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The Portuguese model of determinants that make up the management consultancy sector

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Abstract: In a historical retrospective, and although the literature entitles the management consultancy industry as an extraordinary industry and a unique phenomenon in the business context, these statements are not accompanied by a number of academic studies that highlight the importance of the effective work of management consultants. To battle the lack of studies in this emerging field, this article aims to build a determinant model that helps to understand this specific sector. The results of empirical analysis in the form of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires given to management consultants and managers of SMEs in Portugal, show that the activity of strategic consultants, mediated by strategic practices, bring in fact to the research of the

strategy-as-practice a new direction in strategic thinking. It shows that consultant sector could be viewed as a key factor in the development of knowledge between different sectors in organizations, a Knowledge Intensive Activity, a specialist sector having consultants with the title of specialists and, consultants that could be considered as practical strategists.

Keywords: Management Consulting, Strategy, Strategy-as-Practice

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1. Introduction

The perspective of the strategy-as-practice evolved from a widespread discontent about the strategic research and therefore being carried out by several authors who have been studying this field of research refocusing research in the actions and interactions of the practical strategy.

For many years the strategy was analyzed primarily based on the actions and internal dynamics of companies trying to relate this vision in terms of organizational performance (Johnson et al., 2007), focusing the action only on certain top groups and so it seemed that only they can act strategically, which Johnson et al. (2003) explain as a result of the microeconomic area, leaving aside the emotions, motivations and actions that lead and drive the strategy itself (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009; Seidl and Whittington, 2014; Bednarek *et al.*, 2016)

The development of the strategy-as-practice in some way addresses these concerns by bringing to the main study the actions and interactions in the field of strategic research, the social complexity and basic view's causal ambiguity of analysis resources (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski and Lê, 2016), while explaining the practice that constitutes the strategic process (Johnson et al., 2003).

According Jarzabkowski et al., (2007), the term strategy-as-practice can be thus defined as a situation that includes actions, interactions and multi-stakeholder negotiations in construction and a set of practical situations that result later in a particular activity, and so their parameters translated in the practical study (practitioners - people who make the strategy work), practices (social tools, symbolic and material with which the strategy is made) and the "praxis" [the flow activity in which the strategy will be implicit (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Jarzabkowski et al, 2007;. Whittington, 2006; Seidl and Whittington, 2014; Bednarek et al., 2016)].

Together, the " practitioners", the "practices" and "praxis" are the elements that make up the topics of the strategy-as-practice research, establishing what is called

"strategising" (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009) or "strategizing" (Jarzabkowski et al. (2007), worrying about who does what, how they do it, what to use and what are the implications of this guidance in the conceptualization of the strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009), which is of decisive importance as regards the possible direction and organizational performance.

The idea of practice in strategic theory emanates from the sociological construction of practice (Kaiser and Kampe, 2005). Here, the practice is basically defined as the matrix of human activity. This largely reflects the sociological thinking of Giddens (1984) trying to examine the independent activity of social structures. Following this idea, Schatzki (2001: 2) defines the practice as "the matrix of centrally human activity organized around common practical understandings," highlighting the development and dependence of the activity on the skills and shared understandings, thus pointing to the unification of mind and activity in practice.

In order to ensure the relevance of the formulated problem regarding the shortage of studies and information concerning the management consulting industry and particularly in terms of the determinants that make up the sector, this article aims to contribute to define the segment as knowledge activity simultaneously understanding the role of consultants in this field. Therefore, this article purposes a matrix with a visible model of determinants that make up the management consultancy sector in Portugal, trying to show to academic community if consultancy activity in Portugal could be considered as (1) a Key factor in the development of knowledge between different sectors organizations, (2) a Knowledge Intensive Activity, (3) specialist sector having consultants the title of specialists, (4) a sector where consultants could be consider as practical strategists. At the final discussion, all of this information will be read in connection to the literature review about strategy-as-practice.

This article is split into four parts. The first shall strategy-as-practice basis theory and its connection to services and consulting sector. In the second part will be present it the methodology inherent to this research. In third and fourth parts will be presented and discussed the results of this research. Some final considerations will be made upon the analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Strategy-as-Practice

Thevenot (2001: 56) speaks of practice as "bodily activities and shaped by the habits without reflection," stressing the nature of routine action. The focus thus centers on the unconscious, daily activities, routines, habits and traditions. In business terms, practice is therefore the condensation of body and mind active in the routines of the organizational process. (Swidler, 2001; Thevenot, 2001).

But to look at the strategy-as-practice we must ponder about the concept of "speech" as Knights and Morgan (1991: 253) understand it. A speech "is a set of ideas and practices that affect our way of relating and acting on particular phenomena". A particular discourse creates these phenomena of thinking and acting within a given context. It also creates real effects, setting the foundations of the world, with specific problems that the speech can solve (Hendry, 2000).

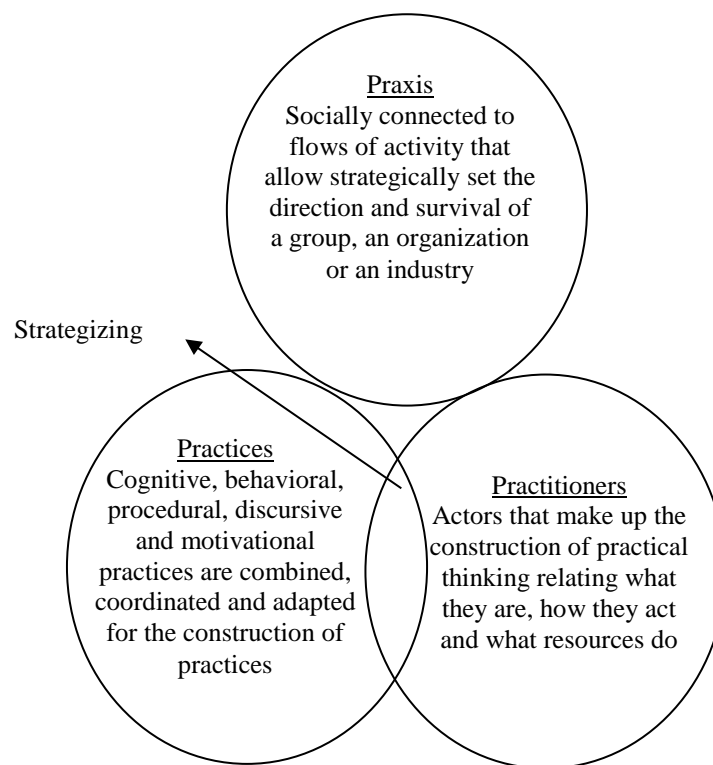
In order to contextualize the strategy as a "speech", historically this theory is developed when the practitioners had the shared belief about market manipulation influencing business success of internal planning and decision making (Bracker, 1980; Knights and Morgan, 1991). Thus, the action of a manager reflects their assumptions about specific events and shows intentions of how to face them (Hendry, 2000).

