

Research Article

Qualities of Interactions and Success Factors of Management Consulting Services

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Abstract

This research explores the effectiveness of management consulting services in organizational development, focusing on the consultant-client relationship, the andragogical approach, and the interactions within this process. The study identifies the challenges faced by organizations, particularly SMEs, and their reluctance to seek external advice, often due to cultural perceptions or the cost of services. The study demonstrates that collaboration and active organizational involvement in the services, combined with an adult-centered learning approach, foster organizational autonomy and the sustainability of solutions. The theoretical framework draws on the models of Schein (consultant-facilitator), Knowles (andragogy), and Wallot (organizational development), emphasizing that the consultant's role extends beyond that of an expert to become that of a facilitator who guides the client in learning and adopting the solutions. In Benin, where the consulting sector remains in its infancy, the study reveals that the value of consulting services is not yet fully recognized, but the growing need for organizational performance is driving the development of this practice. The results show that the success of interventions relies on interactions based on trust, communication, and collaboration. Consulting services, when they incorporate an andragogical approach, enable organizations to develop internal skills while strengthening collective performance. The article concludes that the effectiveness of consulting services depends on their ability to establish a sustainable organizational learning process and their contribution to the development of managers and the organization as a whole.

Keywords

Management Consulting, Organizational Development, Consultant-client Relationship

1. Introduction

Improving performance is one of the major challenges facing organizations today, both in terms of competitiveness and their effective contribution to national development. This imperative certainly involves resolving the managerial problems that are a daily occurrence for these organizations and implementing performance-oriented management. Indeed, an appropriate performance measurement system is a lever for

value creation because it allows for an evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of actions undertaken by companies and organizations, as well as a better understanding of progress and gains achieved. Performance management aims to create a context for understanding the meaning of the results of the various performance measures used [21] and for disseminating priorities throughout the organization. Simi-

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larly, it allows for assessing the degree of alignment between set objectives and achieved objectives in order to adopt a proactive rather than reactive management policy [5]. We would therefore agree with [23] that a performance system constitutes a management tool enabling us to "guide action".

To remain competitive, organizations must adapt to numerous environmental changes, including increased competition, rapid technological progress, and the globalization of markets [24]. An organization's performance is so crucial that its management style requires particular attention. In the context of organizations, especially Small and Medium Enterprises/Industries (SMEs), the literature indicates that this category of organization has specific characteristics based on the particular psychological and cultural traits of its leaders, who are not open to external interventions. Furthermore, the influence of personality and the leader's personal management style leads them to be self-reliant and thus develop skepticism towards external stakeholders [5]. "It is still frowned upon among SME/SMI managers to spontaneously seek external advice when faced with a problem that cannot be solved on their own or optimally using internal skills." [5].

Furthermore, according to a 1991 survey by the consulting firm Bernard-Julhiet Conseils, 54% of French SMEs reported never having used external consulting services.

Managers are influenced by mental frameworks developed from past experiences. As Bouchikhi [6] indicates, each manager gradually constructs their own managerial theory through action, in a contingent manner, based on the situations they have encountered. He also notes that some individuals stop learning at a certain point, having too much confidence in their judgment and their way of acting.

However, the changing environment, which is compounded by the internal managerial problems of organizations, represents a significant challenge facing managers. Their rational capacity for decision-making and action implementation is often insufficient to find optimal solutions to uncertain situations, the outcomes, causes, and implications of which they are often unaware [20]. Thus, when faced with organizational crises, leaders cannot single-handedly control the appropriate course of action, strategic decisions, and actions to be implemented for resolution. Their perspective and scope of action are significantly challenged by the fluctuations within the organization's context. At great risk of becoming obsolete, they need to engage in a dynamic process focused on the continuous pursuit of new knowledge and effective management techniques; in short, they must find the right formula for effective management [10].

These demanding requirements lead managers to be more or less inclined to consider external interventions in order to engage in a dynamic search for solutions to improve performance. Therefore, it may seem logical for managers to look outside the organization for a new approach, as proposed by [19]. The pursuit of performance implies, to this extent, that organizations do not rely solely on their own internally mobilized resources but also, and above all, employ external

resources and specialized skills. This expertise is used by the organization for support during critical situations and uncertainties that arise from time to time and disrupt the organization's operations and environment. In such a situation, we can expect a new form of activity in the labor market, such as management consulting services within organizations. Thus, the demand for consulting expertise is intuitively triggered among managers who adopt external managerial intervention because of its proven ability to address organizational management issues. "Consulting firms, by bringing a fresh perspective to a situation that has become all too familiar for those who experience it daily, and by quickly offering extensive experience and proven know-how, play a valuable role for organizations" [15]. Given the multifaceted needs of organizations [2], competitive conditions, evolving client demands, internal contradictions within the organization, and more broadly, the desire to improve performance, all appear as explanatory factors for the adoption of managerial innovations and the use of consulting firms' expertise.

It appears that management consulting firms [5] occupy a privileged position in the supply of managerial knowledge, given the significant growth this sector has experienced since the 1970s. Thus, as indicates [1], organizational development is an interactive and continuous change management process aimed at improving problem-solving and organizational renewal through more effective management of organizational culture, with the assistance of change agents, who, in the context of this research, are none other than consultants. In this context, the consultant is not simply known as an expert who provides magic solutions to problems, but rather as a facilitator of the organizational development process. This highlights the delicate nature of the consultant's role within organizations, as it primarily consists of transferring "knowledge" and not "doing" or "getting things done." The practitioner must therefore not only support the organization in its process of change and development, but also train its members to make them autonomous in the face of the difficulties they may encounter in the future.

