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# **Is the Black Box Grey or does it have Black Spots?**

**- a study of consultants doing practical change work**

***Authors:***

*Marie Thorstensson*

*Oskar Christensson*

***Advisor:***

*Martin Blom*

## **Abstract/summary**

- Title:** Is the Black Box Grey or does it have Black Spots? – a study of consultants doing practical change work
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- Authors:** Marie Thorstensson and Oskar Christensson
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- Five key words:** organizational change, consultants, practical work, power, politics
- Purpose:** To make *an empirically grounded description of the interaction between consultants in Consult and the clients in implementing change initiatives and how this interaction affects the change*
- Methodology:** An interpretative constructionist perspective is adopted using a single case study.
- Theory:** Combining knowledge work theory, Alvesson (2004) and Løwendahl (2005), with that of organizational development, by Beer et al. (1990). This is nuanced with Hardy and Redivo's (1994) power notions.
- Empirical foundation:** A medium size consultancy firm is studied through one observation and semi-structured interviews with current and previous clients.
- Conclusions:** The firm of Consult works with structure, skills, support and social ability in order to implement an intended change within their client's organization. By making the client owner of the project, the client continues to build on the implemented changes. The owning of the project also creates problems in information flows that seem to be neglected.

We would like to thank the people from Consult that have been very helpful to us in our study. To all our interviewees, we thank you for your cooperation. Finally, for all good advice and supervision, thanks to Martin Blom, our supervisor.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Why the need for consultants?

There is a constant need for knowledge in our society of today, and therefore the claim to knowledge gets increasingly important (Alvesson, 1993; Donaldson, 2001; Newell, 2002). Everybody seems to be a consultant these days and there seems to be an endless need for people's expert opinions. Managers feel the need to change their organizations due to pressure from the markets, but at the same time believe that they do not possess the proper skills themselves to follow up this initiative or the knowledge of what kind of change is needed (Clark, 1995). It is not easy being a manager today and it is no wonder that they turn to the help from management consultancies, which in the last decades have grown intensely, in order to be advised and supported in different managerial issues (Clark, 1995).

Løwendahl (2005) reports that in 1993 services accounted for two thirds of the GDP in developed countries and that this share continues to grow. According to Canbäck (1998) the management consultancy business globally grew from \$2 billion to \$35 billion in total annual revenue between 1980 and 1997, an annual growth of more than 20%. In 1998 there were more than thirty consulting firms with 1000 consultants or more. In 1980 there were five such firms. Thus the institutional knowledge is not just growing but also being spread over more individuals. The increasing importance of consultants is also demonstrated by Canbäck (1998). In 1998 the United States had a ratio between management consultants and the kind of executive that typically interacts with management consultants of 0.5 (Canbäck, 1998). This indicates the power that the institutional knowledge and consultants have on business.

Re-organizations such as the trend of outsourcing and "lean production", is another explanation to the "explosion" of consultants in business life today put forward in organizational studies (Alvesson, 2004; Løwendahl, 2005). This would imply that it is not just a question of more people with the appropriate knowledge, but that they have gone from "normal" employment within the organizations to being external consultants. If we take into account that what constitutes a consultant is not protected by any organization, like lawyers and doctors, this work can be practiced by anyone, also explaining the recent increase in the number of consultants, since the barrier of entry to the market is very low (Clark, 1995;

Løwendahl, 2005). Anyone who feels that their main work task is giving advice can titillate themselves as a consultant.

## **1.2 Who are they?**

The new knowledge society has led to an institutionalization of the importance of knowledge (Alvesson, 2004; Newell, 2002). The “intellectuals” like the knowledge intensive society, since it gives prominence to ideas, of which they are rich (Donaldson, 2001). This gives them motivation to work for increasing and maintaining this notion, and hence gives them status. The reputation of being an expert will give legitimacy to your actions and then people will trust you. Even though the results from the so-called knowledge-intensive firms (from here on we will use the acronym KIF) are documented to be ambiguous (Alvesson, 2004) the mere claim to knowledge is a means of power. Knowledge takes a preponderant place in the companies today and knowledge has become a key factor in the economy and working life (Alvesson, 2004).

