ISCTE ◈ Business School

University Institute of Lisbon

CAREER PATH IN CONSULTANCY: CHALLENGES FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

Diogo Correia Santos Guanilho

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Supervisor:

Dr. Leandro Ferreira Pereira, Assistant Professor, ISCTE Business School

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ABSTRACT

Careers have been evolving over the years, as a result of changes in the labor market and individuals' perspectives. Until 21st century, careers were relatively stable, and individuals usually had only one job experience throughout their life. Nowadays, looking for different working experiences and development opportunities within diverse companies is quite common, and individuals are more concerned about their career movements. In this context, organizations were pushed to adapt their employee value proposition and place a higher focus on individuals' career needs, which lead to new career management approaches. In the consultancy sector, due to its specificities, career management can be much more complex and difficult to manage. Since consultants' roles and responsibilities can quickly change, according to their project, establishing career progression requirements might be a tough task for organizations. Some companies decide to offer career progression opportunities according to employees' seniority and experience, while others focus on performance assessments that can give them information to decide who should be promoted. This investigation aimed to understand how consultants, from different hierarchical levels and companies, see the relation between career management, seniority and performance. The investigation was based on data collected from 92 responses to an online survey, addressed to current or former consultants within the Portuguese consultancy market. The results and conclusions comprise information regarding the current correlation between seniority and career management, consultants' preferences about seniority or performance for career progression and consultants' points of view concerning a possible performance appraisal system that guides career management decisions.

RESUMO

O conceito de carreira tem evoluído ao longo dos anos, em função das mudanças no mercado de trabalho e nas perspetivas dos indivíduos. Até ao início do século 21, as carreiras eram relativamente estáveis e os indivíduos tinham apenas uma experiência laboral durante a sua vida. Atualmente, a procura por diferentes experiências e oportunidades de desenvolvimento é bastante comum e existe uma maior preocupação com decisões de carreira. As organizações necessitaram de adaptar a sua proposta de valor laboral e reforçar a importância dada aos objetivos de carreira dos seus trabalhadores. Quanto ao setor de consultoria, face às suas especificidades, esta temática pode relevar-se mais complexa. As responsabilidades e tarefas de um consultor podem facilmente variar, pelo que estabelecer requisitos de progressão de carreira não é uma tarefa simples. Algumas organizações decidem progressões com base na antiguidade e experiência dos seus trabalhadores, enquanto outras utilizam sistemas de avaliação de desempenho como suporte à tomada de decisão. A presente investigação teve como objetivo perceber de que forma os consultores percecionam a relação entre gestão de carreiras, antiguidade e desempenho. Esta investigação baseou-se em dados recolhidos de 92 respostas, através de um inquérito online a consultores que trabalham ou já trabalharam em consultoras. Os resultados e conclusões agregam informações relativamente à atual correlação entre antiguidade e nível hierárquico dos consultores, às suas preferências sobre antiguidade ou desempenho enquanto variáveis de progressão de carreira e pontos de vista sobre um possível sistema de avaliação de desempenho associado à gestão de carreiras.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Problem

Career management is a fundamental matter for individuals, since it supports them defining career goals and designing an appropriate strategy to address them (Mathis and Jackson, 2008; Palade, 2010; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), but also for organizations, due to its contribution to promote employees' development and motivation and to create a positive image and culture within the organization (Eby et al., 2005; Palade, 2010).

As a result of changes in the labor market and organizations, career management has become more complex and unpredictable (Greenhaus, et al., 2010), especially for organizations, as employees look for new approaches to their careers and value new typologies of benefits, exchanging more stable careers for a greater diversity of experiences (Baruch, 2004; Ivancevich and Konopaske, 2007).

This complexity can be even higher in consulting companies, since they typically cover several areas of knowledge (Kubr, 2002; Kakabadse, et al., 2006) and consultants can assume a wide range of roles and responsibilities across different projects and according to different contexts (Lippitt and Lippitt, 1986; Chapman, 1998; Schein, 1999). Besides, career management models tend to be more generalist and there do not seem to exist specific approaches for consulting companies, although several challenges and considerations have been identified for each consulting career stage (Stumpf, 1999; Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010). In addition, there is no clarity with regard to the main drivers of consulting career decisions in consulting, as some authors highlight the role of seniority and experience for career advancement and others place a higher emphasis on employees' performance (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

Having this in mind, this dissertation aimed to deepen and expand the topic of career management in consulting companies, with particular focus on its relation with seniority and performance variables. Moreover, the dissertation intended to identify the main principles of a performance-based career management in consulting organizations, trying to understand the most appropriate stakeholders and instruments to compose it.

1.2. Research Objectives

The main goal of this investigation was to understand how consulting companies should address employees' performance with regard to organizational career management. In this sense, and according to the theoretical knowledge gathered in the literature revision, three objectives were defined: (i) Understand how consultants see the correlation between career management, performance and seniority; (ii) Identify the main principles of performance assessment, necessary to guide career decisions in consulting organizations; and (iii) Assess the main differences between consultants and their respective managers, regarding seniority and performance as two approaches for career management. The three objectives and the results that derived from them intended to give contributions for both academic and professional fields, by validating or refuting approaches and theories that have been already made around the topic and by adding new points of view to the current scientific knowledge. These findings and contributions might be also harnessed by consulting organizations to improve their career management models, according to consultants' views and opinions.

1.3. Dissertation Structure

To accomplish the proposed goals, this dissertation was divided into eight chapters. The first one (introduction), explains the basis of the dissertation and the original research problem. In chapter two, a literature revision was conducted, describing the main definitions and approaches regarding careers and career management. These two concepts were also linked to the consultancy sector, that was analyzed and studied in detail. The third chapter (critical analysis) summarizes the main literature contributions and explains the root of the problem under study. In chapter four (research methodology), the main research objectives were defined and specified, in accordance with the scientific knowledge gathered on the literature revision. In addition, this chapter describes and explains the methodology used to approach these objectives and the sample of the study. Chapter five (results) details all the results and findings found in the investigation and segments the sample into three major clusters with similar characteristics. In chapter six (discussion and findings), the results were interpreted and compared with the current scientific knowledge about the theme. Chapter seven summarizes the conclusions and the practical and theoretical contributions of the investigation. Finally, the last chapter describes the limitations of the research and establishes considerations for further investigation.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Career Concept

The concept of career can have several definitions, since it covers many meanings and has changed through time (Ivancevich and Konopaske, 2007), which highlights the importance of analyzing the interpretations of different authors and time spaces.

Hall (1976) defined career as *"the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of a person's life"* (Hall, 1976, cited by Paradeise, 2006). The author also stated that a career can be seen in four distinctive ways: as a professional occupation, a sequence of jobs and functions, a sequence of promotions and a set of professional experiences during life.

Baruch and Rosenstein (1992), described a career as *"a process of development of the employee along a path of experience and jobs in one or more organizations"* (Baruch and Rosentein, 1992, cited by Baruch, 2004: 59).

For Mathis and Jackson (2008), a career is *"the series of work-related positions a person occupies throughout life"* (Mathis and Jackson, 2008: 295) and its approach differs between individuals and organizations, because of their different needs and objectives.

According to Sullivan and Crocitto (2009), cited by Schilling (2012), a career is *"an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations that form a unique pattern over the individual's life span"* (Schilling, 2012: 726). Individuals can desire different career alternatives and every career event, even job losses, can be seen as opportunities for new experiences (Schilling, 2012).

Greenhaus, et al. (2010), stated that a career is *"the pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of a person's life"* (Greenhaus, et al., 2010: 10). The authors also identify two approaches on careers, one being a structural property of an occupation (Barley, 1989, cited by Greenhaus, et al., 2010) and other being a property of an individual, resulting on the sum of experiences, jobs and positions he has during his life.

Although all presented definitions are different, it is possible to identify one common point among them: the set of experiences lived by individuals, related or non-related with their working-life, that impact their work's path, decisions and satisfaction.

2.2. The Evolution Of Careers

The definitions and approaches to careers are constantly evolving, as a result of changes in work and organizations, and new typologies of careers emerged trough time.

In the latter half of the 20th century, careers were understood as linear pathways of individuals development within one stable employing organization (Schilling, 2012) and were considered relatively stable and consistent (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). Typically, organizations' hierarchy was highly rigid and static, career models had a clear unidimensional path (Baruch, 2004) and organizations were used to develop career plans to prepare their employees to higher positions of the hierarchy (Chiavenato, 2010).

Career success was evaluated according to the velocity of upward mobility and economic and social achievements (Baruch, 2004). For some people, careers were seen as professions, for representing a more desirable career choice, involving work with high level of autonomy, economic status and compensation (Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

These traditional perspectives on careers, that highlight progress and stability, were somewhat restricted for considering that pursuing a career implies quick progress in status and money with just one or two employers and that careers are developed within a single occupational field or closely connected fields (Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

Nowadays, careers are less structured, less automatic and more unpredictable (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). With a climate of economic uncertainty, where businesses are looking for flexibility in order to better adapt to change, linear professional trajectories have become rare (Schilling, 2012). In some industries, changing jobs and companies every year or two is becoming more common (Mathis and Jackson, 2008), which lead organizations to replace established career paths for more innovative routes (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). Organizations changed their approach of offering careers to secure employment, to offering opportunities for development, and individuals started being less committed to organizations (Baruch, 2004). Instead of exchanging effort and loyalty for job security and advancement, organizations started to offer flexibility and willingness to develop new skills for continued professional development (Callanan, et al., 2017). Also, Böhmer and Schinnenburg (2015) reinforced the fact that employees are being pushed to trade security for flexibility, especially in times of rapid changes.

With these changes, careers switched from long-term based relationships between employees and employing organizations, to transactional, short-term based ones (Baruch,

2004). Additionally, the diversity of experiences at work became the focus of individuals and their nonwork life became more important on career decision making (Ivancevich and Konopaske, 2007). The previous linear upward career transitions began to take diverse forms (Hennequin, et al., 2017), such as geographical mobility, change of organization and conversion to other profession (Nicholson and West, 1989).

In this context of change, new models of careers emerged, comprising a variety of options and many directions for development (Baruch, 2004). Individuals started to have *"multidirectional career paths"* (Baruch, 2004: 61) and assessing the success of a career became much more complex, because a massive variety of criteria can be established, such as work autonomy, work-life balance and inner satisfaction (Baruch, 2004). Table 1 illustrates the main differences between the traditional perspectives on career and the contemporary ones.

Aspect	Traditional deal	Transformed deal
Environment	Stable	Dynamic
Career choices	One, at an early career age	Repeated, at different age stages
Main career responsibility lines with	Organizational	Individual
Career horizon (workplace)	One organization	Several organizations
Career horizon (time)	Long	Short
Scope of change	Incremental	Transformational
Employer expect and employee give	Loyalty and commitment	Long time working hours
Employer give and employee expect	Job security	Investment in employability
Progress criteria	Advance according to tenure	Advance according to results and knowledge
Success means	Progress on the hierarchy ladder	Inner feeling of achievement
Training	Generalist formal programs	Specific, on-the-job
Essence of career direction	Linear	Multidirectional

Table 1 – Traditional and contemporary perspectives on careers

Source: adapted from Baruch (2004)

Additionally, according to Chiavenato (2010), linked to the traditional and contemporary perspectives on careers are the career focus on positions and/or competencies, as can be seen in table 2.

The traditional career perspectives focus primarily on upward promotions within one single organization for positions with higher levels of complexity and responsibility. In this case, the efficacy of career management is measured by the adequacy of individual career plans and the number of employees promoted.

On the other hand, the contemporary perspectives emphasize individuals' enrichment of knowledge and competencies, through a diverse set of experiences, roles and responsibilities within different organizations, areas and industries.

Aspect	Career based on positions	Career based on competencies
Primary objective	Upward mobility within the organization	Improvement of individual and collective competencies
Final objective	Occupation of every hierarchical levels	Competencies acknowledgement by every employee
Efficiency	Internal mobility to positions with higher complexity	Internal mobility of competencies increasingly complex and challenging
Efficacy	Appropriate occupation of positions increasingly complex in the hierarchy	Appropriate offer of increasingly complex and challenging competencies for every areas and levels in the organization
Indicator	Adequacy of career plans	Availability of competencies in every areas and levels of the organization
Return on investment	Number of employees promoted / costs with career plans	Number of competent employees promoted / costs with career plans

Table 2 – Career based on positions vs. based on competencies

Source: adapted from Chiavenato (2010)

2.3. New Career Typologies

As stated before, career perspectives and interpretations have changed over the years, in conformity with changes in the labor market and in individuals' expectations and objectives regarding their jobs.

In the past, due to a greater hierarchy and bureaucracy in organizations, career paths were considerably stable and predetermined, since there were not many variations in career paths. Nowadays, with careers becoming less bureaucratic and structured, new career typologies emerged, standing out the boundaryless and protean careers, two career typologies that are characterized by self-initiated career behaviors and mobility (Nikandrou and Galanaki, 2016).

The term of boundaryless career, originally developed by Arthur (1994), refers to *"a new principle of management based on individualization of rewards and flexibility of jobs"* (Arthur, 1994, cited by Paradeise, 2006: 3288). This concept emphasize that individuals navigate across boundaries between the organization and networks they had established with other organizations and individuals (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). For being associated with variation and social interaction, boundaryless careers can promote the flow of information across organizations and contribute to knowledge creation with consequences on individuals, groups and organizations (Arthur, 1994).

According to Greenhaus, et al. (2010), boundaryless careers have three main dimensions, regarding (i) the disconnection between individuals and organizations (individuals' careers are disconnected from one single employer), (ii) the necessary set of competencies and strategies to pursue this type of career (individuals need to pursue job contacts, expand capabilities and establish connections with a network of influential people outside their organization), and (iii) the need to have an high level of self-responsibility for decision making (individuals should be adaptable and proactive in managing their careers according to their goals and values).

The protean career, as stated by Hall (1996), is a career driven by the person, not the organization, and can be reinvented from time to time, as the person and the environment change. In protean careers, individuals have the responsibility of planning and managing their career and changing it according to their will and preferences (Hall and Mirvis, 1996, cited by Baruch, 2004). In this type of career, individuals have to be versatile and adaptable to succeed in managing their careers.

2.4. Career Management

The changes to socio-economic environment and to organizations that occurred over the last decades of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, originated not only new perspectives on careers but also new models for career management (De Vos, et al., 2007), which reinforce the importance of clarifying and analyzing distinctive approaches about the concept.

Career management, according to Greenhaus (1987), is *"the process by which individuals collect information about values, interests and skill strengths and weaknesses (career exploration), identify a career goal, and engage in career strategies that increase the probability that career goals will be achieved"* (Greenhaus, 1987, cited by Noe, 1996: 119). This definition emphasize that career management is a process of the individual, not the organization, but, according to De Vos, et al. (2007), *"even though individual career initiatives might be a relevant variable to explain career-related outcomes, organizations still form the context in which career development takes place"* (De Vos, et al., 2007: 160).

For Sturges, et al. (2002), career management consists on the activities and behaviors, undertaken by organizations and individuals, concerned with planning and managing employees' careers (Sturges, et al., 2002, cited by De Vos, et al., 2007). Contrasting with Greenhaus' approach, this definition states that career management has an individual and an organizational perspective, which De Vos, et al. (2007) named individual career management (ICM) and organizational career management (OCM), respectively.

The consideration of these two perspectives strengthen the fact that career management and human resource management programs are critical to both individuals and organizations (Arthur, et al., 1989), once they cover a wide range of issues, from individual careers to strategic concerns, such as the characteristics and capabilities of the organizations' workforce.

According to Greenhaus, et al. (2010), both individuals and organizations can benefit from understanding the process of career management, once individuals aim to manage their careers effectively and organizations can profit from understanding the career decisions and doubts that confront their employees. Also, Baruch and Peiperl (2000) stated that both organizations and individuals play an important role in career

management, by sharing important information about opportunities and links to be pursued for the benefit of both.

As reported by Palade (2010), the process of career management has advantages for both individuals and organizations and should be accomplished by balancing the requests of organizations and the interests of individuals. The author also affirmed that the success of career management depends on both efforts of individuals and organizations. While individuals play an important role on planning their career according to their interests, organizations can provide the right resources and frameworks for individuals' development and mobility (Palade, 2010).

The existence of both individual and organizational perspectives on career management highlights the importance of analyzing each one separately, to understand the process of career management as a whole.

2.4.1. Individual Career Management

The individual perspective on career management, according to De Vos, et al. (2007) refers to the proactivity individuals show when managing their career, including their efforts to achieve career goals, searching for feedback to continuously improve and creating new career opportunities. For Guttering (1986), individual career management consists on *"a process by which individuals develop, implement and monitor career goals and strategies"* (Guttering, 1986, cited by Greenhaus, et al., 2010: 12).

Individuals, by planning and managing their careers, may succeed faster and better enjoy their work (Palade, 2010). Moreover, for having more initiative on developing their own careers, individuals may experience a more satisfying level of career progression (De Vos, et al., 2007). In this perspective, career management can be seen as a process by which individuals can make appropriate decisions about their working life or a problem solver approach used to address career decisions (Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

To manage their careers and achieve success, individuals have five main tasks (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). They (i) should gather relevant information about themselves and organizations, (ii) understand their strengths, weaknesses and interests, (iii) define career's objectives, (iv) develop and implement strategies to achieve those objectives and (v) search for feedback on the effectiveness of the strategy and the achievement of goals. Mathis and Jackson (2008) also considered that identifying personal abilities and interests, planning life and work goals, assessing alternative paths regarding careers and recognizing changes in interests and goals across times are other activities that individuals should perform to effectively manage their careers.