This approach to intervention and change management within organizations is relatively new in the field of management consulting. This idea, which underpins the concept of organizational development, represents a profound break with the role of the "traditional" consultant who acts as an expert using ready-made solutions. The organizational development consultant plays the role of "facilitator," meaning they assist with change and work closely with the client, who is now placed at the heart of the process. Thus, the consultant's role is primarily one of supporting the client organization in a learning process.

In Benin, as in most sub-Saharan countries, organizations are strongly characterized by practical performance and efficiency problems that undeniably impact their competitiveness. The emergence of management consulting firms and consulting structures across African countries in recent decades reflects a growing collective awareness of organizational

shortcomings and weaknesses. This situation raises questions, as organizations resort to consulting firms for various reasons. And even when they do, performance problems sometimes persist.

Given these observations, it seems appropriate to ask whether management consulting services are delivered using an approach that enables organizations to perform effectively. This research aims to highlight the meaning of management consulting services through the interactions that occur during these services, with a view to organizational development.

Specifically, to evaluate the effectiveness of management consulting services within organizations, this research focuses on studying the factors that influence the effectiveness of management consulting services for organizations within an organizational development framework. Considering that organizations aiming for a certain level of performance are staffed by responsible adults with knowledge and skills, it is reasonable to ask whether the interactions arising from management consulting practices are part of an andragogical and organizational development approach.

The main question then becomes: are management consulting services based on an andragogical approach leading to organizational development? This question leads us to examine the factors that enable the implementation of an andragogical approach in management consulting services for organizations, while simultaneously ensuring that this approach is part of an organizational development dynamic.

2. Methodological Elements

This research is purely qualitative. It is necessary to interpret the empirical data collected in the field. This qualitative data consists of representations, perceptions, and insights that will be used to analyze the research hypotheses formulated in relation to the theoretical framework developed above. This approach was chosen to better explore the contours of the research topic and to highlight the meanings that allow for an analysis of the effectiveness of human resource management consulting services on organizational development.

Therefore, to obtain results, the research will focus on well-suited techniques and tools, including document review and the collection of empirical data through semi-structured interviews. The main categories of people involved in the research are categorized into three groups according to the nature of the information sought. The survey population is therefore comprised of two target categories: directors of consulting and training firms or centers and their consultant-trainers; and managers of organizations receiving consulting and training services and their staff. The directors of consulting and training firms or centers and their consultant-trainers represent the managers of management consulting firms in Cotonou and the consultant-trainers who work there. These directors are relevant to the research because they are involved in providing consulting services to organizations. They represent reliable sources for providing information

related to the context of management consulting in Benin, the delivery of consulting services based on the consultant-client relationship and the learning process, and its effectiveness on organizational development. The consultant-trainers are consultant-trainers working in the management consulting firms in Cotonou identified above. They work with companies and organizations through consulting and training assignments. As the key players, they are central to management consulting services. They are involved in research in that they are skilled at providing information on interactions, particularly the consultant-client relationship and the learning process. They are able to provide information that will explain their role as facilitators in the learning and organizational change process and inform us about the effectiveness of their services in organizational development.

The firms and centers identified in this research include: the Centre for Management Improvement and Assistance (CEPAG), Talents Plus Afrique, RESHUFORM, Afrique Conseil, Agence de Consultation, d'Expertise et de Formations (ACEF), Bayley Performance Plus (B2P), Société Générale de Formation (SGF), RH Elyon, GEC Conseil, GRH Conseil, and AK International Consulting. The managers and staff of the organizations receiving consulting and training services are the managers and staff of the companies and organizations that request and use management consulting services. These individuals are also involved in this research because they are reliable sources for providing sufficient information regarding the consultant-client relationship, organizational learning, and, above all, the effectiveness of consulting services on organizational development. As part of this research, some companies and organizations have been identified, including the Road Fund, Benin Petro, Benin Control, ONIP, Orabank, MTN, Bolloré Transport Logistique, and General Insurance Company of Benin (GAB).

To better understand the various aspects of the subject, the methodological approach of this research prioritized specific data collection techniques. These included document review and field data collection through interviews. The research was conducted in three phases: a preparatory phase; an exploratory phase; and a data collection and analysis phase. Following data collection, the data were processed and analyzed. To obtain a representative sample that sufficiently reflects the characteristics of the survey population, a non-probabilistic, or non-random, sampling method was used. This method employed the techniques of reasoned choice and snowball sampling. The research was therefore limited to 25 interviewees.

Using an interview guide, data was collected via a tape recorder to record the interviewees' statements and a notepad to jot down critical points. Information processing involved transcribing the statements, analyzing their content, and comparing points of divergence and convergence based on their importance and relevance to the previously formulated hypotheses.

3. The Context of Management

Consulting in Benin Based on the results of fieldwork, it appears that the management consulting sector in Benin is little known and still in its embryonic stage, as mentioned above. Management consulting began as a service activity only a few decades ago.