Thus, the practice produces real effects in a certain "speech" and improves the structure of social phenomena. Instead, the "speech" is embedded in social practices. Thus, the strategy may be regarded as "speech", and then the strategy is also a concept of social practices (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Ezzamel and Wilmott, 2004; Bednarek et al., 2016). This leads to the definition of the strategy from a practical point of view, covering "a set of actions and interactions that contribute to activate and transform the company's management on a daily basis" (Denis et al., 2003: 34) and the focus of actors management as strategists because they are the actors of management who perform the work of the strategy, both through their social interaction with

others and in terms of specific resources and practices that are presented in context (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Jarzabkowski et al., 2012; Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2017).

In order to structurally theorize the concept of strategy and practice and based on three conceptual elements of the strategy-as-practice ("practitioners," "practices" and "praxis"), Whittington (2006) proposes a framework that allows to isolate each of these elements, so that each constitutes an analytical study on the choice of the strategy-like (Jarzabkowski 2005) - Figure 01.

Figure 01: Conceptual framework of analysis of the strategy-as-practice



Source: (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007)

The heart of the conceptual model of the strategy-as-practice is what Whittington (2006) calls "strategizing", covered by the architecture represented in Figure 01, being each of these elements essential to investigate the field of strategy-as-practice.

Strategic practices are so routine behaviors that are expressed by body and mental activity of people and analyzed in different ways, their way of thinking and use of their

knowledge, their understanding and their emotional and motivational state (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2014; Cherman, 2016), i.e. the strategic practices related to habits, objects or social norms as defined models, methods, rules and routines. Basically, what gives meaning and information (for example, a hotel conversation, data collection, influential contacts - persuasion, incidental cooperation, conversations, etc.) or in other words, are the resources used during the activities.

It is important however to unravel strategic practice from strategy-as-practice because if the first emanates from a set of routine behaviors, the second refers to situations, interactions and own interpretations that cause strategic activity.

If the strategic practices are the structural elements of practice during the process of a strategy that, in turn, creates strategic practices for its activity (Giddens, 1984; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2001; Whittington, 2002; Seidl and Whittington, 2014; Bednarek *et al.*, 2016; Cherman, 2016) the strategy-as-practice refers to the application and interpretation of these same practices.

In this context it is also important to note that it is not practical process. A process refers to "how and why" of the involvement of things over time, which in its relationship with the strategic component refers to the concern as to how the organizational strategies are formulated and implemented (Van de Ven, 1992). Practice, and as suggested by Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002) is an extension of the process, or, as suggested by Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst (2006) is one of the six main strategy outlook of the construction process.

From this dichotomy, and as suggested by Whittington (2007) if practice is conceptualized as the three elements that make up the research field of the strategy-like practice, the process is continued, leading to conclude logically that strategy-as-practice is not content, is not change and probably not the substance, but rather a process.

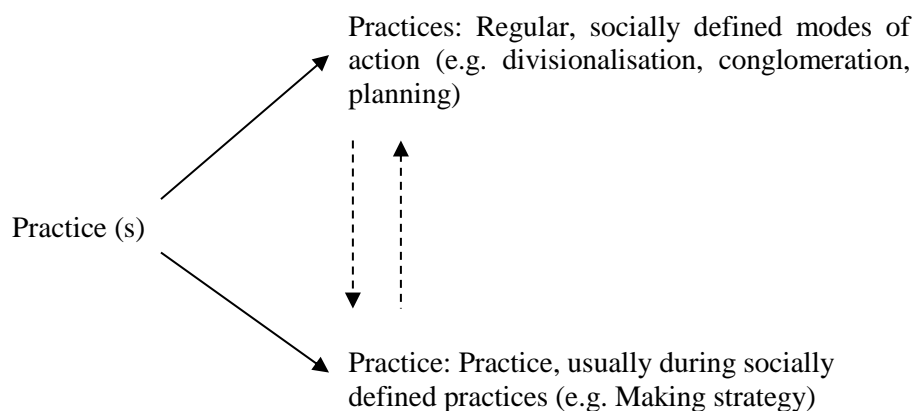
In another context, "practitioners" are individuals who define and implement strategies (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009) in, and with, organizations, bringing them new and special management tools, new interests, ambitions and resources for their strategic work. They are seen as the organization's actors, whether they are managers or not and whether they are internal or external to these same organizations (Whittington, 2007; Lundgreen and Blom, 2009).

According to Whittington (2007) and Lundgreen and Blom (2009), it was from this definition that resulted the first topic of interest of the strategy-as-practice, the "strategic profession", whose focus lies in the institutional field, being implied the research area of strategy-as-practice.

Finally, the strategic "praxis" are the various activities involved in the formulation and implementation of corporate strategy (Whittington, 2006) and can be described as the activity in which the strategy is carried out (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski and Lê, 2016) such as decisions, meetings "workshops" of strategic change processes, stock patterns change, among others, that is, are the activities that constitute the strategic work.

The complexity and ambiguity of these concepts, as well as its duality in terms of action and structure can be seen in Figure 02.

Figure 02: Strategy-as-practice - Interaction of practices and practice



Source: Whittington (2001: 6)

In this perspective, the emphasis in terms of "practices" is about when the practice takes place (in space and time), on how to think during these contribution to the strategic direction of the company as well, on how to act organizationally (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2001; Whittington, 2002; Seidl and Whittington, 2014), referring, as stated earlier, on the perspective of the strategy-as-practice for the application and interpretation of these same practices.

