

With a little help from my friends:

How do management consultants contribute to innovation processes?

Abstract

In step with an increasingly knowledge-based competition firms increase their innovation activities. For this purpose integration of external inputs from management consultants increasingly comes fore. However, the value of management consultants in general and to innovation processes in particular has been challenged. From some perspectives, management consultants are being criticized as dressing up mundane truths in fancy concepts and doing nothing but telling customers what they already know. The purpose of this paper is to try to understand the value of management consultancy from a sensemaking perspective, using a case study of concept development processes in a leading European Kitchen manufacturer. As will be showed, redressing what customers already know may in fact comprise a valuable input for their clients' ability to identify a conception of reality which entails an actionable conception of reality.

Introduction

As a consequence of the ongoing shift from a production-based to a knowledge-based economy firms in general are becoming more knowledge-intensive (N. Anand, et al., 2007; Nurmi, 1998; Zack, 2003). Companies whose competitive position used to be defined by their ability to control and manage production processes and semi-skilled labour are becoming increasingly dependent upon knowledge to create value. Furthermore, in order to sustain their value creation abilities, these firms rely increasingly on innovation to secure and strengthen market positions and create

new opportunities. Responding effectively to these two developments requires an increased understanding of innovation in knowledge-intensive companies. Such innovation processes, however, are still poorly understood (Anand, Gardner, & Morris, 2007).

In order to strengthen their innovative capabilities, firms increasingly look beyond their own boundaries and use knowledge inputs from external network partners to challenge existing concepts and practices by exposing them to new ideas and alternative inputs. (Anand, Glick & Manz, 2002). One type of knowledge input originating from beyond the firm's perimeter is that of management consultants. Owing to the fact that they have accumulated knowledge through repeated assignments with similar clients and have not become blinded by established practices, ideally at least, consultants can supply knowledge to innovation processes that the insider cannot (Engwall & Kipping, 2002; Fincham, Clark, Handley, & Sturdy, 2008). Using inputs from management consultants in innovation requires knowledge of how to integrate external knowledge in internal processes. So far, however, few studies have detailed these integration processes. On that background, we ask the following research question: How do knowledge inputs from management consultants affect innovation projects in knowledge-intensive firms? We are concerned with the introduction of external knowledge into innovation processes and with how such knowledge is used in framing and developing innovative solutions and new concepts.

Departing from the traditional understanding of knowledge integration as linear and progressing uni-directionally, we suggest an alternative understanding of the role of external knowledge integration in innovation. We discuss the introduction and integration of knowledge inputs from management consultants from a sensemaking perspective. Sensemaking as a process involves the interaction of managers' information seeking, meaning ascription and associated responses (Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993). It is an ongoing, retrospective process in which

interpretation and action interact in shaping managerial decisions concerning, for instance, innovation (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). In this process, knowledge inputs from external sources like suggestions for new concepts from management consultants interact with the past experiences and existing identities of managers to shape new concepts and future actions.

We analyze the process of external knowledge integration at a Danish kitchen manufacturer, which has outsourced all production activities and is now focused on concept development. Using observations and interview data from the different stages of an innovation project, we illustrate how managers notice and bracket certain knowledge inputs from management consultants and use it to come to a clearer understanding of their existing core concepts.

The paper is structured as follows. Following a brief overview of different perspectives on the integration of knowledge inputs from consultants as they appear in the literature on management consulting, we present the theoretical framework, which is subsequently used to analyze the case study. The framework is grounded in theory on sensemaking and views innovation as the outcome of individual sensemaking processes, interactions between participants and the crystallization of certain emerging outcomes over others. We apply the theoretical framework on a case study of an innovation process in a knowledge-intensive firm in order to extract what can be proposed as key contributions of management consultants from a sensemaking perspective.

Management consultants as providers of external knowledge in the innovation process

Over the last decades, the consultancy industry has been among the fastest growing sectors in many countries (Fincham & Clark, 2002). The increased significance of the industry can be ascribed to the change pressure faced by many firm as they react to the challenges of, for

instance, globalization and rapid technological development by striving to develop and renew products and processes at an increasing pace (Antal & Krebsbach-Gnath, 2001). These challenges are requiring firms to rapidly develop new competences often radically different from existing ones, motivating the use of external expertise. External consultants are typically seen as creating value in these change processes by bringing in privileged knowledge from the outside and/or by managing the process of installing this knowledge in the organization (Antal & Krebsbach-Gnath, 2001; Fincham et al., 2008).

Consultancy has been defined as ‘independent professional advisory service assisting managers and organizations in achieving organizational purposes and objectives by solving management and business problems, identifying and seeing new opportunities, enhancing learning and implementing changes’ (Kubr, 1996 quoted in Antal & Krebsbach-Gnath, 2001:463). In a thorough review of the literature on management consultancy, Pelligrinelli (2000) discusses a number of conceptualisations of consultancy based on which three broad schools of thought can be identified: a rational analytical view, a process view, and a subjectivist view. Each of these schools builds on different ontological assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and thus, understands the value and inputs of management consultants differently.

	Rational analytical view	Process view	Subjectivist view
Main focus	Task orientation and problem-solving	Consultant-client relationship and interaction process	Rhetoric strategies Management fashions
Conceptualization of knowledge	Objective and stable (Advice)	Objective, but only accessible through individual reflection	Socially constructed
Consultant input	Solution	Process framework	Experience
Integration process	Consultant-driven Linear and pre-	Client-driven Iterative and interactive	Dialectic and interactive

	determined		
Paradigmatic grounding	Functionalism	Critical realism	Social constructionism

Table 1. Three views on consultancy

The *rational analytical view* is grounded in a problem-solving tradition (Pellegrinelli, 2000). Here, the role of management consultants is task-oriented and directive. The value of consultants is reflected in the solutions they are able to prescribe to their clients, using frameworks containing pre-determined steps or stages (Kubr, 1986), which can be applied almost mechanistically without regard for the characteristics of a particular client or consultant-client relationship. Rooted in a functionalist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), this perspective assumes the existence of an independent and given social world that is identical across different social contexts and individual perspectives. Knowledge inputs from consultants accordingly consist of independent, objective advice which exists in a given shape prior to the consultancy process and the content of which does not change throughout this process. The integration of knowledge inputs from consultants in innovation projects is viewed as taking place in a linear fashion and developing progressively. Consultants are intentionally brought in at an early stage of the innovation process; a decision which is rooted in a clearly defined need or problem which is believed to be solvable provided the right model or expert advice is applied. There is an implicit expectation that the process initiated by the inclusion of management consultants will progress uni-directionally following phases and steps that can be initiated and planned (Antal & Krebsbach-Gnath, 2001).

