Papers of BAS
Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol. 7, 2020, No. 1

Comparative analysis of best practices in organizational consulting in a cross-cultural context with focus on the IT, telecommunications and outsourcing sector

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Abstract. The paper explores and analyses different cross-cultural practices used in organizational consulting. First, a short overview of the concept of organizational consulting is presented, followed by various techniques on how to better understand and apply organizational consulting in a cross-cultural environment. The development of the main aspects of the process in the dynamics of today's workplace is traced. The consulting process is viewed from a cross-cultural perspective. Employee's and manager's perceptions of the consulting process are also considered as part of creating the relationships and synthesis between the consultants and those being consulted. This is considered crucial for the forming of effective work relationships between consultants and clients. Furthermore, an in-depth examination and comparative analysis of best practices used by different businesses and companies operating in the international arena have been conducted. Knowledge management as well as competitive intelligence strategies have also been explored. All of this is proof for the complexity of the consulting cycle. For an organizational consulting to be effective, a mentoring and enhancement based process is required through which consultants aim to coach their clients and teach them to use the appropriate means when managing their organizations. As a result of the theoretical review and comparative analyses, an attempt is made to frame guidelines on a successful organizational consulting model for a cross-cultural environment.

Key words: organizational consulting, cross-cultural practices, knowledge management, cross-cultural environment

Introduction

Today's business world is very dynamic and complex and it requires a solid mix of knowledge, experience, wide network, authority, good market positions, etc. in order to be successful and well-recognized. There are also different political, economic, social and technological (PEST) factors that affect those processes. In recent years, many international companies with headquarters in leading European countries, such as Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland,

UK, Netherlands as well as USA, and others, have been established and operate in many of the so-called "low-cost countries"[1] (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece, India, and the like). One of the most serious problems that those big corporations encounter are the cross-cultural differences and barriers. For example, a successful business model of French management guidance in a company with German heritage and taking into account its office in Bulgaria should not be just the same ("lifted and shifted") if it wants to remain successful. That is why organizations need good consulting services providers that can make them understand and adequately manage the cross-cultural specifics. Together with that, the role of the "transition lead" is becoming increasingly popular. That person is in fact the leading consultant who studies the environment, analyses the differences, proposes working models, implements changes, and reinforces the process of learning the "new" company values. These are the aspects of the organizational consulting process which the paper focuses on.

First, a short overview of the main concept - organizational consulting and related ones such as knowledge sharing (which is very important when it comes to cross-cultural collaboration for example) and competitive intelligence (which helps organizations gain a competitive advantage on the market), is presented. The whole consultancy process is thoroughly analysed. Special attention is paid on the manager's and employee's perceptions of the consulting process because they usually have different roles, starting points, and involvement in the consulting cycle (which will be presented in details in the paper). In fact, the focus is on the cross-cultural differences found in the consulting process when comparing various examples and best practices observed on the spot. As a result of the theoretical review and comparative analyses guidelines on a successful organizational consulting model for a cross-cultural environment are proposed.

The organizational consulting concept

Consulting as a term has a very wide usage in many different business areas - medicine, finance, human resources management, information technologies, education, trade, etc. According to the *Cambridge English Dictionary* 'consulting' means "the activity or business of giving expert advice about a particular subject" (Cambridge Dictionary), which gives us the most common understanding of the term. Defined in this way, consulting sounds really simple, but at the same time each consultancy has very strict and specific requirements for a person to become a consultant in any specific area. This ensures the quality of services provided and guarantees the methods used and the expected results.