Noe (1996) divided individual career management in three main steps. The first one is career exploration, where individuals have exploratory behaviors to discover information about themselves and their environment (Stumpf et al., 1983, cited by Noe, 1996). In career exploration, individuals aim to increase their awareness about career opportunities and their consciousness of what skills and behaviors they need to develop to succeed on their careers. The second step consists on the development of career goals, such as promotions, salary improvements or skills acquisition. According to Locke and Latham (1990), cited by Noe (1996), the definition of goals can influence individuals' activities and behaviors, by giving them orientation, stimulating their motivation and facilitating the development of strategies for goal attainment. When developing career goals, individuals should specify them as much as possible. The more specific and focused the

goals are, the more likely individuals engage in their accomplishment and have motivation to pursue them (Noe, 1996). The third step comprises the implementation of career strategies. A career strategy, as stated by Noe (1996), is *"an activity or behavior, such as participating in mentoring relationship, that increases the likelihood of career goal attainment"* (Noe, 1996: 122). Individuals can develop interpersonal strategies, such as developing contacts inside and outside their employing organization, and intrapersonal strategies, such as developing critical skills and competencies (Gould and Penley, 1984, cited by Noe, 1996).

In a similar way, Palade (2010) identified three critical stages of individual career management that individuals should take to succeed in their careers.

The first one, named orientation, involves establishing the typology of career individuals want to pursue and the set of activities and steps necessary to get there.

The second stage, designated development, gather all activities individuals undertake to create and develop capabilities for potential employment opportunities, such as having training or courses for improving specific skills. The activities performed in this stage should be the ones previously defined in orientation.

Lastly, the third stage, evaluation, comprises different and complementary evaluations on individuals' performance, regarding their career objectives. This stage assists individuals assessing their strategy, making changes if necessary and adapting their future efforts.

1. Orientation	**2. Development**	**3. Evaluation**
Definition of career objectives and a strategy accordingly (that is, the set of activities necessary to accomplish the objective).	Addition and development of capabilities and competencies necessary to pursue the objectives established.	Comparison between the actual stage and the objectives defined, identifying necessary changes and improvements.

Figure 1 – Stages of individual career management
Source: Palade (2010)

Greenhaus, et al. (2010) designed a more detailed model of individual career management, that considers the influence of external factors and highlights the process as being continuous. The figure below illustrates the referred model.
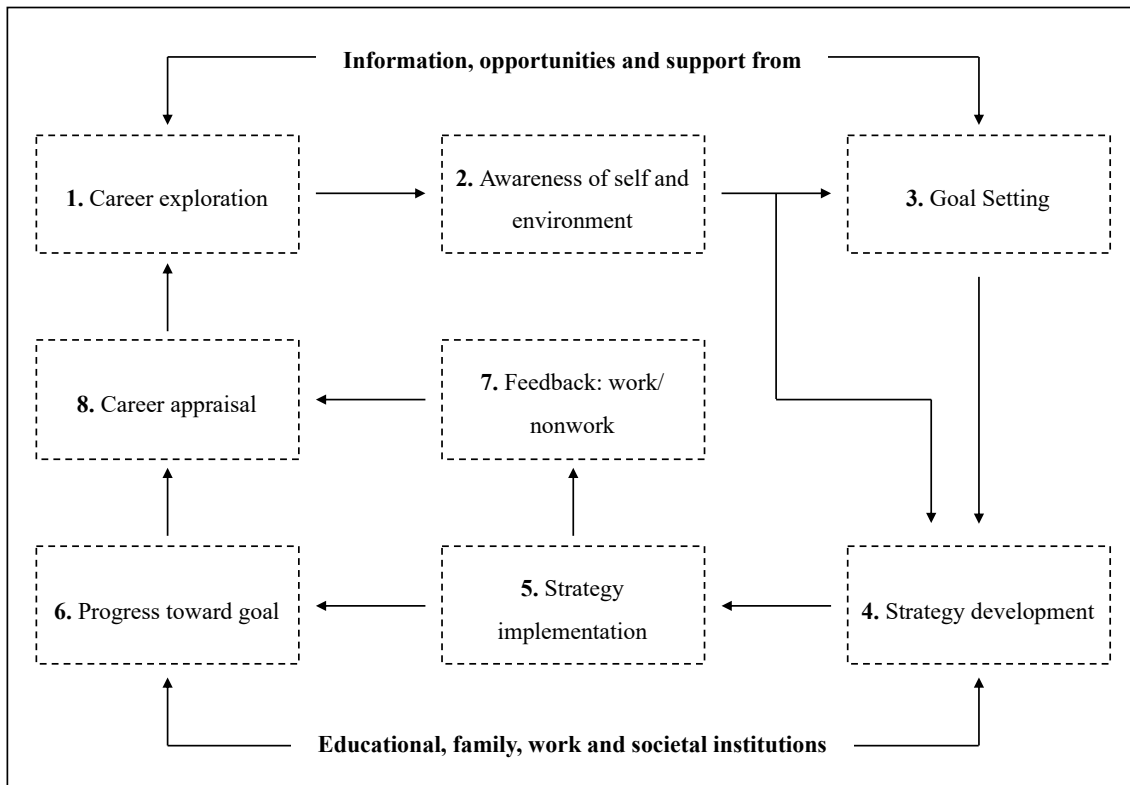
Figure 2 – Model of individual career management

Source: Greenhaus, et al. (2010)

Although this model is very similar to those designed by Palade (2010) and Noe (1996), it considers a phase of feedback, regarding work or other related subjects, that help individuals shaping their career strategy. Additionally, as mentioned before, this model highlights the influence of family, education and societal institutions in the development of a career strategy and in the achievement of goals, while the previous models put all the focus on themes directly related to work.

2.4.2. Organizational Career Management

The organizational perspective on career management refers to the set of activities carried out by organizations that are relevant to the career development of their employees (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000). Organizations need to understand their employees' career needs and help them managing their careers, in order to improve their satisfaction and manage their expectations (Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

In fact, organizational career management can affect employees' attitudes and satisfaction (De Vos, et al., 2007), which can consequently impact their intention to stay and commitment to organizations.

For Eby, et al. (2005), *"organizational career management is used to assess employee skills, to develop competencies and to facilitate internal mobility within the organization"* (Eby et al., 2005, cited by De Vos, et al., 2007: 163). Palade (2010) identified five main objectives of organizational career management:

- Identify and assess potential within the organization;
- Develop a succession strategy according to the organization needs;
- Promote employees' development;
- Improve employees' motivation and levels of participation;
- Create a positive image and culture within the organization.

Career management, regarding its organizational perspective, is a very comprehensive and complex process, since it involves different activities and functions of human resources management. According to Mathis and Jackson (2008), organizational career management comprises the activities of identifying future staff needs, planning and designing succession plans, assessing potential and training needs and developing a career system.

Baruch and Peiperl (2000) defined five main typologies of organizational career management practices (basic, formal, active management, multidirectional and active planning), classified in accordance with their level of sophistication, that is, the simplicity or complexity inherent to it, and level of involvement that the organization needs to have. The figure 3 illustrates the five typologies referred and the main activities associated to each one.

```
                                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                                    │ Multi-directional       │
                                    │ Peer appraisal          │
                                    │ Upward appraisal        │
                                    │                         │
                                    │                         │
                                    └─────────────────────────┘
┌────────────────────────┐ ┌─────────────────────────┐ ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Formal                 │ │ Active Management       │ │ Active Planning         │
│ Written personal career│ │ Assessment centers      │ │ Performance appraisal as│
│ planning               │ │ Formal mentoring        │ │ a basis for career plan.│
│ Dual career ladder     │ │ Career workshops        │ │ Career counseling       │
│ Career books and/or    │ └─────────────────────────┘ │ (1) by the direct       │
│ pamphlets              │ ┌─────────────────────────┐ │ supervisor              │
│ Common career paths    │ │ Basic                   │ │ (2) By the HR department│
└────────────────────────┘ │ Job postings            │ │ Succession planning     │
```

Figure 3 – Organizational career management practices along two dimensions

Source: Baruch and Peiperl (2000)

The basic practices of organizational career management, that have a low level of sophistication and medium level of involvement, might typically best fit with more bureaucratic and rigid organizations or with organizations where employees expect high levels of security and stability. These practices include, for example, lateral movements, such as changing to a function of another department with similar responsibilities and complexity.

Formal practices, that have a higher level of sophistication than the previous ones, represent a formal system of information and presentation of opportunities to individuals. In these practices, the organization has a low level of involvement, since most of the practices are accomplished by individuals, such as a written personal career planning.

Active management practices, such as assessment centers, contemplate a process of information gathering about individuals and, consequently, the use of that information to their development. Typically, these practices occur regularly and allow the organization

to keep informed about employees' needs, expectations and actual or potential performance.

In active planning practices, the organization needs to have a high level of involvement and a planning component that reflect both individuals' development and organization's needs. This is the set of activities that organizations should take to plan the functions' succession adequately.

Lastly, multidirectional practices stimulate feedback sharing between employees from different levels and departments, enhancing the existence of multiple options or paths within the organization.

There is a set of objectives and considerations associated to each of the presented practices, summarized in the figure below.

Multi-directional
Maximize performance feedback
Promote open culture
Risks in small or "closed" organizations

Formal
Support internal labor market
Provide stability
Clarify options for career development

Active Management
Maximize firm knowledge of employees
Maximize employee knowledge of firm and options within it

Active Planning
Make performance-career links explicit
Offer personal and emotional support
Provide for succession

Basic
Offer basic career system elements
Satisfy employees' expectations
Requires infrastructure

Figure 4 – Key goals of organizational career management practices
Source: Baruch and Peiperl (2000)

As stated before, organizational career management is a process incorporated in a broader human resources management system, thus both systems are connected and can help each other meeting individual and organizational needs (Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

Human resources management *"concerns to all management decisions and actions that affect the relation between organizations and its employees"* (Bilhim, 2006: 29), which can represent an important source of competitive advantage (Becker and Gerhart, 1996), because it influences employee skills, encourage collaboration (Huselid, 1995) and impact individual and organizational performance (Bilhim, 2006).

According to Bilhim (2006), a human resources management system comprises four main functions (recruitment and selection, performance evaluation, rewards and compensation and development), which can impact, directly or indirectly, the satisfaction and performance of individuals, the performance of the organization and career management processes.

The figure below intends to better explain this relation, by presenting the integration of career management within a human resources management system.

| Business environment | ⟷ | Strategy and goals | ⟷ | Core capabilities |

| Workforce planning | **Career management** | Performance management |
| Learning and development | Organization development | Employee relations |
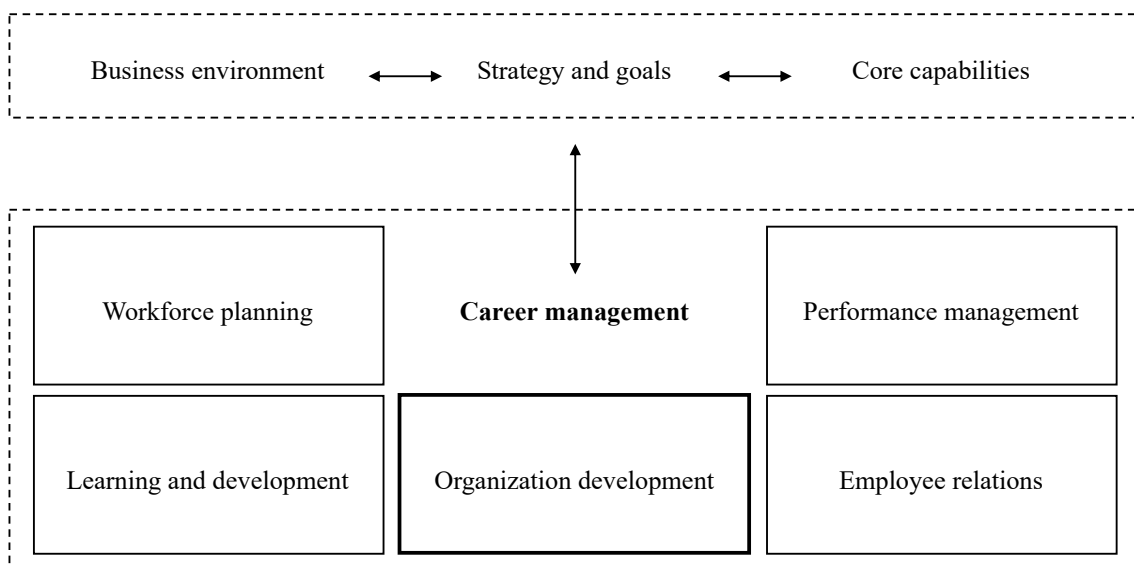
Figure 5 – Integrative framework of career management within human resources management
Source: adapted from Greenhaus, et al. (2010)

Career management is a process directly supported by workforce planning, learning and development, performance management and employee relations and, ultimately, all the five processes impact the performance and development of the organization. Additionally, career management is influenced by the strategy and goals of the

organization, its core capabilities and business environment (Chirstenson, 2006, cited by Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

The key activities of the four processes that support career management are illustrated in table 3.

Process	Key activities
Workforce planning	Recruiting; identifying future workforce demands; designing transition plans
Learning and development	Succession planning; designing orientation programs; developing competencies; creating future leadership programs
Performance management	Measuring performance and objectives; designing benefits programs
Employee relations	Coaching and counselling; designing work-life programs

Table 3 – Key activities of four HRM processes
Source: adapted from Greenhaus, et al. (2010)

It is perceptible that career management is impacted by several human resources themes and by the typology of the organization and its employees. Therefore, these factors should be taken into account when analyzing and defining a career management system.

2.5. The Consultancy Sector

Consulting, according to the generality of authors and relevant entities, is a business characterized by the provision of advice, training and mentoring by specialized individuals to companies facing a particular challenge.

As stated by the Management Consultancies Association (MCA), cited by O'Mahoney and Markham (2013), consultancy is *"the creation of value for organizations, through the application of knowledge, techniques and assets, to improve business performance"* (O'Mahoney and Markham, 2013: 11).

According to Kubr, *"consulting is an independent professional advisory service assisting managers and organizations to achieve organizational purposes and objectives by solving management and business problems, identifying and seizing new opportunities, enhancing learning and implementing changes"* (Kubr, 2002: 10).

Greiner and Metzger (1983) defined consultancy as an advisory service contracted for and provided to organizations by specially trained and qualified persons who assist, in an objective and independent manner, the client's organization to identify management problems, analyze them, recommend and implement solutions (Greiner and Metzger, 1983, cited by Kakabadse, et al., 2006).

For the International Council of Management Consulting Institutes (ICMCI), cited by Kubr (2002), *"management consulting is the provision of independent advice and assistance about the process of management to clients with management responsibilities"* (Kubr, 2002: 3).

The provision of advice, training and / or mentoring can be focused on different areas and themes, depending on the need of the organization and consultants' skills.

As stated by Biswas and Twitchell (2002), consulting evolved from accounting, engineering and manufacturing to include advisory about strategic business issues and, nowadays, the consultancy business can be segmented in four main fields: strategy, operations, IT and human resources (Biswas and Twitchell, 2002, cited by Adams and Zanzi, 2005).

Kubr (2002) divided consultancy in two main dimensions: a technical and a human dimension. When an organization face a technical issue, that is, a problem regarding business processes, strategies, structures, systems and technologies, consultants typically

provide a more technical advisory (e.g. processes reengineering or strategic plannning). For these types of services, consultants usually should have knowledge about technologies, engineering, statistics, mathematics, economics, account and/or management (Kubr, 2002). On the other hand, when an organization is concerned about its human capital, consulting companies typically offer services related to human resources management, such as giving training, empowering human resources or performing activities to improve their motivation. These kinds of services typically require knowledge and competencies in the areas of psychology, sociology and human resources management (Kubr, 2002).

Technical Dimension	Human Dimension
Strategy	Human Resources
Operations	
Information Technologies	
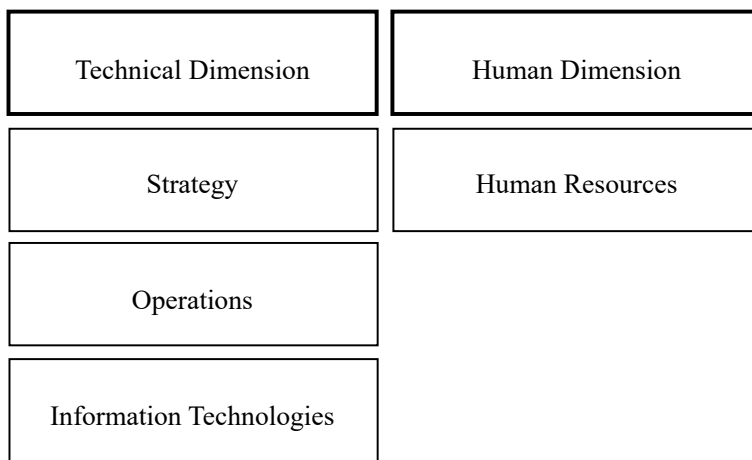
Figure 6 – Consultancy main dimensions and fields of intervention
Source: adapted from Kakabadse, et al. (2006) and Kubr (2002)

Additionally, according to Richter, et al. (2007), consulting companies usually have one of two main archetypes (or organizational configurations) named professional partnership (P2) and managed professional business (MPB). These two archetypes differ according to their organizational structures and systems (Greenwood and Hinings, 1993, cited by Richter, et al., 2007).

P2 companies usually see professionalism as a guiding principle, offer highly tailored services and have a strong commitment to its clients. In these kinds of companies, project teams are generally small and consultants have a low level of specialization, which allows them to work on projects of diverse matters. In contrast, MPB companies seek to be more pragmatic and focus on the implementation and operationalization of their projects. Decisions are more centralized, project teams are larger, and consultants are typically divided by departments or services (Richter, et al., 2007).

The table below highlights the main characteristics of P2 and MPB-type consulting companies.

Aspect	P2-type consulting companies	MPB-type consulting companies
Governance	Self-governance (the company has autonomy and control)	External ownership
Focus	Professionalism	Business thinking
Size	Small to medium (elitism)	Large scale
Decision making	Consensus-based and decentralized	Directive and centralized in top management
Structure	Three main hierarchical levels (associate, project manager and partner)	Three or more layers, that may differ between service lines
Services	Highly tailored services, often with substantial client involvement	Greater standardization of services
Approach	Analytical/expert knowledge-based approach	Pragmatism and implementation orientation
Specialization	Low specialization/differentiation	Greater differentiation (e.g. departmentalization)
Project teams	Small project teams	Large project teams

Table 4 – P2 and MPB-type consulting companies

Source: adapted from Richter, et al. (2007)

2.6. Consultant's Role

The existence of different dimensions and fields of intervention in consultancy, according to the needs and challenges of the organizations, lead consultants to fill a variety of roles, depending on the demands of the situation (Chapman, 1998, cited by Kakabadse, et al., 2006).