As a reaction to this problem-solving approach, much literature on consultancy adopts a *process view*. As the word implies, concern is here shifted from the solution delivered by the consultant to the actual change process. Although this view also tends to rely on models or

frameworks to guide the work of consultants and hence applies a structured intervention process, the consultant is seen as performing a helping role and responsibility for designing and implementing a change rests with the client throughout the process (Schein, 1999). Much literature on process consultation relies on an organization development (OD) perspective, where focus is on the application of behavioural science knowledge in planned change efforts aimed at improving the organization's ability to achieve its goals (Cummings & Worley, 2001). In terms of consultancy, focus is on how consultants can improve organizational effectiveness for their clients through a cooperative, planned intervention process (Fincham & Clark, 2002; Schein, 1999). The effectiveness of this process is at the centre of literature taking this perspective and authors are preoccupied with how problems throughout this process can be diagnosed and solved, for instance by optimizing the number or sequence of stages in the intervention process, encouraging management learning or matching the problems to be solved with different consultancy modes or styles (Fincham & Clark, 2002).

On the one hand, the process view shares with the rational analytical view a conceptualization of knowledge as existing independently of discovery and therefore of consultants as suppliers of formal, privileged expertise that can be integrated into client organizations and processes provided the right steps are followed. Consultants gain legitimacy through their status as outside experts, who create value for their clients by transforming experiences from performing similar tasks in a range of different client organizations into process models for how particular organizational challenges or change activities are best managed (Fincham et al., 2008). On the other hand, the fact that external knowledge inputs are integrated into the client organization and processes during an interactive process also means that knowledge inputs are continuously shaped and adapted, reflecting individual client needs and perspectives. In this sense, the underlying paradigmatic assumptions of the process view have

much in common with those of critical realism, which assumes the existence of an independent and given social reality, which, however, is not immediately accessible (Fleetwood, 2005). Following the ontological underpinnings of critical realism, knowledge despite being real is also a consequence of a process of reflection. Actors bring to this process their individual predispositions and theories, shaped from previous experience. Therefore, although they may originate from standardized frameworks and concepts, knowledge inputs from consultants do not necessarily transform into uniform processes and standardized solutions. On the contrary, the consultancy process is shaped by human activities, which explains the focus of the process view on the evolving change project and the interaction between consultant and client more than on solution per se.

In recent years, a more critical perspective on consulting has emerged, which we label the *subjectivist view*. From this perspective, issues related to how to best design and manage the consultancy process which are central in the process view represent second-order problems and issues addressed include the very nature of consultancy and the actual value that consultants can offer their clients (Alvesson & Johansson, 2002; Fincham & Clark, 2002). Rooted in social constructionism, this perspective disassociates itself from the view of knowledge inputs from consultants as objective and directly applicable across different client relationships through definable steps or models defined by a functionalist and to some extent also a critical realist ontology and takes a subjectivist stance, where knowledge is viewed as socially constructed and ambiguous (Alvesson, 1993; Legge, 2002). The central assumption is the existence of reality as a socially constructed phenomenon (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this reality, entities such as knowledge are seen as products of the continuous interaction and interpretation processes among individual actors. The consultancy process accordingly is interactive and dialectic (Sturdy, 1997) and knowledge inputs from consultants do not exist prior to the consultancy process, but rather

emerge during and as a consequence of it. In this process, consultants rely on objectified and institutionalized expertise grounded in the consultants past experience, which is then confronted with the beliefs and perspectives of clients, hence developing new knowledge (Starbuck, 1992).

The preoccupation of literature taking a subjectivist view is less with increasing the performance of clients or otherwise improving practice and more with the persuasive strategies of consultants, who through their rhetoric skills are seen as being able to frame particular organizational or managerial problems (Berglund & Werr, 2000). Consultants are seen as creators and providers of ‘institutionalized myths’, which they use to establish an expert position in the eyes of their clients and which clients will use to gain legitimacy in their institutional environment (Alvesson, 1993). However, discussions taking a subjectivist view often take a macro perspective discussing management consultancy in general at the expense of a detailed insight into how knowledge inputs from consultants are integrated into internal innovation processes; a fact which has been ascribed to the lack of in-depth empirical work on consultancy (Alvesson & Johansson, 2002). This impression is confirmed, for instance, by Sturdy (1997) who points out that the active role of clients in the consultancy process as well as the interactive nature of this process have been neglected. By focusing, for instance, on the persuasive strategies of consultants, the active role of clients is to some extent overlooked (Sturdy, 2002). Along similar lines, Engwall and Kipping (2002) in pointing out that the interaction process between consultants and their clients is still poorly understood, identify the ‘internal and external forces shaping the hiring of consultants and the outcome of their interventions’ as a relevant research issue (Engwall & Kipping, 2002:8).

As pointed out by Alvesson & Johansson (2002), literature on consultants tends to either view consultants in a very favourable light, highlighting their professional competencies and unquestionable expertise. Or take a very critical tone, contesting the actual value that

management consultants contribute in the innovation process (Engwall & Kipping, 2002). Management consultants have been charged with supplying and promoting short-lived ideas and management fashions which they use as the backdrop for making bold promises of staggering increases in productivity and efficiency (Kieser, 1997; Newell, Robertson, & Swan, 2001). Consultants have been criticized for doing nothing more than telling clients with unclear goals what they already know, but dressing it up in fancy terms and concepts, resulting in a waste of money on “unnecessary, unhelpful or irrelevant consultancy projects” (Ashford, 1998:22). However, despite their scepticism with regards to the value for money provided by consultants, firms keep using them (Ashford, 1998; Engwall & Kipping, 2002), which underlines the need to discuss the value of consultants’ inputs to innovation processes from a new perspective. Taking a subjectivist view, in the following, we therefore focus on how knowledge from consultants is introduced and integrated in an interactive process where the reactions and reflections of clients to inputs from consultants influence the negotiation of the eventual outcome of the innovation process (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008; Sturdy, 2002).

Integration of management consultant inputs as a sensemaking process

An increasing number of studies in the management literature address organizational sensemaking as a perspective for understanding the explanatory processes involved with organizational change. Also, sensemaking has been discussed in relation to management consulting (Thiry, 2001). Sensemaking in an organizational context is concerned with the ongoing processes through which issues are framed in order for managers to comprehend them and assign appropriate courses of action. Framing concerns the active process of forming assumptions within existing cognitive schema which guide attention and assumption building, suggesting that sense-making is partially under the control of existing knowledge, which directs

managerial attention as well as provide frames for aligning observations with action (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995).