When it comes to organizational consulting, the focus is narrowed to giving expert advices about the general people/process related activities that occur in every organization. This might include but is not limited to: change man-

[1] The term 'low-cost countries' refers to locations where there are highly qualified professionals and the total costs paid for them are less than the average of all the countries where a company operates.

agement, performance management, leadership development, climate/culture/interpersonal relationships, organizational structure/work processes/job design, strategic planning/visioning, etc. (Organizational Development Consulting Services). One should also has in mind some basic and widely accepted characteristics of the effective consultants that are more or less related with personal traits and are beyond cross-cultural specifics (though they may influence some of the behaviours presented) (Corey 2009). Those might be: strong identity; self-esteem; openness for change; making life-related choices; authenticity, sincerity and honesty; admission of own mistakes; living in the presence; considering the cross-cultural aspects; orientation towards the well-being of others; effective interpersonal skills; involvement in the work process and perceived meaning of the job; passion; keeping the borders. In a long-term collaboration of the author of this paper with an international company in the IT and telecommunications sector some interesting observations can be shared. The organization has some key locations providing HR services - India (with own "university" focused on delivering tailor-made learning solutions and programs); Poland (hiring and educating the main population of international trainers); United Kingdom, USA, France and Germany (where the HR centres of excellence are led from), and others. In order to operate effectively internationally, all consultants should stick to the globally aligned procedures. So the observations showed that due to their specific accent, Indian and Polish consultants invest a lot in improving their language skills. From an individual perspective, however, the Indians are more oriented towards establishing positive relationships and rely on emotional reflection and collective well-being (typical for the collectivistic cultures). The Polish, on the other hand, are more individualistic, they have already established learning programs and they are not so eager to change and adapt those to the specific needs of the other locations. When it comes to the French and German consultants - they have a very high self-esteem (typical for individualistic cultures) and the perception that since their countries represent the senior management of the company (very high percentage) they should have a leading role in shaping the HR consulting services format. The Dutch and USA representatives in the researched company somehow balance on the international field being more tactful and adaptive to the global consultancy standards set by the company and the cultural specifics of each subsidiary of the organization around the globe. Many of the characteristics mentioned seem to be individually related, but at the same time, the cultural pre-dispositions are also seen. This example actually shows that the role of the consultant might be very important in coordinating such international consultancy initiatives by adapting to their own professional work style and cultural traits, centrally defined by the organization quality standards and what each individual client (each separate country) of these services expects according to its own needs and work habits.

Arthur Turner (1982) tried to conceptualize this vision and proposed a model representing the hierarchy of consulting purposes (Fig. 1). He separates those into traditional and additional goals. The first ones are obligatory for every effective consulting. They include the information exchange step (consultant - organization and vice versa); finding a solution to the problem; conducting an appropriate diagnosis so that the real problem can be verified and redefined

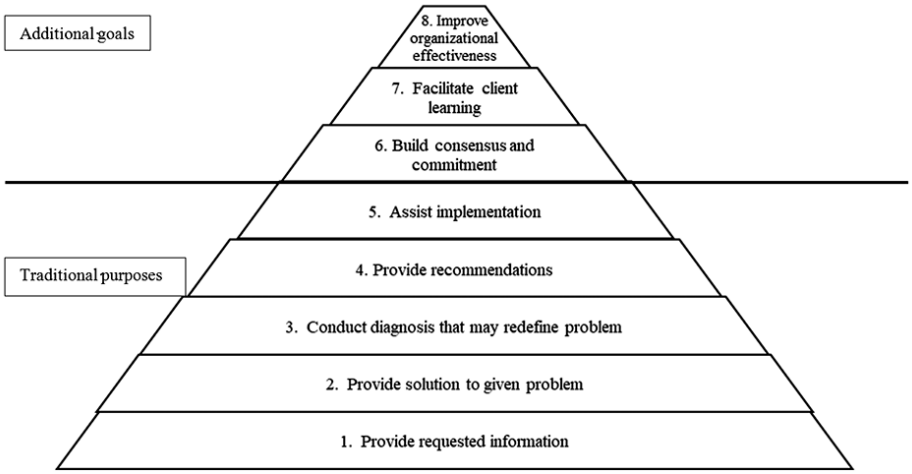

Fig. 1. Hierarchy of consulting services

Source: Turner 1982.

if needed; providing recommendations and professional advices what is good to have/do, and finally, assist the implementation of the action plan created. In addition, the consultant may engage further (if wanted, needed and accepted by the organization) in: building consensus and commitment (about the involvement, resources, professional service); facilitating client learning (so that the client will be prepared well enough to deal with similar situations in the future), and work for overall increase of the organizational effectiveness. Moving up to the additional goals in the pyramid, the consultant actually fully closes the cycle that conducts a whole organizational development program.