A list of the characteristics of the KIF is presented by Alvesson (2004):

1. Highly qualified individuals doing knowledge-based work, using intellectual and symbolic skills.
2. A fairly high degree of autonomy and the downplaying of organizational hierarchy.
3. The use of adaptable, ad-hoc organizational forms.
4. The need for extensive communications for coordination and problem solving.
5. Idiosyncratic client services.
6. Information and power asymmetry (often favoring the professional over the client)
7. Subjective and uncertain quality assessment

A KIF is identified by a mix of the internal structures of the firm, how the firm relates to its surroundings and the output of the firm. In the following section we will explore these definitions with less emphasis on the internal structures and instead focus on the relationships and outputs that concern the KIF. KIFs can be divided into two different types: R&D firms and professional service firms, from here on called PSFs (Alvesson, 2004). Examples of the first type, not explored at any length here, are pharmaceutical and high-tech companies. As

the name implies PSFs involve a service that can be more or less connected to a product, examples are management and IT consultants.

Løwendahl (2005) uses somewhat different, but yet quite similar, characteristics to the ones described above set by Alvesson (2004), when defining what sets a PSF apart from other more or less knowledge intensive firms. The characteristics are interconnected, but some of these characteristics are more important when dealing with the management of knowledge workers and the structure of the firm. These are primarily points 1-3 in Alvesson (2004) and we will not explore these deeper as the focus of the study lies on the interaction with the client.

The characteristics presented above refer to the structure of the firm, however it implies some operational standards that hints towards the type of individual who would like to work under these conditions. As discussed above, there are no concrete definitions of what constitutes a consultant and therefore it is hard to make a clear distinction of the attributes of such an individual. Normally, it seems like the people employed, or practicing, as consultants either have an academic degree or many years of experience from the “real world” (Alvesson, 2004). In the ideal case it can be both.

### **1.3 What do they do?**

What are then consultants really doing in practical life? If you ask the experts or consultants themselves, or read literature by many authors in the field, it seems to be surrounded by a mystical aura (Alvehus, 2006; Deetz, 1998). As discussed above, the work of these knowledge workers is ambiguous as to results and nature. In a study some managers were asked to describe what they were really doing and many of them used metaphors of “magic” and “art” in their descriptions (Alvehus, 2006; Donaldson, 2001). This would imply that the work in itself is something elusive and hidden, a “black box” (Alvehus, 2006; Alvesson, 2001).

Is this black box so hard to explain that it is not possible to do or is it just a part of the secrets involved in KIFs, in order to maintain some mystery so other companies cannot copy the work (Alvehus, 2006)? Of course the mystery is somewhat different depending on the service the consultants claim to provide. The support managers are looking for is concerning



everything from executive headhunting to productivity improvements and therefore the actions by the consultants will be different in depth and uncertainty.

The link between professional work and commercialism has been suggested to lead to a focus on control of the processes of work, in order to sell the ambiguous product. The communication or interaction process involves the collaborative identification of what should be done by the PSF (Løwendahl, 2005). This is connected to the customization of the service as it is, to a certain extent, created or modified to fit the need of the client. The information asymmetry, referred to in the characteristics of KIF, refers to the “expert” label that is synonymous with many knowledge workers. The client’s counter measure is the financial part of the agreement. Løwendahl (2005) points out that the “production” can only occur after the contract is signed and that you cannot test-drive a service, which swings the pendulum back to the knowledge worker a little. The subjectivity of assessment relates to the fact that a service delivered by an “expert” might only be judged accurately by other “experts” (Løwendahl, 2005).

These studies of knowledge intensive work have been with focus on control and rhetoric. The practice is not studied in depth, as pointed out by Barley and Kunda (2001). They are saying that there used to be a strong link between organization studies and the work itself (Barley and Kunda, 2001). With greater levels of abstraction and a focus on system theory, at the same time as many organization theorists were “forced” into business schools, the studies of organizational work changed (Barley and Kunda, 2001). In the literature today focus is more on management and employment relations (Barley and Kunda, 2001). The authors are calling for further studies of the actual work taking place behind or during these relationships.