Although collective sensemaking occurs as an ongoing accomplishment in organizations, it is seldom explicit. From a sensemaking perspective, organizations are reconstructed every day as employees arrive at work and start interacting. However, the ongoing accomplishment of sensemaking in organizations rest on taken-for granted norms and behaviours, which are applied in a routine-like fashion as double interacts by organizational members. Sensemaking becomes explicit in the rare moments where the validity of existing frames of references for guiding managerial attention and action is challenged (Weick et al., 2005). One way of understanding the possible value of including management consultants in business concept development concerns their ability to orchestrate and participate in strategic conversations. A strategic conversation is a verbal interaction focusing on strategic generalities, in which managers, their subordinates and mediators such as consultants join efforts to synthesize their emotional states and mental framings of reality into implemented strategy (Westley, 1990). Strategic conversations on the development of new business concepts may be seen as a process of organizational identity construction, where basic premises of how an organization currently interrelates and should interrelate to key constituents (such as customers, retailers, suppliers and competitors) are questioned.

In the following, we use insights from the sensemaking approach to explore how interaction among external management consultants and managers unfolds and the role of management consultants in influencing this *ongoing* process. We will focus on three aspects of knowledge integration in strategic conversations among managers and consultants: i) The sensemaking efforts of the participants and how they link to retrospection and justification, ii) the interaction that unfolds among the participants and the processes of creating commitments to

particular constructs, and iii) how crystallizations from these shape and alter the emergent business concept. These are portrayed in figure 1 below.

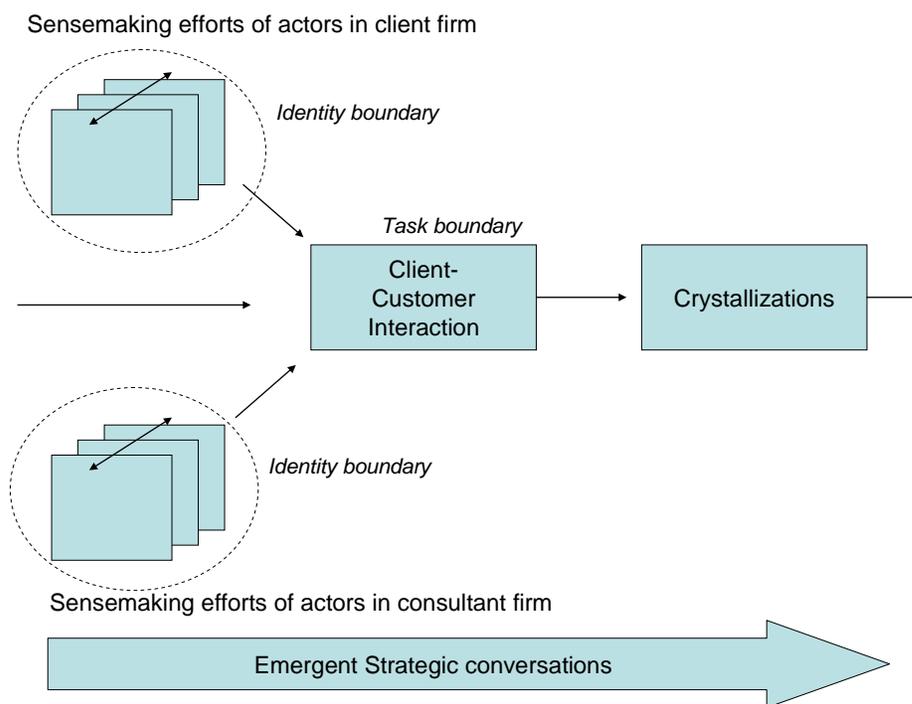


Figure 1: An overview of the strategic conversation process

Strategic conversations are ongoing in the sense that they have no clear starting or stopping point. What we try to capture here is simply a sequence in this process, which involves managers as well as consultants. This means that crystallizations morphs with the sensemaking efforts of managers and consultants, and gradually blurs the boundaries between identities and the evoked task.

Sensemaking efforts within client and consultant organizations

An important insight from the sensemaking perspective concerns the role of retrospection in organizing processes. Retrospection refers to the fact that organizational members use prior

experiences to classify events in order to enact sense into the world in order to make it appear as more predictable. Weick (1995:135) describes it using the saying: “how can I know what I think before I see what I say?” Saying is here followed by seeing, meaning that concepts are not “out there” to be discovered, before they are noticed and bracketed. Phenomena become knowledgeable through recognition rather than through discovery (Latour, 1987). Managers seeking new knowledge consciously and unconsciously search for familiar patterns in order to frame reality as exemplars of specific situations to which an appropriate action can be assigned. Framing a particular event or stream of events and labelling it – for instance as an organizational crisis – is both the acknowledgement of a new phenomenon – while at the same time a use of pre-existing frames to understand it within an organization.

Action frameworks are to be found in the arrays of possible situational framings and actions commonly referred to as experience (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). The collective of actors in an organization share to some extent these mental framings based on collective experiences and participation in prior conversations. As such, they share properties of a common mind-set of who we are (identity) and mental models for understanding their surroundings (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). They are guided by these retrospections when enacting a cognitive categorization and a typology of actions for recognized ongoing phenomena which does not yet have a label.

The ongoing process of retrospection in client organizations is a potential dilemma for a management consultant’s attempt to support innovation processes, since a predominance of pre-existing frames among a group may reinforce repetitive thinking, thus excluding new ideas. This phenomenon is referred to as groupthink, as process where peer pressure towards uniformity or cohesiveness in thinking or exaggerated desire to go along with the perceived group position irons out potentially fruitful disagreements on how to interpret information and assign decisions

to them (Henningesen, Henningesen, Eden, & Cruz, 2006). Because management consultants are not part of the group, they may maintain a diverting viewpoint and in this sense provide fruitful dissonance and fight the groupthink phenomenon. However, for the group of managers, the identity and ability to understand possible new realities starts from pre-existing frameworks. Hence, from a sensemaking perspective, the role of a management consultant is better understood as one of rebalancing retrospections, than one of replacing pre-existing mental frames. To rebalance means to help organizational members reinterpret or re-label issues, so they may be seen as opportunities rather blockages (Dutton, 1993).

Interaction

There is an important distinction between private sensemaking and the sensemaking efforts unfolding in interaction with others. There is also a social aspect to private sensemaking, since when actors are engaged in sensemaking, they do so contingent on their calculations of other's expectations and reactions. In this particular context we focus on the collective sensemaking efforts that unfold in the interaction between members of the consulting and the client organization. We describe this as an evoked task boundary, at least initially created around a specific project to which the actors involved dedicate some of their time and resources in order to pursue a specific aim. However, in terms of social context, it is a "third place", a neutral space for social interaction which host regular and anticipated gatherings of organizational individuals beyond the realms of their respective organizations. This does not mean that we do not acknowledge the ongoing interaction between actors internally in the organizations involved: rather it suggests, that a different boundary than that of identity is evoked when engaging in strategic conversations relating to the innovation process, that this context is imagined by the

involved actors in their private sensemaking activities and also in their interaction within their separate social contexts.