“The practice of consulting as a professional activity is not yet part of our culture. In the past, coaching and consulting were not well-known. But the Beninese environment is changing. In the recent past, a few years ago, 10, 15, or about 20 years ago, it was especially in the 2000s that it gradually began to take hold.” (G. B., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

Beninese market is therefore fertile ground for the development of management consulting activities. However, the value of consulting is not yet fully recognized by organizations in Benin, despite the proliferation of firms being established throughout the country. This is what the interviewee attempts to explain when he goes on to specify that the value of consulting is not yet perceived by organizations in Benin due to the intangible nature of the services provided. This situation presents a challenge that consulting firms face in carrying out their work.

“For the moment it’s not easy. Companies do not yet perceive the usefulness and scope of advice and support. Unlike products, where the value is very well perceived, for advice it is not perceived because it is abstract, it is not tangible. For example, if they buy a computer, they already know what it is used for, but advice is a bit like they are buying hot air, it is purely intellect and naturally they fear throwing money away” (G. B., Director of a Firm, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

This situation necessitates a certain professionalization of the consulting profession, so that consultants are able to create tangible value in the eyes of organizations.

“If the client can’t already imagine what the consulting will bring them, don’t ask them for money to buy thin air. The service is intangible: so you have to do everything to make it tangible so that the client can appreciate it, because intangibility is what prevents the client from quickly perceiving the added value of these services” (C. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

Thus, the value of consulting is not perceived by business leaders, who feel they don’t need it or are unconvinced of its usefulness. This is precisely what [16] and [18] highlight when they suggest that clients harbor a “suspicion of deception,” and the purpose, usefulness, and quality of the services provided are regularly questioned.

It is nevertheless important to draw attention to the fact that consulting services are not accessible to all organizations. It is primarily large organizations and corporations that seek consulting services. Indeed, these organizations have substantial human resources and significant financial capacity to request and bear the costs of consulting services, which often

prove prohibitively expensive.

“Small businesses rarely seek consulting services because it’s beyond their reach. Especially financially, they find it expensive and say they don’t have the money. Currently, it’s large companies limited liability companies (SARLs) and public limited companies (SAs) that have the financial resources and are willing to call or accept support to improve their operations. In my experience, the most requested services are quality management, occupational health and safety standards, procedure writing, accounting, and especially human resources, which are in high demand by companies.” (C. Z., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, June 2, 2020).

Human resources occupy a privileged position within organizations; they are at the heart of every organization's operations. Consulting services in managing these resources are therefore sought after by organizations with a significant number of employees. Hence, effective management requires support and assistance to achieve better performance.

However, it is important to understand the reasons behind seeking management consulting.

4. Reasons for Seeking Management

Consulting The reasons for seeking management consulting are multifaceted. This allows us to distinguish two major trends: internal and external motivations. Internal motivations stem from a lack of skills within the organization, creating a need for support. This is what the interviewee explains when he states:

“They do not have internal skills, and very few have management skills. So they are forced to seek support from a firm. Their leadership and management alone are not enough to solve the problems” (C. Z., Director of a Firm, Personal Communication, June 2, 2020).

It is also in this same logic that he states that “leaders are motivated by the need for expertise or a professional in a field that does not exist internally. Thus, they expect professionalism in the services and quality of the consultant's recommendations” (G. H., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

This also applies to the leaders themselves, who, facing significant challenges, feel the need for support in their actions and in the overall management of their organizations.

“If we consider the management of the company itself, they need to implement a system that meets specific standards, international standards. Or they already have a system and still want to reach a higher level. Lacking the necessary skills internally, and faced with their own incompetence in addressing this challenge, they turn to consultants for support. After all, someone competent is needed to bring order to the organization.” (D. Y., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 2, 2020).

Thus, we see that leaders are motivated by the desire to improve, the desire to reach a higher level. This improvement,

which is the cornerstone of organizational performance, is only possible with a high-quality workforce. This state of affairs is discussed by [5] and [17], previously cited in the literature review.

"Increasingly, at the organizational level, managers need an external perspective on everything that is happening. They realize that many resources are being invested in their structures, yet they are not getting the expected results. They need results-oriented staff. This, therefore, raises the issues of skills and motivation among internal resources." (C. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

It is with this same perspective that the interviewee added: "Companies aim for the individual performance of their staff in order to achieve the overall performance that is the very foundation of their creation. Consulting provides an opportunity to find solutions to problems and needs related to the work and performance of employees" (G. H., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

External factors, on the other hand, indicate that consulting may be required by law, mandated by funders or the organization's partners.

"But some organizational leaders are forced to seek consulting if their partners insist, they adopt a particular approach. For example, in the area of quality, if they lack ISO certification or specific staff profiles, they will lack credibility with their partners" (G. B., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, June 27, 2020).

These results, linked to the motivations for seeking consulting services, are also discussed by Perez [14], previously cited in the literature review.

5. Interactions Arising from Management Consulting Services

This section presents information related to the interactions that occur during management consulting services. These interactions specifically concern the consultant-client relationship and learning.

Research findings reveal that interactions are central to consulting services and are present at every stage of the intervention process within organizations, beginning with a scoping session.

This excerpt provides further details:

"Interactions must be considered from the beginning to the end of the consulting process. It all starts with a scoping meeting to clarify the client's expectations for the service. This is a crucial aspect that the consultant must take into account. The service will be delivered based on everything agreed upon in this meeting, and it will be evaluated on this basis during the validation session. Normally, at the validation session, the report you present should align with what was planned and what was actually delivered" (H. O., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 9, 2020).

