5 years	3
B	Consultant- Owner Partner	Over 15 years	1
C	Consultant- Owner Partner	Over 15 years	1

Source: Research's Data

CHART 3 : Analysis' Categories and Sub-categories.

ANALYSIS CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORY ANALYSIS
Discursive manifestations of the expert model	A- Consultant as The organizational advisor and focus on his managerial expertise
	B - Consulting, gurus and the organizational management development
Social Learning Model Discursive manifestations	A - The Consultant as a supporter of its customers;
	B - The involvement of the client throughout the Consulting process and rites of passage;
	C - The customer's responsibility and shared results;
	D - The transmission of knowledge and focus on training of customers;
	E - The Consulting customer on respondents' perspective ;
	F - Conflict in Consultant-client relationship.
Critical Model Discursive manifestations	A - It is not enough being good; you need to seem/look good!
	B - The impression management strategies.
	C - The Consulting and the power of high organizational management .
	D - Consulting Dysfunctions on the respondents' perspective.

Source: Developed by authors.

(...) The Consulting is a way to shorten the acquisition of knowledge of the companies. The knowledge it would take long to absorb, the Consulting enables it to be a smaller term. The company hires a Consultant, for his experience, because he has already done similar work in other companies. And with that the customer has access to a range of information and experiences that would take some years to achieve (says one of the interviewees, Senior-Consultant).

According to the interviewees, the differential of Consultants lies not only in the accumulated knowledge, but also in the fact that they can act on the organizational processes in a more impartial manner (given that the organization are external agents). The great merit of Consulting therefore resides in the ability to act on the organizational points where their customers are flawed, either because they do not have the necessary managerial knowledge or because they are unable to see their problems / limitations of a more comprehensive and systematic way (and less influenced by the issues of the day to day).

B- Consulting, gurus and the organizational management development:

The view that the Consulting enables a wider and differentiated organizational knowledge also appears at times when the interviewees justify why they chose the Consultant career. Given the dynamism and sector coverage, the consultants says in Consulting that they see a way to enhance their knowledge of organizational management. The

Consulting is perceived as a school, where consultants have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge from experience with different organizational realities. This view is seen in the speeches of junior consultants.

On the interviewees' perspective, to the extent that knowledge of Consultants translates into books and management manuals, their contribution goes beyond the limits of the projects in which they operate. The Consulting begins to contribute to the development of the concept of organizational management, since their management ideas can be replicated, even by organizations that are not used directly for their services.

Author's Considerations:

As approached by Nikolova and DeVinney (2012), the weight that managerial expertise assumes within the Consulting tends to vary according to the type of project. The approach of the specialist model seems, in fact, to be more successful in technical projects, in which the solution to be adopted is already clear, being part of the Consulting's job to execute it.

The analysis led to the debate on the nature of the project, which may signal that the knowledge of the Consultant, by itself, is not sufficient to ensure the proper performance of the work. Other elements are required to be, for example, greater customer involvement in the process. Therefore, the implementation of standardized solutions and previously determined by Consultants, seems to give way to the realization of projects that require a

broader understanding of organizational reality, which implies the need for greater involvement of the client with the work.

4.2 Social learning model discursive manifestations: customer engagement in the process of Consulting and the shared responsibility of the results:

A- The consultant as a supporter of his customers:

The relationship between consultants and clients was quite stressed by the research subjects. Some Consultants define themselves as supporters of their customers. Several times, when referring to the work they do respondents use terms such as: help, support, help and support. This view leaves implied the idea that customers should also have their share in the organizational performance improvement process. Although this understanding has been present in the speech of all respondents, the emphasis on the role of customers has been addressed in different ways by the Consultants.

Respondents stressed that, however much experience and managerial expertise the Consultant has; there are elements that are inherent to the organizational structure, so learning along the process shall be mutual. It is understood that both consultants and clients are holders of fundamental knowledge to solve the problems.

B- The involvement of the client throughout the Consulting process and rites of passage:

The Consultants describe the key moments in which customers are required to participate in the consulting process: after hiring, when seeking the mobilization and commitment of people who will actively participate in the project; validation of the data collected and analysis made; approval of leadership in relation to the proposed changes; and the rite of passage, where people involved in the work are again pooled and then proceeds to the project closing session.