As pointed out by Anderson (1983), in goal setting processes such as concept development, goals are discovered through a social process involving argumentation and debate in a setting where justification and legitimacy plays important roles. Interaction in conversation evokes public commitments to specific beliefs, which also calls for justifications that embarks on identities – hence are in line or counter to strongly held and shared beliefs. When actors commit to a specific understanding of reality, these acts of commitment tends to occur as interacts rather than as solitary acts. Justification for giving one interpretation of reality primacy is supported by behavioural commitment, which locks in specific understandings and intensifies the search for cues and morph identities correspondingly. An important social dynamic is committed interpretation, which is the process though individuals, by committing publicly to a specific viewpoint also shape identities to retrofit with commitments made. These public commitments become enactments and are urged by others to be used as a workable framing of reality. This has also been addressed as sense-giving activities. According to Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991), sensegiving concerns the process of articulating an abstract vision that is then disseminated and championed by corporate management to stakeholders in an attempt to influence how another party understands or makes sense. Decisions on strategies, allocation of resources and organizational changes are all examples of commitments which are the consequence of sensegiving efforts in strategic conversations.

Understanding knowledge integration as a process where concepts are talked into existence begets another important question: A conversation may endorse several attempts at framing reality, by stating what are to be seen as figure and context, or by suggesting alternatives ways to link suggested causes and events. The question that remains to be answered is: how is a

shared understanding reached by those involved? Actor network theory suggests that a primary concept here is the “interessement” of actors, through which actors by creating boundaries between themselves and all other identities who seeks to define them otherwise, creates an enrolment to a specific enactment (or problematization) of reality, that makes it possible to a) create an obligatory passage point – an indispensable construct to which the actor stands central and b) tie actors in a stable and shared interpretation of reality (Callon, 1986; Legge, 2002).

Crystallization of meanings

As pointed out, through the process of sensemaking and interaction, enactments are “talked into existence” (Weick et al., 2005). This means that sensible cues may be formed through and as a consequence of increasingly committed actions, which shapes an emergent understanding of reality. We describe this process as a crystallization of meanings, serving as common reference points for interpreting future streams of events and to be evoked in subsequent conversation incidents. In one way these crystallized sentiments of meaning represent the emergent outcome of the strategic conversations. They work as typification schemes, for addressing reality in a novel way, hence for making reality sensible and actionable. Crystallization has been described by social constructivists as institutionalizations. These occur, whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by actors (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). However, institutionalizations are not an end stage; they are challenged by interpretations and reinterpretations, but may for a while be guiding interaction patterns. As suggested by Weick (2001), a behavioural commitment is a stimulus to build cosmologies and coherent world views out of whatever is at hand. Crystallizations allows for actors to marshal their forces and motivational commitments towards explicating detailed actions for reaching a shared aim. Such commitments tend to reify a particular explanation, as it occurs in a committing context and

therefore also binds partners and increases the search for justifications. In other words, crystallizations may have a lock-in effect on other actors. In this sense the crystallized interpretations to which actors commit introduce stability and increase social order.

Data and Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of this research and the corresponding need for insights into the nature and process of partner involvement in complex organizational settings, the empirical part of the paper is based on a qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2003). A case study approach is recommended when the issues are complex and evolving, and where alternating between the empirical field and different theoretical frameworks can be useful for generating additional insights (Yin, 2003).

Data has been collected through qualitative interviews and complementing field studies drawing on methods of participant observation. In total 32 hours of observations has been recorded. The interview study concerned the case event of concept development meetings. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face with informants, while a few were completed by phone. Interviews have further explored informants' intentions, attitudes and experiences related to the knowledge interaction, by confronting the informants with issues and situations occurring at meetings and then asking them to comment as a mean of further exploration and validation.

The methodology of participant observation has been utilized, providing important information about the interaction, which is difficult to obtain through interviews. Access for doing complementing participant observation studies in the case was obtained by one of the authors. During observations, the researcher has obtained the role as observer-as-participant (Gold, 1958) and every informant was informed about the study.

A field journal (Jorgensen, 1989) has been kept, and observations as well as interviews have been taped and transcribed for analysis. The triangulation of observational data and data from interviews has given the benefit of an in-depth understanding and a ground for analyzing multiple aspects and perspectives (Carson, Audrey, Chad, & Grønhaug, 2001) – conscious as well as unconscious to the informants.

Data analysis was based on content analysis, using the concepts from the sensemaking perspective presented in this paper as the starting point. Thus, theory has been applied as sensitizing devices for conducting field work. Due to the characteristic of gathering observational data, on-going analysis has been an inherent part of the process. This has provided the ground for continuous development of the interview protocol in general, and for generating case specific themes and questions to be discussed with informants, addressing e.g. issues of relationship atmosphere at development meetings, in particular.

Kitchen Case

The case concerns a European kitchen producer (Eurokitch), which has initiated a process of developing a new business concept. The business concept of “The Kitchen” has been dominant in Eurokitch business for the past decade. A consulting company (Mentor), specializing in innovation activities, has been hired in to facilitate the process. The process plays out in 5 large encounters between key personnel from EuroKitch and Mentor (see table 2 for details).

	Place	Time	Attendants
Workshop 1	EuroKitch HQ	Half day, May 2008	Eurokitch: CEO (CEO), Concept Director (CD), Marketing Director (MD) Mentor: Consultant 1 (CONS 1), Consultant 2 (CONS 2)

Workshop 2	Workshop Facility	Full day, June 2008	Eurokitch : CEO, CD, MD, Sales Director (SD) Mentor: CONS 1, CONS 2, assistant (AST) External: Anthropologist researcher (AN), Kitchen Designer (KD), interior designer, product specialist, architect student
Workshop 3	Workshop Facility	Full day, June 2008	Eurokitch : CEO, CD, MD, SD Mentor: CONS 1, CONS 2, AST External: KD
Workshop 4	Convention Centre	Full day, June 2008	Eurokitch: CEO, CD, MD, SD, production director, store director Mentor: CONS 1, CONS 2, AST External: 3 retail specialists, 2 Eurokitch customers
Workshop 5	EuroKitch HQ	3 hours, Sept. 2008	Eurokitch: CEO, CD, MD, SD Mentor: CONS 1, CONS 2

Table 2. The workshops.