Moreover, one should never forget the ethical principles of the consulting process. An example is the American Counseling Association which in its Code of Ethics defines several main areas of ethical standards in consulting: counseling relationship; confidentiality and privacy; professional responsibility; relationships with other professionals; evaluation, assessment and interpretation; supervision, training, and teaching; research and publication; distance counseling, technology and social media; resolving ethical issues (ACA Code of Ethics 2014). In addition, the expansion of the geographical borders and all related aspects of cross-cultural perspective might be included. This reflects the importance of ensuring clear and open relationships in the process that will build trust and lead to effective and beneficial outcomes for all. No one should underestimate the ethical point and the psychological contract between the consultant and the "consultee" as this puts the basis of the successful long-term relationship. And this is especially important when it is about a virtual (not face-to-face) interaction even though technology might be used to enable video and audio streams. Furthermore, dealing with people from different cultures, backgrounds, even different legislation creates a lot of alert and "have in mind" points in the consulting process that should never be forgotten. That is why it

is so important to have a verified consultancy record, professional recognitions, and all needed certificates to practice this legally and in favour of your clients as a consultant. This also explains why so many professional organizations have their own specific associations (e.g., the aforementioned American Counseling Association) which strictly follow all the compliance requirements to be able to perform the job. For example, if one wants to work as psychology practitioner in United Kingdom, membership of the British Psychological Society[2] is required. In practice, when companies look for an organizational consultant they value most those who have a CIPD[3] certificate - this usually applies to European countries and the Middle East. Acquired scientific degree (mainly PhD) is another important "indicator for professional qualification" which guarantees a high standard of the consultancy services provided. Attaining of all these certifications and degrees inevitably goes with adherence to solid ethical principles, high professional standards, and quality of consulting interventions.

The organizational consulting process - employee and manager's perceptions

In order to develop a truly successful relationship, each professional needs to build a strong consulting engagement cycle. It consists of five main steps: establishing winning relationships; assessment of the situation; solution design; solution delivery and measuring results (The 5 Steps). According to the Michigan State University, the consulting process includes:

1. Assessment of issues - in confidential interviews with the consultants, staff have the opportunity to share their feelings and views about such areas as interpersonal relationships, effectiveness of communication, effectiveness of processes, skills and style of leadership, quality of physical environment, quality of tools and equipment, etc.
2. Review and summary of findings - consistent themes and trends in the comments of interview participants are noted.
3. Writing a report of findings and recommendations - based on interview comments.
4. Report to the administrative group - the group or individual who originally requested the OD[4] activity meets with the consultants to hear findings and recommendations.
5. Report to the entire group - the consultants meet with everyone in a group setting who participated in interviews.
6. Action planning - the consultants meet with the administrative group (and others if appropriate) to plan steps to address issues found during the assessment phase.

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[2] https://www.bps.org.uk/
[3] Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (https://www.cipd.co.uk/).
[4] OD - organizational development.

7. Conduct interventions to address issues. These activities may include: staff retreat to establish or refocus mission, behavioural style assessments, conflict mediation training, skill building in a variety of areas, identification of core values and establishment of interactive ground rules, and individualized management coaching (Peterson 2007). These activities are generally conducted over an extended period of time, with order based on priority of need (Organizational development consulting services).

Hofstede Insights - a consultancy firm that follows the Hofstede's paradigm about organizational culture also presents a model about the organizational consulting process (Organizational culture consulting). Though based on solid academic and theoretical frameworks, compared to the one of the Michigan State University, that model is more concise and practically oriented. It is established around 5 main steps: 1. Set target (define the target and plan the course of action); 2. Measure (the current culture of the organization); 3. Optimal culture (optimal culture for the organization should be defined); 4. GAP Analysis (what should be checked is whether the organizational culture enables or hinders the company strategy), and 5. Implement change (by using different change tools, etc.).