To better understand the paradox between practice and strategy-as-practice, it is necessary that there is a distinction between macro and micro perspectives. The macro phenomena are related concepts, tools and structuring of elements that reflect the society, that is, the business environment, by decision of profitability (Whittington, 2001; Whittington, et al., 2004). The micro phenomena, on the other hand, are social interactions, held in an interpersonal way and can be seen as the life of a strategic process manager's point of view. (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Whittington, 2001; Whittington et al., 2004; Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004; Bednarek et al., 2016; Jarzabkowski and L  , 2016). The strategy-as-practice results thus simultaneously in observing the "what" is done and "how" it is done, having as a priority the discovery of situations that result in strategic activity, the so-called "micro activities that break down strategy into practice "(Johnson et al., 2003: 3).

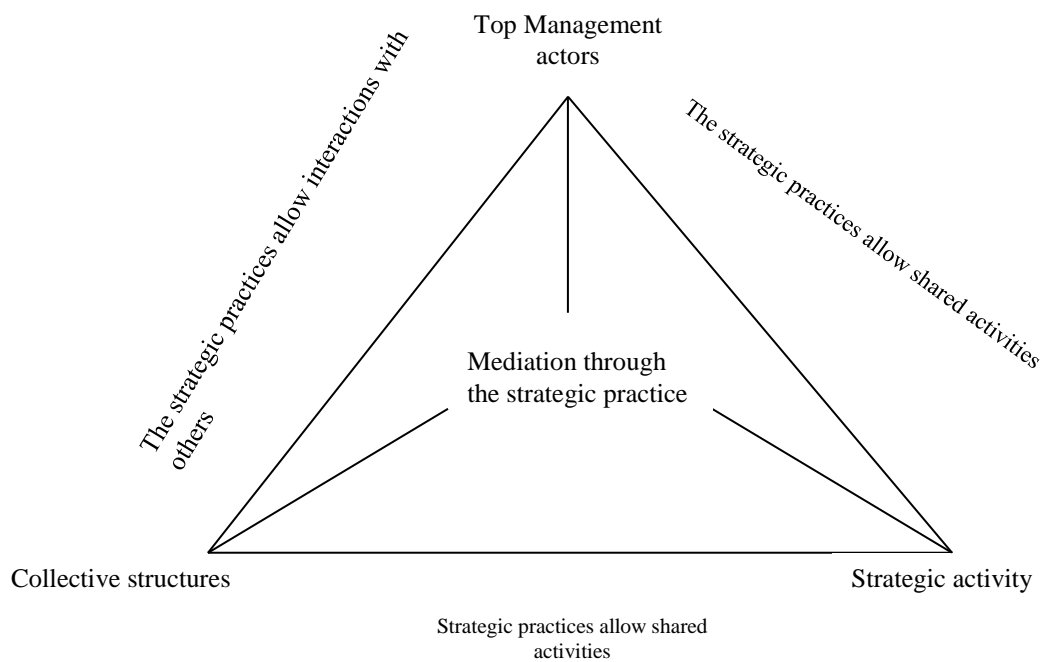
But to better understand how they interact strategic practices, an analytical framework is needed to allow the practice research of a strategic process, and this view onto micro strategy is accomplished through Basic Activity Vision (VBA) and interpretation of the respective strategic activities (Kampe and Kaiser, 2005). This approach focuses in practical terms on the processes that feature the daily activities of organizational life and result in outcomes and strategic consequences. The goal is not so connected to the explanation of the strategy as an end result, but rather the set of activities in a sequence of good practice (Johnson et al. 2003; Wilson and Jarzabkowski, 2004).

The main benefit of a VBA is fundamentally linked to the micro phenomena with macro influences in order to overcome the division of content and perspectives in the

strategic process, focusing on practice. In addition, VBA also seeks to figure reality descriptively, by concentrating on management actions that form the strategy, such as communication, control, formulation, environment, human resource management and the organization as a whole (Johnson et al. 2003; Aaltonen, 2003).

The VBA analytical structure is outlined by Jarzabkowski (2003) and consists of a structure of three distinct vertices constituted by the top management, the strategic activity and the organizational and social structures, all of them, mediated by strategic practices (Figure 03).

Figure 03: The activity system in which the strategic-as-practice occurs



Source: (Jarzabkowski, 2003: 25)

In the model, the strategic activity is the expression of the professional interaction with the structure. Strategic practices are the link of mediation and make the interaction structure, thereby fulfilling its role in the infrastructure of the strategy in order to define the strategies and actions in strategy formation (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). The practices are therefore a guarantee of stability in its structuring role. The structure helps to define the search context regarding the

influence that exists in the strategy from a practical perspective. Finally, the actors are the practitioners; they are those who do the work while being the means of strategic practices.

The holistic perspective of VBA and concept practice are illustrated in the structure shown above, by authors Whittington (2002) and Wilson and Jarzabkowski, (2004) as a "strategizing" process, whose activity appears associated (based) in the interaction of thinking and acting.

Normally the association to strategy's study, as known is exhaustively linked to infrastructure such as management tools, technologies and speeches, where actions are analyzed as macro dissociating what is implied between different analysis contexts, i.e. the micro actions (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Vaara and Whittington, 2012).

The strategy-as-practice as research approach is going to create and emphasize the links between macro and micro perspectives, not just focusing on the study on what the organization does, but what its members do, what Johnson et al. (2003) call "do strategy" firming the research in the actions and interactions of the practical strategic (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007), regarding the organizational research and simultaneously with the humanization of management (Pettigrew et al. 2002; Knight and Paroutis, 2016).

The argument here is that, given this new context, obtaining a competitive advantage may depend not only of the environment or resources and business capabilities, but also, and crucially, on routine tasks of work formulation and implementation of the strategy at a micro level.

Returning to the micro level of analysis although it is not a new theme in the social sciences (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Rossoni and Marietto, 2011; Bhattacharya et al., 2017), in fact it bring a new approach in strategy studying, implying of course that the research field of strategy- as-practice has set a new direction in strategic thinking, primarily for managers in the way they act and interact and how "do" strategy, but also to teachers, researchers, and "strategy practitioners" as consultants, all this

implying an analysis that goes beyond the handling of large statistical databases and/or simple conceptual readings of conceptualized approaches (Whittington, 1996; Seidl and Whittington, 2014).