The focus on rhetorical issues is based on the notion of knowledge workers as language workers (Alvesson, 1993; 2004). The importance of creating a good image in order to present their knowledge in an interesting way to generate positive expectations and the implications of this impression management has been discussed in the literature (Alvesson, 1993; 2004; Clark, 1995). Still, as Alvehus points out, there has to be something behind the rhetorical surface (Alvehus, 2006). In this study we want to try to regain focus on the discussion of work itself – we are curious individuals and we would very much like to know, or at least get a “sneak-peak”, into this black box.

Barley and Kunda's (2001) solution to this situation is a stronger focus on grounded theory. By using more quantitative measures, combined with qualitative methods, organizations can be studied in a more consistent way, according to the authors. We find their reasoning about the "disappearance of work" interesting, but since we are adopting an interpretative perspective, and due to pragmatic reasons, we will focus on a single qualitative case study.

## **1.4 Entering organizational change**

As discussed above, today many organizations feel they have to change in order to adapt to the surroundings or they will be out of business (Clark, 1995). According to some researchers this can be an explanation of the "explosion" of concepts about why and how to change that have been presented in the last couple of years (Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). There can be different internal or external factors behind the organizational change, such as political, cultural, and economic reasons (Dawson, 2003).

Before moving ahead, a brief discussion of what change is will be pursued. As noted in the beginning, the aim for many organizations today is to change into a more flexible structure, in order to be more apt in dealing with change in the future (Clark, 1995). One common perception is that this implies a radical change from one structure to another stable situation. This notion is contrasted by researchers who believe that there is no such thing as stable organizations, but that they are to be regarded as in constant, continuous change (Dawson, 2003; Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007). In this study we are adopting the first perspective, building on the three steps provided by Lewin (1951) of unfreezing-change-freezing. Lewin was one of the founders of the Organizational Development, aiming at identifying a need for change in attitudes and behavior in order to accomplish efficiency and provide a better organization (Lewin, 1951; Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007). This type of change is initiated from the top and slowly works its way down the hierarchy. One such plan for change is presented by Beer et al. (1990), which is further developed in the theoretical discussion later, where they are also pointing out the necessity of support for change and their opinion that change in attitudes is accomplished through applying new structures which lead to changes in behavior.

The planning of change has been criticized by researchers who believe that they tend to overemphasize the ability to control the changes and being too rationalistic (Sveningsson and

Sörgärde, 2007). The contrast would be a focus on process or a continuous change which will be an open process without start or end to adapt to the changing environment. Emerging change which comes from “below” is also a contrast to the top-management approach (Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007).

## **1.5 Problematizing the role of consultants in change**

Since managers seem to be uncertain of how the perceived need of change should be remedied, they turn to the help from consultants, as discussed previously (Clark, 1995). According to Clark (1995), Huczynski believes that the three steps by Lewin (1951), unfreezing-change-freezing, is the most appropriate way of describing the consultant’s role in this work. We adapt a similar position and are looking at a radical change process, rather than incremental or continuous change, where the consultants actually go in and try to implement tangible changes as opposed to being reluctant to take on responsibility for implementation or outcomes (Sturdy et al., 2005). We believe that one sort of change that is likely to have an active interaction as well as a noticeable result is a change aiming at productivity improvements and efficiency gains. This type of change is about structure and changed behavior of the participants, which is something we would like to study.

Our empirical focus is a single case study of a medium sized consultancy firm, practicing primarily in Scandinavia. The firm, from here on out called Consult, works with productivity and efficiency improvements without specific industrial focus. Even though the firm is not industry specific we have been able to gather information only from production industry projects. Thus our definition of a consultant will be one based in a perspective of production efficiency and ruling out IT and strictly management consultants. Through contact with the company vice president we have learned that they claim differentiation from other management consultancies by, again, claiming to be exceptionally proficient in the change of behavior. The changes usually happen at middle and low management levels. How is this change of behavior achieved? Time restraints limit our possibility to study behavioral change. We would however like to study the interaction that supposedly leads to these changes and supposedly successful projects.