Those interviewed therefore reinforce the roles of professional firms take over the project milestones. In this context, customer participation in Consultant process is associated primarily to two main points: i) the customers that provide and validate the information necessary for the smooth progress of the project, be it quantitative and / or qualitative; ii) periodic validations to the customer's leaders minimize the chances of dissatisfaction at the end of the project. Given that key stakeholders will always have a report of what is being done / planned, disagreements about work can be corrected in time. This view was highlighted mainly by consultants whose business focus concentrates on small and medium enterprises, which may be related to the type of project delivery and customer profiling itself.

C- The customer's responsibility and shared results:

The emphasis on the role of executor is also evident in the speeches. According to this view, the client effectively participates in the process of organizational change, engaging in problem analysis and implementation of actions. Questions were made by the interviewees as for the effectiveness of the results proposed by management Consulting companies in a short time work, are already able to identify organizational problems based solely on their expertise, neglecting customer engagement.

To the extent that the client is involved in consulting process, also becomes co-responsible for the reached results. For most interviewed Consultants, impairment of Consulting with improving organizational performance does not relieve the customer of his responsibility for the decisions taken. In this approach, Consultants reaffirm their role of counselors; hold a power that is defined as advisory. Therefore understand that, ultimately, it is up to the customer to decide whether or not they will accept the advice from the Consulting work. The consultants say that the responsibility for the outcome of the project cannot be fully attributed to Consulting because when interdependence between consultants and clients is established, good project performance is directly linked to the degree of partnership established between the two.

D- The knowledge transmission and the focus on customer training:

The focus on customers training was perceived in some speeches. According to the research subjects, the work of the consultants should be directed not only to the improvement of organizational management, but also to provide learning to the people involved over the projects. In view of the provisional character of Consulting, respondents maintain that learning is important so that the knowledge generated can be perpetuated in the organization after the work.

E- The consulting customer on the interviewees' perspective:

As assert Sturdy *et al.* (2009), within the client organization there are various customer groups, who have different interests and inclinations and perform different roles in the relationship that the company establishes with the hired Consulting. Customer plurality role was always present in the discursive manifestations on the interviewed Consultants. In general, the client's vision was summarized in three main approaches: (i) the role of the owners, executives or senior management leaders responsible for project contracting; (ii) the role of the areas / managers involved (directly or indirectly) in consulting projects; (iii) the role of the organizational entity, i.e. the design of the company as a whole. In each of these approaches, the Consultant-client

relation - dyad- is described from different perspectives.

The customer still in the role of the senior management leader, is also understood as the entity responsible for involving other individuals / employees in consulting project. At other times, in turn, when Consultants mention the customer role, they refer to the areas and / or managers who are involved in the projects, that is, to groups of customers who actually work and will be responsible for performing the actions planned. Respondents also refer to operational areas and managers when they talk about the resistance that may arise from the customers over the projects. Finally, it is observed that the respondents also use the term client when mention the company as a whole, that is, when referring to the organization in which consulting service was provided.

F- Conflicts in Consultant-client relation:

One of the points of conflict reported by respondents refers to situations in which clients request for Consulting work demands that are beyond the planned scope. The dilemma experienced by Consultants is whether the demands of their clients should or should not be incorporated into the project that is in progress. In such cases, there is a risk that the focus on Consultant-client relation overlaps the very own contracted work.

Interviewees claim that seeking customer participation and establishing a partnership is not always an easy task for advice. The Consultants show that the Consultant-client relationship (interactional dyad) is often complex and difficult to manage. By exposing the organizational problems, Consulting ends up exposing the work of the people involved. It is expected, therefore, that some areas become resistant to work, fearing that its inefficiencies are highlighted. In addition to the fear that the errors and inefficiencies are exposed, there is also the fear that the changes proposed by the Consultants involve cost-cutting and layoffs. Against the backdrop of doubts and fears, customers end up not adopting an open attitude to the project and, in some cases, they even hope that the implemented changes do not give out, as a way to justify the operational inefficiencies of areas in which they operate.