According to Lippitt and Lippitt (1986), cited by Kakabadse, et al. (2006), there is no established role in business consultancy, so consultants can fulfill a number of roles that they judge to be appropriate for the client's situation. Rangan and Dhanapal (2016) also stated the ambiguity of a consultant's role, especially when the consultant feels being manipulated by the client. Despite this, Sturdy (1997), cited by Kakabadse, et al. (2006), argued that the main role of consultants is to provide clients with a reassuring sense of control, aiming to reduce the uncertainty existing within the organization.

To summarize consultants' role, Schein (1999) identified three models, that differ according to the nature of help and involvement of the consultant in the process: expertise model, doctor-patient model and process consultation model.

The figure 7 illustrates the representation of these three models according to the nature of help and consultant involvement.

Strategic	Nature of help	Operational
Expertise model	Doctor-patient model	Process consultation model
-	Consultant involvement	+
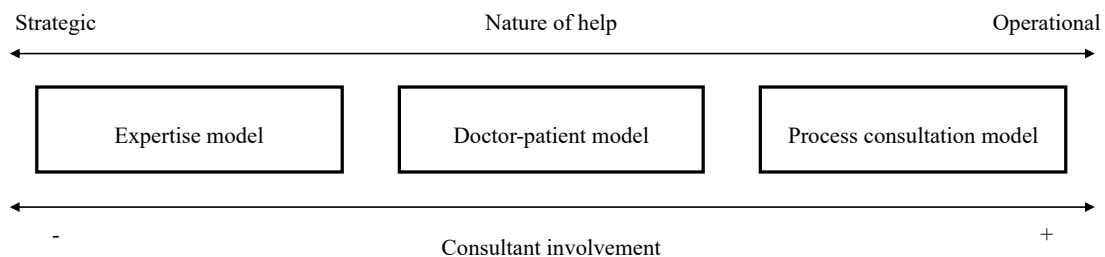
Figure 7 – Consultant's role, according to his level of involvement and nature of help
Source: adapted from Schein (1999)

The first one (expertise model), is a model where the consultant plays a more strategic role, by performing expert analysis and providing a specific service according to client's need. In this case, the problem or challenge is typically identified by the client, but the consultant has the responsibility of designing the solution. Additionally, the consultant has a low level of involvement, since he just interacts with the client in specific times.

In the second model (doctor-patient), the consultant is brought into client's organization to find out what is wrong or need to be changed and, therefore, recommend and implement a solution.

In the third one (process consultation model), consultant and client work together in the identification of the problem and implementation of the solution. In this case, the client typically wants to participate in the entire process to be able to understand the solution designed and know how to solve similar problems in the future.

Notwithstanding the existence of the three main models described, "*the operational environment in which a consultant works changes frequently, and a consultant may be a member of five or more different teams within one year*" (Greenhaus, et al., 2010: 790). Since consultants work with a variety of clients and because markets are constantly changing, competitive advantages are never stable and new business models and approaches often require different skills and competencies (Böhmer and Schinnenburg, 2015). The role and responsibilities of a consultant can also differ between functions and hierarchical levels, which reinforces the importance of analyzing career management patterns.

2.7. Career Management in Consultancy

Career management is not uniform among consulting firms, as it may differ on a number of factors such as the size and characteristics of the organization. Although some patterns might be identified, there is a great diversity of career structures in consulting firms, due to their history, size, technical areas covered, consulting models used, and even personal preferences of the key decision-makers (Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

As already mentioned, professional partnership (P2) companies usually have a structure that comprises three hierarchical levels: associate, project manager and partner. In these companies, *"human resources management is an integral part of the organization system and is run in practice by consultants, rather than specialized human resources staff"* (Richter, et al., 2007: 198). Individual career paths are defined in order to reach partnership positions and there is no focus on any specialization, since *"functional or industry-related specializations are seen as a natural by-product of a consultant's development over time"* (Richter, et al., 2007: 195).

In contrast, most MPB (managed professional business) companies have more than three hierarchical levels, that can change between service lines, having a greater differentiation compared to P2-type firms. This structural differentiation implies *"the need to define roles and responsibilities for both consultants and support staff more specifically that would be the case in P2-type consulting firms"* (Richter, et al., 2007: 196). Some differences in human resources management and career management between P2 and MPB-type consulting firms can be seen in table 5.

Aspect	P2-type consulting companies	MPB-type consulting companies
HRM principles	Identical or similar principles apply across units	Heterogeneity in HRM principles across different units (e.g. offices/countries)
Career paths available	Little choice of different career paths	Some choice of different career paths possible
Career decisions	Depends on performance evaluation	Underpinned by formal HR instruments, such as internal assessment centres
International opportunities	Available for all levels, on short-term project basis	Available for high performers

Table 5 – HRM practices in P2 and MPB-type consulting firms

Source: adapted from Richter, et al. (2007)

However, looking at the generality of the industry, Greenhaus, et al. (2010) identified five main hierarchical levels in consulting companies: (i) junior consultant, (ii) operating consultant, (iii) supervising consultant, (iv) junior partner and (v) senior partner. According to Adams and Zanzi (2004), each level has very different requirements and responsibilities and, consequently, needs different sets of skills and knowledge.

The first level (junior consultant) can be also known as trainee, associate, analyst or entry-level consultant. In this level, consultants should try to understand as much as possible about the essential consulting skills and knowledge (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). According to Stumpf (1999), junior consultants are expected to learn about areas of practice, analytic approaches and methodologies.

The second level (operating consultant) is usually also named consultant, associate consultant or management consultant. Operational consultants learn to integrate their firm's methodology, logic and format into their work with clients (Stumpf, 1999) and are generally responsible for projects' operative tasks (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007).

The third level (supervising consultant) can be also titled as senior consultant, project manager, senior associate or manager. Supervising consultants typically act as team or project leaders, *"which requires competency in structuring the work of others and leading an engagement team"* (Stumpf, 1999: 392), but can also perform some operational tasks that require more experience (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). According to Mone and London (2018), this and higher positions are usually responsible for supporting the development of employees at lower positions and foster their career progression.

The fourth level (junior partner) comprises responsibilities and tasks of marketing and management. Junior partners are typically accountable for promotional work and client relationship management (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). Secondarily, they are also responsible for developing more junior staff (Stumpf, 1999).

The fifth level (senior partner) is frequently also designated as managing partner or director. Senior partners are functions usually concerned with the strategy and policies of the organization or specific business units (Greenhaus, et al., 2010) and have unique rights and responsibilities (Stumpf, 1999).

Naturally, career progression implies a higher level of responsibility and different responsibilities, which forces consultants to develop rapidly and assume a widening range of responsibilities throughout their career (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). These different

responsibilities can be grouped in four many categories, being (i) supervisory, (ii) promotional, (iii) managerial and (iv) technical. Figure 8 represents the four categories of responsibilities that consultants may have.

Supervisory	Promotional	Managerial	Technical
Team leadership Project management	Marketing Negotiation	General management Top management	Particular experience Specific knowledge

Multiple combinations of these four alternatives

Figure 8 – New or improved responsibilities related to career progression
Source: adapted from Greenhaus, et al. (2010)

Analyzing in more detail consultants' responsibilities, Aguilar and Vallejo (2007) identified the main valued and undervalued skills of junior (junior consultant and operating consultant), manager (supervising consultant) and senior (junior partner and higher) positions. According to the authors, junior positions should have mostly soft skills, such as ability to listen and question, initiative and proactivity, enthusiasm and teamwork. On the other hand, managers typically stand out due to their problem-identification skills and experience, being these competences the most important for their work. Senior positions should especially have interpersonal and problem-analysis skills, leadership and flexibility. Also, these positions are typically disassociated with technical skills, that are more representative in lower levels.

The figure 9 summarizes a general career structure in consulting organizations and the main responsibilities in each hierarchical level. As described, the second, third and fifth levels of the career structure are the three hierarchical levels most seen in P2-type consulting firms. However, it is important to note that the main tasks and responsibilities allocated to these three levels can be different in P2-type consulting firms, since there are less levels in the hierarchy and each role can aggregate more responsibilities.

1st level	2nd level	3rd level	4th level	5th level
Junior consultant	Operating consultant	Supervising consultant	Junior partner	Senior partner
Learn and develop essential consulting skills	Perform most of the technical consulting work	Manage projects and teams and perform some consulting work	Negotiate and manage the relationship with several clients	Define and manage the company strategy and objectives
Technical	**Technical**	**Technical**	Technical	Technical
Supervisory	Supervisory	**Supervisory**	**Supervisory**	Supervisory
Promotional	Promotional	Promotional	**Promotional**	**Promotional**
Managerial	Managerial	Managerial	Managerial	**Managerial**

☐ Hierarchical levels of P2-type consulting companies

Figure 9 – General career structure in consulting organizations

Source: adapted from Greenhaus, et al. (2010)

Associated with the five hierarchical levels described, Stumpf (1999) identified five phases of professional development for consultants: (i) firm entry and finding oneself, (ii) client work and gaining traction, (iii) team leadership and developing others, (iv) developing client relationships and building the institution, (v) and firm leadership and giving feedback. According to the author, *"each phase has a least one area of major challenge, turmoil and excitement – and each area has a set of skills, competencies, emotions and perspectives to be understood and mastered"* (Stumpf, 1999: 393).

The table below highlights the main challenges that consultants face and responses they can have in each of the described phase.

Phase	Challenges	Response	Personal risks
Firm entry and finding oneself (Junior consultant)	Fit • Who am I? • Do I have a voice? • Can I be me here? • Do I want to belong?	Excitement Relief Loneliness Ambivalence Anxiety Inadequacy	Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem Blame self or firm
Client work and gaining traction (Operating consultant)	Confidence and competence • Can I do this? • Am I valued? • Do they want me? • Do I want them?	Pride Exhaustion Despair Confusion Overwhelmed	Loss of peer value and esteem Loss of internal marketability

Team leadership and developing others (Supervising consultant)	Complexity and meaning • Do I know enough? • Am I structuring the work adequately? • Am I providing support? • Is the sacrifice worth it?	Inadequacy Stimulation Energy Fatigue Conflict	Loss of control (time, money, content)
Developing client relationships and building the institution (Junior partner)	Authority and dependency • Does the client trust me? • Am I giving good counsel and value? • Am I an equal? • What is next?	Power Anxiety Fear of disapproval Fear of rejection One-down or one-up	Loss of client value and esteem Loss of continuity
Firm leadership and giving feedback (Senior partner)	Commitment and ownership • Do I feel that this is my place? • Do I care enough to give back? • Can I provide a voice? • Am I doing enough?	Self-satisfied Success Conflicting demands Burnout Ambivalence	Loss of perspective Getting out of touch

Table 6 – Consultants development's phases and challenges

Source: Stumpf (1999)

After entering in the organization and starting to work or having training, consultants (or junior consultants) usually report feelings of anxiety, loneliness and isolation intermixed with feelings of success and excitement (Stumpf, 1999). The main challenge for consultants in this phase is to fit with the company culture, practices and people, and they frequently report being concerned about their ability to perform and, simultaneously, pride and excitement by the work they are doing (Stumpf, 1999). Most firms recognize this challenge and try to provide support and encouragement in this phase, mostly through informal support given by more experienced consultants (Stumpf, 1999).

In the second phase (client work and gaining traction), the main challenges consultants face are related to their levels of confidence and competence (Stumpf, 1999). Operational consultants usually report the need to feel included and to have some influence over their assignments and, given the diversity of work, often experience difficulty adjusting their approaches to others (Stumpf, 1999).

When consultants become project or team leaders (that is, when they become supervising consultants), it is expected that they can be capable of *"independently respond to inquiries, leverage a project into a longer-term relationship, provide team leadership and learning opportunities for junior staff"* (Stumpf, 1999: 395). The main challenge in this phase is to regularly and adequately play a leader role in several projects, while contributing to the development and growth of all team members.

In the fourth phase of consultant's development (developing client relationships and building the institution), consultants (or junior partners, as it is named at this level) usually experience increased levels of anxiety, as the nature of their work goes beyond the content and focus more on establishing a basis of trust and collaboration with clients, connecting with their vision and position themselves as a key partner to achieve that vision (Stumpf, 1999).

Regarding the fifth phase (firm leadership and giving feedback), Stumpf (1999) stated that senior partners can become formal or informal leaders. While formal leadership consists on assuming managerial and administrative tasks related to the running of the organization, informal leadership represents an active involvement and contribution to the ongoing administration of the organization (Stumpf, 1999). For both leadership contexts, consultants may struggle with conflicting external (regarding clients) and internal (regarding the organization) demands.

It is possible to see that most of the described challenges are related to performance and self-confidence, which highlights the importance of knowing how to evaluate performance and giving feedback in every moment. However, the challenges that consultants face may depend on the way that careers are managed, and that vary considerably across firms (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007). Generally, career advancement in consulting firms is highly related to seniority and experience (Greenhaus, et al., 2010), and consultants usually expect to be two or three years on each hierarchical level. According to Hong, et al. (2016), the higher the rank and seniority in an organization, the greater authority and responsibilities an employee may have. However, performance appraisal is an instrument used in several consulting organizations to guide promotion decisions and responsibilities assignment, but, in some companies, career management is formally independent from performance evaluation (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007). According to Martín et. al (2001), companies that base the movements of people on either performance or skills and knowledge typically undervalue seniority, in the context of career management.

Additionally, some companies usually try to encourage consultants with low levels of performance to leave the organization, instead of trying to give them the appropriate training or support (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007), which can influence the challenges that consultants may face in their career.

CHAPTER 3. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Career is a topic that has been widely studied over last years, with particular focus on understanding its evolution and the different approaches that have emerged throughout history.

Careers, that initially (that is, in the middle of the 20th century) were seen as a linear path that individuals pursued in one single organization (Baruch, 2004; Chiavenato, 2010; Schilling, 2012), can now assume a wide range of possibilities and forms (Nicholson and West, 1989; Baruch, 2004; Mathis and Jackson, 2008; Hennequin, et al., 2017), once individuals search for different life and work needs and objectives throughout their working life (Baruch, 2004; Chiavenato, 2010). In this context, two new career typologies emerged (protean career and boundaryless career), representing two kinds of careers characterized by self-initiated career behaviors and mobility (Nikandrou and Galanaki, 2016), that is, careers that are shaped and decided by individuals and their personal motivations.

With the appearance of new career typologies, new ways of career management were also developed and several authors highlighted the importance of taking into account two distinct perspectives: an individual and an organizational one (Arthur, et al., 1989; Sturges, et al., 2002; De Vos, et al., 2007; Palade, 2010).

While the individual perspective intends to describe and analyze the steps that individuals take during their career, namely career exploration, development and evaluation (Noe, 1996; Palade 2010; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), the organizational perspective tries to explain how organizations approach careers and what corresponding activities are performed, namely talent and performance assessment and planning succession (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000; Mathis and Jackson, 2008; Palade, 2010).

These perspectives and approaches to career management gain even more complexity and abstractedness regarding consulting companies. Consulting is a sector that can cover many dimensions and areas of knowledge, more technical or relational (Kubr, 2002; Kakabadse, et al., 2006), which lead consultants to assume a wide range of responsibilities and perform different roles according to different contexts (Lippitt and Lippitt, 1986; Chapman, 1998; Schein, 1999).

Besides this, a general career structure of a consulting company may comprise five hierarchical levels (Stumpf, 1999; Adams and Zanzi, 2004; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), but

depending on the nature, size and characteristics of the organization, it can only have three hierarchical levels (Richter, et al., 2007).

Regardless of the existence of three, five or more hierarchical levels, it is noticeable that consultants face different and broader responsibilities throughout their career, which reinforces the importance of learning quickly and being flexible to diverse contexts (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). With new or improved responsibilities, consultants also face different challenges on their career advancement (Stumpf, 1999), that can affect them, positively or negatively, and influence their performance. Although the response that consultants give to those challenges can highly depend on themselves, consulting companies may play a major role on preparing consultants and knowing when and how to manage their career.

Usually, career advancement decisions are made based on seniority and performance (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), but there is unusual to see consultants progress to a hierarchical level higher than the level above them (for example, seeing a junior consultant becoming a senior consultant). Although a gradual career progression might seem more appropriate, there can be consultants who, because of their high performance and merit, are able to perform tasks and assume responsibilities that are considerably higher or more complex than the ones they have and, consequently, should have a faster progression in the company. To do so, consulting companies need to have a concrete and well-designed model to assess and reward merit.

However, this is a topic still few addressed in the literature and scientific studies, not only regarding how consulting companies evaluate and reward merit and performance, but also how consultants see and cope with that. Therefore, it is important to understand how consulting companies should balance seniority and performance to guide career decisions, so that career management policies can be fair and benefit both company and employees.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Objectives

The link between career management and performance in consulting companies is an under explored topic, since only a few authors approached the main variables, principles and challenges of career management in consulting firms (Stumpf, 1999; Richter, et al., 2007; Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

As already stated, careers can be quite diverse and assume a wide range of possibilities, since there are a number of factors that can influence it. These factors can be related with the company, such as its size and structure, business and growth strategies and main services provided (Stumpf, 1999; Adams and Zanzi, 2004; Richter, et al., 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), or related with the individual, like his intentions, expectations and performance (Mathis and Jackson, 2008; Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

Notwithstanding, the most common path in consulting companies consists in upright advancements, that occur gradually, between the hierarchical levels that the company has. Generally, the progression between hierarchical levels is highly related with seniority and, in some cases, with performance (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

In this sense the research of this dissertation focused on how consulting companies should address the performance topic and link it to career management, being capable of making appropriate career decisions based on that. Thus, the main objectives of this dissertation are:

(i) **Understand how consultants see the correlation between career management, performance and seniority**

According to Baruch (2004), the traditional perspective about careers reinforced the role of tenure or seniority in career advancement, while more recent perspectives, especially after the beginning of the 21st century, place results and knowledge in the basis of career progression.