We claim that the organizational change that we have studied can be best described as a planned change as it is the result of a decision made by the top client. The change is not a

paper product, it is implemented with much resolve, and thus it is a process. The projects are tightly controlled with regards to time, affected units of the client organization, and content. As we will see it can best be understood from a technical-bureaucratic and political perspective. The theoretical framework will therefore mainly revolve around a theory on change process presented by Beer et al. (1990), complemented by the notions of power from Hardy and Redivo (1994) and combined with some important attributes of consultants (Alvesson, 2004).

In all the literature that we have read during our studies of knowledge intensive work and organization there has been an interesting, yet abstract theoretical discussion, but limited talk about practice. One of the few longitudinal studies of consultants in action is Sturdy et al. (2005). With the help of our case study we believe that we will be able to take a closer look at the consultant-client interaction within a change process. Of course, due to pragmatic limits of time we will not be able to dig as deep as we would have liked to, but we are still aiming at reaching an understanding of how such a situation can play out.

The presentation of consultants, or knowledge workers in general, focus a lot on the selling of the product, which is in itself problematic, but there is little focus on what actually takes place within the work, once commenced.

## **1.6 Purpose**

The purpose with this study is to make *an empirically grounded description of the interaction between consultants in Consult and the clients in implementing change initiatives and how this interaction affects the change.*

## **1.7 Limitations**

There is of course some limitations to this study, some voluntarily and some due to time and other restrictions. What we are studying is the interaction between consult and client, and how this interaction, directly and indirectly, influences implementation of the organizational change, thus as mentioned above not the management of consultants. Even more important, we, to a large extent, equate consultancy work with change work, since the situation studied revolves around this.

You cannot study people without taking their background into account. We are however not looking at the consultants' backgrounds as such, since they are specific for every person and cannot be generalized. It is not relevant that an individual has a certain education or has worked for a specific company. What is relevant is the collected experience, work and life related, that influence the individual's behavior.

We assume that there is general resistance in association with change. We are not focusing on resistance as a general phenomenon, but resistance specifically linked to the studied change effort. We are interested in the implementation of change and this involves the overcoming of the resistance.

The empirical material relies on information from consultants and client managers at different levels. The perspective therefore becomes top-down oriented, since no person on lower levels has been interviewed, as the purpose is to study the interaction between the consultant and managers.

## **1.8 Structure of the report**

To clarify what to expect in reading this text, we would like to make a short description. We follow this introductory chapter with a traditional methodological part and then our theoretical framework. In the fourth chapter we start our analysis by describing first the material regarding the client company where the observation and most interviews were performed. Second, we make a short summary of the four other companies in which we have gathered information and then we continue analyzing differences and similarities from the situations described, resulting in *The Consult way of working*. Finally, we end the analysis with our main thoughts and links to theory before heading on to our conclusions.

## **2 Method**

### **2.1 Methodological considerations**

#### **2.1.1 Ontological: objectivism or constructivism**

Within social ontology the central question is how to view social entities, whether there is an objective reality that can be described or if it is socially constructed (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In objectivism an organization is considered a separate object that can be studied and described as a reality (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In contrast to this is the concept of constructivism, that every social phenomenon and its meanings are constructed and revised through social interaction (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Huzzard and Ekman Philips, 2007; Gergen and Thatchenkery, 1996). This social interaction is also the way to creating knowledge, through sharing understandings (Huzzard and Ekman Philips, 2007).

The advocates for the objectivist approach are pointing out the absence of subjectivity as one of the upsides, since they are studying the organization as an isolated unit (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Ironically, says Deetz (1996:194) since “in practice so-called ‘interpretivists’ and others often labeled as ‘subjective’ often have the better claim to objectivity through the way they allow alternative language games and the possibility of alternative constructions”.

We believe that our study is based on a constructivist perspective, both in how we view our study object as constructed by social actions and how we work with building up the results presented here. None of us can say that we are a totally blank sheet, of course we do have a framework and vocabularies from our studies and are always influenced by our pre-understandings (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). Considering our background within the academy is loaded with theories of consultants and change work, it is impossible to avoid using this knowledge. According to Alvesson and Kärreman (2007:1265), “empirical material is an artifact of interpretations and the use of specific vocabularies. Data are inextricably fused with theory”.