Authors' Considerations:

In the model of social learning, tacit knowledge that is inherent in the client organization becomes relevant within the scenario of management consulting. The customer is requested to contribute to the organizational process and takes an active role in the dynamics of the projects. The interaction between consultants and clients was one of the subjects of a higher recurrence in the speech of respondents. At various times the consultants

stressed the importance of customer knowledge and involvement throughout the consulting process.

4.3 Critical model discursive manifestations: impression management and the political aspects of the Consultant-client relationship:

A- It is not enough being good; you need to seem/look good:

It is understood that much of the work of consultants is related to the need to convince customers about the value of their practices. The impression management emerges as decisive factor for the Consulting projects to be understood as successful. So the consultants were unanimous that impression management is a critical factor in consulting projects. According to those interviewed, it is essential knowing to sell the customer the value of the work performed. In some cases this, this speech appears in a more concealed manner.

There's no point doing a great job and then not knowing how to turn in the result to the public that you are dealing with it. That's where the Consultant closes on a high note all the work he did. (says one of the interviewees).

At other times, explicitly talking up the importance of instilling the customer to know that the project was well done. It is evident in some lines that customers need to be convinced about the value and importance of the work performed. Implicitly, the speech reveals the intangible nature of the Consulting work and the fact that the customers will not always be able to assess the service being provided or measure the results. It would therefore be the Consultant's role to legitimize the value of their work, turning it into something tangible, objective and deserving of positive assessment of their clients.

B- The impression management strategies:

The elements used by consultants in the process of legitimation of their work are many. Certainly these elements will vary according to the project and the Consultant in question. Some aspects, however, seem always to be expected when defining the image of a good Consultant. Proper use of rhetoric was one of the main elements mentioned by respondents. When asked, for example, about the particular skills to be a good Consultant, all agreed that it is essential the ability to communicate properly.

It was noted that one of the respondents associated the ability to communicate with the Consultant's ability to read the environment and identify to whom he speaks. This will be crucial to define how he will express himself. Aspects related to the Consultant's image, such as how to dress, how to present yourself, or even, how to prepare the performances are also cited as important factors to add value to work. By the way they dress; the Consultants seek to increase credibility with their customers. Always being well dressed reinforces the image of a successful person, sure of himself. In the

case of the senior levels, the suit / social clothing puts Consultants at the same level of their viewers, speak as equals and thus gain voice.

Another aspect also mentioned is the fact that the average age of Consultants is relatively low. It is common to find Consultants in the range of twenty or thirty years old working alongside the senior customers. In such cases, the way you dress is even more important in the image and credibility that the consultants pass on to their customers. The perception that generate about the value of his work also seems to be directly influenced by the way they prepare the material presented throughout the project. In this context, not only the content becomes relevant but also aspects related to the aesthetics of presentation as well as the arguments of the driving logic also come to be considered. The way presentations are prepared and conducted was mentioned by several interviewees as an important factor in the Consulting projects. This is evident especially in the speech of Consultants who provide Consulting to large organizations. Possibly due to the fact that they are more structured companies, which tend to require projects that require greater analytical and financial support and the number of people involved is greater.

C- The consulting and the power of high organizational management:

Besides the impression management, other issues widely debated within the critical model refer to the relations of power and the political aspects of the interactional dyad. As pointed out by Nikolova and DeVinney (2012), the critical approach about the power of Consultants is seen as an extension of the senior management power. Among the interviews, some points regarding these issues were observed. As already approached, while discussing about consultant-client relation, many customers were mentioned by the Consultants, which sometimes referred to the operational levels and at other times, concerned the intermediate hierarchical levels. It is clear, however, in the speech of all respondents for whom they work and are accountable: the hierarchical levels of senior management.

One concern I have is always to involve the owners of the company, because if those who hire the Consultant is in the middle management, the probability of the project to go wrong is very large. But the entrepreneur is a guy who will be perpetuated in the company, while the manager may no longer be there tomorrow. So a concern that we have is always dealing with the owner, the owner of the company, because then you know he will always twist and do everything to succeed, because if it goes wrong, he's throwing his money away (says one of the interviewees).