2.2 Strategy-as-Practice in the Services and Industry Management Consulting

Despite the strategic consultancy being dominant sub-branch of management consulting (Poufelt et al., 2005) and an increasing interest in strategy consulting and its strategic influence in companies, there is a very limited number of studies investigating the contributions of the consultants in the strategic process (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Bloomfield and Danieli, 1995; Fullerton and West, 1996; Kirby and Jones-Evans, 1997; Lundberg, 1997; Powell, 1997; Salaman, 2002; Werr and Styhre, 2002; Fincham and Clark, 2002a; Clark, 2004; Mowles, 2009, Amin and Mohamad, 2017) and its contribution to the creation, dissemination and use of knowledge management the macro and micro level.

If we take into account aspects of the process and at the same time the content of human activity, as provided by the analysis of the strategy-as-practice, based on the analysis of the effective work of the consultants, this shortage is even more evident (Kaiser and Kampe, 2005; Lungreen and Blom, 2009; Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009), which is also accentuates the need for strategy to be analyzed from the accumulation of social practices, produced, practiced and used by so-called extra-organizational strategic experts.

The focus of the study of strategy-as-practice organization in extra actors such as consultants (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al, 2007;. Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009) and their complex interactions as practical strategy due to their extra-organizational status in relation to their client companies (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009), comes to contribute concretely to the development of this research field, this status is characterized by a relationship (client-partner) of mainly formal nature, which eventually may develop over time into more informal relationships (Lungreen and

Blom, 2009), and for this reason Jarzowski et al. (2007) entitles the "practitioners", the "praxis" and "practices" as essential factors of what is called "making strategy."

Thus, to carry out research on the influence of strategy consultants, it is not sufficient to describe their presence during the numerous stages of the strategic process, it is not sufficient to explain their contributions to the content of the strategy. There is the need of a more global perspective to capture its influence in the genesis of the strategy, i.e. taking into account the importance of these actors as co-producers of management and the contribution they bring to the corporate strategy (Clark, 2004).

The study of the management consulting industry in the field of strategy-as-practice done by Sturdy et al. (2006), shows us by example how micro routines and practices can show the path of action and interaction of strategists, and also their own strategic outcomes that are produced, in this case illustrating how a simple social routine like a business dinner can progress to the creation of a business for the strategic agents such as management consultants, conceptualizing a mundane theory and a micro-practice into building strategic patterns of activity (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008).

According Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) and Seidl and Whittington (2014), however, analyze the influence of consultants in a practical perspective goes far beyond this type of research because it means to investigate which practices affect the strategy and determine the influence of consultants on these practices, which leads to an important disentangle of formal and informal strategic practices and the influence of consultants on these same practices.

A formal practice is a process of in advance planned exploration, and the informal practices appear next to the formal procedures and occur freely in time and space without explicit relationships for the organizational system (Cummings and Wilson, 2003). A formal practice can be a board monitoring a strategy, and an informal practice can take place on a casual discussion between two strategic managers who are defining the objectives of a given project.

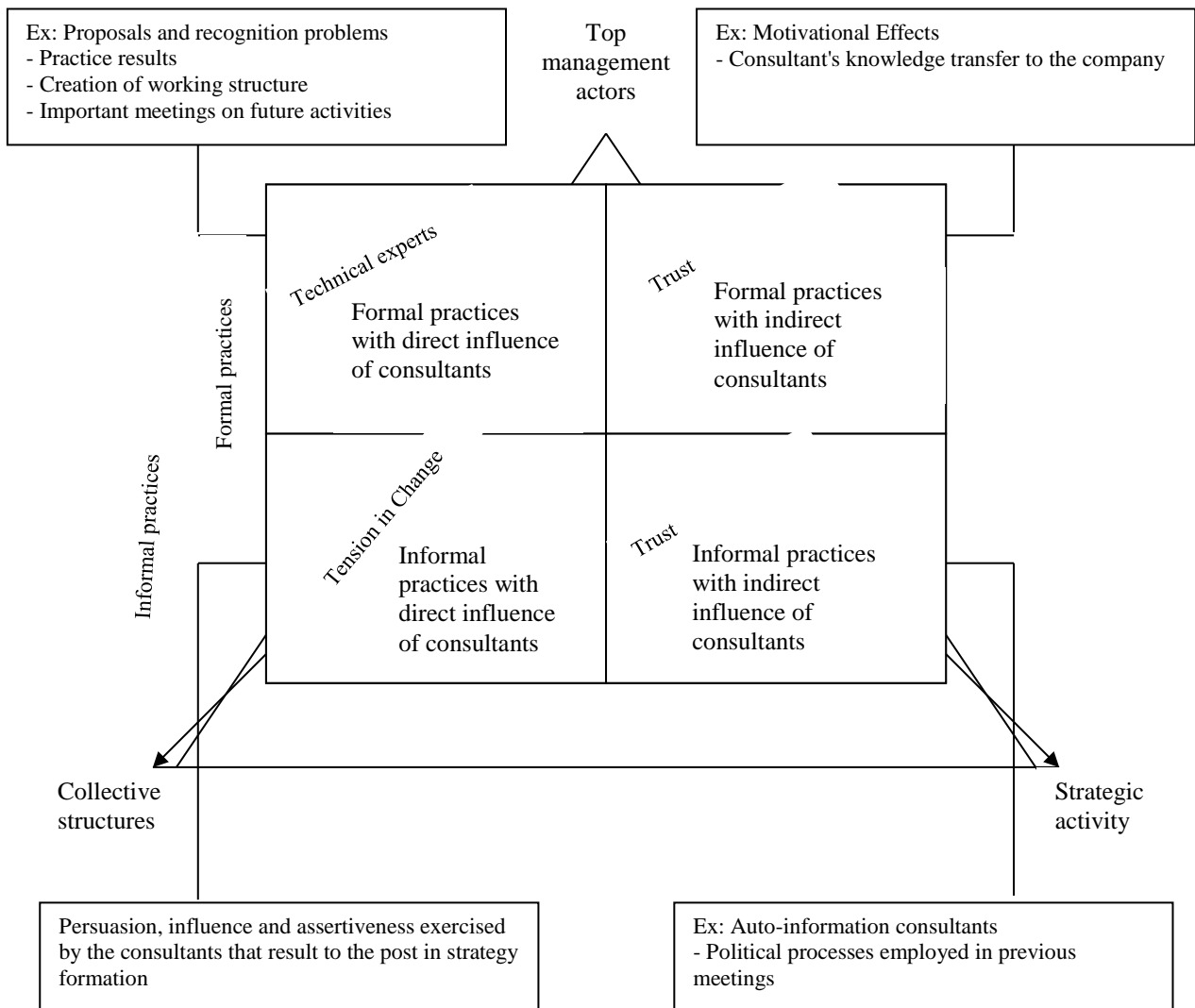
The case study of Kaiser and Kampe (2005) shows that the strategic activity evolves from formal practices (e.g. strategic "workshops") but also from informal practices,