Another important point are the perceptions that managers and employees have about the process. They need to have clear understandings of their roles, the steps, expected outcomes and the benefits of the consulting in order to be fully engaged in that. In some cases, managers order the consultation, and employees undergo it. In others, all of them go through the consulting process. Very often a manager of a certain nationality, based in a certain location, manages reports from different nationalities in different countries. When all of them as a team undergo a consulting program they need to adapt and consciously approach each other in the process. Every deviation from the main consulting line should be further investigated so that the consultant can ensure it is not based on cross-cultural differences. A clear explanation (if necessary, translated from the official company language (usually English) into the mother tongues of the participants) of the main concepts, steps, exact duties and expected outcomes of all is also needed. Everybody in the process should agree on a common understanding as well as an action plan.

In Jackall's model of consultancy an interesting relationship is explored: managers being anxious about the careers need new approaches to control the organization, which fuels consultancy industry. On the other hand, the latter reinforces the former (Jackall 1988; Sturdey 1997). This concept is further developed in the model shown in Fig. 2 which extends to environment and identity. It represents the dynamics in the relations between a client with keen interest in innovations and the consultancy services offered. The client interest fuels and challenges the consultancy industy while the latter reinforces and renews the former. This is a dynamic and open collaboration effort which should bring an increased organizational effectiveness, satisfaction and better results.

In addition, there are concerns about why or not to use specific consultancy services. Some of them are related to costs; dependency and search for long-term relationships; ambiguous techniques and results; abstract and standard-

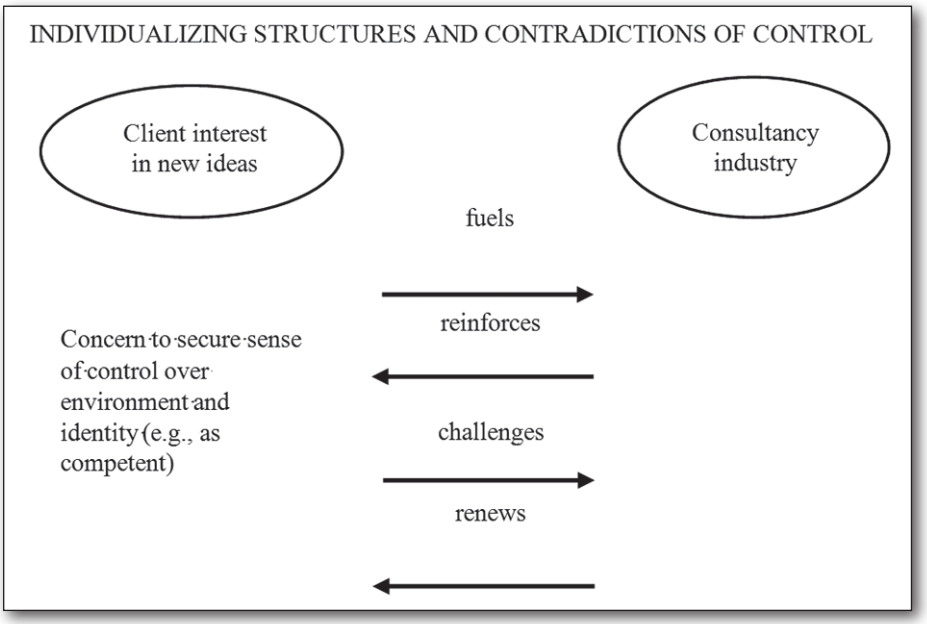

Fig. 2. Consultancy - an iteractive process

Source: Sturdey 1997, 397.

ized models; confidentiality; lack of industry knowledge; repacked old ideas; senior experts sell the service but juniors perform the actions; tendency to conservatism; formulation without implementation; insensitiveness and even arrogance to employees, etc. (Sturdey 1997). When all of this is considered and re-evaluated then the best choice is made. Everyone deals with a limited set of resources and has their own priorities. This is also reinforced by the cross-cultural specifics and organizational policies, what more is aimed to be achieved, etc.