Holding a scoping meeting is just as important as the service itself, and this is precisely what one interviewee emphasizes when he states:

"Without it, you risk delivering a service that completely misses the organization's expectations, and this creates problems that can negatively impact the consultant's relationship with the client organization (...) Consulting services depend heavily on the organization's expectations, motivations, needs, and objectives" (L. F., Head of an organization, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020).

The interactions arising from consulting services were previously discussed by [22] in their concept of consulting.

5.1. The Consultant-client Relationship

Field research reveals that the contract is the foundation of all consulting services within organizations. The relationship with the client begins with defining the expectations and obligations of the stakeholders.

"Everything starts with the contract; that's where the relationship begins. Everything stems from there before even getting to the actual execution of the mission" (C. Z., Director of a Firm, Personal Communication, June 2, 2020).

This is clearly conveyed by this firm statement:

"Interactions take place within a formal framework embodied by a service contract, essentially comprised of the obligations of each party, both the service providers and the clients" (J. D., Staff Member, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

Establishing a contract that clearly defines each party's responsibilities is also an important step in improving the consultant's relationship with the client organization and minimizing the risk of misunderstandings.

This statement is supported by another interviewee who said:

"We implement a contract to prevent conflicts, misunderstandings, and unnecessary tensions that hinder the smooth delivery of the service" (E. B., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, May 30, 2020).

Having clarified the terms of the contract for the execution of consulting services within organizations, it seems appropriate to understand the responsibilities of each party.

5.2. The Consultant's Responsibility

The consultant's responsibilities are multifaceted. The results of this research indicate that they generally consist of meeting the organization's needs and expectations by implementing a sound working environment, fostering a positive relationship, and delivering high-quality services. This is precisely what this interviewee emphasizes when he states emphatically: "It is the consultant's obligation to provide the service we requested until we are fully satisfied" (Mr. Z., Staff Member, Personal Communication, May 30, 2020).

"If there are misunderstandings or tensions, the client is not

at fault; it is the consultant's fault for not managing their relationship with us effectively. There will always be resistance, people within the organization who won't want what you're doing. But it's up to you to channel them, manage them, and get them to work with you." Because if there is a hearing which finds errors, the blame is not placed on the organization but rather on the consultant who was unable to develop his managerial skills to properly conduct the mission" (R. M., Staff Member, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020).

5.3. The Client Organization's Responsibility

However, it is essential to note that the responsibility for a consulting service does not rest solely with the consultant. The organization requesting the services also has a share of responsibility in the implementation of the consulting intervention.

"The organization must provide the consultant with the financial, material, and intellectual resources. By intellectual resources, understand a documented formulation of needs and requests; the organizational resources, adherence to deadlines, and staff involvement" (G. H., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

It is within this framework that an interviewee stated the following: "The organizations that request our services must also facilitate the completion of the work; they must provide us with the necessary resources to carry out the mission and validate deliverables" (J. S., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

5.4. Characteristic Elements of Consultant-client Relationship

Research indicates that the consultant's relationship with the client organization is complex and can be understood through several aspects through which it is established.

"The relationship is only successful if it is built on a solid foundation. With the client, credibility, professionalism, trust, and communication are essential, and above all, the consultant must demonstrate their ability to provide added value to their services and honor their commitments." (M. F., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 17, 2020).

It is also important to note that one of the aspects upon which the consultant-client relationship is based is communication, open-mindedness, and the consultant's flexibility. This is evident in these statements.

"During the service, we are somewhat flexible in our relationship with clients and we place great emphasis on communication, which is a crucial tool" (G. B., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

"It is through discussions with the client organization that we diagnose the problem. For example, the client might ask the consultant: 'Can you look at this aspect of my struc-

ture?' 'I sense there's a problem in this department; can you investigate to see what needs to be done?' It's essential to understand the organization's challenges in order to better support it" (C. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

"The consultant must be open; they shouldn't be surprised by comments and input. They must see the relevance of what people say, because they can't see everything; there are aspects they may miss because the client is the one who knows what they want" (C. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

"Communication is crucial in the consultant-client relationship" (D. Y., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 2, 2020).

In addition to these aspects (credibility, communication, flexibility, open-mindedness) that characterize the consulting relationship, it is also important to note that trust is paramount in consulting interventions. However, establishing a climate of trust is one of the challenges consultants face daily. The results of this research reveal that this relationship is easy to establish if the organization already has prior information about the firm/consultant's reputation or has already had a close relationship with them. This relationship is, however, difficult to establish when the firm/consultant intervenes in the organization through a call for tenders to which they submitted a bid and were selected.

This is precisely what this interviewee explains when they state:

"When consulting is requested through a direct, negotiated agreement, people get along better than if the consultant comes through a call for tenders, an unknown outsider entering the client organization's structure." But a consultant can establish themselves and build trust through the quality of their work. When the work is done well, you can tell it's a reputable firm, and that already creates a climate of trust. In the end, you agree on quality deliverables. But if you don't master your work, each person involved will develop their own theoretical approach, confusing you and ruining the project, which isn't good for your firm" (C. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

It follows from these remarks that the consultant, in their relationship with the organization, must be up to the task; they must master their work in order to establish a climate of trust. It is through their expertise that they reassure the organization and support it in resolving its problems. This is precisely what Abbott (1988) and Blanchard (2016), previously cited in the literature review, mention when they simultaneously highlight the importance of trust and expertise.