What we try to do when analyzing the empirical material is an interpretation were we create our understanding of the material through “fusing horizons” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). Using our pre-understanding of consultants as a point of origin we bring our empirical material into this by jumping between these bodies of knowledge. Alvesson and Kärreman

(2007) have proposed to move focus from “data” to how this empirical material is constructed, in order to gain better theoretical reasoning. This suggests to put the analysis and theoretical reasoning in focus, in order to think more freely and combine (or come up with new?) ideas. That is also a part of what we are trying to do here; complement theories in a field where not much is written – the practical work of the consultants (Jacobsen, 2000; Alvehus, 2006).

### **2.1.2 Epistemological: positivism or interpretivism**

In the early years of social science research a positivist stand was usually taken, a stand which is still advocated by natural scientists (Jacobsen, 2000). The aim with this is to find general laws for how things work and function. Trying out a hypothesis through experiments and gathering data objectively is the only way to knowledge according to these researchers (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Pihlanto 1994). The main counterargument raised within interpretivism is that social studies demand a different logic of research methods, going from an *explanation* of human behavior to an *understanding* of the same (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Jacobsen, 2000). In line with this it is also common with an inductive way of working, i.e. working from empirical material and then bringing in theory, compared to trying out theories to find evidence of these as researchers do in natural science (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

In our study we are adopting an interpretive perspective, since we do not believe that it is possible to make any generalizations of human behavior, but are aiming at understanding this specific situation (Jacobsen, 2000). We try to interpret our findings on different levels, as suggested by Alvesson and Kärreman (2003). The different parts are interpreted in depth, but they are also related to the whole. Interpretation along the lines of simple, double (and sometimes triple) hermeneutics will be possible through our chosen method of information gathering and analysis (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

### **2.1.3 Quantitative or qualitative methods**

We are trying to describe the close interaction between client and consultant. To get to this deeper level of understanding, and as a result from our previous choices of methodological standpoints, it feels natural to use qualitative methods. The quantitative research strategy is well adopted to natural science and trying out a hypothesis, but more related to numbers and

statistic than feelings and meanings which is what we are looking for here (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The strengths of qualitative methods are to “produce” deeper information about the situation or person in question, rather than painting a broader picture. We have therefore ruled out surveys, cross-sectional designs and other quantitative methods in favor of qualitative research methods.

#### **2.1.4 A single case study**

According to Pihlanto (1994:373): “when the aim of a study is to achieve a profound understanding of the behavior of people in real-world organizations, an intensive method such as the case study is unavoidable”. Due to time and other pragmatic reasons, this seemed to be the best method for our study. We had the opportunity to gain access to a consultancy firm, which became our focus of study. The firm will be our case study and the information about it comes from one observation and four interviews in the main organization Botox (all names, companies and persons, are fictional), as well as four previous clients. We think that this gives us a good picture of Consult. There are of course different forms of case studies, which all have their advantages and disadvantages (Yin, 2003). Considering our interpretive approach and that we are not aiming for generalization, but trying to gain an insight in how the situation can play out, we find a single case study that lies somewhere between revelatory and representative appropriate (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Yin, 2003).

## **2.2 Generation of empirical material**

To collect our empirical material, within the case study, we work with both an observation and semi-structured interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Although some of our empirical material is of double hermeneutics (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000), through interpreting people’s interpretations of situations, we find the comparison between these and our own interpretation of a similar social interaction very interesting. In our case, the observation has been complemented by interviews and this, we feel, provides us with a credible account of how the work is conducted within the studied firm.

These two techniques felt as the most logic choice, since our purpose is to understand how people act and also to a certain extent think in a specific situation. There are of course alternatives to these techniques, such as documentation (Yin, 2003), “shadowing” (Bryman



and Bell, 2007) and focus groups (Bryman and Bell, 2007), but all of these are more demanding in time and access, neither of which we are rich.

In our empirical work we have been reliant on both verbal interaction, creating it, recording it, and on interaction between humans. With the help of a somewhat critical standpoint we try to delve deeper into the verbal and non verbal interaction we have observed, questioning the immediate and obvious observations to try and get behind the façade.