In table 3, the main findings from the case analysis are arranged according to the elements of the theoretical framework; sensemaking, interaction and crystallization.

	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 3	Workshop 4	Workshop 5
Sensemaking efforts Eurokitch	Trying to link the consultants' understanding of key categorizations with their own	Use the inputs from consultants to realize that they have not been faithful to their core values and rephrase the agenda for the workshop	State that revitalization of existing concepts is has priority, leading to a discussion of its underlying concepts. Openly abandon the original plan to identify an entirely new concept	Revitalization of existing concept is framed as contingent upon different operational issues.	Challenges the consultants' understanding of key categorizations concerning their identity in general and segmentation in particular.
Sensemaking efforts Mentor	Outlining findings from study and seeking to frame the concept development discussion as a	Try to make the new agenda promoted by Eurokitch fit with their own understanding by	Consultants try again to relate the identity of Eurokitch to their own suggestions but defensively. They	Orchestrate brain storming session. To some extent reassume rational	Understanding their role as providers of new ideas, consultants again try to introduce new

	choice between outlined concepts Advice providers rationalistic image	attempting to link Eurokitch's concerns with their own suggestions for new concepts	increasingly adapt to the key categorizations as presented by Eurokitch rather than argue with them. Assume a more facilitating role	expert role, but related to Eurokitch's existing concept.	initiatives and re-label Eurokitch's concept.
Eurokitch – Mentor interaction	Consultants seeking to enroll management in their definition of the problem: a choice between suggested product concepts, which are resisted by key representative from client firm	Eurokitch openly overrules Mentor's plan for the workshop and – supported by the inclusion of the new sales director – takes a commanding role	The weight in initiative changes and the CEO understanding and framing of events completely dominates the emerging conversation	Joint sensemaking and coherence around detailing and brainstorming on how the new buying experience should develop	Eurokitch resists the attempts of Mentor to enroll them in their understanding of future kitchen requirements.
Crystallizations	Key categorizations which are used in the discussion emerge (e.g. what is social behavior and what counts as a concept)	The term “Social kitchen ver 2.0” is introduced, linking back to existing concept. Maintaining a low price emerges as important.	“Social kitchen ver 2.0” increasingly relies on understanding and experiences shared between Eurokitch and Mentor	Operational issues that need ‘fixing’ surface.	

Table 2. Elements of strategic conversations

In the following, the five workshops are analyzed, using instances of sense making, interaction and crystallization to illustrate the emergence of a new concept and the contribution made by consultants in this process. The case shows how inputs from the consultants play an important role in the sensemaking processes of Eurokitch executives. Most notably, these inputs are used by managers, particularly the CEO, to reach core categorizations concerning company identity. It is shown how management consultant inputs are valuable not so much as isolated expert advice, but to a larger degree feed into an ongoing retrospective process of rediscovering core concepts and identities on behalf of managers.

Workshop 1

A trend expert from Mentor initially formulated 49 relevant trends, which were narrowed down and clustered to six trend clusters, which were again narrowed down to four relevant business

concepts for Eurokitch. These concepts, termed “the good life”, “leader in design”, “corporate social responsibility”, and “the buying experience” formed the basis for the first workshop. The objective of the entire process was to choose one of these as the new Eurokitch concept, which could then be brought into the Eurokitch organization and operationalized. Hence, the workshop series were intended to provide inputs to and discussions of the four concepts, forming the basis for the final choice. The consultants carried out a field study among Eurokitch customers and franchisees to gain insights on their understanding and opinion of the four concepts. At this first workshop, the consultants are to present the findings of this study and facilitate a brainstorming session aimed at elaborating further on the four concepts. Three more workshops have been planned before arriving at the final concept.

The two Mentor consultants run this workshop, reporting the findings of the field study and putting words on the four concepts, conveying their perception of the concept features to the three Eurokitch executives. The presentation revolves around three identified core elements for each concept – product, communication, and store. Basically, the consultants are listing and describing a range of novel features and activities connected to each concept. Half an hour into the session the CEO starts addressing the presented material. He objects to the conveyed impressions and counter argues on several points during the remaining session. A key discussion arises regarding functionality versus emotionality in the kitchen. CEO clearly thinks the presentation focuses too much on functionality, as opposed to emotionality: *“I think that cooking together – together with the kids – help them with their homework – to me this is highly emotional – and togetherness like – then it seems wrong to term it functional”*. Responding to ideas of integrating playing and learning functionalities and gadgets into the kitchen he states: *“I have to say – to me this is so far away from something that is emotional – it is a functional thing – you (CONS 1) said it before: “then I can do a little on and off...” – but then the nearness is*

gone completely – if the nearness is gone how can things be emotional?”. The consultants accept the CEO views and continue their presentation.

Another conflicting discussion appears when discussing the nature of a business concept. Objecting to one of the consultants equating concept with product concept the CEO states “*But we don’t have any concepts – do we?*” CONS 2: “*The Kitchen?*” CEO: “*That is not a product concept – it is more a philosophy – more of an idea or set of thoughts – I don’t feel we are looking for a physical product!*” This discussion clearly shows a discrepancy between the consultants and the CEO in their understandings of the notion of concept and indeed of the entire aim and mission of the process. The consultants are thinking products, features and events, but the CEO is thinking philosophy or way of thinking. This is critical to the entire exercise and is the first time the CEO expresses a concern for company identity.

These discussions over key terms and assumptions in the concept development project provide examples of sense-making processes of the CEO. Listening to the consultants’ presentations of potential future concepts and implicitly their understanding of the kind of company that Eurokitch is, initiates a process where these input interact with his own understanding of their identity. In other words, reacting to what he sees as a misunderstood representation of his company, he openly challenges the consultants’ understanding, using their inputs to reflect upon and sharpen his own understanding of Eurokitch. As it turns out, these early and critical reactions of the CEO becomes crucial for the shaping of the entire projects and crystallize much more clearly over coming meetings as an increasing number of project participants buy into them.

The consultants continue focusing on functionality, products, and events in the remainder of the session, with frequent interruptions by the CEO. Discussing the subsequent sessions in the final stage of the workshop, the group agrees that the CSR concept should be

abandoned. The CEO argues for dropping the buying experience also, because Eurokitch is already carrying out several other projects in this area. However, it is decided to keep the buying experience, but treat it as part of the two other concepts.