Research by Mercer Human Resource Consulting finds that country norms for drivers of engagement, as well as for other employee perceptions about their work and their employers, differ noticeably from region to region - and not in ways that might be expected. Global engagement drivers include: the work itself, including opportunities to develop; confidence and trust in leadership; recognition and rewards; organizational communication (Sanchez, McCauley 2006). This is a good start, but one should never forget the cultural specifics.

Another example, related to that, might be obtaining the Great Place to Work Certification[5] - a famous certification survey which identifies the most desired employers with a high (70%+) trust index of their employees. In an IT and telecommunications company (already mentioned) this is part of the an-

[5] https://www.greatplacetowork.com/

nual HR related activities. In 2020, several locations got that prestigious certificate - Greece, Poland, Croatia, Estonia, Bulgaria, and others. What is interesting is that these are countries with relatively smaller representation (as number of employees, revenue, and the like) compared to the leading ones (e.g., France, Germany, UK, USA). Another important fact is that most of them operate using the shared services centre model. Results show that employees have a strong connection with their organizations, high trust, and employee satisfaction. In Bulgaria, the cultural perceptions of the employees indicate significant presence of clan culture, social engagements, and well-being (Lyubomirova 2018). Those observations and research data reinforce the importance of the right consultancy services - adapted to both the organizational and national cultural specifics.

Comparative analysis of best practices in a cross-cultural context

Organizational consulting has already become very popular in the management studies. What is new in the last 20 years is the international focus it is gaining, especially when so many companies operate in different geographies and need support to be as efficient as in their home countries.

The special issue of the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* on "International Organizational Consulting: Consulting Psychology Goes Global" provides highlights of experienced practitioner consulting psychologists' work in a variety of multinational contexts. Emerging themes in international organizational consultancy are supplement to the standard topics explored such as team, leadership, and organizational development. The first theme concerns the critical importance of the cultural context of the organizations. The second emphasizes worldwide organization development. The third theme centres on national and regional economic development. The fourth considers the role of consultation in facilitating global social change. Cultural contexts and worldwide organization development imply the need for an integrated consultancy approach (Cooper 2012).

In an executive commentary by John Bing for ITAP International and other (Bing 2004), the author speaks about the immense impact Hofstede had on developing consulting and business practices. On-boarding orientations, leadership trainings and development, business practices are only a few of those (Darling, Heller 2012). International companies experience change on an even more frequent basis and in their global operations, and they must navigate the cultural impact of change projects. Hofstede's dimensions offer guidelines for localizing a culturally acceptable approach to corporate activities. This can be done by educating both consultants and clients about the cross-cultural awareness, diversity and accepting and understanding the other ones. A very basic start is to set a common language (usually English is the official language for many international companies) understood by all. Another point is to organize your consulting programs from a global perspective and present the general picture, mission, vision, and values and when there are employees from different cultures/locations to avoid going into specifics that you are not quite aware of. What is more, practice shows that repeating, re-phrasing, asking participants

for new ideas, sharing comments and involvement will ease the integration process. Many of the behavioural characteristics of the employees may be explained by Hofstede's theory. With all that said, aligned consultancy may reach deeper levels of knowledge exchange, learning of new things, and better understanding and perception of the group.

A more practical and contemporary view on the Hofstede's theory was proposed by the consultancy firm Hofstede Insights (Organizational culture consulting). They speak about "multi-focus model on organizational culture" as a key strategic tool for assessing and evaluating the culture concept within the organizations. It consists of six dimensions: D1 - means-oriented vs. goal-oriented; D2 - internally driven vs. externally driven; D3 - easy-going work discipline vs. strict work discipline; D4 - local vs. professional; D5 - open system vs. closed system; D6 - employee-oriented vs. work-oriented. This eases the adaptation to the specifics of different countries when practicing organizational consulting as the firm operates in more than 10 countries, such as Australia, France, Finland, India, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Nigeria, USA, and others. It also tries to combine both the main theoretical assumptions but together with that - the real business needs.