Thus, in light of these findings, it appears that there is a certain reluctance on the part of the organization when the consultant is brought in through a request for proposals. This is also explained by the interviewee when they state: "They don't trust the person in front of them until they've tried them" (A. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

And, "so it's a very complex relationship that requires the

consultant to manage with great tact the influence of previous experiences. All of this is based on experience; you manage all of this based on experience" (E. B., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, May 30, 2020).

As a result, the consulting relationship is much more complex to establish, even more so if the firm/consultant intervenes within the organization through a tendering process.

Therefore, it remains true that in the consulting profession, the first thing a consultant sells, even before delivering their service, is the message that reassures the client and establishes the foundations of a relationship of trust.

"Before selling a technique or an action, the consultant sells a message; this is why the profession must constantly strive to cultivate and build trust" [26].

5.5. Collaboration During the Consultant-client Relationship

According to the results of the field research, collaboration is a key characteristic of the consultant-client relationship. Consultants working within an organization are expected to collaborate with the organization and involve it in the intervention process. "The consultant needs collaboration with the client because consulting is a chain; the consultant cannot do anything without the staff involved" (H. O., Consultant, Personal communication, June 9, 2020).

"The client is involved from the beginning to the end of the service delivery process. They are present throughout and kept informed of the intervention's progress through validation sessions held at each level to ensure we are aligned with the client's perspective" (C. Z., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal communication, June 2, 2020).

"The consultant collaborates with us according to the terms of the contract and also through informal sessions and meetings" (R. M., Staff Member, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020).

Research also indicates that the intervention method often adopted by consultants to advise client organizations is the participatory approach, which is one of the fundamental principles of an andragogical approach. This is precisely what the interviewee stated:

"The diagnosis and the proposed solution are carried out jointly with the organization" (P. M., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 25, 2020).

Other perspectives reinforce these statements:

"The client is heavily involved in the process; in everything we do, the client is a key player. We don't replace the client in their daily activities. No! No! No! We want to advise them, you want to support them, as they say, we support someone in doing what they need to do. That's what it is, in fact." (G. B., Director of a firm, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

This approach is not without its effects on the organization. It evokes a number of states in the manager, as can be seen below:

"This approach awakens in the client the desire for a lasting solution to their problem and the new possibilities that open up to them thanks to the resolution of said problem" (A. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

To highlight the importance of collaboration, the latter argues in these terms:

"It's important that they at least know what it's about so they can be more involved, to understand the rationale; this facilitates their integration into the implementation of the intervention process." (A. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

These results are highlighted by [4] and [17], previously cited in the literature review, who designed counseling based on a collaborative relationship.

In light of these results, it follows that a consulting approach focused on the individual learning of the client will clearly prioritize supporting the manager's reflection so that they can find their own solutions to their problems. This approach by the consultant is much more consistent with the characteristics of managers' learning processes discussed earlier in the review. Furthermore, the necessary appropriation mechanisms have real effects on their attitudes and behaviors. From this perspective, the consulting relationship established between the external consultant and the manager can be analyzed in terms of raising awareness, catalyzing, guiding, and supporting the client's learning, as discussed by [6].

Moreover, collaboration is also used as a means of integrating the organization's staff into the consulting intervention process. This is precisely what we observe in the interviewee's statement:

For me, as a consultant, it's an opportunity to get them on board, to spark their interest, to make them fall in love with it, I would say, so they see that it's good for the company and pay attention to it. We give them the information, they go and see everything that needs to be done; it's also a way to engage them, to make them willing participants, to come voluntarily and not be forced to attend the sessions. (G. B., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

However, it turns out that not all consulting firms use a participatory approach in their interventions. This is precisely what this interviewee is referring to with these statements:

"It's true that other firms choose to do everything for the client, involving the client very little, providing them with the documentation and procedures, and then the consultant comes to present their new system. Often this approach doesn't work because if people aren't involved, they don't understand what it is. So, as a result, the intervention doesn't even work in the long run." (A. B., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

To shed light on this issue, this interviewee shared his experience:

"I worked in an organization as a quality manager where the consulting firm handling everything did it without any training. The staff didn't even know the standard or its

requirements; they simply accepted what the auditor or consultant told them to take, and that was it, as if it were gospel truth—they were the expert. I found it unfair to operate like that.” (A. H., Staff Member, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020).

However, “if we act too much like experts in front of the client, the staff do not participate in the mission and therefore the consultant does not have the necessary information to succeed in his service” (A. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020), explains this interviewee.

It follows that the success, if not the effectiveness, of training is heavily dependent on the consultant-client relationship, which is based on collaboration. Without this collaboration, the consultant's actions cannot bear fruit. It is from this same perspective that De Bandt and Gadrey [13] explain that, on the service provider side, the “expert” positioning is sometimes questioned, or even rejected, in the name of an ideal of “service co-production” that promotes consulting as an activity of production, knowledge transfer, and reciprocal learning.

The collaboration between the consultant and the client is increasingly manifested through a learning process.

6. Learning

All the consultants interviewed recognized the importance of learning, specifically training, in their services.