Workshop 2

The aim with the second and third workshops is to discuss the two remaining concepts and add further depth, to allow the final choice of one focus concept. External specialists are invited to provide inputs and ideas. The interactive software system Anyzing[®] is used by the consultants to increase brainstorming effectiveness. CEO introduces the history and identity of Eurokitch along with historical business concepts, including The Kitchen. Explaining the identity of Eurokitch, he makes an important statement that comes to set the stage for the remaining sessions: *“We (Eurokitch) have realized that we should not come up with products – something that looks different – there is not much to be innovative about when it comes to the product – the cabinet door looks as it does! – but the emotional part – here we can take responsibility – as we have done with The Kitchen... - and we know that this is what we can do and what we are best at”*. This statement stands in stark contrast to the consultants’ workshop plan, where brainstorming of products, functionality, and features connected to the two concepts dominate the agenda.

Several new external agents have joined the group for sessions two and three. Especially an anthropologist (AN) specializing in the home and an independent kitchen designer (KD) come to play key roles. AN makes an impression by arguing for the social importance of the kitchen and by providing new angles on people in the kitchen. In addition, a newly hired sales director (SD) at Eurokitch immediately takes a commanding role in the process. He asks the CEO early in the process about the aim of the process. CEO answers that what they are looking for is a state of mind and a way of thinking – *“the next thing capturing something emotional”* He also

states that the new concept could be something to build on top of The Kitchen, but that it is still early in the process. The arrival of SD and KD triggers a key discussion of identity. Both continuously state that the existing concept of Eurokitch is very strong and outstanding in the market – questioning the need for inventing new business concepts. Also, existing Eurokitch visions that emphasize low price and a solid design element, without being first movers or innovative on the product/design aspect are mentioned. SD: *“When I come from the outside in I think the existing visions are spot on – it sounds like we have an existentialistic discussion of what Eurokitch is supposed to be – but Eurokitch has a crystal clear, sharp concept that just needs to be executed aggressively”* – CONS 1: *“Yes, but unfortunately we have gotten the assignment of finding out where Eurokitch needs to be in a couple of years”* (laughter) – SD: *“But perhaps it is not necessary to change anything?”* Both KD and SD are clearly in favor of retaining the existing concept, but improving operational aspects of business rather than the overall business concept. MD responds to these propositions that invention is critical to the business, which makes the CEO state, that this cannot compromise existing visions: *“these are not up for discussion! – they will not appear on the white board – it should be something that supports these”* Furthermore, these discussions also make the CEO comment that due to the wish for maintaining a low price, the number of operational ideas that can be implemented are limited.

During this day session the CEO notes several times that Eurokitch has probably not been faithful to existing visions and concepts. He refers to company identity and its importance to the innovation process: *“I think we have been unfaithful to The Kitchen – and this has been going on for years – and we have been unfaithful to the price, which we discussed and to the size of our product program ... why do we need something new – why not grow what we have – and then build something on top of this – no one can convince me that The Kitchen, with the values it contains regarding the social life and kitchen and quality of life... - this will also*

work in 20 years... I think we have had a tendency to just come up with and fill up with something new – without considering that we already have gold that we can improve even more”.

Discussing the missing social angle, the CEO also notes that the Eurokitch catalogue has been cleaned from pictures with people, which makes it barren and lifeless. During discussions the notion “The Kitchen 2” appears as a working title for a concept. The good life is not eliminated, but rather raised to an umbrella concept.

During this second workshop the consultants clearly start realizing the change in focus among key Eurokitch actors. They stick to the plan of discussing concrete initiatives regarding products, communication, and store experience, but allow the discussion to unfold, realizing that a more fundamental discussion of Eurokitch identity is inevitable. While they were the drivers of the first session, introducing inputs and explaining, this session incorporates the inputs and initiatives of Eurokitch executives regarding existing concepts and practice. They pick up on The Kitchen and try to make a connection between “the good life” and The Kitchen. They also start combining the steering role with one of facilitating the discussion of company identity.

Workshop 3

The consultants change their strategy dramatically in the beginning of the third session. Contemplating on the events on day two, the original plan is to a large extent abandoned. They start by presenting the list of ideas from day 2 and present an exercise aimed at producing additional ideas and discussing these in relation to the original trends. But then they ask for participants’ opinion of this plan and urge the CEO to comment on the process and yesterday’s results, effectively leaving the driving stick to the CEO, perhaps realizing that he demands command of the process and their need to go with the flow. Throughout the day, this session turns out to be the most difficult to the consultants. After stating that the intention was never to

find a substitute for existing concepts, the CEO repeats that it is fine if the process ends up with a revitalization of The Kitchen. Next, each of the Eurokitch participants gets to make lengthy comments and statements regarding their opinions, while the consultants stay in the background, gauging the opinions and making sure everyone is heard.

The above illustrates two points. First, the weight has been shifted among participants. Until the second workshop, conversation revolved around Mentor's framing of concept development and their suggestions. Now the term "The Kitchen 2" has been introduced and with the consultants' abandonment of the intention to come up with a radical new concept, the CEO's understanding and framing of events in effect dominates the emerging conversation. Second, the consultants accept this shift of weight. Even though they probably feel that their initial assignment is being misrepresented, they start adapting to these changed terms rather than argue with them.

Agreeing that The Kitchen is going to provide the foundation for further work, the participants get into a discussion of the understanding of this existing concept. The CEO admits that the existing visions and The Kitchen concept are inadequately described and somewhat confuse – *"it needs depth!"* The consultants on their side admit that the good life has also been explained poorly in the previous process and the parties agree that the aim of the session is to explain the revitalized concept of The Kitchen. Being new to Eurokitch, KD and SD repeatedly argue that The Kitchen along with the visions seem quite clear externally among customers etc., but that there seems to be lack of understanding internally. MD agrees: *"We have been busy with a lot of other things – too busy to fold out the existing concepts and massage them into the organization"* The group quickly agrees that internal communication efforts towards spreading the conceptual understanding has been lacking. CEO : *"I recently asked to get all the material about what we really tell new sales assistants about The Kitchen – I want to know this 100% -*

and you know we don't tell them anything... we spend perhaps ten minutes telling them about our philosophy" Listening to the strategic conversation, the consultants pick up on this need and start discussing the need for education and communication. This quickly becomes a key task, to communicate The Kitchen throughout the organization – and it becomes a new hook for the consultants speculating how they can adapt the upcoming process and support these new tasks.