### **2.2.1 Presentation of study object**

“Consult” is a consultancy firm that operates mainly in Scandinavia, but also has offices in other parts of Europe and south East Asia. Since the start, ten years ago, the firm has grown to about 100 employees with educations primarily in engineering, business or social sciences. Employees must have consulting experience and working experience outside of the consultancy occupation and the average age of the employees is 40. Not surprisingly the experience of the consultants is put forward as a success factor.

Even though they claim not to be industry specific most of the cases used in promoting material are from production industries. Their main objective is to increase profit for their clients by improving productivity and efficiency, often using already available resources.

Consult has a sophisticated sales organization that consists of a number of assistants contacting the heads of Swedish and international companies setting up introduction meetings that are carried out by president and senior vice president. The average time frame of a project is six to eight months, but it is of course depending on the scale of the project. In the initial pre-study there may be many consultants taking part, but after a contract is signed it is usually two consultants that are working together full time at the client site.

The work process within the firm is written down and used for educational purposes. Since their competitive advantage lies within their methodological approach, we were not given access to the official information. Our approach is therefore to study the work from an outsider’s point of view and then try to find explanations for this within our theoretical framework.

### **2.2.2 Observation**

This study of a certain event and how people seem to view it give us a possibility, not to generalize, but to show the specific situation and how it seems to work right then and there. This is developed further in an article by Kärreman and Alvesson (2001), who suggest that you can gain interesting aspects by focusing on a specific situation. Of course this situation has its limitations, but also (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2001:84) “potentially rich and informative accounts of some vital aspects of organizational life”. Although our empirical material is very limited in time and volume, we do believe that the basic principle is reasonable also in our situation.

To gain a better insight in how a certain situation plays out, it seems logic to be a part of it. Of course we are not invisible, like a fly on the wall since people would try to kill even the smallest fly if it annoys them. Our aim was to go to the meeting with eyes and ears wide open and try to write down the findings as authentic as possible, without interfering.

#### **2.2.2.1 Performing the observation**

We were able to attend an encounter between consultants from company Consult and people from the client organization Botox. This meeting was held in beginning of May, on the site of the industrial company in the middle of Sweden, where a current project is located. The client company started an organizational change project about six months ago and today the process is more about implementation than initiation of new ideas. The meeting we witnessed was a meeting that is held weekly in order to follow the process of a sub-project within the bigger project. The participants had started working together, in these meetings, about three weeks earlier.

Participants at the meeting were four employees from different functions within the company Botox, the internal project coordinator, two consultants from Consult and the two of us. We had met the two consultants in the morning and spent the whole day with them, except when performing another interview. During the day we had also been treated to a tour of the factory and briefly seen the different activities taking place there. We were introduced by the consultants to the rest of the group, before the meeting started, as “students that are here to observe”.

During the observation, which lasted two hours, we made notes as to what we experienced happening, trying to cover as much as possible. We were seated in different parts of the conference room, which was all in all no more than 15 m<sup>2</sup>. The conference room was a plain, white room except for some decorations in form of products from the factory. The agenda of the day was shown on a large screen taking up most of one of the walls. This slide-show was controlled by the coordinator and visible to all participants, although one of us and one of the consultants were sitting a bit too close to get a good overview.

### **2.2.2.2 Notes on the observation**

Since our aim was mainly to study the interaction between the participants, we focused not on the specific wording but on how people acted as well as how they presented and argued their case. Due to confidentiality we did not record the meeting, since some information might have been sensitive. Directly after the observation we compared our impressions and made complementary notes. We did not agree beforehand to focus on different aspects of the meeting but tried to get two separate accounts. Some of the notes were similar while some complemented each other in order to complete the picture.

### **2.2.3 Interviews**

The purpose with using interviews is to gain further knowledge in the attitudes and opinions of persons involved in the interaction. We used an interview guide to help focusing the questions for biggest possible exchange from the interviews (Appendix 1). This semi-structured interview is helpful to guide the interviews to cover all important aspects and make sure that nothing is left out. At the same time there is an opportunity to pose spontaneous questions if something unexpected and more interesting appears during the conversation (Bryman and Bell, 2007). As both the clients and consultants have the “gift of gab” we allowed them to give their account without interrupting, even if they strayed from the intended subject.