This is highlighted by the following comments: “The problems of motivation and therefore low performance of their staff necessitate training on the tools that are linked to expectations (...) training is provided when the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the assignment stipulates it, and it is to prepare them, to enable them to face problems in the future” (G. C., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

This speaker highlights the formal framework for training activities when he states:

“The learning process takes place within a framework defined by mutual agreement with the client; a schedule and organization are also established by mutual agreement” (C. Z., Director of a firm, Personal communication, June 2, 2020).

The learning process in management consulting services nevertheless requires the consultant to assume the role of facilitator, which in turn enables the implementation of an andragogical approach.

6.1. The Role of Facilitator

The consultant plays their role as facilitator of the learning process:

“By supporting the client in identifying their learning needs, and by designing learning materials that take into account the satisfaction of those identified needs. Then, during the learning process, the consultant involves participants as much as possible through practical case studies, sharing

each person's experiences in their role and environment. The consultant thus becomes a true guide who facilitates the understanding and adaptation of key concepts related to the learning objective to real-world situations.” (M. F., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 17, 2020).

“In the learning process, it’s not about saying we want to give a lecture; we’re not giving lectures to students, no! no! no! It’s an exchange.” “The consultant plays several roles at once; he is a moderator, facilitator, and expert who explains better; he listens to them, stimulates the participants and motivates them to intervene” (G. B., Director of a Firm, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020) explains this interviewee.

The role of facilitator is further clarified by these statements:

“Training is not gospel truth; it’s not a bible. You sometimes stray from the topic to make comparisons with concrete situations. Sharing experiences and relating to everyday life situations is essential, especially work situations in the professional environment, to ensure the initial implementation of what is learned” (C. Z., Director of a firm, Personal Communication, June 2, 2020).

The comments of a training participant subsequently confirm what the consultants say regarding their role as facilitators:

“When the consultant-trainer leads well, we all leave happy with the training, knowing that we have learned something new, even if we didn't intend to participate at first, we always end up participating” (Mr. Z., Staff Member, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020).

Furthermore, in consulting interventions, follow-up through the facilitator role is not neglected by a minority of consultant-trainers interviewed, who seem to have a good grasp of their role. This is evidenced by the statement: “The effects of training on the organization's functioning are observed through post-training follow-up and awareness-raising among the supervisors of the trained individuals” (M. F., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 17, 2020).

In light of these results, the resulting analysis suggests that in providing consulting services, relational and psychological aspects are key points of attention that the consultant must consider. According to the Person-Centered Approach (PCA), inspired by Rogerian psychology, the most essential condition for engaging in any of the many “helping relationships” is not a dogma, but a way of being with people that is perceived as facilitating. The facilitator (helper) must be able to communicate certain attitudes that have been integrated into their personality.

For [3] the conditions of the therapeutic relationship are not necessarily generated solely by individuals with professional training. He writes:

“Growth and change of personality occur only if the client perceives a certain psychological climate and experiences, it within the relationship. The conditions that constitute this climate do not consist of knowledge, intellectual training,

orientation in any particular school of thought, or specific techniques. They are feelings or attitudes that the counselor must experience and that, to be effective, must be perceived by the client. Those that I consider essential are the empathic and sensitive understanding of the client's feelings and their personal significance, warm and accepting esteem for the client, and unconditional positive regard" [4].

Psychotherapeutic approach [3] is similar to [25] consultant-facilitator model and [19] andragogical model. However, the first model focuses the consultant's attention not on the problem itself, but on how the organization learns to solve a problem, and posits that the only way to help the client is to involve them in the diagnosis and intervention. The second model, through its principles, emphasizes the creation of a climate of trust that allows the adult learner to become involved while developing their latent resources. In this way, the relationship resulting from consulting services can be considered from the perspective of mastering the client's learning processes.

6.2. Organizational Learning

Consulting services within organizations, particularly in human resources, are intended to influence human capital. If these services positively impact the productive output of employees, they consequently impact the performance of the entire organization. The results of the research show that the organization is heavily involved in its learning process, playing a significant role in guiding and delivering training. This is what this organizational leader emphasizes when he states:

"The organization validates the learning materials and methodology proposed by the consultant and monitors adherence to the learning process plan" (J. C., Head of an organization, Personal Communication, June 12, 2020).

Training within the organization is part of this approach, where the leader seeks to strengthen the skills of their staff in order to achieve overall performance. This is what an interviewee conveys through these expressions:

"The client says: 'I want to do this. My guys don't have the expertise to do it.' So, not having the resources to train all the staff at once, he proposes to do the training in cascade. There, only the trainers, who are the department heads, need to be trained; the trainers in turn will train the others. The fact of training others is taken into account in strengthening the staff" (C. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

Further on, to highlight organizational learning, a speaker elaborated, emphasizing the impact of training on organizational performance in these terms:

"Take, for example, the quality management training, the ISO 9001 standard, that we provide in our firm. We give all our management staff comprehensive training on the standard, covering its 309 requirements, over three days. And then, more generally, we hold an awareness session for

non-management staff so they also have an understanding of what it entails. But managers must know the exact requirements of the standard because they are the ones who must play a leadership role with each of their team members. So, if some of them aren't engaged and aren't fulfilling their leadership role, it will cause problems at the department, management, and organizational levels. That's what general training is all about." (E., M., Director of a Cabinet, Personal communication, June 8, 2020).