In the context of consulting companies, some authors stated that career management is not uniform, as it may differ on a number of factors, such as the size, structure and services provided by each organization (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010). Notwithstanding, Greenhaus, et al. (2010) identified seniority and

experience as the main drivers for career advancement and affirmed that most consultants usually expect to be two or three years in each position, before growing for a higher rank. Contrarily, Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso (2007) stated that performance appraisal is, in some consulting companies, an instrument used to guide career decisions. Additionally, Martín et. al (2001) pointed out that companies that base the movements of their employees on either performance or skills typically undervalue seniority. Therefore, there is a need and opportunity to study and deepen the importance of performance and seniority in career decision making, with respect to consulting firms.

(ii) **Identify the main principles of performance assessment, necessary to guide career decisions in consulting organizations**

Baruch and Peiperl (2000) identified five main clusters of organizational career management practices, that can be classified by their level of sophistication and involvement (that the company needs to have on the respective practice). One of the clusters, for example, includes multidirectional practices (appraisal from peers and supervisors) and other has active planning practices (performance appraisal as the basis for career management and career counselling from the supervisor or the HR team to help on career development).

As stated by Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso (2007), performance appraisal is a common instrument among consulting companies, although it is not always formally connected with career management. Richter, et al. (2007) specified that the contribute of performance measurement for careers differs between firms. According to the authors, smaller and specialized consulting companies, which they named P2-type consulting firms, usually place performance evaluation in the center of career decisions and, for example, offer international opportunities to every employees of the company. On the other hand, larger companies, which they called MPB-type consulting firms, rely career decisions on internal assessment centers and give some opportunities only to the best performers within the organization.

Although consultants can have a different number of roles and responsibilities (Chapman, 1998; Schein, 1999; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), it is necessary to identify patterns and establish rules for assessing performance and implementing a principle of merit as a career guide.

(iii) **Assess the main differences between consultants and their respective managers, regarding seniority and performance as two approaches for career management**

As stated by several authors, both individuals and organizations play an important role in career management, once individuals plan their career according to their interests and organizations provide the resources and frameworks for individuals' development and mobility (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000; Palade, 2010; Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

In most consulting companies, managers or higher positions have the responsibility of evaluating their consulting teams (Stumpf, 1999; Richter, et al., 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010) and consequently influence the career development of their respective employees. Additionally, as identified by Stumpf (1999), the main challenges felt by consultants can be grouped by their positions in the organization and, in the earlier stages or positions, the majority of challenges are related with performance or self-confidence doubts.

In this sense, it is critical to understand the points of view of the two main career management players in consulting firms: the ones accountable for performance evaluation and career management (managers), and the ones impacted by those appraisals and decisions (consultants).

4.2. Methodology

According to Igwenagu (2016), a research methodology comprises the theoretical analysis of a body of methods and principles associated with a branch of knowledge and several qualitative and quantitative techniques to evaluate hypothesis and search for evidences. According to the author, a research can come from a variety of reasons, such as when trying to solve a problem or reaching objectives.

In this case, three main objectives, that were previously identified, represent the purpose of the investigation. Six research questions were defined to guide the conducted research and provide the necessary information for accomplishing the objectives of the dissertation.

These research questions and their linkage to investigation's objectives are represented in the table 7.

Goals	Research questions	References
(i) Understand how consultants and their managers see the correlation between career management, performance and seniority	1. Do consultants see seniority as important for career advancement? 2. Do consultants see performance and potential as important for career advancement? 3. Do consultants value more seniority or performance for career advancement?	Martín et. al (2001); Baruch, 2004; Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso (2007); Greenhaus, et al. (2010)
(ii) Identify, for consultants and their managers, the main principles of performance assessment, necessary to guide career decisions	4. Who should evaluate a consultant's performance and influence his / her career advancement? 5. What are the most important criteria of a performance appraisal that guides career progression?	Baruch and Peiperl (2000); Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso (2007); Richter, et al. (2007)
(iii) Assess the main differences between consultants and their respective managers, regarding seniority and performance as two approaches for career management	6. What differences exist regarding career management, between consultants and their respective managers?	Stumpf (1999); Baruch and Peiperl (2000); Greenhaus, et al. (2010); Palade (2010)

Table 7 – Relation between bibliographic research, objectives and research questions

Source: Elaborated by the author

In respect to the objective (i), three questions were drawn. The questions 1 and 2 intend to analyze, respectively, the importance of seniority and performance for career management and career progression decisions. As stated by Greenhaus, et al. (2010), consultants usually expect to progress after being two or three years in a position or hierarchical level, which may imply a higher positive correlation between seniority and career advancement. However, this scenario of seniority-based career management may not correspond to consultants' points of view, and performance might be the preferred element regarding career management. It is important to note that the second research question also contains the concept of potential, since several authors identified it as one possible driver of career management and also one of its objectives (Barcuh and Peiperl, 2000; Mathis and Jackson, 2008; Palade, 2010). Additionally, question 3 aims to directly compare seniority and performance and tries to establish a preferred variable or a balance between both variables.

With regard to the objective (ii), two main questions were defined, one regarding the possible actors of a performance appraisal system to guide career management and other concerning the main evaluation criteria. Baruch and Peiperl (2000) identified five main clusters of organizational career management practices, being one of them a multidirectional approach, with peer and upward appraisals, and other an active management procedure, comprising assessment centers and formal mentoring. Although some authors stated that performance is a driver for career management in consulting companies (Richter, et al., 2007; Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007), none have identified and analyzed the actual practices and rules established within performance evaluation systems of consulting organizations. Additionally, some authors stated that different hierarchical levels may require different sets of skills and competencies and that new career perspectives rely on competencies acquisition (Stumpf, 1999; Adams and Zanzi, 2004; Chiavenato, 2010), but none have defined which competences are the most preferred or necessary for each level in consultancy.

Lastly, the objective (iii) was addressed by the sixth question, that intends to compare the points of view of consultants and their respective managers/leaders, trying to identify possible differences as a result of leadership experiences. It is also important to notice that, in this context, leaders (typically managers and higher positions) can be seen or

interpreted as the organization itself, since they have, in theory, a higher impact on organization practices and decisions.

To answer and analyze the six research questions, a quantitative investigation was conducted from a non-random sampling, since all the respondents were working or previously worked in a consulting organization. According to Igwenagu (2016), there are several types of research, such as surveys, case studies and simulations, that might better fit with different cases, depending on the purpose of the research. As stated by the author, a survey, that can be represented in the form of questionnair or interview, is used to obtain data about practices and situation views. Even though a survey can be more subjective and less detailed as other research methods, it is mostly used in social sciences and educations (Igwenagu, 2016). This was the method chosen to address the investigation, more specifically a sample survey, since it was only directed to a specific target (current and former consultants).

In this sense, the survey comprised about 20 questions, associated with the six research questions previously identified, and several descriptive information about the respondents.

The descriptive information allowed to perform some correlation analysis between the main variables of the research, namely performance, seniority and career management, and the characteristics of the respondents, such as their working years in consultancy, current department and hierarchical level and company dimension. These correlations are especially important in this context because, as already stated, career management is widely variable in consulting firms, depending on factors such as the dimension of the organization (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010). Additionally, other kind of information was collected and correlated to seniority and performance, although with lower relevance, such as the knowledge about own tasks and responsibilities, career expectations and planning (see questions B.1/C.1 to B.7/C.7 on the annex 10.1.)

Table 8 encompasses the main questions arranged on the survey and their respective association between the six research questions.

Research questions	Survey questions[1]
1. Do consultants see seniority as important for career advancement?	8. Career progression should be based on seniority/experience
	13. Someone should only progress after reaching a certain level of seniority in his/her current role
	16. People with more experience should be in the highest positions
2. Do consultants see performance and potential as important for career advancement?	9. Career progression should be based on performance/ merit
	10. Career progression should be based on potential
	14. Someone should only progress if demonstrates certain above-average skills or competences
	15. Someone should only progress if exceed his/her goals
	17. People with better performance should be in the highest positions
3. Do consultants value more seniority or performance for career advancement?	11. Performance/merit is more important than seniority for career advancement
	12. Potential is more important than seniority for career advancement
4. Who should evaluate a consultant's performance and influence his / her career advancement?	18. Performance should be evaluated by more than one intervenient
	19. The manager is the best person able to evaluate performance
	20. Peers are the best persons able to evaluate performance
	21. The client is the best person able to evaluate performance
	22. Career progression should depend on manager's evaluation
	23. Career progression should depend on peers' evaluation
	24. Career progression should depend on client's evaluation
5. What are the most important criteria of a performance appraisal that guides career progression?	25. Soft skills are the most important for career progression
	26. Hard skills are the most important for career progression
	27. Goal accomplishment is the most important for career progression
6. What differences exist regarding career management, between consultants and their respective managers?	[2]

Table 8 – Survey questions and linkage to research questions

Source: Elaborated by the author

[1] This table only includes the main questions of the survey, that were designed according to the research questions. The remaining questions and/or information asked on the survey can be found in the annex 8.1.

[2] The sixth research question does not have a specific correspondent survey question. Instead, the responders were asked about being or not managers (that is, responsible for leading or managing one or more employees of their organization) and the comparison between consultants and managers was managed according to that.

Regarding the questions above described, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each question in a scale of 1 to 5, being 1- totally disagree and 5 – totally agree. The adoption of this scale facilitated answers' comparison, the analysis of results and allowed to establish possible correlations and dependencies between variables.

In perspective, the overall investigation conducted in this dissertation comprised two main steps: (i) a bibliographic research or literature review, where the concepts of career and consultancy were approached and relevant data was studied and gathered; (ii) a survey, to assess consultants' points of view about the research variables (seniority and performance in the context of career management) and compare it with previous studies and articles identified on the literature revision. These two steps are illustrated in the figure below.
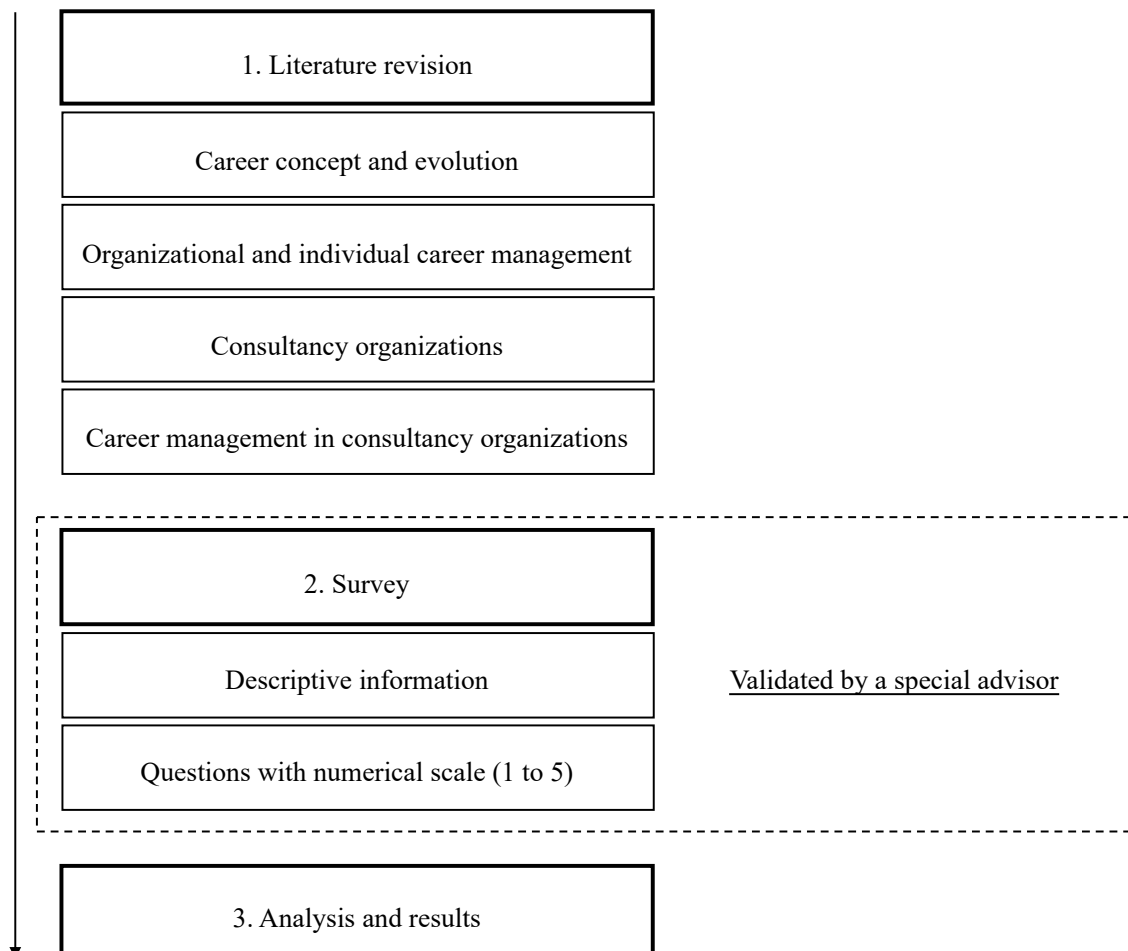
Figure 10 – Overall investigation structure
Source: Elaborated by the author

4.4. Sample Description

As already stated, the consultancy sector comprises a variety of services, roles and areas, that can influence the structure of the company and its main policies, such as career management. Thus, the investigation's sample intended to have people with distinctive characteristics and experiences, working in different companies and departments and with diverse responsibilities, namely technical responsibilities and managing / supervising responsibilities.

In this way, 92 people answered the online survey, of which 51 were men (55,43%) and 41 were women (44,57%). Regarding to their age, the majority of respondents were between 31 and 45 years (36,96%), followed by respondents with 23 to 25 years and 26 to 30 years (20,65% each). The bachelor and master's academic degrees were the most representative, totaling about 43,48% and 33,70% of the sample, respectively. In relation to their years of experience, both at consultancy and at their current company, more than 75% of the respondents had five or less years of experience (76,09% at consultancy and 82,61% at their current company). Respecting to the dimension of the company, more than half of the respondents were working in an organization with 51 to 200 employees (about 52,17% of the sample), while 26,09% belonged to an organization with more than 1000 employees. The departments or areas of project management, strategy and operations and IT were the most represented, with 26,09%, 22,83% and 21,74% of the sample, respectively. Of the total sample, about 18 respondents (19,57%) were not working at any consultancy company at the moment they answered the survey, and of those who were, 23,91% were analyst / junior consultant (first hierarchical level), 18,48% were consultant (second hierarchical level) and 16,30% were senior consultant (third hierarchical level). Finally, nearly 70% of the respondents were not accountable for leading and managing employees in their company, therefore performing mainly technical tasks, while 29 respondents (31,52%) had supervisory responsibilities.

The distribution and characterization of the sample can be consulted in more detail in the annex 10.2.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS

5.1. Identification of Main Clusters

Based on the answers obtained, it was possible to identify and characterize three main clusters from the sample, whose main points of view can be observed from table 9. The values shown in the table represent the average deviation of each group from the average of total answers. Thus, a positive deviation (> 0) reveals a higher level of agreement than the average, and a negative deviation represents the opposite.

Question ref.		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
B.8. / C.8.	Career progression should be based on seniority/experience	-0,24	0,39	0,15
B.13. / C.13.	Someone should only progress after reaching a certain level of seniority in his/her current role	0,18	-0,43	-0,02
B.16. / C.16.	People with more experience should be in the highest positions	0,25	-0,08	-0,41
B.9. / C.9.	Career progression should be based on performance/ merit	0,11	-0,28	0,01
B.14. / C.14.	Someone should only progress if demonstrates certain above-average skills or competences	0,41	-0,77	-0,20
B.15. / C.15.	Someone should only progress if exceed his/her goals	0,42	-0,45	-0,47
B.17. / C.17.	People with better performance should be in the highest positions	0,46	-0,33	-0,64
B.10. / C.10.	Career progression should be based on potential	-0,17	0,07	0,27
B.11. / C.11.	Performance/merit is more important than seniority for career advancement	0,11	-0,73	0,34
B.12. / C.12.	Potential is more important than seniority for career advancement	-0,17	-0,11	0,41
B.18. / C.18.	Performance should be evaluated by more than one intervenient	0,21	-0,31	-0,17
B.19. / C.19.	The manager is the best person able to evaluate performance	0,16	-0,30	-0,07
B.20. / C.20.	Peers are the best persons able to evaluate performance	0,22	0,48	-0,79
B.21. / C.21.	The client is the best person able to evaluate performance	0,21	0,35	-0,67
B.22. / C.22.	Career progression should depend on manager's evaluation	0,25	-0,54	-0,07
B.23. / C.23.	Career progression should depend on peers' evaluation	0,22	0,12	-0,51
B.24. / C.24.	Career progression should depend on client's evaluation	0,24	0,09	-0,53
B.25. / C.25.	Soft skills are the most important for career progression	0,21	-0,50	-0,03
B.26. / C.26.	Hard skills are the most important for career progression	0,39	-0,57	-0,32
B.27. / C.27.	Goal accomplishment is the most important for career progression	0,35	-0,54	-0,26

Table 9 – Identified clusters and respective characteristics

Source: Online survey

Cluster 1

As the table indicates, most responses from cluster 1 were higher than the average of total responses. Of all the positive deviations, it is possible to highlight mostly:

(i) The higher importance gave to performance, especially regarding competences demonstration (0,41), goals achievement (0,42) and top positions filling (0,46). This cluster assign a high value on demonstrating competencies or meeting goals as career advancement criteria, and further enhances the presence of top performers in the top positions of an organization;

(ii) The reinforcement of manager's role as an actor in an evaluation process that guides career decisions, as indicated by deviations about "the manager is the best person able to evaluate performance" (0,16) and "career progression should depend on manager's evaluation" (0,25);

(iii) In line with the first point, this cluster also stood out by giving a greater importance to all assessment elements (soft skills, hard skills and objectives) that should be part of an assessment system that guides career progression decisions, especially to hard skills (0,39) and objectives (0,35).