#### **2.2.3.1 Choosing interviewees**

The study aims at investigating the interaction between consultants and clients. Our choice of interviewees is therefore made to see this from different perspectives. We had the opportunity

to talk individually to the two consultants in charge of the meeting we observed, directly in relation to the observation. Both were men that had worked two and six years respectively at Consult. The interviews took place at the client site of Botox. Two individuals involved in the project at Botox were interviewed. One was the internal project coordinator and the other a production manager (referred to as OMT member, defined later).

We have also interviewed four different previous clients, trying to get their view of the process. All interviewees were the client's internal project leaders, one woman and three men, which had worked closely with the consultant in each project.

### **2.2.3.2 Forming the interview guide**

We worked from different perspectives from our course literature when we formed our interview guide. This gives us a broad perspective since we did not want to be "trapped" in a certain theoretical perspective already before the interviews. We tried to keep the questions as open as possible to facilitate a broad range of answers. The main areas were the interviewees' backgrounds as well as the history of the company in question. Further we asked questions related to Consult and the project: why it was initiated, the process of the project, and attitudes towards the project by employees and managers. For the two consultants we added a few more questions regarding consultants in general (Appendix 2), but in all other aspects we kept to the general interview guide.

### **2.2.3.3 Performing interviews**

During the interviews we used a tape-recorder to be able to recount the process as accurately as possible. One of us was also taking notes, in case the tape-recorder would break down, while the other one was posing most questions.

All interviews were taking place in the office of the interviewee or in a conference room, where we would not be disturbed. The appointments were made about a week in advance in most cases and the interviewees were given the same information previous to our arrival. Before starting the interview we promised them total anonymity and described in very short terms what we have been studying and the general aim of our thesis work. After the interview was completed we thanked them and made sure that we could send them follow-up questions

in case we ran into any problems, when transcribing the material. We also asked if they wanted a copy of the finished master thesis.

## **2.3 Working with the information**

After the observation as well as the interviews we transcribed our notes and the tape as soon as possible, to minimize the risk of losing good information. The empirical material used in the analysis was translated from Swedish to English. That the observation and interviews were performed in Swedish were of practical reasons, but considering our methodological standpoint it is not the exact words that is the most important, but the overall impression. We feel that we have been able to find satisfying translations the statements made by our interviewees and even if this adds another dimension to the interpretations, we do not find it a big problem compared to if the interviewees themselves should have been “forced” to perform the conversation in English.

From the first transcripts certain trends in the material were found, which we investigated more thoroughly in other interviews. This gave us an opportunity to make certain changes in the interview guide accordingly. The material is then analyzed with the help of our theoretical framework.

## **2.4 Critique of method and sources**

### **2.4.1 Limitations in method chosen**

The observation and the interviews were made in an industry where the consultants as well as the clients are concerned that the information from the projects are kept a secret. They might therefore be a bit reluctant to talk freely in front of us. We have promised discretion, anonymity and elimination of the information that might be sensitive.

In hindsight, we think that our first interviews helped us to form a better picture of Consult’s way of working before doing the observation, which might have led us to be more perceptive to nuances. Since we only had the opportunity to do one observation, we feel that this line of

working was to our advantage. Thus this can have some implications regarding our “open-mindedness” we still do not think that it has hindered our free-thinking about the events.

We are aware of the influence we can have on the interviewees during the observation as well as the interviews, but since we do believe that every interview is a social interaction (Alvesson, 2003) this is not possible to exclude totally. As long as we are aware of the role we are playing and since it will always be our interpretation that will be told in this paper, we do not find this a problem.

Of course it can be discussed if the method chosen is the “right” one. From our point of view it is the most rewarding way of working for our purpose. Of course it could have been better if we had the chance of gaining a deeper understanding of the background and the possibility to perform more observations and interviews. Due to pragmatic reasons, such as limitations in time and experience, this is not possible and we will have to work with what we have.

#### **2.4.2 Choice of theory**

We have been working rather inductively, in order to keep as open a mind as possible during our gathering of empirical material (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This way we have tried to fit our theoretical framework according to the most interesting parts of the empirical material. We try to find relevant links between the theory and our material, both exemplifying and also contradicting statements.