It is noted that the strengthening of relations between senior management and the Consulting creates some challenges. On the one hand, the

consultants take on the challenge of developing a work that is aligned with the guidelines and gain management's expectations or those who hire them (whether financial or not). Second, the Consultant seeks the involvement and the commitment of organizational leaders in order to validate and legitimize the work done and also to minimize possible internal resistance that can be configured as barriers to the completion of the work.

The Consultant's speech reveals that his presence is not always welcome inside the organizations. Hiring Consultancy management mostly occurs by the senior management to meet specific demands of directors / executives. The participation of consultants in the top down way organizations ultimately generates some organizational tension, because the work to be executed is not always clear to the employees or because it involves significant changes, affecting both the structure and the organizational culture.

Dealing with internal resistance seems to be an expected situation by Consultants. This situation becomes even more aggravating for consulting management that besides planning, also participates in the implementation of the changes step, which requires the direct involvement of the areas related to the project. In such cases, the board of endorsement in relation to the work of consultants is made even more important. In some cases, consultants are more explicit in pointing out that the involvement of senior also aims to coerce those who do not buy the idea of the project.

The issues presented illustrate the concerns of Consultants with the political aspects related to the Consultant-client interaction, aspects which have to be dealt with throughout the project. Be in relation to the ways they will seek the support and endorsement of leadership, or how they will minimize the resistance of opposing or skeptical of work sectors. For Consultants, the way in which they will deal with the forces and political tensions will directly reflect the expected result or the perception that customers create in the project. It is worth noting that, although the political aspects of the Consultant-client interaction have influenced the speech all the interviewees; this issue appears more strongly in the speech of the senior consultants; probably because they end up exercising leadership functions primarily at the expense of operational activities, usually aimed at younger consultants.

D- Consulting dysfunctions in the interviewees' perspective:

When asked about the criticism to which the Consultants are submitted, respondents were emphatic in stating that most of them have merits. However, when they addressed the matter stories from other consultants were referred to. At this point, the lines become predominantly in the third person, referring to a third party. For the vast majority of

respondents, the criticism is relevant but refers to a Consulting reality far from the one they experience. Although it is understood the criticism is not applied to the work they execute.

The application of standardized and poorly adapted solutions to meet the real needs of customers was one of the major critical points raised by the consultants. According to reports, in cases where this occurs, the diagnosis made by the consulting tends to be shallow to the point of not clearly identifying the real customer problem. As a result, the actions implemented tend to be palliative, not actually acting on the root causes. Such an understanding eventually forward to Caldas' approach (1999) regarding the standardization of solutions, for whom the Consultants would standardize the remedy of its customers even before their actual administrative diagnose pathologies. A few respondents, however, discoursed on the standardization of solutions within the reality they experience.

Hiring Consultants in order to legitimize internal organizational practices (Sturdy, 2011; Sturdy *et al.*, 2009) was also addressed by the Consultants. In this case, unlike the other critical points mentioned, the consultants reported several times situations they experienced. In this context, one sees that, regardless of the focus on improving management, the hiring of Consulting takes on also another role: increasing the visibility and credibility of managers who hire the services of Consultants. To the extent that organizational managers support ideas and goals that are not unanimous within the organizational context, they see the hiring of consulting as chance to seek support and legitimacy for the implementation of their projects.

Authors' Considerations:

Regarding impression management, respondents unanimous agree that it is part of the work of consultants knowing how to sell the product, but, according to his understanding, this concern would not be exclusive of the Consultancy. The definition of labels and archetypes is understood as an important step in processes involving the interaction between people, such as the sale of consulting services. According to respondents, the impression management helps Consulting to gain credibility with the customer. However, by itself, it is not sufficient to sustain the permanence of consultants in organizations. In this sense, it is stated that the Consultants' image may open doors, but ultimately, the continuity of work will be linked to the quality of work done and the results obtained.

The issue of communication between consultants and clients is also addressed by respondents by an optic that goes beyond merely persuasive aspects. As pointed out by one of the consultants, one of the great challenges of Consulting is translating for customers in a few minutes, the work carried out for several months. Often, the time

available for organizational leaders and managers to discuss issues with Consultants to work is small and therefore the form of communication becomes an even more critical issue.