Characterizing this cluster, it is important to mention that it comprised 48 respondents of the survey (more than half of total respondents) and is mostly represented by consultants aged between 31 and 45 years old (35,42%), especially of the male gender (60,42%). Nearly half had a bachelor's degree (45,83%), one third had 1-2 years of consulting experience (33,33%), and more than half belonged to an organization with 51 to 200 employees (54,17%). This cluster is mostly composed by analysts (25,00%) and consultants (20,83%), allocated to IT (22,92%) and project management (22,92%) departments and with no leadership responsibilities in their respective organization (68,75%).

Cluster 2

In cluster 2 it is possible to highlight the negative deviations of most responses. Nevertheless, and analyzing the main positive and negative deviations of this cluster, the following stand out:

(i) The importance attached to seniority as a basis for career management (0,39) and, at the same time, the lower reputation or importance given to performance (-0,28), skills or

competences assessment (-0,77) and goals accomplishment (-0,45). This importance given to seniority can be seen through the question "performance/merit is more important than seniority for career advancement", which had, averagely, -0,77 points than the average of all responses;

(ii) The lower agreement with manager's relevance on an evaluation process that guide career decisions (-0,30) and, at the same time, the strengthening of peers (0,48) and client (0,35) roles in that same process;

(iii) Contrary to point (iii) of cluster 1, the lower agreement with all assessment criteria identified, namely soft skills (-0,50), hard skills (-0,57) and objectives (-0,54).

This cluster comprised 19 respondents (about 21% of the total sample), mostly women (63,13%), aged between 31 and 45 years (36,84%). Almost 60% of the cluster had a bachelor's degree and the majority had less than 1 year of consulting experience (31,58%). The highest represented position and department were analyst (31,58%) and strategy and operations (31,58%), respectively. Once again, most respondents belonged to a company with 51 to 200 employees (52,63%), and approximately 90% had no leadership responsibilities in their organization.

Cluster 3

The third cluster, similar to cluster 2, presents mostly negative deviations from the average of the responses. Due to the deviations, it is possible to highlight the following:

(i) This is the cluster that most values potential as a pillar of career management (0,27), and is also the one that most agrees that both performance (0,34) and potential (0,41) are more important than seniority;

(ii) In contrast to the previous point, this is the cluster with the largest negative deviation on the question "people with better performance should be in the highest positions" (-0,64), although it also recorded a deviation of -0,41 on the question "people with more experience should be in the highest positions", which does not allow to draw a clear conclusion;

(iii) In contrast to point (ii) of cluster 2, this is the cluster that less agrees with the importance of peers (-0,79 and -0,51) and clients (-0,67 and -0,53) in an evaluation process that guides career decisions.

This cluster represented almost 30% of the sample. It was mostly composed by men (60,00%), aged between 31 and 45 years (40,00%), with a master's degree (40,00%). The majority of cluster constituents had 1-2 years or more than 6 years of consulting experience (both representing 32,00% of the cluster) and were working mostly in companies with 51 to 200 employees (48,00%). The most represented positions were consultant and senior consultant (both with 20%), and the most common department was project management (32,00%). Additionally, about half of those in the cluster had leadership responsibilities in their organization (48,00%).

5.1. Do Consultants see Seniority as important for Career Advancement?

There were mainly three questions on the survey that could help measuring the importance of seniority for career management: (i) career progression should be based on seniority / experience, (ii) someone should only progress after reaching a certain level of seniority in his/her current level and, (iii) people with more experience should be in the highest positions.

Question ref.	B.8. / C.8.	B.13. / C.13.	B.16. / C.16.
	Career progression should be based on seniority/experience	Someone should only progress after reaching a certain level of seniority in his/her current role	People with more experience should be in the highest positions
Totally disagree	16,30%	**30,43%**	14,13%
Partly disagree	26,09%	**30,43%**	25,00%
Neither agree nor disagree	14,13%	23,91%	20,65%
Partly agree	**39,13%**	13,04%	**33,70%**
Totally agree	4,35%	2,17%	6,52%

Table 10 – Relation between career management and seniority

Source: Online survey

As it can be seen from table 10, approximately 44% of the respondents agreed, partly or totally, that seniority should be taken into account for career progressions, and about 42% disagreed with that. Moreover, a similar percentage (around 40%) agreed and disagreed that people with more experience should be in the highest positions, with higher levels of responsibility. These levels of agreement reveal that seniority, as a basis for career progression, is not particularly a consensual theme, being important for some people and unimportant for others.

Notwithstanding, more than 60% of the respondents partly or totally disagreed that seniority should be a must for career management. This means that, although it is not consensually agreed that seniority should be considered for career advancement decisions, the majority of respondents did not see seniority as a mandatory factor or rule that needs to be accomplished.

Once analyzed the overall agreement distribution regarding these three statements, it is important to examine possible correlations between those levels of agreement and the characteristics of the respondents, such as their age, academic degree, years of experience in consultancy and hierarchical level, and their organization. These correlations are described in table 11.

Question ref.	B.8. / C.8.	B.13. / C.13.	B.16. / C.16.
	Career progression should be based on seniority/experience	Someone should only progress after reaching a certain level of seniority in his/her current role	People with more experience should be in the highest positions
Age	-0,059	-0,001	-0,169
Academic degree	-0,104	0,086	0,082
Years in consultancy	**-0,224**	-0,100	0,019
Company dimension	0,032	0,062	-0,014
Hierarchical level	**-0,299**	-0,003	0,056

Table 11 – Correlations between seniority and respondents' characteristics
Source: Online survey

As it can be noted, there are no significant correlations (that is, higher than 0,50 or -0,50) between the three statements and the other variables. However, the negative correlations between the importance of seniority as a basis for career management and the number of years at consultancy or the consultant's hierarchical level stand out. These two negative correlations show that people with more working years in consultancy organizations or in higher hierarchical levels tend to give less importance to seniority.

Analyzing particularly the behavior of the variable "working years in consultancy", represented on the graphic 1 of the annex 10.3., it is possible to highlight that more than 55% and 65% of respondents with six to ten years of working years and more than ten years, respectively, partly or totally disagreed with seniority being a career management basis. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents with less experience (five or

less working years in consultancy) partly or totally agreed that career advancement should consider the seniority level.

Additionally, the variable "hierarchical level" had a similar behavior, although with a larger divergence. As it can be seen from the graphic 2 of the annex 10.3., about 60% to 70% of the highest positions' respondents (managers, senior managers and partners) partly or totally disagreed with career management being seniority-based. Instead, in the levels of manager and partner, only 14,29% agreed with that. In contrast, more than 60% of analysts and consultants, typically the two firsts hierarchical levels in a consultancy organization, reinforced the importance of seniority for career advancement decisions.

	Age	Academic degree	Years in consultancy	Company dimension	Hierarchical level
Age	1,000				
Academic degree	0,015	1,000			
Years in consultancy	**0,374**	**0,297**	1,000		
Company dimension	0,032	0,004	0,042	1,000	
Hierarchical level	**0,351**	**0,340**	**0,714**	-0,081	1,000

Table 12 – Correlations hierarchical level and respondents' characteristics

Source: Online survey

In addition to the respondents' views about seniority, it is possible to compare the actual correlation between their age or seniority and their hierarchical level, as represented in table 12. As it stands out, there exists a moderate positive correlation between age and hierarchical level (0,351) and a very strong correlation between working years in consultancy and hierarchical level (0,714).

Specifically analyzing this last correlation, as illustrated on the graphic 3 of the appendix 10.3., as the number of working years in consultancy increase, the lowest hierarchical levels tend to disappear and the highest tend to increase. From the total sample of the survey, there was no manager or higher position with less than three years of experience, as also none partner with less than six years of experience. Additionally, partners represented 50% of the respondents with more than ten working years in consultancy, while managers and senior managers constituted, together, 62,50% of the respondents with six to ten years of experience.

5.2. Do Consultants see Performance and Potential as important for Career Advancement?

To measure the importance of performance for career management, as previously stated, four questions of the survey were designed: (i) career progression should be based on performance / merit, (ii) someone should only progress if demonstrates certain above-average skills or competences, (iii) someone should only progress if exceed his / her goals and (iv) people with better performance should be in the highest positions.

Additionally, a fifth question was drawn (career progression should be based on potential) since although potential is not directly related with performance, it can be a sign of having a good performance in a future state.

Question ref.	B.9. / C.9.	B.14. / C.14.	B.15. / C.15.	B.17. / C.17.	B.10. / C.10.
	Career progression should be based on performance/ merit	Someone should only progress if demonstrates certain above-average skills or competences	Someone should only progress if exceed his/her goals	People with better performance should be in the highest positions	Career progression should be based on potential
Totally disagree	0,00%	4,35%	2,17%	2,17%	0,00%
Partly disagree	0,00%	13,04%	14,13%	5,43%	8,70%
Neither agree nor disagree	2,17%	16,30%	14,13%	13,04%	10,87%
Partly agree	23,91%	**40,22%**	**48,91%**	38,04%	**47,83%**
Totally agree	**73,91%**	26,09%	20,65%	**41,30%**	32,61%

Table 13 – Relation between career management and performance

Source: Online survey

As table 13 indicates, almost three quarters of the respondents totally agreed with career progression being based on performance, and none respondent disagreed with that. Additionally, more than 65% of the respondents partly or totally agreed that demonstrating above-average competences or exceeding goals should be a determining factor to establish career advancement decisions. Also, as regards to hierarchical levels, about 80% of the respondents reinforced the importance of having the better performers on the highest positions or levels of an organization. In terms of potential, the majority of respondents stated its importance for career management, by agreeing that it should be a basis for career progression decisions (about 79% of the respondents partly or totally agreed).

Concerning possible correlations between the selected questions and the characteristics of the respondents, four main correlations stands out, as the table 14 indicate.

Question ref.	B.9. / C.9.	B.14. / C.14.	B.15. / C.15.	B.17. / C.17.	B.10. / C.10.
	Career progression should be based on performance/merit	Someone should only progress if demonstrates certain above-average skills or competences	Someone should only progress if exceed his/her goals	People with better performance should be in the highest positions	Career progression should be based on potential
Age	-0,143	-0,033	0,015	**-0,343**	0,057
Academic degree	0,149	0,141	0,073	0,207	0,022
Years in consultancy	0,090	0,104	**0,265**	-0,020	0,070
Company dimension	-0,112	-0,035	-0,096	-0,180	-0,169
Hierarchical level	0,165	**0,250**	**0,280**	0,006	0,067

Table 14 – Correlations between performance and respondents' characteristics

Source: Online survey

Firstly, there is a moderate negative correlation between respondents' age and their agreement with better performers being on the highest positions in a company. As the graphic 7 of the appendix 10.4. indicates, while about 94% of respondents with 23 to 25 years old agreed that the highest positions in a company should be filled by the better performance employees, only approximately 40% of respondents with 46 or more years old agreed the same. In contrast, the academic degree positively correlates with the agreement of having the better performers in the highest positions. Although it has a weak correlation (0,207), the more academic qualifications someone has, the more he agrees with performance as measure to identify top-level employees. Secondly, both working years in consultancy and hierarchical level positive correlate with agreeing that exceeding goals should be determinant for career progression. The importance given to goal attainment increase as people have more experience and climb in their organization's hierarchy. Regarding the levels of manager and senior manager, 100% of the respondents partly or totally agreed with this matter, while at partner level only about 14% partly disagreed. Lastly, a similar behavior can be seen between the hierarchical level and the level of agreement about demonstrating above-average skills as a must to career advancement. The higher a person's position, the greater is his agreement with the importance of having a competence-based career management process.

5.3. Do Consultants value more Seniority or Performance for Career Advancement?

Once analyzed both seniority and performance importance for career management, it is important to compare these two points of view and highlight their main differences.

i. While seniority's importance was not consensus among respondents, a performance-based career management seems to be more popular.

As already identified, the opinions about the importance of seniority for career decision making are divided, since 40% of the respondents agreed with its importance and other 40% disagreed (see table 10). In contrast, there was no disagreement about career progression being based on employees' performance and almost 74% totally agreed with that possibility (see table 13).

Directly comparing the relation between performance and seniority, represented in the table 15, the preference for performance is clear (67% of the respondents totally agreed with performance being more important than seniority for career advancement). With regard to potential, although the preference is less evident, about 42% of the respondents agreed on potential being more important than seniority.

Question ref.	B.11. / C.11.	B.12. / C.12.
	Performance/merit is more important than seniority for career advancement	Potential is more important than seniority for career advancement
Totally disagree	0,00%	4,35%
Partly disagree	2,17%	13,04%
Neither agree nor disagree	8,70%	20,65%
Partly agree	21,74%	**42,39%**
Totally agree	**67,39%**	19,57%

Table 15 – Comparisons between performance, potential and seniority
Source: Online survey

ii. The higher the hierarchical level, academic degree and years of experience, the greater is the importance given to performance.

The contrast between seniority and performance is even higher at higher hierarchical levels or years of experience. On one hand, there is a negative correlation between working years in consultancy or hierarchical level and the importance given to seniority for career decisions (see table 11) and, on the other hand, the opposite is noted for the

importance given to performance, since it has positive correlations with working years in consultancy and hierarchical level (see table 14).

Therefore, the higher the hierarchical level and the years of consulting experience, the less is the importance given to an employee's seniority and the greater is the importance given to their performance.

iii. The higher the knowledge about own responsibilities and career expectations, the greater is the importance given to performance.

Looking at the table 16, it is noticeable that the preference for performance has a positive correlation with several variables related to an individuals' knowledge about his main tasks, evaluation process and career expectations. Considering the two highest correlations highlighted in the table (I understand my tasks and responsibilities – 0,399; My company know my career expectations – 0,324), it can be stated that someone that truly understands his responsibilities has a higher preference for performance-based career management, as also someone who has career expectations clearly defined and known by his company.

For this reason, the higher the knowledge about own tasks and responsibilities and the clearer the career expectations, the less is the importance given to seniority and the greater is the importance given to performance, regarding career advancement decisions.

Question ref.	B.11. / C.11.	B.12. / C.12.
	Performance/merit is more important than seniority for career advancement	Potential is more important than seniority for career advancement
I understand my tasks and responsibilities	**0,399**	0,087
I know the criteria of my performance evaluation	0,130	-0,008
I am evaluated for my performance	0,174	0,109
I am evaluated for my potential	0,131	0,203
My company know my career expectations	**0,324**	0,002
I know what career opportunities my company has	0,161	-0,060
I have a career plan defined	0,128	0,072

Table 16 – Correlations between performance/seniority and other career variables

Source: Online survey

5.4. Who should evaluate a Consultant's Performance and influence his / her Career Advancement?

The survey comprised seven questions associated with the possible stakeholders to evaluate consultants' performance, that are below analyzed.

Question ref.	B.18. / C.18.	B.19. / C.19.	B.20. / C.20.	B.21. / C.21.
	Performance should be evaluated by more than one intervenient	The manager is the best person able to evaluate performance	Peers are the best persons able to evaluate performance	The client is the best person able to evaluate performance
Totally disagree	0,00%	5,43%	5,43%	4,35%
Partly disagree	2,17%	15,22%	17,39%	15,22%
Neither agree nor disagree	1,09%	10,87%	19,57%	17,39%
Partly agree	25,00%	**51,09%**	**47,83%**	**45,65%**
Totally agree	**71,74%**	17,39%	9,78%	17,39%

Table 17 – Agreement levels with performance actors

Source: Online survey

As table 17 indicates, the majority of the respondents (71,74%) totally agreed that performance should be measured by diverse stakeholders, which special emphasis to manager's evaluation. However, the differences between the three stakeholders' importance were quite insignificant. While peers were the worst ranked stakeholder (less than 10% of the respondents totally agreed on peers' assessment capabilities), about 18% agreed on both manager and client being able to evaluate performance.

Question ref.	B.18. / C.18.	B.19. / C.19.	B.20. / C.20.	B.21. / C.21.
	Performance should be evaluated by more than one intervenient	The manager is the best person able to evaluate performance	Peers are the best persons able to evaluate performance	The client is the best person able to evaluate performance
Age	-0,269	-0,049	**-0,212**	-0,049
Academic degree	0,266	-0,189	-0,191	-0,043
Years in consultancy	0,279	-0,163	-0,116	0,063
Company dimension	-0,008	-0,077	-0,053	-0,131
Hierarchical level	0,162	-0,191	-0,188	0,048

Table 18 – Correlations between performance actors and respondents' characteristics

Source: Online survey

Analyzing the correlations of these levels of agreement with the characteristics of the respondents and their organizations (table 18), it is possible to underline some differences.

Firstly, there is a moderate negative correlation between respondents' age and their agreement with peers being able to evaluate performance. Notwithstanding, the higher percentage of totally agreement (16,67%) was registered on the respondents with 46 to 65 years, therefore this correlation should only be interpreted generically.

Secondly, respondents' academic level, working years in consultancy and hierarchical level registered a low negative correlation with agreeing on manager and peers as the most adequate actors for performance assessment. Regarding to working years in consultancy, the most representativeness of totally disagreements, both regarding manager and peers, appeared in the more experienced levels. In addition, concerning to hierarchical levels, as represented on the graphics 8 and 9 of the annex 10.4., about 42% and 56% of the respondents in a partner position disagreed, partly or totally, that manager and peers, respectively, are the best persons capable to evaluate performance.

Question ref.	B.22. / C.22.	B.23. / C.23.	B.24. / C.24.
	Career progression should depend on manager's evaluation	Career progression should depend on peers' evaluation	Career progression should depend on client's evaluation
Totally disagree	1,09%	11,96%	4,35%
Partly disagree	18,48%	26,09%	15,22%
Neither agree nor disagree	25,00%	23,91%	26,09%
Partly agree	**43,48%**	**29,35%**	**41,30%**
Totally agree	11,96%	8,70%	13,04%

Table 19 – Agreement levels with performance dependencies for career management
Source: Online survey

As illustrated on table 19, the higher agreement levels registered both on career progression depending on the manager and client assessments, with about 55% and 54%, respectively. As verified in the previous analysis, the importance given to peers' evaluation was lower than the one given to managers and client, since only approximately 30% of the respondents partly agreed with career progression depending on peers' evaluation. Furthermore, the representativeness of respondents who disagreed, partly or totally, with the client evaluation being a determinant factor for career progression was equal to the ones who agreed (about 38% each), reinforcing the controversy around that matter.