illustrating that the same a significant number of informal practices that happened, tells us that these are highly relevant to the strategic process.

On the other hand, concerning the influence of consultants on the practices that affect the strategy, these may be direct or indirect. A direct influence may result from the definition of a problem at a meeting, i.e. a practice can only be directly influenced by the consultant's presence. Still, it should be noted the importance of indirect influences (e.g., the use of consultants database by project leaders) in the strategic process. Although such influences are not as focused or visible, such practices cannot be neglected to obtain success, although they lack active intervention by the actors.

The differentiation between formal and informal practices can be seen in Figure 04, the structure was built on the exploitation of the investigative framework of formal and informal practices, and direct and indirect influences of Kaiser and Kampe (2005), and the introduction of some notes a posteriori by the author, which established a framework of strategic practices to consider in the development of the work done by the consultants in the management consulting industry.

Figure 04: Structure of strategic practices influenced by the work of the consultants



Source: Adapted from Kaiser and Kampe (2005)

In order to ensure the relevance of the formulated problem regarding the shortage of studies and information concerning the management consulting industry and particularly in terms of the determinants that make up the sector, this article aims to contribute to define the sector as knowledge activity simultaneously realizing role of consultants in this field.

2.3 Knowledge Management in management Consulting Sector

Quick changes in technological, shrinking product lifecycles, "downsizing", highly volatile market, are today's challenges faced by organizations and make these find themselves constantly faced with the need to improve management and their business processes as well as the distribution of knowledge generated and acquired over the years.

In that sense, knowledge management has been widely recognized as one of the most competitive resources that companies can hold in terms of global dynamics of today's business environments (Sharif et al., 2005) when connected to different interpretive dynamic, allowing them, when understood and applied (Brooking, 1999) from the variables experience, values, contextual information (Davenport and Prusak, 2000) to increase the individual capacity of individuals in action (Ayer, 1956), in a more explicit way (result for example the presentation of a research report), tacit (resulting from discussions, personal stories and interactions related to personal perspectives, intuition, emotions, beliefs, experiences and values) and/or in an implied or systematic way depending on the contextual framework level one wants to consider, which can be individual, group or as an organization (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Inkpen, 1996; Nonaka and Konno, 1998; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Dixon, 2002; Amin and Mohamad (2017).

But is the management consulting a way to distribute and transfer of knowledge and new organizational practices as advocate Bechima and Bommen (2006)? In fact what it appears from this research is that management consulting is undoubtedly based on a structure of expertise, and may even be considered as a knowledge-intensive activity, as what happens in sectors or areas such as accounting, medicine or law, which defends the theories of Alvesson (1993, 1995) and Engwall and Kipping (2002) and opposite to the understanding on this matter by Perkin (2002) and Grob and Kieser (2006) when they mentioned that the management consultancy sector does not own a structure of knowledge, nor be compared to classics sectors such as those mentioned above in terms of knowledge production.

From this analysis it can be concluded as pointed out by Fincham et al. (2008), that the credibility and knowledge are the two great pillars in the management consulting process that differentiate an expert on the customer's perspective, though these can sometimes be ambiguous and/or transcendent. Indeed, there is a fine line between what the client needs and what for the consultant makes sense to the customer. In strategic consulting is where you notice this type of gambling, leading the consultant to propose what the customer wants rather than what they think is best for the business. This is the typical situation of strategic consulting happening most of the time in the subconscious, eventually affecting the purpose of management consulting. It is also concerning this assumption that the value given by consultants and managers when asked about the importance of the nature of relationships in a process of this kind, and the first impressions and relationships may be crucial for the development of a successful process.

In this same area of analysis and, in the same line of Fincham's thoughts (1999, 2008), it is pointed out that also the importance of lifelong learning on behalf of consultants in several processes which are involved in conjunction with teamwork and with the most different kinds of clients and projects, considering that learning is the key factor of development of knowledge in the management consulting industry (Fosstenlokken et al., 2003).