In the afternoon, the consultants continue the idea brainstorming session, but adapt it as an exercise aimed at describing the content and features of The Kitchen. Time comes up as another classic element of The Kitchen. MD: *"It is a matter of not spending time on the boring things – the trivial things – so you get more time for the funny things"* Having reverted from the plan and process, the consultants experience some difficult moments in the afternoon. Several times they mention that they are to go home and recap and get an overview of the new situation before progressing further. Finishing the session, they seem to realize that the objective of arriving at a new final concept ready for implementation is unrealistic: *"...then we must see where we end – it is difficult to see now if we can see a coherent picture in it..."* CEO concludes that the process, despite producing limited new angles, has at least updated the Eurokitch executives to the same level with regards to their understanding. CEO and CONS 1 seem to find common ground in the belief that despite looking in many places and providing lots of inputs the existing concept still turned up the best. At the end of the day the consultants have accepted the new direction and adopted the existing visions and concept. Their final action is to inquire about existing documentation of The Kitchen to use in the remaining process. At first glance, at the end of this workshop the expert role of the consultants has been severely challenged, not least by CEO. The consultants are faced with the challenge of having to redefine their role. At the same time, however, common ground between Eurokitch and the consulting firm has been established from which the project can progress. The emerging concept is increasingly the result of a

retrospective sense-making process in which Eurokitch managers and consultants apply a range of shared experiences.

Workshop 4

At the fourth workshop one week later, the consultants are back on their home turf, running a brainstorming session with the aim of finding ideas for new, concrete initiatives aimed at improving the Eurokitch buying experience. Their focus returns to providing external knowledge as new inputs to Eurokitch. The session involves three external buying experience specialists, who have successfully implemented innovative buying experiences. Moreover, three additional Eurokitch executives with relevance to the buying experience are attending, on the request from the CEO. The session runs smoothly and the large group discusses mainly operational initiatives. The concept and company identity are only discussed in a few instances. In one such instance, CEO reacts to some of the ideas and claim that these are part of the existing The Kitchen concept: *“I feel that these things are elementary – perhaps it is about getting these things out in the open once again”* Later, CEO states that sales assistants need to show real interest and be honest in the way they approach customers: *“...you don’t show a real interest by asking these hardcore questions – should it be white or black or with grips? – you do that by asking “so you have kids? – are you cooking with them often?””*

At this workshop, Mentor again assumes the role of an external expert, whose task is to provide advice in the form of new, concrete ideas to be implemented by their client. There is a main difference, however, compared between this role and the one assumed in the first workshop, in the sense that sensemaking, interaction and eventually crystallizations emerge from and feed back into a strategic conversation that is much more aligned between actors than previously.

Workshop 5

Following workshop 4, the group decides to have another session to clarify the concepts and plan the process further. To synthesize on the previous sessions and prepare for this workshop, the two consultants have held two meetings with CD before workshop 5. Hence, they go into the fifth meeting having a revitalized agenda adapted to the experienced changes and attitudes. In the morning session the two consultants present the two concepts “The Kitchen 2” and “the buying experience”, based on their interpretation of the information and discussions surfacing through the 4 previous sessions. Then they present a new concept, framed as a result of going through the material. In the afternoon session, the group plans the upcoming process, including aims, challenges to overcome, time frame, success criteria, and measures etc. for The Kitchen 2.

Going through The Kitchen 2, the consultants soon meet resistance. Based on ideas of segmentation discussed in session 3, they propose to target The Kitchen 2 at 4 segments ranging from young people, over families to seniors. CEO interrupts this presentation, arguing that there are certain segments that The Kitchen was not intended for, specifically the seniors and the young people (below 30). CEO: *“When we made it was the railway station of the family – people going in and out continuously – kids, friends etc. – but to be quite honest - the young below 30 – there is not much railway station in that!”* CONS 2: *“Well I think the railway station works well here also – our customer study shows that there is traffic here of young people – but it is a different traffic compared to the family, for whom The Kitchen was developed”* CEO: *“I really just think this is wrong – can you remember when you were under 30?”* MD: *“There is not much railway station when you don’t have kids – there isn’t! – you are not getting through with this!”* The group finally agrees that product and store wise there is not going to be differentiation, but that the communication could be stretched to incorporate the “odd” segments.

Having been back reanalyzing the sessions, the consultants again propose a range of initiatives, products, and functionalities for The Kitchen. They continuously seek to raise the bar and influence Eurokitch to strive for industry best practice on functionality, electronic systems, and processes. However, during this workshop, they experience opposition from more fronts in Eurokitch. CONS 2: *“It is important to have the most sublime buying experience through these three phases – before, during, and after – I don’t think anyone disagrees with that...”* SD: *“Yes I do! – we are very cheap – in an ideal world perhaps... – but we cannot afford this! – we cannot make extravagant web sites and electronic integration – we need a level of ambition that corresponds to our concept!”* CONS 2: *“OK, remove sublime”* CEO: *“As SD says we have to match it to our level and set the agenda for what the customer can expect from us”* CEO takes this argumentation further: *“Thinking 10 years back and the journey we have been through – yes we don’t have all the goods set up in the system and yes we don’t have the world’s best drawing program – but we have been growing a lot and are really competitive – so we should be careful not to do too much in our eager to think that this is the way”* MD: *“Lots of good ideas have come that we need to relate to and these are nice things – and our founder (Jack) would say “yes, yes there is so much you can do!” – but we have to agree what it is that exactly fits us on this journey”* MD continues: *“The more analyses we make the more we have to correct – before we start filling new things on”* CONS 2: *“Well the task originally was to look at some of the things you were not doing now”* MD: *“But innovation is not to do more of what we are already doing today”* CONS 2: *“Of course it has to fit with what you are doing today”* Referring again to the financial possibilities CEO states *“Everything we do should have a touch of our visions – nice kitchens at low prices”* This discussion finally leads the CEO to eliminate the buying experience completely as a focus area: *“Shouldn’t we skip the buying experience – I am not ready to discuss this really – it is only logistics – there is nothing innovative in it”*

After discussing The Kitchen and buying experience the group proceeds to discuss what they term “The World Kitchen” CONS 1: *“We have been thinking out of the box wildly – something we think is really exciting and we look forward to hearing your opinion”* The World Kitchen is presented as a concept proposition referring to the good life, design, brand value, and it draws heavily on state-of-the-art interactive kitchen electronics and an idea of a global kitchen community. Completing the presentation, they ask the Eurokitch managers for their opinion. SD: *“Interesting, but again does it fit with a Eurokitch concept?”* CEO responds more aggressively: *“You have probably not heard me say this - I still think that when it is about The Kitchen and togetherness then it is a social room – but PCs and TVs are really egoistic – and I honestly don’t believe in things that are integrated at all – there have been so many experiments with this and they have failed – we are not going to succeed with this! – you don’t want to communicate on Skype in the kitchen where you eat! – you will go to the office”* CONS 2: *“But we thought it would be a beautiful thing to take The Kitchen and make it a virtual The Kitchen – that was the thought – but perhaps in 2020?”* Recognizing the opposition, CONS 1 withdraw by noting: *“Perhaps you could start in a light version and then if people like it you can scale it up”*

The interaction between Eurokitch and Mentor at this workshop provides a number of examples of how retrospection plays a key part in the sensemaking processes of Mentor. Based on experience from previous assignment for other clients, Mentor are likely to see their role vis-à-vis their clients as tightly linked to providing new, preferably innovative input, that the client has not been able to come up with themselves. This understanding of their role leads Mentor to once again try to suggest more radical new concepts despite the fact that over the previous four workshops, especially the Eurokitch CEO has explicitly denounced such suggestions.