In a cross-cultural context we should also be aware of the different possibilities for knowledge sharing. Venkatesh and colleagues speak about the factors that influence it (Venkatesh et. al. 2003; Li 2010). They incude: perfomance expectancy; effort expectancy; social influence and facilitating conditions. This is completely applicable to the business consulting area, especially when it comes to international companies. The final results are achieved in different ways due to some cultutal specifics. The work habits of people vary - some need a lot of effort, others - not so much. In Germany, for example, empolyees are sued for non-compliance with working hours, while in Spain the measures are less stringent. In both cases the desired results have been achieved but the way of working is different. For that reason the HR consultancy approaches need to be adapted, as social influence factors are inevitable part of the envitonment, market, industry, so that they can facilitate or impede the results. Even the empirical data confirm that "organizations should make efforts to provide knowledge sharing systems that can be integrated into employees' daily work practice or design jobs that entail knowledge sharing if they want to promote knowledge sharing effectively" (Li 2010, 46). Openness to the new and sharing what you have personally learned is a very positive approach used during consulting. Applied in a cross-cultural context this technique also eases a better understanding of why someone does things in a specific way and what are the factors that require such behaviour. Theoretical knowledge might be more generally applicable but it also can be revised according to the cultural circumstances. Moreover, some good practices may be good and working in one context but totally inappropriate in another one.

A related to the organizational consulting construct is the competitive intelligence (CI) - it is a continuous and evolving process by which businesses assess the behaviour and capabilities of its current and potential competitors to assist in maintaining and developing a competitive advantage (Calof, Wright 2008). The definition cited can be successfully applied to the current research

on cross-cultural consulting in the dynamic world we live in, filled with large corporations spread around the world. The five-step process for establishing a cross-cultural CI program is as follows:

(1) Define requirements. Be aware of the cultural, social, and economic differences between the home country and the host country.

(2) Assign a cultural leader. Select an individual who knows about different cultures and is fluent in the country's local language.

(3) Organize cross-cultural CI structures. Identify a staff with the consideration of their cultural backgrounds. Also develop a common language and an ethical framework for the cross-cultural CI project.

(4) Collect information and analyse it. Learn as many things about the industry in the foreign country, keeping in mind the cultural context in which such information was collected. The analysis of such information must also be conducted by taking into consideration the cultural constraints of sharing intelligence.

(5) Disseminate intelligence. The end game of CI is not collection and analysis of information, but real-time dissemination of intelligence to the decision maker. In a cross-cultural CI project, the analyst must clearly educate the decision maker regarding cultural challenges in converting such information into intelligence (Adidam, Gajre, Kejriwal 2009, 677).

A research by Weisinger and Trauth (Weisinger, Trauth 2003) explore different international companies in the IT sector with offices in USA, UK, Japan, etc. The implications are very informative and provide good practical advices how to manage better this cross-cultural context. IT sector in general is very dynamic, and the pace with which it grows and develops is far away from many of the better known industries such as engineering, health services, banking, etc. However, it is also one of the most fast-expanding around the globe. So what the research mentioned finds is that a management objective that requires formal systems in order to be accomplished by a global firm in one country (e.g., Germany) may be accomplished informally via tacit sociocultural processes in another (Italy). It also discovers that management practices in the IT workplace that might be viewed as relevant and even essential in one local context of a multinational firm may, nonetheless, be viewed as unnecessary or even culturally offensive in a different local context of that firm. And last but not least - management practices that are generally accepted in the cultural context of one country can sometimes be successfully transferred to a different country in order to resolve IT management problems (e.g., Germany and Bulgaria).