We therefore agree with this interviewee that "learning through training aims to sustain the actions of the service delivery in order to achieve overall performance" (C. G., Consultant, Personal Communication, May 29, 2020).

These results corroborate the work of [7], previously cited in the literature review, which stipulates that the role of the management consultant is considered that of an "agent of organizational learning." They highlight the challenges of organizational learning by hypothesizing the "marginality" of the consultant's position versus the "centrality" of the client's position during the different phases of the consulting process. Furthermore, the individual learning processes that arise from the consulting relationship are amplified by collective or organizational learning processes within the organization. These will occur primarily to the extent that the manager is willing to disseminate their learning throughout the company. This phenomenon will be amplified and its effectiveness increased if, in addition to a willingness to engage, there are appropriate pedagogical skills and training procedures to raise awareness, explain, persuade, and convey the message to all employees within the company [9]. From an analytical perspective, it is important to emphasize that the evolution of the world through scientific progress and technological revolutions compels professionals, regardless of their field, to adapt in order to ensure the sustainability of their professional activity over time and across different contexts. Adult education, specifically the andragogical approach in any intervention within an organization, is essential for performance development. The economist [24] sounded the alarm regarding lifelong learning, which requires continuous adaptation to the rapid pace of technological advancements and the ability to anticipate new needs and/or demands of the labor market. Therefore, ongoing training and capacity building for human resources through consulting services are fundamental elements for acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities. This is essential not only for fully engaging in rapidly evolving societal and professional environments and increasing productivity, but also for ensuring the effective transfer of knowledge and expertise throughout the organization.

However, it is important to emphasize that training within the organizational learning process does not always encompass all of the organization's personnel. This is clearly illustrated by the following clarification:

"There is what we call specific training. Specific training is not given to everyone; it is reserved for a target group, a subset of key individuals. For example, training on finance

laws or the revised OHADA accounting system is reserved for agents within the finance department. In the context of risk management training, for instance, a specific target group is involved. They are told the required profile to participate in this highly specialized, high-level training." (M. P., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 26, 2020).

Crucini and Kipping (2000) had already noted that management consultants not only provide knowledge in the form of tools, techniques, plans, and strategies, but also translate and adapt specific knowledge to suit the client's circumstances and needs.

However, fieldwork raises a debate about the role of the consultant-trainer who involves the organization in their intervention process. This view does not seem to be shared by all the consultants interviewed. This is evident in the following comments:

"But the role of the consultant-trainer also has its downsides. If staff are heavily involved, it implies that there are activities they must perform, and if they are not very proactive, there is a risk that the process will be lengthy and time-consuming. Whereas, if we do it ourselves, it can be faster, and we present them with the document: 'Here's this, here's that,' it's a bit quicker." (C. H., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 12, 2020).

From another perspective, it appears that some consultants aim to maintain their expert status by not involving the organization in the consulting process. This situation suggests that there may be economic interests at play, because the numerous requests generate financial costs that obviously benefit the consulting firms.

When staff are fully involved, it's true that it's a way to transfer expertise within the company, which may subsequently no longer deem it necessary to call upon you. They say, "We ourselves contributed to doing this, we can do what he did, so we can manage without him." Thus, the organizations no longer need you, which is why other firms never want to provide training so they can always intervene, saying, "Do this, do that." (C. Z., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, June 2, 2020).

This situation is clarified by the comments of a staff member from an organization who deplores this strategy, which fails to respect the andragogical approach, when he expresses himself in these terms:

"I found it unfair to operate this way. When they do this, it's to prevent the client from being independent after they leave and doing the work alone. But ultimately, it's their fear that they're not training the client. That's it. It's a system designed to ensure the client always needs them instead of making them independent and autonomous." (R. M., Staff Member, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020).

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize a key aspect of the consultant-client relationship based on learning. Indeed, the benefits of training are not limited to the client organiza-

tion. Consultants also gain valuable experience through their work with organizations. This leads to a mutually enriching learning relationship for both parties.

6.3. A Rewarding Learning Relationship, Beneficial for Both the Consultant and the Client

The consultant's potential to benefit from their work with organizations is highlighted by these statements:

We always gain something through our interactions with the client. That's what's great about being a consultant, especially when you have experience. Because a consultant has seen and heard so much, if they discover a model elsewhere, in another organization during a consultation, that they find effective it's not their model, they didn't introduce it they take it, adapt it to their knowledge, and implement it in another organization that needs it. They won't say, "I saw that at so-and-so's place." No! They're the consultant; they're the one making the proposal. So, we learn a lot when we're open-minded. (G. B., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, May 27, 2020).

This is also what this interviewee testifies to when he expresses it in these terms:

I did a training last week for the administrators of a large local organization, they were big bosses, the bosses themselves for three days it was very enriching, I learned a lot from them, from the discussions, from how they work, and everything, it was really enriching (H. O., Consultant, Personal Communication, June 9, 2020).

However, consultants need a certain predisposition, open-mindedness, and active listening skills to fully benefit from the advantages offered by their numerous consulting and training interventions within organizations.

Even during the training sessions we conduct, there's always something to learn from others, unless you're unwilling to learn. Some people are closed-minded; they think they know everything. Conversely, if you're open-minded, there's always something to learn from the other participants. (C. Z., Director of a Consulting Firm, Personal Communication, June 2, 2020).