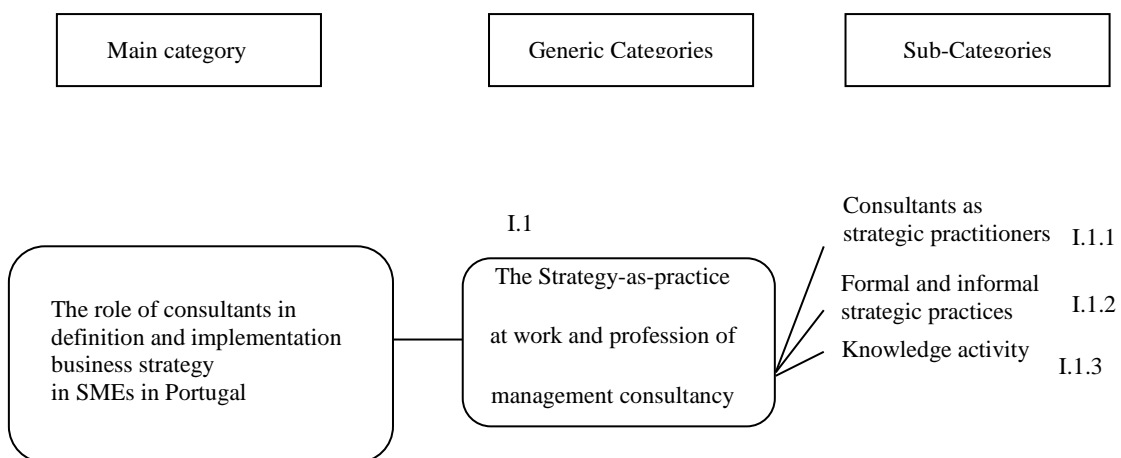
2. Methodology

Regarding the means, this research was based on a pragmatic or inductive character, and was conducted from a non-probabilistic convenience sample made according to the availability and accessibility of covered elements (Carmo and Ferreira, 1998) in this case by management consultants and senior managers of Portuguese SMEs. In this sense, we sent 300 questionnaires to SMEs to 350 to management consultants (which include 50 independent consultants) by e-mail. 37 questionnaires of SME managers were returned and 29 of management consultants, totaling 66 questionnaires with a response rate of 10.15%.

However, given that the interest of this research has focused on discovering the meaning and represent experiences of multiple realities, we also used as a qualitative method of analysis conducting 17 interviews with 9 senior management consultants and 8 managers of SMEs in Portugal, and the sample in terms of interviews had an intentional character, since the participants were selected for being the best to represent the investigated phenomenon in terms of knowledge.

In terms of the qualitative analysis technique used to interpret the reproduced data from the interviews, this was translated into a content analysis, trying to relate the semantic structures (signifier) to the sociological structures (meanings) of statements in order to articulate the surface of texts with the factors that determine their characteristics (psychosocial variables, cultural context, and the context, processes and listening to the message) - Figure 5.

Figure 05: Categorization and codification of "corpus" of the interview for qualitative analysis



In short, this research was based on a set of primary sources, from the application of surveys in the form of 17 semi-structured interviews to 9 consultants and 8 managers of SMEs and the use of questionnaires with open and closed questions to 29 consultants and 37 managers of SMEs in Lisbon, Douro, Leiria, Setúbal, Madeira, Minho, Beira and Algarve (Portugal), with a representative sample of male (63%) respondents, and whose age has an arithmetic average of 37. Nearly all respondents have a higher level of academic education and have been working in their current companies for 8 years. Also note that the sample at the level of SMEs is fundamentally linked to the retail and

consulting area to various sectors of activity that makes up the area of business management.

3. Research results

The learning, combined with sensitivity gains, historical, acquisition of knowledge along the circuit, experience, building standards and growth with past mistakes, can be called the pollination effect, as in the wild within the photosynthesis of plants and insects leading to knowledge and learning that can be transferred between different organizations from different sectors, allowing an unquestionable potential improvement.

But if the knowledge and learning are taken as the basis of management consulting, may we entitle the professionals as experts? In this investigation, although consultants call themselves real experts, such as entitled by Kampe and Kaiser (2005) Lungreen and Blom (2009), Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009), Jarzabkowski et al., 2012, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2014), in fact this is not concluded with the reports collected from the managers, because, according to them, they would have to have a deep understanding of the customer's activity, which in fact does not happen at all. This is why they are entitled generic specialists because even though they have most often a great knowledge of the market, or of the numerous sectors practices, this alone cannot lead entitled themselves an expert. To illustrate this point of view we can even summarize the situation into a sentence mentioned by one of the interviewed managers, "the consultants never say no to anything," making it clear in the report of most interviewed managers, there are situations that clearly are not feasible or possible to accomplish, particularly when we are talking about a kind of more procedural consultancy linked to the development of projects that involve processes of information technology – Table 1.

Table 1: Content analysis - management consultants as generalized specialists

Content Analysis - Interviews			
Interviewee	Text	Generic Category	Subcategory
Consultant 3	Thus, I think the consultant should have a mix of expertise but general knowledge. You need to know what goes on in other business to import other practices that might be useful.	I.1	I.1.1
Consultant 8	It is therefore difficult to be a specialist in an SME when it has to be more general. I often say that I am more of a general practitioner than anything else. I'm not really an expert in strategy, or marketing, or HR. I am told that I am more prone to HR and marketing, but in reality I have to be a generalist.	I.1	I.1.3
Consultant 4	The consultant has this ability, and the ease of interacting with many organizations, and ends up having a much more comprehensive and specific reading of what the organization's needs are.	I.1	I.1.3
Manager 3	They may be specialists, but generalized.	I.1	I.1.1
Manager 2	The knowledge of the consultants to me, is very generic. The great advantage is that it makes us think, but they do not think for us. And they are far from taking the lead or the initiative to tell us the way it is here. Because the consultant's natural job is to ask questions.	I.1	I.1.1
Manager 4	The consultant to be a specialist had to work with people for at least a year, and with all areas. This is because each company has its specificity. He may even know the theory, but what about practice?	I.1	I.1.1
Manager 1	It works just like a general practitioner who knows my business, and although from a distance I cannot tell you what the diagnosis is, but it can give me an orientation on how to find a solution.	I.1	I.1.1

In short, if knowledge is the basis of consultancy, if learning is seen as the key factor in the development of that knowledge and, if some consultants call themselves experts, although they are not seen by managers as experts because they do not have a deep knowledge of business, the consultants can be called strategic practitioners as well as they are named by Jarzabkowski (2005), Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) and Jarzabkowski Spee (2009) and Whittington (2006). Can we say that consultants are individuals who define and implement strategies (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009) in/and with organizations, bringing them new and special management tools, new interests, ambitions and resources for its strategic work?

Although the vast majority of management consultants call themselves strategy "practitioners" (yes), the fact remains that they cannot be seen this way (no), and this

because of the responsibility towards the responsibility of formulation and implementation of strategies.