Another reasearch conducted in a company operating on the IT and telecommunications market in Bulgaria (Lyubomirova 2018) reinforces the above findings. This example is very informative about the shared services model that many IT and outsourcing companies apply when entering the Bulgarian market. This organization shows its German heritage and solid history. Then, in 2016, it was acquired by a French company. Conversations with different employees confirm that it is really visible how the senior management (predominantly French) treats different divisions and locations. For example, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Croatia, and India are perceived as strategic global delivery centres considered low-cost countries. In these countries, the emphasis is on

how to train people to adopt the company business thinking model and achieve the desired results mainly through the "lift and shift" approach. In other countries, such as France, Germany, UK, Netherlands, and the like, it seems that employees are more demanding and have much more opportunities and exposure to different learning programs, chances of easily obtaining higher managerial roles. A very clear example of this different attitude is the perceptions of the Indian employees. They are very well educated, motivated, proactive, but they are kept strictly to operate on their local markets, and their chances of moving to Europe/USA are very limited. And here come the challenges in the consulting process. In general, this organization invests a lot in training and development of its employees - it has own "Univeristy" that offers various learning academies; it also has partnerships with leading providers such as Google, Microsoft, Harvard, etc.; own internal learning platform and many others. It also works with external consulting providers such as HEC in Paris, TowersWatson for salary benchmarking, etc., but it also stands for internal consultancy. Another example of this is a Polish trainer who failed to conduct several internal trainings for managers in Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania due to a lack of cross-cultural understanding. That person was not very open to travel or to adapt the learning materials to the specifics of the countries. So in that case, the only plus was the low cost of internal training. As a result, e.g., the Bulgarian office decided to invest its own funds as entity in order to provide adequate training programs for its employees (Lyubomirova 2018).

In the context of knowledge sharing and cross-cultural management practices, Ogbor and Williams (Ogbor, Williams 2003) examined the thesis whether the cross-cultural transfers make the cultures and companies similar or diverse. "The discussion so far has shown how Western and non-Western cultural norms of organizational leadership co-existed in a Westernised organisation in a non-Western society. A simple, yet powerful, reason for this is that practices derived from traditional and cultural values are sometimes more practical in achieving the objective goals of the organisation than the exigencies of the organisation's formal criteria for authority" (Ogbor, Williams 2003, 17). They also argue that the presence of power imbalance within the network of relationships in the organisation seems to encourage organisational involvement and commitment, which of course has its effect on the consultancy process. The need to reciprocate for benefits received in order to continue receiving them serves as a starting point for the mechanism of cooperation for the performance of organizational duty. A practical example from a leading European IT and telecommunications company shows how Indian employees with German managers tend to show more traits of typical German working model - clear procedures, desired results, strict obedience of the working ime, high sales orientation than the specifics of Indian culture where family, relationships and mutual development go together.

Very close to that is the point of managing international projects where it is inevitabe to have a consultant role - in this specific case - more or less related to business consultancy. The very strategies for coping with cross-cultural differences are culture bound approaches. One such example is drawing upon professional cultures to bring together international teams to fit the French context of interpretation within which the occupation is part of personal identity and

plays a large role in the regulation of working relations. Such a strategy may be meaningless to apply to Japanese partners who do not pay so much attention to occupations. The above-mentioned approach, which relies on communication between actors and on unveiling tacit sets of meanings, fits the American context, which emphasizes explicit rules. The notion of feedback, praised in American literature to enhance cross-cultural communication shows the widely spread belief that making hidden evidences explicit fosters mutual understanding (Chevrier 2003). Another example is how a leading French company successfully estabslihed HR shared services centres in Bulgaria, India, and Mexico. The general picture and standards are set as per the French model, but all cultural specifics of the cultures mentioned are considered - high skilled professionals, low costs, high employee motivation and satisfaction, IT services and equipment about the average, which ensure smooth operations, etc.

When considering this topic, it is crucial not to forget how important is the cultural synergy that recognizes the cultural paradigms of each organizational constituency - employees, clients, stakeholders, etc. This approach assumes that all the parties involved can jointly construct a best way of understanding of the most efficient management and consulting practices as per the different realities. It includes several steps: 1) situation description; 2) cultural analysis; 3) development of cultural creativity; 4) solution implementation (Adler 1980). And all that works when there is a string synergy and common perception.