5.5. What are the most important criteria of a Performance Appraisal that guides Career Progression?

To understand how performance should be evaluated, three questions of the survey were analyzed: (i) soft skills are the most important for career progression, (ii) hard skills are the most important for career progression, and (iii) objectives accomplishment is the most important for career progression.

Question ref.	B.25. / C.25.	B.26. / C.26.	B.27. / C.27.
	Soft skills are the most important for career progression	Hard skills are the most important for career progression	Goal accomplishment is the most important for career progression
Totally disagree	6,52%	5,43%	2,17%
Partly disagree	9,78%	15,22%	6,52%
Neither agree nor disagree	11,96%	14,13%	9,78%
Partly agree	**57,61%**	**55,43%**	**56,52%**
Totally agree	14,13%	9,78%	25,00%

Table 20 – Agreement levels with performance criteria

Source: Online survey

Table 20 represents the levels of agreement regarding three possible criteria to incorporate in a evaluation process: behavioral competences, also known as soft skills, technical competences, or hard skills, and objectives. As it can be noticed, goal accomplishment was classified as the most important for career progression, totalizing about 81% of agreement, partly and totally. After that, the importance of soft skills for career progression was the most considered, with approximately 71% of the respondents partly or totally agreeing on it.

Analyzing the correlation between these agreement levels and the characteristics of the respondents, no point stood out in particular. However, looking at table 21, it is possible to identify a small correlation between respondents' age and the three statements, which may also be explained by the minor negative correlation between age and the importance given to performance (see table 14).

Nonetheless, the greater correlation (-0,204) registered between age and goal accomplishment, emphasizing that the youngest consultants give higher importance to objectives attainment. Contrarily, the importance assigned to goal attainment positively correlates with the hierarchical level of the consultant (0,145). That is, consultants from higher hierarchy levels see goals achievement as more important that demonstrating good

or above-average soft and hard skills (that had a positively correlation with hierarchy level of 0,049 and 0,116, respectively). Additionally, there is a small positive correlation between the academic degree and the importance given to hard skills for career progression (0,129), which means that people with higher academic levels value more technical competences.

Question ref.	B.25. / C.25.	B.26. / C.26.	B.27. / C.27.
	Soft skills are the most important for career progression	Hard skills are the most important for career progression	Goal accomplishment is the most important for career progression
Age	-0,112	-0,136	-0,204
Academic degree	0,081	0,129	0,091
Years in consultancy	-0,020	-0,011	0,098
Company dimension	0,122	0,107	0,015
Hierarchical level	0,049	0,116	0,145

Table 21 – Correlations between performance criteria and respondents' characteristics

Source: Online survey

5.6. What differences exist regarding Career Management, between Consultants and their respective Managers?

To develop this analysis, the sample was divided in two groups: (i) a group of leaders, composed by people who, regardless of their hierarchical level or position, are responsible for managing and leading one or more employees in their organization, and (ii) a group of non-leaders, that is, people that do not have any leadership responsibility. Thus, it is important to first characterize the composition of these two groups before exploring their main differences.

(i) Leaders' characterization

Of the total sample, 29 respondents classified themselves as leaders, thus having the responsibility of managing one or more employees of their organization. Of these 29 respondents, about 55% were men and 44,83% were between 31 and 45 years old, the most representative age. Most leaders had a bachelor's degree (43,38%), followed by a master's degree (33,70%). Regarding their working years at the consultancy sector, about 31% had between 1 and 2 years of experience, while approximately 23% had between 3 and 5 years. The most representative positions or functions were manager and partner, both with 20.69%. Finally, more than half of the leaders belonged to an organization with 51 to 200 employees (52,17%) and the most represented departments were strategy and operations (31,03%), project management (27,59%) and IT (24,14%).

(ii) Non leaders' characterization

The group of non-leaders totalized 63 respondents, which represents approximately 68% of the total sample. As in the previous group, males were the most represented gender (55,43%) and the most common age range was 31 to 45 years old (33,33%). About 44% of these group's respondents had a bachelor's degree, and 31,52% had one to two years of consulting experience and less than one year of work at their current organization. The most represented functions were analyst (34,92%) and consultant (25,40%). Regarding departments, project management and IT were the most represented, with 25,40% and 20,63% of the group, respectively. Finally, equally to the first group, more than half of respondents belonged to an organization with 51 to 200 employees (52,17%), and approximately 26% belonged to an organization with more than 1000 employees.

The comparative analysis of leaders and non-leaders' points of view was based on the questions (1) What importance do consultants give to seniority, in the context of career

management?, (2) What importance do consultants give to performance, in the context of career management?, and (3) How do consultants see a performance evaluation process that can help guiding career decisions?, previously answered. In this sense, the subsection (5.6.1.) intend to assess the main differences between leaders and non-leaders about seniority and performance in the context of career management, while the subsection (5.6.2.) aim to analyze the perspective of the two groups regarding an evaluation process that supports career progression's decisions.

5.6.1. Differences regarding Seniority and Performance

Table 22 aggregates the agreements levels of the two groups regarding the importance of seniority for career management. In general, the group of leaders tended to give less importance to seniority as a career basis when compared to the group of non-leaders. While none leader totally agreed with career progression being based on seniority and about 41% partly disagreed with that, the same percentage (41%) of non-leaders partly agreed with that statement. On the other hand, the percentage of non-leaders who totally disagreed with seniority as a mandatory factor for career advancement is considerably higher than the percentage of leaders who shared the same opinion (34,92% vs. 20,69%). Additionally, there are more leaders than non-leaders agreeing, partly or totally, that top positions should be filled by seniors or more experience people (about 48% of leaders against 36% of non-leaders).

Question ref.	B.8. / C.8.		B.13. / C.13.		B.16. / C.16.	
	Career progression should be based on seniority/experience		Someone should only progress after reaching a certain level of seniority in his/her current role		People with more experience should be in the highest positions	
Group	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders
Totally disagree	17,46%	13,79%	**34,92%**	20,69%	19,05%	3,45%
Partly disagree	19,05%	**41,38%**	26,98%	**37,93%**	20,63%	**34,48%**
Neither agree nor disagree	15,87%	10,34%	25,40%	20,69%	23,81%	13,79%
Partly agree	**41,27%**	34,48%	11,11%	17,24%	**33,33%**	**34,48%**
Totally agree	6,35%	0,00%	1,59%	3,45%	3,17%	13,79%

Table 22 – Leaders and non-leaders' points of view about seniority

Source: Online survey

Analyzing the two points of view regarding performance's importance on career management, the table 23 seeks to summarize the agreement distribution of the two groups.

As it is possible to observe, the leaders' group attributed a higher agreement to all the questions directly related to performance and career management. While more than 86% of leaders totally agreed with a performance-based career management, only 68,25% of non-leaders did the same. Additionally, there were more leaders partly or totally agreeing with demonstrating above-average skills and exceeding goals as a requirement for career progression (37,93% and 24,14% of leaders totally agreed with competences and objectives as mandatory for career advancement, respectively, while only 20,63% and 19,05% of non-leaders agreed the same, respectively). Finally, more than 82% of leaders agreed with high performers being on the highest positions of an organization, while approximately 78% of non-leaders had the same opinion.

Question ref.	B.9. / C.9.		B.14. / C.14.		B.15. / C.15.		B.17. / C.17.	
	Career progression should be based on performance/ merit		Someone should only progress if demonstrates certain above-average skills or competences		Someone should only progress if exceed his/her goals		People with better performance should be in the highest positions	
Leadership	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders
Totally disagree	0,00%	0,00%	4,76%	3,45%	3,17%	0,00%	3,17%	0,00%
Partly disagree	0,00%	0,00%	9,52%	20,69%	14,29%	13,79%	3,17%	10,34%
Neither agree nor disagree	3,17%	0,00%	20,63%	6,90%	19,05%	3,45%	15,87%	6,90%
Partly agree	28,57%	13,79%	**44,44%**	31,03%	**44,44%**	**58,62%**	38,10%	37,93%
Totally agree	**68,25%**	**86,21%**	20,63%	**37,93%**	19,05%	24,14%	**39,68%**	**44,83%**

Table 23 – Leaders and non-leaders' points of view about performance

Source: Online survey

Table 24 complements the two tables discussed above, by directly confronting seniority and performance, in the context of career management.

It stands out the difference of almost 28% between the percentage of leaders and non-leaders that totally agreed with performance being more important than seniority for career advancement, which reinforces the results previously described. As regarding potential, both the majority of leaders and non-leaders partly agreed with it being more central than seniority, and there are no big differences to highlight.

Question ref.	B.11. / C.11.		B.12. / C.12.	
	Performance/merit is more important than seniority for career advancement		Potential is more important than seniority for career advancement	
Group	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders
Totally disagree	0,00%	0,00%	4,76%	3,45%
Partly disagree	3,17%	0,00%	15,87%	6,90%
Neither agree nor disagree	11,11%	3,45%	15,87%	31,03%
Partly agree	26,98%	10,34%	**42,86%**	**41,38%**
Totally agree	**58,73%**	**86,21%**	20,63%	17,24%

Table 24 – Leaders and non-leaders' points of view about performance vs. seniority

Source: Online survey

Table 25 summarizes the main differences between leaders and non-leaders by correlating the various questions analyzed with respondents' leadership responsibilities. As already stated, non-leaders gave a slightly more importance to seniority, as represented by the negative correlation (-0,132). Contrarily, leaders attached a greater importance to performance, as well to accomplishing goals and demonstrating above-average skills, as demonstrated by the positive correlations.

Question ref.		Leadership responsibilities
B.8. / C.8.	Career progression should be based on seniority/experience	**-0,132**
B.9. / C.9.	Career progression should be based on performance/ merit	0,198
B.13. / C.13.	Someone should only progress after reaching a certain level of seniority in his/her current role	0,116
B.14. / C.14.	Someone should only progress if demonstrates certain above-average skills or competences	0,053
B.15. / C.15.	Someone should only progress if exceed his/her goals	0,143
B.16. / C.16.	People with more experience should be in the highest positions	0,156
B.17. / C.17.	People with better performance should be in the highest positions	0,044
B.11. / C.11.	Performance/merit is more important than seniority for career advancement	**0,259**

Table 25 – Correlation between leadership responsibilities and seniority and performance issues

Source: Online survey

5.6.2. Differences regarding Performance Evaluation Systems

With respect to a performance evaluation system as a basis for career management decisions, the majority of both leaders and non-leaders stated the importance of having more than one actor in the evaluation process, as represented in table 26.

Question ref.	B.18. / C.18.		B.19. / C.19.		B.20. / C.20.		B.21. / C.21.	
	Performance should be evaluated by more than one intervenient		The manager is the best person able to evaluate performance		Peers are the best persons able to evaluate performance		The client is the best person able to evaluate performance	
Leadership	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders
Totally disagree	0,00%	0,00%	4,76%	6,90%	1,59%	13,79%	1,59%	10,34%
Partly disagree	1,59%	3,45%	12,70%	20,69%	14,29%	24,14%	7,94%	31,03%
Neither agree nor disagree	1,59%	0,00%	11,11%	10,34%	20,63%	17,24%	19,05%	13,79%
Partly agree	25,40%	24,14%	**49,21%**	**55,17%**	**50,79%**	**41,38%**	**49,21%**	**37,93%**
Totally agree	**71,43%**	**72,41%**	22,22%	6,90%	12,70%	3,45%	22,22%	6,90%

Table 26 – Leaders and non-leaders' points of view about performance actors

Source: Online survey

As for the stakeholder who is better capable of evaluating consultants' performance, leaders reinforced the role of managers (more than half of respondents partly or totally agreed on manager being the best person able to evaluate performance) and assigned less importance to peers and client's evaluations (less than 50% of the respondents agreed with the importance of both evaluations). On the other hand, non-leaders gave the same importance for manager and client's evaluations (about 71% partly or totally agreed that both manager and client are the best people to evaluate performance), while peers' evaluation was less prominent (notwithstanding, approximately 63% of non-leaders' respondents partly or totally agreed that peers are the best persons to evaluate performance).

In addition, according to the table 29 in the annex 10.6., in leaders' opinion, career progression decisions should depend mainly on manager's assessment (about 58% partially or totally agreed with that), which matches with the results described above. In contrast, more than 58% of non-leaders stated that their career advancement should depend on client's evaluation, while only about 54% agreed that it should depend on manager's assessment. As regard to peers' evaluation, more than one half of non-leaders'

respondents considered they had the ability and knowledge necessary to make an adequate assessment.

Question ref.	B.25. / C.25.		B.26. / C.26.		B.27. / C.27.	
	Soft skills are the most important for career progression		Hard skills are the most important for career progression		Goal accomplishment is the most important for career progression	
Group	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders
Totally disagree	7,94%	3,45%	7,94%	0,00%	3,17%	0,00%
Partly disagree	6,35%	17,24%	11,11%	24,14%	1,59%	17,24%
Neither agree nor disagree	12,70%	10,34%	14,29%	13,79%	11,11%	6,90%
Partly agree	**57,14%**	**58,62%**	**58,73%**	**48,28%**	**61,90%**	**44,83%**
Totally agree	15,87%	10,34%	7,94%	13,79%	22,22%	31,03%

Table 27 – Leaders and non-leaders' points of view about performance criteria

Source: Online survey

Regarding the preferred elements of evaluation, as denoted in table 27, both leaders and non-leaders mostly agreed with goal accomplishment as the most important measure for career progression (84,12% of non-leader's respondents and 75,86% of leaders' respondents partly or totally agreed with that).

Question ref.		**Leadership responsibilities**
B.18. / C.18.	Performance should be evaluated by more than one intervenient	-0,009
B.19. / C.19.	The manager is the best person able to evaluate performance	-0,155
B.20. / C.20.	Peers are the best persons able to evaluate performance	**-0,274**
B.21. / C.21.	The client is the best person able to evaluate performance	**-0,356**
B.25. / C.25.	Soft skills are the most important for career progression	-0,051
B.26. / C.26.	Hard skills are the most important for career progression	0,018
B.27. / C.27.	Goal accomplishment is the most important for career progression	-0,045

Table 28 – Correlation between leadership responsibilities and performance system issues

Source: Online survey

Table 28 summarizes the main differences between leaders and non-leaders, regarding performance actors and criteria. As already identified, the highest divergences are related with peers and client's evaluations, since non-leaders attribute a greater importance to both, as shown by the negative correlations of -0,274 and -0,356.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The present dissertation had three main objectives and six research questions associated. In this sense, the discussion sought to analyze the results in the light of the literature review and the research questions.

The first objective of the investigation was to understand how consultants see the correlation between career management, performance and seniority, which had three research questions associated: (1) do consultants see seniority as important for career advancement?; (2) do consultants see performance and potential as important for career advancement?; and (3) Do consultants value more seniority or performance for career advancement?.

According to several authors, careers became less stable and predictable during the years and the focus of career management, generally and agnostic to industries, has gradually evolved, shifting from seniority, that had a greater importance during the 20th century, to factors such as performance and competencies (Baruch, 2004; Greenhaus, et al., 2010; Schilling, 2012; Callanan, et al., 2017). In the consulting industry, the main driver of career decisions is unclear, with authors stating the role of seniority for these decisions (Greenhaus, et al., 2010) and others identifying performance as new the main driver (Richter, et al., 2007; Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007).

In this context, according to the results obtained, two main findings can be emphasized:

i. Generally, consultants see performance as the main driver for career management decisions.

This viewpoint is aligned with more recent perspectives on careers (Baruch, 2004; Mathis and Jackson, 2008; Chiavenato, 2010), that place a higher value on performance and with some author's perspectives about career management within consulting firms (Richter, et al., 2007; Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007). Contrarily, it contrasts with Greenhaus, et al. (2010) vision of seniority being the main driver of career progression decisions in consultancy.

The preference for performance was especially prevalent on consultants in higher hierarchical level, with higher academic degrees and years of experience, which may strengthen even more this approach and suggest that literacy has a positive correlation with the preference for a performance-based career management. Additionally, the importance given to seniority tend to diminish as consultants have higher

experience/seniority and are in higher hierarchical levels. Although there was no previous studies or reports about which positions or levels give higher emphasis to seniority, it should be expected that younger employees would give less value to seniority than older employees, because of careers' evolution and individuals' news perspectives and objectives (Baruch, 2004; Mathis and Jackson, 2008; Chiavenato, 2010). Notwithstanding, this may be a result of consultants' main challenges identified by Stumpf (1999). As stated by the author, the first years in the sector may be related to doubts about performance and self-confidence, and consultants may be more afraid of seeing their careers being shaped or decided on the basis of their performance and results.

The results also identified that the bigger the consulting company, in terms of number of employees, the lower the importance given to performance. For some reason, not identified in the analysis, consultants from bigger companies place less emphasis on performance, which reinforces the existence of different points of view and approaches in accordance with companies' characteristics (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

ii. Despite consultants' views and opinions, the current reality is marked by a strong positive correlation between seniority and hierarchical level.

Although most consultants preferred performance as the decision variable for career management, seniority is currently highly related with career progression. This contrasts with the previous finding but reinforces the role that seniority still plays for career advancement in some consulting companies, as stated by some authors (Stumpf, 1999; Greenhaus, et al., 2010). Notwithstanding, this scenario may weaken or even disappear in the upcoming years, since consultants agreed that seniority should not be a rule for career progression and performance may achieve higher preponderance in every consulting companies, as it has on other industries (Baruch, 2004; Callanan, et al., 2017).

The second objective of the dissertation was to identify the main principles of a performance assessment, necessary to guide career decisions. Two research questions were associate with this objective: (4) who should evaluate a consultant's performance and influence his / her career advancement?; (5) what is the most important criteria to evaluate, in order to support career decisions?.