The group finally decides to plan the revitalization of The Kitchen. The consultants propose making a manifest to catch the key points of the concept which is accepted by the

Eurokitch executives. Discussing the manifest, CEO argues: *“If we go back to something that has been created at a time back then – then we need to go to the source – so the first thing we need to do is to interview Jack – to get the thoughts and philosophy all the way back – how did it arise?”* MD: *“To get it under the skin”* CEO: *“To get depth – if we don’t get Jack to tell the story then we can’t pass it on - we can stand in The Kitchen showroom and ask about what you can and can’t do in it – to get history in place”* CD: *“Then we can see how things have developed from that time to today – and that we don’t make something that disqualifies from the original thought”* CEO: *“And we could ask “Jack we are thinking of building this on top – what do you think?” as the architect behind it”* MD: *“That sounds good”* The group finally agrees to make another session interviewing Jack and the consultants expand their business with another assignment. During this final session, the version 2 appendix (of The Kitchen) disappears and the group embarks on reviving The Kitchen concept in ways that are true to the original philosophy.

Discussion

The case study demonstrates that the relative success of including management consultants in knowledge intensive firms addressed in the introduction differs depending on the theoretical perspective used on the nature of knowledge and the corresponding role of management consultants applied. From a rationalist viewpoint on management consulting, the expert role and linear method for solving their client’s problem that Mentor consultants attempted to use in the concept development process phase failed. From a rational analytical perspective, the Mentor consultants were not able to legitimize themselves as advice givers in their interaction with Eurokitch managers and may therefore be seen as failing in their initial effort by losing control

over the process, hence providing only marginal value to their clients. Interestingly, however, from a subjectivist viewpoint: by losing control and engaging in increasingly frantic attempts to understand what Eurokitch management wanted from them and in looking for new ways to control the conceptualization process, more interactive process in the sessions followed. The initial meeting was dominated by a one-way conversation, where the Mentor consultants presented their results of their survey and managers from Eurokitch added little to the conversation but challenging the categorization attempts suggested by the consultants. Eurokitch managers eventually revolted in meeting 2 and the subsequent meetings increasingly became characterized by a dialectic and mutual sensemaking process, which strayed from the originally linear structure for the process, but which supported the Eurokitch manager's crystallization process of gaining a clearer understanding and therefore (re)discovering what were considered the core values in the original Eurokitch concept. This led to clarity and to a better understanding of how DeSign could develop their repositioning efforts and therefore, sensemaking efforts were crowned with success. DeSign management recognized an actionable future, which could help them enact change that could help them realize their ambitious growth plans. Hence, from a subjectivist viewpoint, the inputs to the strategic conversation from the Mentor consultants were effective in supporting the sensemaking, but in a rather unintended fashion. Notably, the sensemaking processes of the CEO occurred as a result of his opposition to the initial understandings of his company presented by the consultants. As suggested elsewhere, sensemaking processes may be defined by identifying the negative, that is agreeing upon what is definitively not "on the table" as pointed out by the CEO in this case (Lüscher & Grimes, 2008).

More generally, from a sensemaking perspective, important insights regarding the role of management consultants can be inferred from the case study. From a sensemaking perspective, management consultants may seek to influence the process of shared sensemaking

through staging a collective learning process (Haslebo & Nielsen, 1994). Management consultants may frame which broader themes are to be raised in the strategic conversation. Although the management consultant has a specific starting point in terms of a commissioned task, management consultants are not necessarily bound to this commission. They may challenge the commission and suggest that what is raised as a problem by a client in reality is a symptom of a broader problem or may not be a problem at all. As pointed out by Campbell et al (1991), a consultant helps a client solve a problem through mutual exploration and understanding of the meaning which the inability to solve the problem has for the larger organization. In this sense, it is what the problem represents to the organization which is the real problem, rather than the problem as is. Furthermore, the case study challenges the understanding raised in literature on consultancy taking a rationalistic as well as a process view, that alignment of the expectations of consulting firm with those of their clients before embarking on a change project is essential for a successful change project. In fact, the case study shows how the procedure followed by the consulting firms is challenged and in effect are re-written at a very early point by Eurokitch themselves, suggesting that such terms could well be defined broadly or perhaps even could contain disagreements – within limits.

Management consultants may raise questions for discussion, which seek to bring forward existing understandings of reality. The consultants in the case may appear to be very quickly set straight by the CEO and their input deemed not suitable for what he wants to achieve, raising the question of why Eurokitch chooses to continue to work with the consultants for the remainder of the project. Taking a second look, however, the CEO's critique is used as an input in the subsequent meetings orchestrated by the consulting firm, pointing to the importance of the ability of consultants to be able to depart from their role as 'invincible experts' and instead establishment themselves as dialogue partners.

Also, by suggesting or arranging who to involve in the strategic conversations, management consultants may add value, as they orchestrate how and when alternative perspectives are introduced and in this sense can administer these inputs in accordance with the sensemaking dynamics. New voices can spur new associations, which can pave the way for new sensemaking efforts. In the case, Mentor decided to introduce an anthropologist, in order to increase diversity and creativity. This clearly affected conversations and were viewed positively by the managers from the client firm, which decided to bring the same anthropologist back in during workshop session 5.

Last, but not least, the case provides a clear example of the importance of retrospection in innovation processes using inputs from management consultants. Illustrating how concepts and identities are constructed on an ongoing basis using the experience and knowledge of all those involved, however, we believe that management consultants can perform an important role in the difficult process of managers' shaping and clarifying their existing knowledge and hence, corporate identities.

Managerial and academic implications

Much criticism and questions have been raised with regards to the value of inputs from management consultants. Although the value of advice-giving from a cut-and-dried perspective is questionable, the sensemaking perspective stresses, that the widespread use and popularity of management consultants, may be ascribed as depending less on their abilities to provide expert advice and much more to their ability to initiate and participate in a strategic conversation. Hence, a sensemaking perspective would suggest that asking the right questions in a way that unleashes sensegiving and sensemaking efforts among members of the client organization seems to be the critical input. We have identified four ways that management consultants may influence

this orchestration. By understanding that the value of management consultants is in these processes, managers may become more efficient in their use of management consultants.

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