Table 2: Content analysis - the management consultant as a catalyst and not as a practical strategy

Content Analysis - Interviews			
Interviewee	Text	Generic Category	Subcategory
Consultant 4	Maybe not. Because there is a strand here, the practical part of the strategy, the practice of how the strategy is implemented and implemented, and the definition of strategy. And what happens and that the practice and implementation of the strategy is given most of the time to the company.	I.1	I.1.1
Consultant 5	If we are the practitioners, I do not know if we are the practitioners, we are surely the ones who do more clinic.	I.1	I.1.1
Consultant 6	I liked to say yes, but I do not think so. I think the consultant is not really the practical one of the strategy, I think he can be an excellent catalyst and should provide himself with tools to support the company to move from strategy to practice.	I.1	I.1.1
Consultant 8	If you ask me if I think of the strategy in the actions I do sometimes I think so. Other times for its specificity, at the request of the client who may be far from it, maybe less.	I.1	I.1.1
Manager 1	No. Not speaking badly of them but none of the consultants hired in practical terms can say that they can be here in our place and apply. The professionals have learning capacity but in the model in which they work it does not have the capacity to operationalize. There is a very big gap between what is predicted in the study versus what is done.	I.1	I.1.1
Manager 2	I would say no, because it is a joint effort. I do not believe there is any consulting firm that can devise a strategy if we do not have this side to support that same strategy as well.	I.1	I.1.1
Manager 3	Difficultly. It has a great advantage that is to make us think, but they do not think for us. And they are far from taking the lead or the initiative to tell us the way is here. Because the consultant's natural job is to ask questions. The smart consultant is one who asks a lot of questions.	I.1	I.1.1
Manager 7	They make the definition, but not the implementation. Unless in the definition they are much less speculative and thus bring much less profitability to the project itself.	I.1	I.1.1

4. Results discussion

As seen with this research, there are in Portugal two types of management consultancy, a catalyst consulting for fast decision making, more specific analysis of companies' human and financial resources, all in a diagnostic and counseling logic rather than implementation task (strategic and operational consulting) and another, more technical and facing detail and what is logical, assuming the inclusion of the implementation phase of the recommended changes (by consulting processes).

Thus, to properly analyze the expression "strategic practitioner" this assumes two distinct aspects, the ability to set and simultaneously the ability to implement, which in any of the consulting situations mentioned above is true.

Taking into account the role of strategy or operational consultant, what turns out is that there is actually learning ability but, in fact, the models in which the consultants work do not have operational capacity. Allied to this, if we also take into account the lack of expertise as a result of the absence of a deep business knowledge, one can understand even better the reason for their inability to implement their recommendations.

Furthermore, as noted, there is a "gap" between what is expected in the studies versus what actually takes place. It is the eternal question of "moving from the strategy to practice." Most of the time what managers perceive in management consulting projects, is that there are well-designed models, but then, due to the lack of an absolute alignment with the company's strategy, they cannot reproduce it in the organization so that internally they are able to run properly.

Taking the example of a more operational nature of the project rather than strategic, in an optimization within a chain of stores, although it presents in most cases mathematically perfect reports and mostly focusing on profitability, this is difficult to implement in practice, and in the case of need for hand labor downsize it does not include e.g. any study of social context (social costs) or even motivational impacts, which makes them unfeasible projects and far from reality.

In this sense, with reference to a kind of more strategic and operational consultancy, the consultant cannot be considered as a strategy practitioner, taking at most the role of catalyst able to provide tools and means, given the experience and knowledge to allow them to support companies in the implementation of the proposed actions.

Analyzing consultancy from a more procedural point of view or regarding tasks, the logic is the same, although in this case in reverse angle. That is, although the consultancy for processes assume a logic implementation, this cannot be taken in line of a formulation because although consultancy in processes can be linked to the company's strategy, we are already talking about very late moment that does not include the formulation procedure completely, and the formulation and effective planning will always have to rely on the customer in order to be able to get what is wanted and given their deep understanding of the business.

Taking as an example the introduction of a computer system in a central purchasing department in this case the role of the consultant is to realize through existing information systems what is the best way to respond to business needs in order to enable it to achieve the objectives previously outlined in the strategy. The consultant is in this light the implementer, since participating in the formulation; this is essentially in charge of who defines the strategy in internal terms. Entitling as an expert the consultant, again this factor refers to a general level, because although this may hold knowledge in terms SAP¹, CRM², Oracle Finances³ or any other computer media, these are always seen as "standard", being indispensable to work together with the internal

¹ SAP in this case stands for "Integrated system of business management". It is a "software" belonging to the German company SAP AG, developed in Mannheim (1972) by five German engineers who decided to leave IBM and develop a standard application "software" for real-time business processes, thus creating the company itself. The SAP ERP (its latest version) offers a set of integrated modules with various business applications, accounting for more than 80,000 processes in various business areas such as manufacturing, finance, sales and distribution and human resources