By drawing a parallel between conceptual models and the speeches of the Consultants, it was observed that elements for the three conceptual models of the Consultant-client interaction coexist within the same organizational reality, that is, within the same project. At all times, the interactions are influenced by technical, social and political elements. The weight, however, that each of these elements takes within established relationships is that will vary according to the type of organizational problem, the stage of the project, the goals and the customer profile among other aspects.

5 Final Considerations:

As mentioned, the objective of this study was to verify the positioning of Consultants on the conceptual models of interaction between consultants and clients proposed by Nikolova and DeVinney (2012): expert models, social and critical learning. The first two fall within the functionalist literature and point out the benefits of Consulting under different perspectives, and the critical model questions the Consulting practices and emphasizes the need for Consultants to persuade their clients about the value they generate.

It was found that the models proposed by Nikolova and DeVinney (2012) contributed for the purpose of capturing and theoretically examining how relationships between consultants and customers in a broadly manner, resigned as a interactional phenomenon, allowing the Consulting service to be analyzed from different points of views. However, it was concluded that the information concerning each model coexist in Consulting designs are imposed at all times. This indicates that this descriptive categorization is rich from a theoretical point of view, but the interactional dynamics, they have some overlaps.

The aspects of a technical nature were related primarily to the expert model and returned the questions regarding the managerial expertise of consultants and knowledge contributed by them in the organizations they serve. There is a consensus among consultants that knowledge asymmetrically transferred by consulting to the customers raises the level of management maturity of companies and contributes to accelerate their learning process. The Consultants cases projects recognize, however, that in the Consultant's technical intervention, by itself, is not sufficient to treat the organizational problems.

Respondents show a recent change process in the diagnosis and how to approach the organizations management problems. In this sense, the implementation of standardized solutions and already predetermined looks give way to the realization of projects that require greater involvement of the client

with the work. In such cases, issues of social nature become relevant within the process, which refers to the approached model to social learning, featuring a socio-technical activity. To the extent that the Consulting projects and moving the recommendations for the effective implementation of changes, the customer is requested to contribute to the organizational process and takes an active role in the dynamics of the projects. The speech becomes a partnership speech, and the Consultant is placed in the role of a supporter. In this perspective, customer role, while a task executor, it is vastly enhanced and follows this question the understanding that accountability for results is now shared.

It is worth noting that, from the analysis of the discursive manifestations, there are many aspects that relate to the expert model approach. Although the consultants have emphasized in their speech the importance of customer being involved in the consulting process, it was found that there is an understanding (whether explicit or implicit) that the knowledge and experience accumulated over the years are vectors, alone add value to client organizations.

It was found that the social relations established between Consultant and Client are also subject Sources of conflicts and tensions. Not always the partnership between the two is established spontaneously, properly, making conflict and promoting contracts breaks. In these circumstances, it belongs to the Consultant the challenge of finding ways to engage the customer at work and then providing the necessary link so that the project occurs according to plan. This approach brings out aspects of Consultant-client interaction that in addition to social and technical, incorporate the political dimension. This, in turn, refers to the theory advocated in the critical model. This perspective understands that, not always, customers can identify spontaneously (common sense) the benefits from the adoption of external change agents – consulting. In this sense much of the work of consultants is the ongoing effort to convince them of the value of their practices - impression management.

It adds that, in addition to impression management, other Consulting functions and / or dysfunctions, indicated by the critical literature, were mentioned by respondents, such as the manipulation of results, hiring consultants to legitimize (good and / or bad) internal organizational practices, outsourcing to legitimate downsizing, stock procrastination for contract extension, among others.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the Consultant-client interaction (interactional dyad) is a critical factor for the success of Consulting and the projects seems to be one of the poorest thematic studies and discussions (Donadone, 2001). This work proposes to partially cover this gap by studying the Consulting process from social phenomena and the relationship

between consultants and clients. This research aimed to contribute to the development of a wider analytical base on management consulting, addressing its relationship with customers, its position relative to criticism and its influence on the organizational management improvement process.

As a limitation of this study, it is highlighted, the fact that the analysis have been based only in the vision of Consultants. For future research is suggested to add analysis to the vision of customers in relation to consulting practices.

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