Some authors identified performance management as a common instrument in consulting companies, although its outputs are applied in several ways, to serve different purposes

and needs (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007; Richter, et al., 2007). In some consulting companies, performance is actually measured but does not have any link to career management, while, in other companies, performance management is in the center of career decisions and applied, for example, to offer international opportunities (Richter, et al., 2007). According to Baruch and Peiperl (2000), career management decisions may be taken according to several organizational career management practices that companies can rely on. One of these practices, for example, is a performance assessment by peers and supervisors (multidirectional approach), that can help identifying several information about employees and their work. Notwithstanding, regardless of the performance management approach, it is crucial to identify which criteria (skills, objectives, etc.) should be evaluated, which may be highly complex due to the diversity of roles and competencies that a consultant can assume (Chapman, 1998; Stumpf, 1999; Adams and Zanzi, 2004; Greenhaus, et al.; Rangan and Dhanapal, 2016). However, none author identified the better or mostly used approaches for performance management in consulting firms, namely identifying who are the main actors in the process and what are the preferred elements of evaluation.

In this context, according to the results obtained, two main findings can be emphasized:

iii. The majority of consultants see as important the intervention of more than one stakeholder (e.g. manager, peers and client) in an evaluation process.

The intervention of several stakeholders fits in the multidirectional approach of Baruch (2004), regarding organizational career management, that can be accomplished in different consulting companies, with different dimensions and structures (Richter, et al., 2007).

In this scenario, manager / supervisor is the preferred actor for consultants, regarding his capability and knowledge to evaluate his employees. This preference may be justified by manager's responsibilities previously identified, such as structuring others work, leading and engaging teams, and supporting the development of employees at lower positions and fostering their career progression (Stumpf, 1999; Greenhaus, et al., 2010; Mone and London, 2018). On the other hand, peers' evaluation revealed to be not truly consensus among consultants, especially for the older ones and when it directly impacts career advancement decisions. For some reason, not identified in the investigation, consultants are not comfortable with his career's movements being influenced by their peers' evaluation.

iv. Objectives accomplishment is the most preferred assessment criteria, followed by soft skills demonstration.

The preference for measuring the attainment of objectives was highly prevalent on superior hierarchical levels, the ones that attributed more value to performance-based career management. The reasons for this preference were not justified on the investigation, and although there is no specific content or reference on the literature about objectives accomplishment in consulting companies, this might be explained by the uncertainty in consultants' roles. Since consultants' tasks and responsibilities can widely vary within projects and assignments, defining short-term objectives, specific to each project or task, may be a more effective and efficient approach.

On the other hand, the second preferred element of evaluation (soft skills) is relatively in accordance with Aguilar and Vallejo (2007) findings. As previously stated, the authors found soft skills as the more important competencies for junior positions (namely junior and operating consultants), especially the ability to listen and question, proactivity, enthusiasm and teamwork. Other positions, such as managers and partners, also need to have several soft skills, namely interpersonal skills and leadership. According to the authors, higher positions typically do not need or have more technical competencies, what can be a reflex of their responsibilities (Stumpf, 1999; Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

The third objective of the dissertation was to assess the main differences between consultants and their respective managers, regarding seniority and performance in the career management context.

In most consulting companies, managers typically have the responsibility of evaluating the performance of their respective consulting teams and consequently influence the development of their employees (Stumpf, 1999; Richter, et al., 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010; Mone and London, 2018). For this reason and due to the difference of responsibilities between consultants and managers (Stumpf, 1999; Adams and Zanzi, 2004; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), it is important to understand the points of view of both parties, although none author had so far specifically approached this matter.

In this context, according to the results obtained, one main finding can be highlighted:

v. Managers have a more contemporary view of careers, giving clear importance to performance as a driver of career progression decisions.

Despite most consultants, regardless of their hierarchical level and responsibilities, valued performance for career decision-making, this preference was especially prominent in managerial positions (those with the responsibility for leading one or more employees). This finding, that is in accordance with the positive correlation between hierarchical level and performance preference, rather than seniority, may be an indicator of potential future changes within consulting companies. Managers and higher positions are the principal responsible of establishing and running consulting organizations' processes and policies (Stumpf, 1999; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), being therefore the ones with the greatest facility and capacity to shift career management principles.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

A career can be described as *"an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations that form a unique pattern over the individual's life span"* (Schilling, 2012: 726). Notwithstanding, this concept has had several interpretations and definitions from different authors and has faced many changes over the years (Baruch, 2004; Chiavenato, 2010), due to the socioeconomic and organizations' evolution, which also resulted in new career management models (De Vos, et al., 2007).

Career management, according to Sturges et. al (2002, cited by De Vos, et al., 2007), consists on the activities and behaviors undertaken by organizations and individuals, concerned with planning and managing careers. These activities and behaviors are important for both individuals and organizations (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000; Palade, 2010; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), once they promote the motivation and success of individuals (De Vos, et al., 2007; Palade, 2010) and support a positive culture and enhances the performance of organizations (Palade, 2010; Greenhaus, et al., 2010).

In consultancy, organizational management practices can be more complex due to the uncertainty of consultant's work (Kakabadse, et al., 2006) and changes in roles, skills and responsibilities through consulting projects (Böhmer and Schinnenburg, 2015). In this context, career management is not an exception and seems to differ considerably between organizations (Greenhaus, et al., 2010), according to factors such as their dimension and structure. Typically, consulting organizations have three to five hierarchical levels (Stumpf, 1999; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), from junior consultant to partner, but the rules or procedures behind career progression decisions are not uniform. While some consulting companies place a higher emphasis on seniority and experience (Greenhaus, et al., 2010), others identify performance as the main driver for career progression (Carvalho and Cabral-Cardoso, 2007).

In this context, this investigation proved that seniority has currently a high positive correlation with career advancement (0,714), although the majority of consultants believe that performance should be the main driver of career management decisions (~98% of the sample) and only a few see seniority as a rule for defining career progressions (~15% of the sample). These points of view are mainly supported by consultants with higher experience, that work in higher hierarchical positions and have leadership and team management responsibilities (there was a positive correlation of 0,165 between

hierarchical levels and agreeing with performance as the basis for career management). Additionally, without disregarding the uncertainty associated with consultants' roles, the more the knowledge and understanding of tasks and responsibilities, the higher the preference for a performance-based career management system (correlation of 0,399), which reinforces consultants' willingness to be evaluated and rewarded for the achievement of their tasks and goals.

Considering performance as the core element of career management decisions, consultants revealed to be receptive to a multidirectional assessment (~97% of the sample), composed by several stakeholders, with special importance to manager's intervention, maybe due to its proximity and knowledge about their performance. Additionally, goals and soft skills proved to be the preferred assessment criteria (~82% and ~72% of the sample, respectively), mainly by consultants in higher hierarchical positions and with more years of working experience.

This study intended to contribute for both academic and professional fields, by deepening an under explored topic, since only a few authors have approached the principles and challenges of career management in consulting companies.

In the academic field, some thoughts were confirmed, such as the current influence of seniority for career management decisions, and new views were added to the topic, like the major preference for performance-based career management, especially by the experienced consultants.

In the professional field, this study may contribute to the development of organizational career management practices aligned with consultants' preferences and points of view, which can also impact the motivation and engagement of employees.

CHAPTER 8. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE INVESTIGATIONS

The findings and results of this investigation might be analyzed and considered according mainly with the limitations of the research.

This was a specific investigation, with a particular scope, that allowed the identification of patterns and points of view regarding career management, seniority and performance in consulting companies. However, as the analysis was purely quantitative, the main reasons behind the results were not identified. Additionally, with regard to the binomial seniority-performance, there were not analyzed or described the possible variations or principles of a model that combines both factors. In respect to the specificities of a performance-based career management, there was only analyzed consultants' views regarding possible assessment stakeholders and criteria and other variables could be addressed, such as the frequency of the evaluations.

It is also important to highlight the limitations of the sample, that was restricted to Portuguese consultants or former consultants. Additionally, the sample had only 92 participants, which might have narrowed the analysis and results identified. In this sense, the presented findings and contributions should not be generalized to the whole consultancy industry.

For further investigations, it would be interest to confirm the identified findings with a bigger sample, with a wider range of ages, hierarchical levels and company dimensions, and to perform a qualitative analysis to have a deeper understanding of the results and to address possible justifications to them. Additionally, the study of the binomial seniority-performance, in the context of career management, can take other forms, by correlating both factors with other variables not considered in this study. With regard to a performance system that guides career decisions, more information should be covered to identify all the principles and rules that might define that system, such as the frequency of the assessment and the representativeness or preponderance of each stakeholder and criteria.

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CHAPTER 10. APPENDIX

10.1. Survey

<u>(A) Initial information</u>

A.1. Age

- o   19 – 22 years
- o   23 – 25 years
- o   26 – 30 years
- o   31 – 45 years
- o   46 – 65 years
- o   > 65 years

A.2. Gender

- o   Male
- o   Female
- o   Prefer not to answer

A.3. Academic degree

- o   Highschool
- o   Bachelor
- o   Post-graduation
- o   Master
- o   Phd

A.4. Years of experience at consultancy

- o   < 1 year
- o   1 – 2 years
- o   3 – 5 years
- o   6 – 10 years
- o   > 11 years

A.5. Years of experience in the actual company

- o   < 1 year
- o   1 – 2 years
- o   3 – 5 years

o   6 – 10 years

o   > 11 years

A.6. Number of employees of the actual company

o   < 10

o   11 – 50

o   51 – 200

o   201 – 1000

o   > 1000

A.7. Department / area

o   Strategy and operations

o   Human resources

o   IT

o   Project Management

o   Audit

o   Other

A.8. Hierarchical level

o   Not working in consultancy at the moment

o   Intern / Summer Intern (or equivalent)

o   Analyst / Junior Consultant / Associate Consultant (or equivalent)

o   Consultant (or equivalent)

o   Senior Consultant / Supervising Consultant (or equivalent)

o   Senior Manager / Junior Partner (or equivalent)

o   Partner / Senior Partner (or equivalent)

A.9. Are you responsible for leading or managing one or more employees of your company?

o   Yes (goes to section C)

o   No (goes to section B)

(B) Career management in consultancy (for consultants)

Please select your agreement level with the following statements, in accordance with the indicated scale (totally disagree; partly disagree; neither agree nor disagree; partly agree; totally agree).

B.1. I understand my tasks and responsibilities.

B.2. I understand the criteria used to evaluate my performance.

B.3. I am evaluated in accordance with my tasks and responsibilities.

B.4. I am evaluated in accordance with my potential.

B.5. My company knows my career expectations.

B.6. I know the career opportunities that exist in my company.

B.7. I have a career plan established with my company.

B.8. My career progression should be based on my seniority / experience.

B.9. My career progression should be based on my performance / merit.

B.10. My career progression should be based on my potential.

B.11. My performance / merit is more important than my seniority, to my career progression.

B.12. My potential is more important than my seniority, to my career progression.

B.13. I should only progress in my career after reaching a certain level of seniority in my current role.

B.14. I should only progress in my career if I demonstrate certain above-average skills or competences.

B.15. I should only progress in my career if I exceed my goals

B.16. People with more experience should be in the highest positions.

B.17. People with better performance should be in the highest positions.

B.18. My performance should be evaluated by more than one intervenient (e.g. peers, manager, client).

B.19. My direct supervisor / manager is the best person able to evaluate my performance.

B.20. My peers are the best persons able to evaluate my performance.

B.21. The client is the best person able to evaluate my performance.

B.22. My career progression should depend on the evaluation of my manager.

B.23. My career progression should depend on the evaluation of my peers.

B.24. My career progression should depend on the evaluation of my client.

B.25. To advance in my career, the most important thing is to demonstrate good soft skills.

B.26. To advance in my career, the most important thing is to demonstrate good hard skills.

B.27. To advance in my career, the most important thing is to accomplish / exceed goals.

(C) Career management in consultancy (for managers)

Please select your agreement level with the following statements, in accordance with the indicated scale (totally disagree; partly disagree; neither agree nor disagree; partly agree; totally agree).

C.1. I understand the tasks and responsibilities of my employees.

C.2. I understand the criteria used to evaluate the performance of my employees.

C.3. I evaluate my employees in accordance with their tasks and responsibilities.

C.4. I evaluate my employees in accordance with their potential.

C.5. I know the career expectations of my employees.

C.6. I share career advancement opportunities to my employees.

C.7. I have established a career plan for my employees.

C.8. Career progression should be based on my seniority / experience.

C.9. Career progression should be based on my performance / merit.

C.10. Career progression should be based on my potential.

C.11. Performance / merit is more important than my seniority, to career progression.

C.12. Potential is more important than my seniority, to career progression.

C.13. I should only progress in my career after reaching a certain level of seniority in my current role.

C.14. I should only progress in my career if I demonstrate certain above-average skills or competences.

C.15. I should only progress in my career if I exceed my goals

C.16. People with more experience should be in the highest positions.

C.17. People with better performance should be in the highest positions.

C.18. The performance of my employees should be assessed by more than one intervenient (e.g. peers, manager, client).

C.19. I am the best person able to evaluate the performance of my employees.

C.20. My employees' peers are the best persons able to evaluate their performance.

C.21. The client is the best person able to evaluate my employees' performance.

C.22. The career progression of my employees should depend on mine evaluation.

C.23. The career progression of my employees should depend on the evaluation of their peers.

C.24. The career progression of my employees should depend on the evaluation of the client.

C.25. To my employees advance in their career, the most important thing is to demonstrate good soft skills.

C.26. To my employees advance in their career, the most important thing is to demonstrate good hard skills.

C.27. To my employees advance in their career, the most important thing is to accomplish / exceed goals.

10.2. Sample characteristics and distribution

Age

	Frequency (#)	Frequency (%)
19 – 22 years	8	8,70%
23 – 25 years	19	20,65%
26 – 30 years	19	20,65%
31 – 45 years	34	36,96%
46 – 65 years	12	13,04%
> 65 years	0	0,00%
Total	**92**	**100%**

Gender

	Frequency (#)	Frequency (%)
Female	41	44,57%
Male	51	55,43%
Total	**92**	**100%**

Academic qualifications

	Frequency (#)	Frequency (%)
High school	6	6,52%
Bachelor	40	43,48%
Post-graduation	14	15,22%
Master	31	33,70%
Phd	1	1,09%
Total	**92**	**100%**

Years of experience in consultancy

	Frequency (#)	Frequency (%)
Less than 1 year	20	21,74%
1 - 2 years	29	31,52%
3 - 5 years	21	22,83%
6 - 10 years	9	9,78%
More than 10 years	13	14,13%
Total	**92**	**100%**

Years of experience in the current company

	Frequency (#)	Frequency (%)

Less than 1 year	29	31,52%
1 - 2 years	25	27,17%
3 - 5 years	22	23,91%
6 - 10 years	11	11,96%
More than 10 years	5	5,43%
Total	**92**	**100%**

Number of employees of the current company

	Frequency (#)	Frequency (%)
Less than 10 employees	4	4,35%
11 - 50 employees	2	2,17%
51 - 200 employees	48	52,17%
201 - 1000 employees	14	15,22%
More than 1000 employees	24	26,09%
Total	**92**	**100%**

Department / area

	Frequency (#)	Frequency (%)
IT	20	21,74%
Supervisory	1	1,09%
Strategy and Operations	21	22,83%
Finance and control	8	8,70%
Project Management	24	26,09%
Human Resources	9	9,78%
Digital	1	1,09%
Sales	2	2,17%
Marketing	2	2,17%
Audit	4	4,35%
Total	**92**	**100%**

Hierarchical level

	Frequency (#)	Frequency (%)
Not working in consultancy at the moment	18	19,57%
Intern	1	1,09%
Analyst	22	23,91%
Consultant	17	18,48%
Senior Consultant	15	16,30%
Manager	7	7,61%