A very important topic is related to the consuntants and how the culture shapes them. A 2004 study found that in the UK, the discourse on 'work/life balance' may be understood as a form of resistance at the level of subjectivity. In Finland, the discourse on the 'balanced individual' can be seen as an articulation of a societally bound normalizing discourse. The cultural context can thus be said to have an effect on forms of resistance in knowledge work (Merilainen et al. 2004). This is also important when a French company consults in its Bulgarian office, and the consultant is an Indian corporate trainer (a real example). There is a total mix of different cultural specifics due to national cultures. Can the organizational culture be stronger in this situation? The answer is yes, as regards the policies, procedures, quality of the materials. In reality, however, there are language barriers, different believes, perceptions; own ways of behaving and reacting, and usually the consultant is the one who is the coordinator, moderator, and translator in this process. That is why, none of the participants should underestimate the importance of their role.

Guidelines on a successful organizational consulting model for a cross-cultural environment

Based on all that has been said, it is clear how crucial the role of the cross-cultural context is in organizational consulting. Of course, in addition, diversity and inclusion, leadership styles, team effectiveness, human resources management practices, type of organization, and many other are part of the whole picture. The most important thing is to be fully aware of all the factors that interfere with the consulting process at each level.

Without making any generalizations or pretending to be comprehensive, a few simple steps/guidelines are proposed to be followed so as to ensure a successful organizational consulting model for a cross-cultural environment. The steps offered are based on the literature and concept reviews made in the paper and shared consulting experience. It is not a recipe for a dramatic change and quick effects but rather tips that have proven their effcetiveness in practices.

1. Consultants/Consulting firms should be: self-aware and self-competent; be able to operate in different contexts; stand for clear ethics and values; possess conceptual and technical competences; are experienced in change management; have understanding of group dynamics. All that should be tested with different recipients / different industries / different cultures.

2. Organizations should be: open for change and consultation; supportive; aware of current and desired future situation; main participants and their roles in the consulting process; resources invested and expected results.

3. In the relationship between the two: both should want this consulting to happen; be aware about strengths and weaknesses; define the borders - what is accepted and what is not; clearly understand the scope and impacts and, most of all, at all times, have in mind cultural influences.

4. A diagnosis should be made in the very beginning so that the root cause can be analysed on the spot and the consultants be able to work with the real problems, not the symptoms. Research methods should be chosen very carefully and the most experienced consultants should lead the process. All steps in the consulting process should be considered and not a single one should be missed (without any logical argumentation). The effectiveness of the program should be evaluated, especially when it comes to behavioural changes and new models learnt. Finally, a long-term relationship should be targeted.

Conclusion

The paper provides an overview of the organizational consulting through the prism of the cross-cultural context. It does not pretend to be thorough and detailed. However, it presents the concepts in a concised and structured way and provides different practical examples that confirm the need for research in this area. It can also be used as a basis for conducting further studies by gathering and analysing empirical data, exploring big international corporations, comparing companies in the same industires, etc. In short, it is a good overview of what organizations currently need and predicts many future findings.

One of the key “takeaways” from this paper is that organziational consulting is definitely needed in many business areas and especially in the dynamically developing market, political, social, economic, and technological spheres, as it is a facilitating process that directs the transformation. Regardless of the specific business area in which someone operates, it is applicable to everyone. The roles of the consultant, manager, and employee are also considered in the consulting cycle. They are even reinforced in the cross-cultural context when there is another variable - culture and its specifics. As a trend in recent years, the use of consultancy services to deal with different business cases has become more popu-

lar. And last but not least, consultation in general plays a key role in the whole business and HRM strategies, when the focus is on higher organizational effectiveness, employees' satisfaction and engagement, and great business results.

Some of the implications of the paper also raise questions about who, how, and when can do this, so the emphasis is on the consultant's profile, methodology, places/tools used, but presented in a general way. For this reason, it can be a starting point for further research. In addition, more or less the examples provided here are from "modern" areas such as IT, outsourcing and telecommunications industries, and this can certainly be extended to more and different business areas. In conclusion, a proposition is made to start gathering more intensively real empirical data, especially in Bulgarian companies with an international profile, so that the cross-cultural consulting services can be described, tested, and verified. Many more topics may also arise, but the main goal was to introduce the concept and frame the main aspects of it, so further researches can build on it and expand it.

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