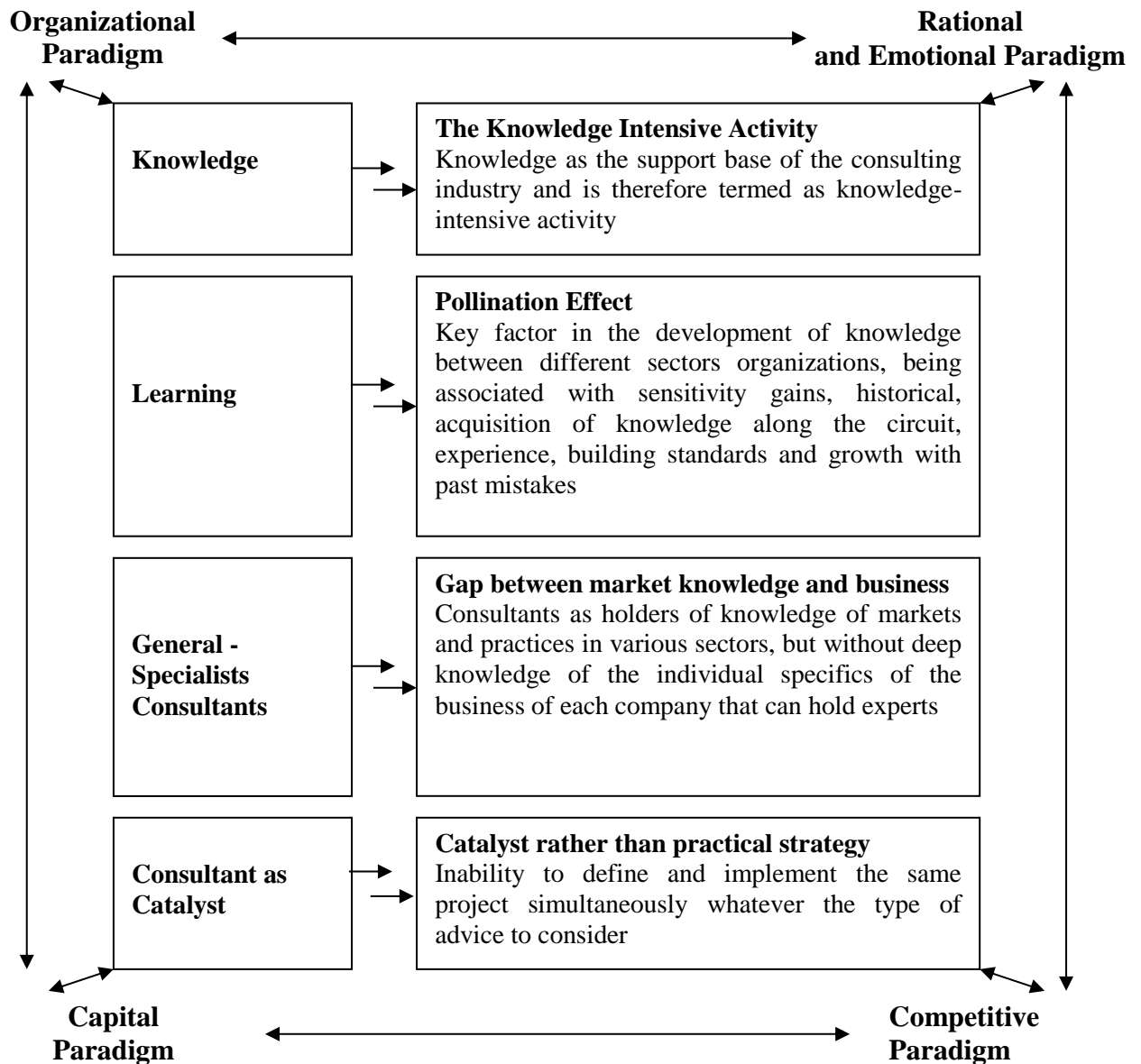
² CRM software (Customer Relationship Management) includes a management process supported by technology that is designed to profiling and centralize all customer information so that you can know them, accompany them and give the best answer to your needs (supplies its users a single view of customer interactions across sales processes, marketing and support)

³ The "Oracle Financial Services Software", majority owned subsidiary of Oracle, offers a comprehensive suite of products that comprise the retail sector, corporate and investment banking, funds, cash management, trading, treasury, payments, loans, management private property, asset management, compliance, enterprise risk and business analytics, among others

management of the company to enable them to understand the information they have and what is needed given the specificities, often very complex, of a particular business. That is, although the management consultants can bring to the new business environment management tools, new interests, ambitions and resources for strategic work, whatever the management consultancy we are examining, these can in no way be called strategic practitioners, as designated by Jarzabkowski (2005), Jarzabkowski et al. (2007), Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009), Whittington (2006), Seidl and Whittington (2014), and Jarzabkowski and Lê (2016).

In order to conceptualize all the data analyzed so far, it is possible to build a conceptual framework that allows viewing the determinants that make up the management consulting industry in Portugal, from the four paradigms of business management consultancy and set base-characteristics that are defined by these four different vertices (Figure 6).

Figure 6: The Portuguese model of determinants that make up the management consultancy sector



Source: Elaborated by the Author

The management consulting industry as a knowledge activity and key development factor of that same knowledge among organizations from different sectors, and management consultants as generalists specialists and catalysts rather than strategy practitioners, brings to the research field of strategy-as-practice a new direction in strategic thinking, showing that strategic activity of consultants does have an important role in infrastructure strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2003) through a set of management actions (mediated strategic practices) that make up this same strategy,

such as communication, control, development and management of human resources (Johnson et al. 2003; Aaltonen, 2003), although, management consultants cannot be called strategy practitioners as Whittington (2006), Jarzabkowski et al. (2007), Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009), Jarzabkowski et al. (2012) or Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2014) to entitle.

The management consultancy is therefore a mean of distributing knowledge and new organizational practices (Bechima and Bommen, 2006) referring to sharing the knowledge produced into a reciprocal process that allows creation and distribution of learning capabilities within and between organizations (Willem and Scarbrough, 2002) and it may result from this complex merger the true construction of legitimacy that may be claimed by management consultants for consideration as active agents of creating fashions and knowledge management (Ernst and Kieser, 2002).

5. Final Considerations

It is important to keep in mind that the findings presented in this study, the result of limitations inherent to the reduced research in terms of sample size (respondents) and the fact reproduce results of a particular context (SMEs) in a given country (Portugal).

In this sense, in terms of external validity, i.e. the ability to generalize the findings to other contexts or samples, although this study has been to strengthen some of the existing theory for the concept of management consultancy, this can be only seen as an exploratory study and cannot therefore be generalized or representative.

Moreover, despite the used secondary sources and other analysis have been developed to supplement the results, also this factor cannot justify the results presented here may be observed as necessarily generalized in terms of practical advice.

Another limitation was related to the impossibility to observe "in loco" client-consultant interactions and therefore the consequent particularities of problems, ideas and techniques that could result from this same interaction.

Thus, although this article mainly aimed at combating the lack of studies on the management consulting industry, we must continue to enter this market and realize this activity, bringing to the academic field a considerable amount of information that brings originality and above all contributes concretely to the development of this field of research.

One way to address this "gap", is by focusing, establishment and institutionalization of practices and activities used in the management consultancy industry and the implications of this in terms of organizational results, seeking to obtain a set of new developments in construction literature with the introduction of new theoretical and empirical perspectives in this field.

In short, it is important to extend these studies to a deeper basis concerning all these matters, so that it can be explored the future of practices, activities, and steps of relationships of the in the management consulting industry, being able in future research include the construction of a model that allows the link between all these variables, so that it can identify which are the most crucial to the success of a management consulting project. The continuous task of the sector should also not forget the impact that all this may have down the chain, namely at the level of clients' satisfaction facing the work done by the consultants and what suggestions they have to improve performances.

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