Senior Manager	5	5,43%
Partner	7	7,61%
Total	**92**	**100%**

Responsibility for managing/leading teams or employees

	Frequency (#)	**Frequency (%)**
No	63	68,48%
Yes	29	31,52%
Total	**92**	**100%**

10.3. Seniority analysis
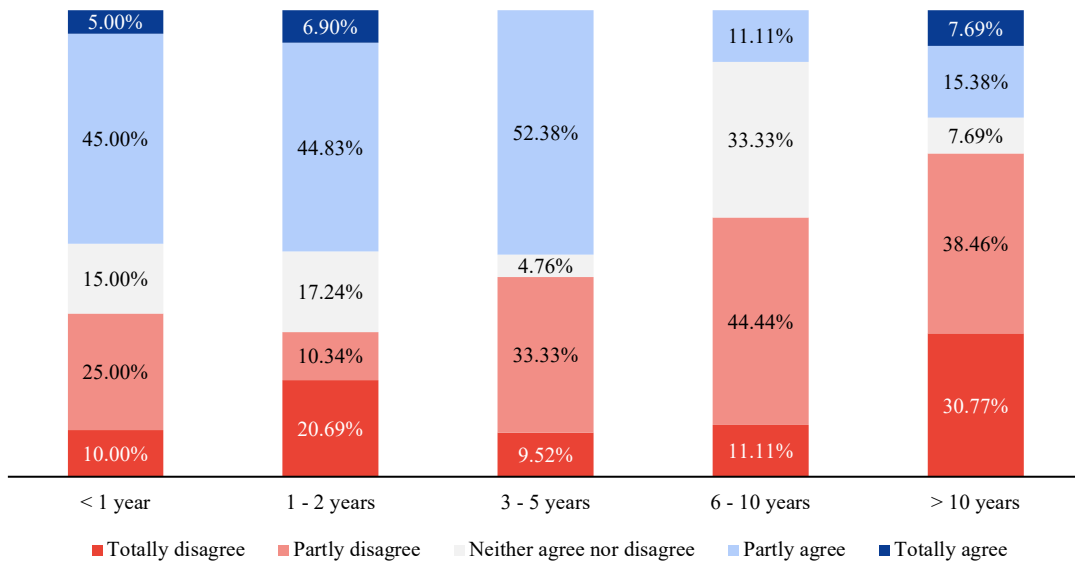
Graphic 1 – Agreement with the proposition "career management should be based on seniority / experience" by working years in consultancy
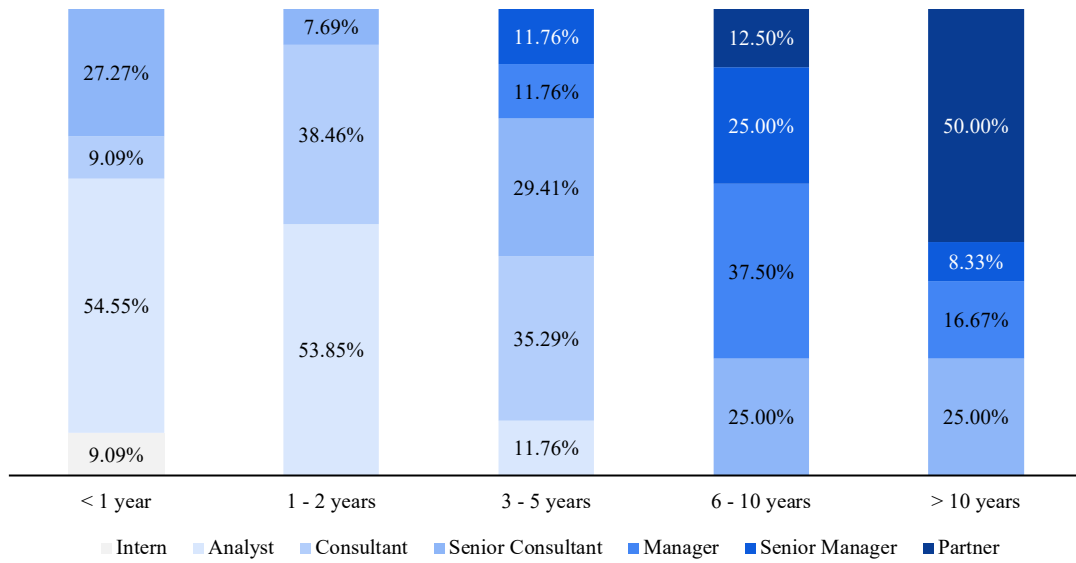
Source: Online survey
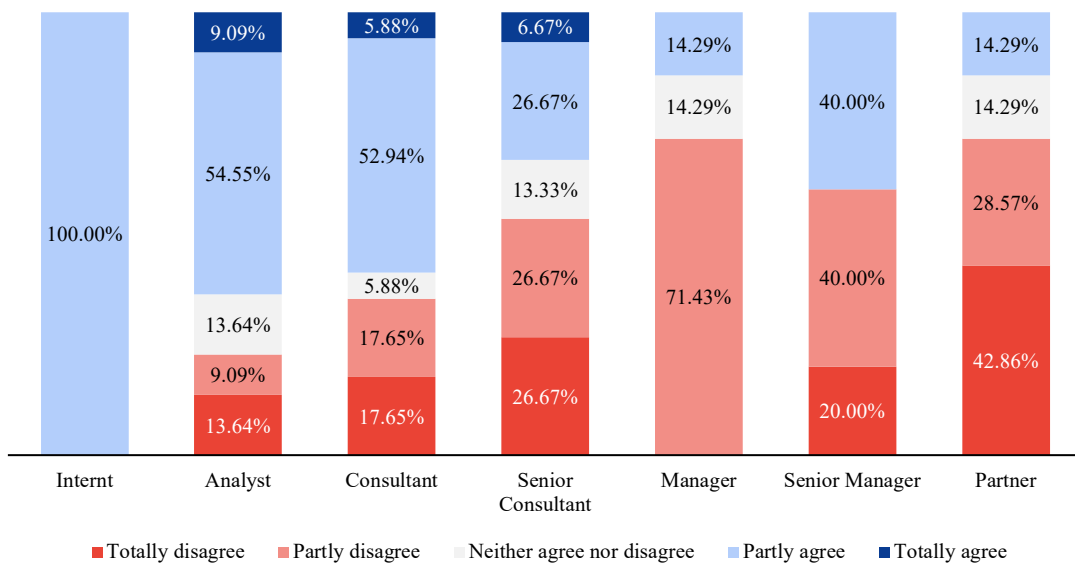
Graphic 2 – Agreement with the proposition "career management should be based on seniority / experience" by hierarchical level

Source: Online survey

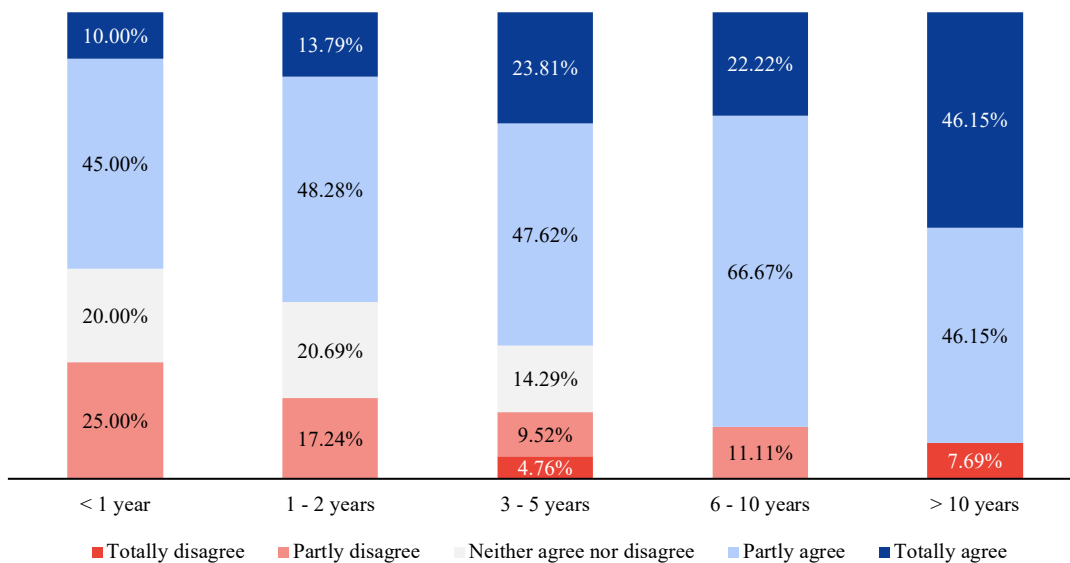Graphic 3 – Distribution of respondents' hierarchical levels by their years of consulting experience
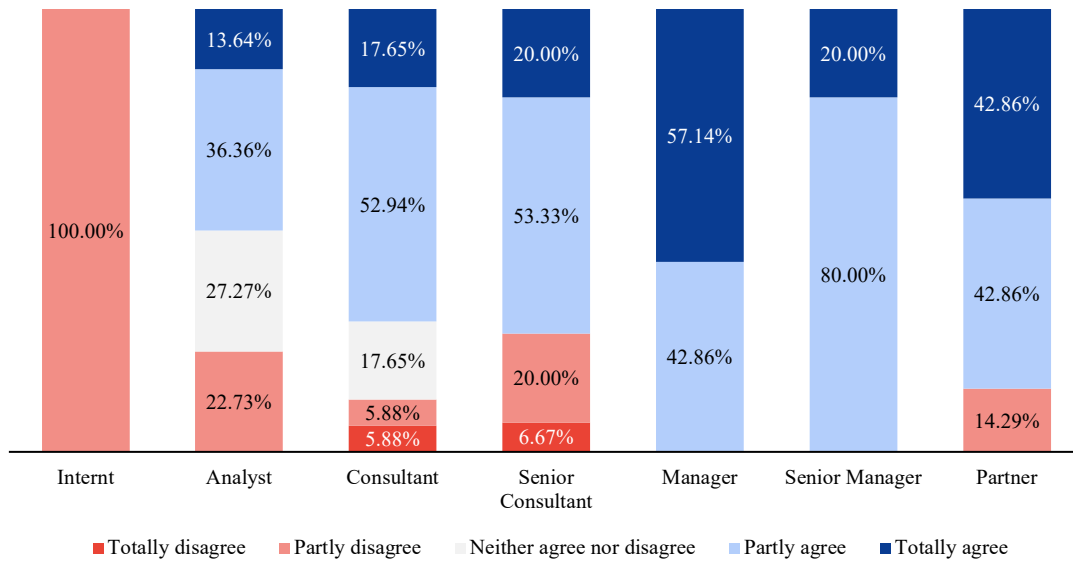
Source: Online survey

10.4. Performance analysis
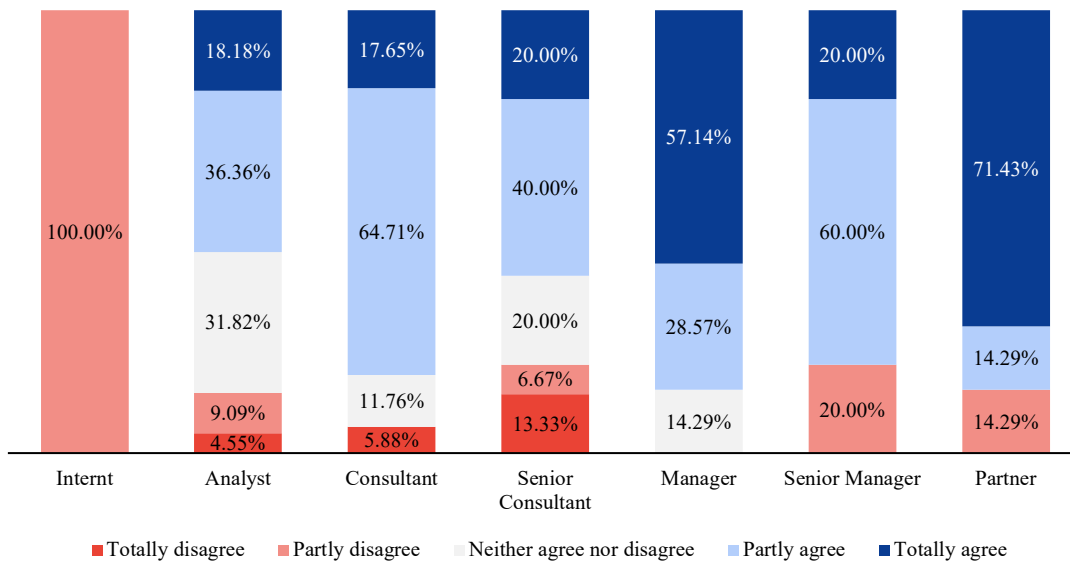
Graphic 4 – Agreement with the proposition "someone should only progress if demonstrates certain above-average skills or competences" by hierarchical level
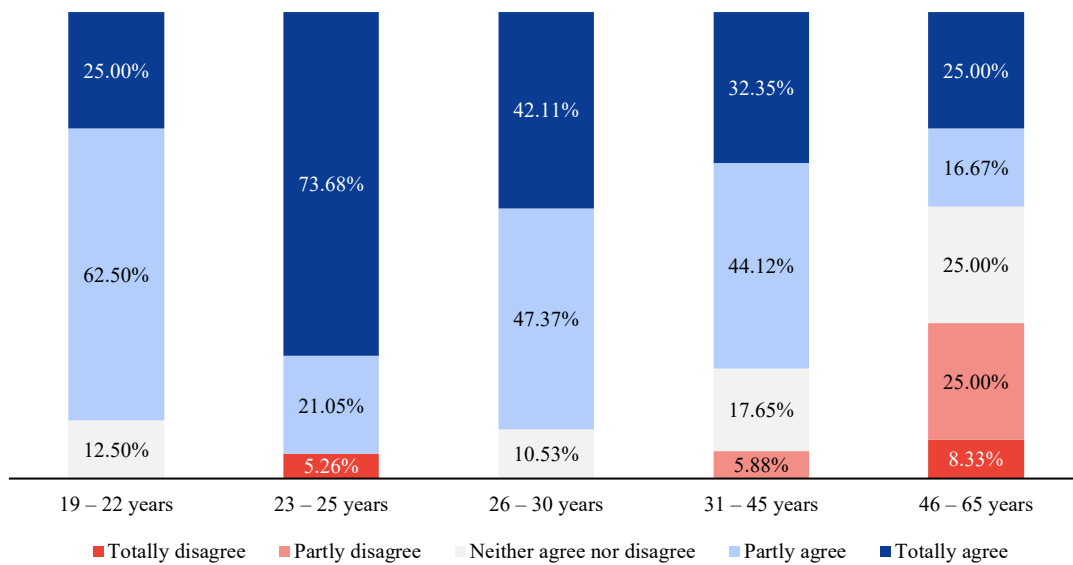
Source: Online survey

Graphic 5 – Agreement with the proposition "someone should only progress if exceed his/her goals" by years of experience at consultancy

Source: Online survey

Graphic 6 – Agreement with the proposition "someone should only progress if exceed his/her goals" by hierarchical level
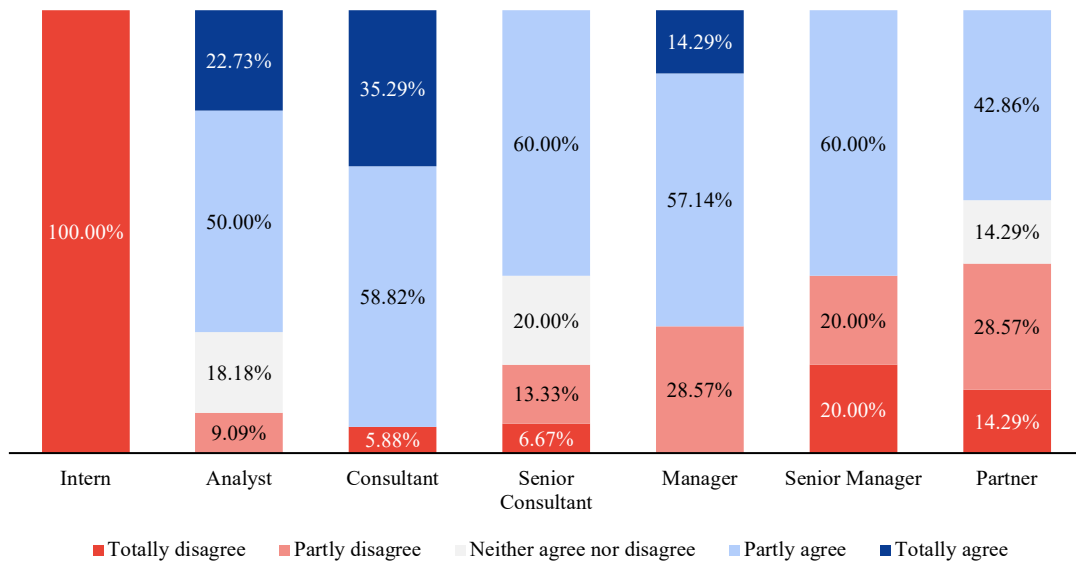
Source: Online survey

Graphic 7 – Agreement with the proposition "people with better performance should be in the highest positions" by age
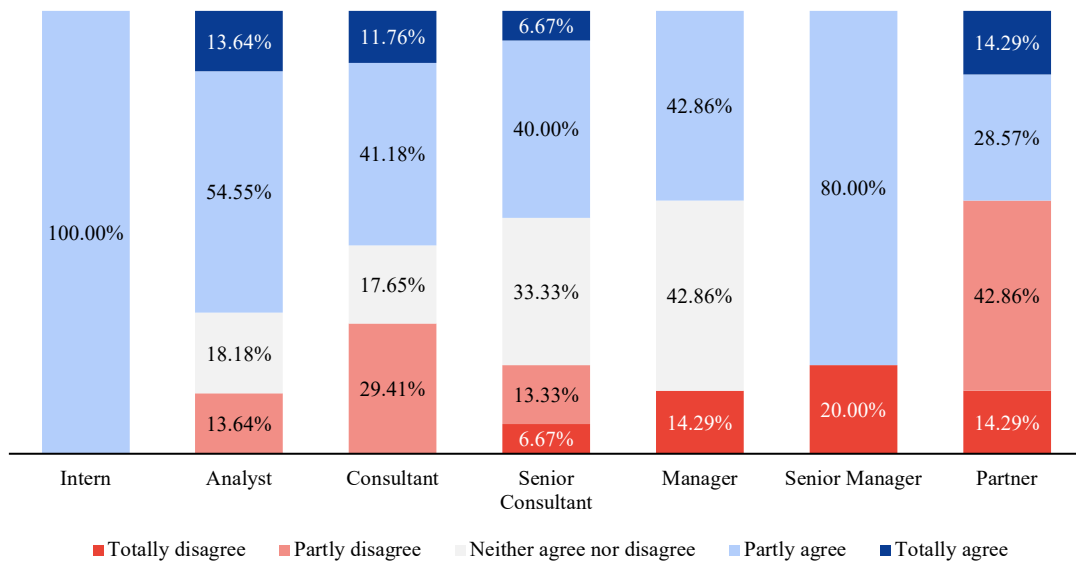
Source: Online survey

10.5. Performance stakeholder's analysis

Graphic 8 – Agreement with the proposition "manager is the best person able to evaluate performance" by hierarchical level

Source: Online survey

Graphic 9 – Agreement with the proposition "peers are the best persons able to evaluate performance" by hierarchical level

Source: Online survey

10.6. Leaders and non-leaders analysis

Question ref.	B.22. / C.22.		B.23. / C.23.		B.24. / C.24.	
	Career progression should depend on manager's evaluation		Career progression should depend on peers' evaluation		Career progression should depend on client's evaluation	
Group	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders	Non-leaders	Leaders
Totally disagree	1,59%	0,00%	11,11%	13,79%	4,76%	3,45%
Partly disagree	19,05%	17,24%	**26,98%**	24,14%	11,11%	24,14%
Neither agree nor disagree	25,40%	24,14%	23,81%	24,14%	25,40%	27,59%
Partly agree	**41,27%**	**48,28%**	**26,98%**	**34,48%**	**41,27%**	**41,38%**
Totally agree	12,70%	10,34%	11,11%	3,45%	17,46%	3,45%

Table 29 – Leaders and non-leaders' points of view about performance actors

Source: Online survey