This leads to the conclusion that management consulting services within organizations, through the consultant-client relationship, are indeed a mutually enriching relationship for both the client organization as the beneficiary and the consultant as the service provider. The consultant-client relationship, through learning, is not only beneficial to organizations, but it also allows consultants to learn, expand, and diversify their experience.

The analysis stemming from this phenomenon of mutual learning reveals that in this andragogical approach, the role of "the other" must be emphasized. While learning is personal and one cannot learn in place of another, we often learn with others, thanks to them, or because of them, as [23] unani-

mously observe. According to these authors, "the other" is central to our learning through several possible roles, sometimes simultaneous or consecutive. This role of "the other" in the learning process is perfectly transposed into the consulting process, into the relationship between the consultant and their client.

It is also from this perspective that [21] argue that in a given situation, a consultant can be either an expert, a facilitator of change, or a combination of both. They act as an expert when they base their relationship with the client solely on their own specific resources [10], particularly their knowledge and technical skills, without any real openness to the client's experience [8]. They act as a facilitator of change (that is, they carry out a "client-centered intervention") when they focus their intervention on the client's resources, structuring the client's problem according to the client's knowledge and experience, with the assumption that the client can teach them something. The consultant-client relationship thus becomes a process of exchange and mutual learning. It is a "natural transaction between people, one of whom is open to receiving help and the other capable and willing to give it" [11]. However, as some authors believe, it is through this andragogical approach based on the mixing of the roles of expert and facilitator that the consultant-client relationship can be optimally capitalized upon, thus allowing an opportunity for mutual learning.

"Perhaps the most enriching mutual experience occurs when the consultant adopts a mixed style: expert at the appropriate time and facilitator at another, so that both the client and the consultant are engaged in a mutual process of learning and discovery" [12].

In this context, the consultant adopts an andragogical approach centered on the client's problems, needs, prerequisites, and experiences. This also provides an opportunity for exchange and learning for both the client and the consultant.

Thus, consulting becomes a true andragogical process that incorporates most of the generally accepted andragogical premises. These premises include, among others, the active participation of adults and the sharing of knowledge, skills, opinions, and experiences that facilitate the learning process.

Thus, the way a consultant manages their relationship with their client, the executive, is highly dependent on the success of their intervention. From this perspective, the andragogical approach that stems from the consulting service can be considered in terms of mastering the client's learning processes. The consultant's intervention, using new concepts, psychopedagogical expertise, methodological tools, etc., acts on perceptions, representations, and mental schemas, and therefore on the attitudes, behaviors, reasoning, and principles of action of the organization [5]. It is generally agreed that the essential objective of consulting and training activities is indeed to foster changes in mindset, attitudes, and behaviors through new learning. Furthermore, numerous authors have emphasized the importance of the learning effect during the management consulting process ([26, 16, 8]), previously cited

in the review of scholarly works. These different conceptions related to the consultant's facilitator role in a client intervention process are represented in both Schein's consultant-facilitator model and Knowles's andragogical model, previously mentioned in the theoretical framework.

Thus, in light of the research findings and the valuable contributions of these scientific authors, it emerges that the interactions related to the client-consultant relationship and learning are essential for implementing an andragogical approach during management consulting services within organizations.

Management consulting services within organizations have significant consequences for their specific functioning and for organizational development in general. The following section is therefore dedicated to presenting and analyzing the results related to this aspect.

7. Conclusion

Human resource management consulting within organizations, as an activity providing intellectual and technical services, presents itself as an undeniable asset supporting organizational management. It guarantees organizational performance because, by providing an external perspective on organizational management, it identifies and corrects weaknesses as effectively as possible. In Benin, this promising sector is still in its infancy and therefore at an embryonic stage. It remains relatively unknown to organizations, and the use of its services has so far been reserved for only a minority: large organizations. However, the investigations conducted for this research have shown that this sector is gradually developing and that leaders are increasingly recognizing the need for support and assistance in managing their organizations, especially with regard to strengthening human resource capacities.

The subject of this research was to analyze the effectiveness of human resource management consulting services on organizational development in the city of Cotonou, Benin. The work carried out in this research, using a qualitative approach, allowed for an understanding of the functioning of the consulting sector in Benin; an in-depth grasp of the interactions that influence the effectiveness of consulting services; and an examination of the changes these services produce on organizational development. Based on a theoretical framework inspired by Schein, Knowles, and Wallot, this research proposes an innovative consulting model centered on the consultant's role as a facilitator, aiming to empower organizations rather than create dependency. Despite encouraging results, the evaluation of these services remains neglected, thus limiting the continuous improvement of their impact.

In a constantly evolving technological landscape marked by digitalization, it is urgent to adapt consulting practices, update consultants' skills, and develop local training programs to further professionalize this field. Finally, strategic educational reforms could encourage young people to pursue this

profession, which remains underrepresented in Benin.

Abbreviations

SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises/Industries
CEPAG	Centre for Management Improvement and Assistance
ACEF	Agence de Consultation, d'Expertise et de Formations
B2P	Bayley Performance Plus
SGF	General Training Company
BP	Benin Petroleum
BC	Benin Control
ONIP	National Printing and Press Office
GAB	General Insurance Company of Benin

Author Contributions

Raymond-Bernard Ahouandjinou is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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