#### **2.4.3 Source criticism**

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) bring up the notions of remnants and narrating sources, where the first is referring to a source not exposed to subjective distortion, while the narrating source has passed through a medium. The remnants will then be worth more than narrating sources in deciding trustworthiness (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000). In our case the notes from the observation can be seen as a remnant, in that the meeting has actually taken place. It can also be regarded as a narrating source as to how the meeting unfolded. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) also refer to the second canon of Betti concerning bias as an intended or unintended interest in “skewing” the information. The judgment of the information is made in relation to

the background of the source. The way of solving a situation of potential bias would be to have several sources of information providing different perspectives of the situation (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

Consult was very welcoming and looks forward to get an outsider's point of view. The chairman of the board, our initial contact, has pointed out that this is a good opportunity for the company as a possible source for marketing towards new clients. This positive attitude together with the fact that the clients we have interviewed are chosen by the company can of course be seen as a bias and a risk for making too quick and uncritical judgments. We do think that we are able to distance ourselves when necessary, but from our interpretative perspective it is also important to get close. We choose to see this as an opportunity to gain access to an interesting industry and welcomed interviews with successful clients rather than standing without them. The perspectives of the clients will still be important for gaining a more trustworthy picture of the interaction taking place. The observation is our main source for information, but is heavily supported by material from the interviews. What we might be missing is accounts from lower level employees, but since the interaction we are interested in studying takes place at management level, we focus our energy on this. The positive view of the company is also the reason why we chose the firm in the first place, since they have a good reputation of succeeding in their projects. As long we are aware of it and take it into account when viewing their statements, we do not see the positive attitude of the clients as a problem.

We are, as stated above, aware of our pre-understanding of the world before we go into our study. We will always have a pre-understanding of every situation we meet and can only try to have them in mind in our analysis. Our interpretation is what is going to be read in this paper and then be linked to possible theoretical perspectives. We do not believe we can "tell it as it is", just try to give our explanation or description of what is happening in the interaction between consultant and client. In this aspect we do think that our account is credible and can be used to confirm or exemplify some of our theoretical framework.

## **3 Theory**

This chapter will pursue two different lines of theory, the work of consultants and organizational change, in the intention of linking them together in the end, before moving on to the analysis. The type of change needs to be explained in depth to understand the role played by consultants. Through an introduction of first consultancy work as it is presented in literature, and second the main concepts within organization change we will develop our theoretical framework.

### **3.1 What do consultants do?**

#### **3.1.1 Consultants and their work**

First, we have a short introduction to the field of study of consultants and their work. Turner (as referred to in Canbäck, 1998) introduces an eight step hierarchy listing what it is consultants do. It ranges from the consultant providing information to the client to being a permanent part of the client's improvement mechanism. Where the consultant is positioned, what the consultant does, is, according to Turner dependent on what is mutually agreed with the client. Schein (as referred to in Canbäck, 1998) uses a different way of identifying the roles of the consultant and also puts it in perspective to the client. The power in the relationship leans towards the consultant as the client has asked them for their services and even though the client is involved in the negotiations of the project the consultants has the sought after expertise. Clark (1995) provides an answer as to how this power relationship is maintained by the consultants.

Clark (1995) presents a problem for the client of a consultancy firm. With no formal knowledge or education restrictions, or initial financial barriers to speak of, entering the consultancy market is easy. So can you make an informed decision of how to choose between the ever growing numbers of companies? The reason to why this is interesting is that it produces a problem for the consultancy firms, how to market themselves. Clark (1995) claims that the answer behind a successful consultancy management is relationship management. Thus, consultants are seen as highly sophisticated salesmen who create uncertainty and insecurities, but also speak in a manner that managers can relate to in order to persuade clients of the goods they can offer.



We entered this project, our thesis, with the belief that there was more to the consultancy occupation than rhetoric and symbols, that there had to be something behind that rhetoric. Being interested in something that presumably exists, or is created, in the interaction between consultants and clients we felt comfortable with using Alvesson (2004) as a starting point for our knowledge work based analysis. This account of KIFs, its characteristics and the socio-political aspect of consultant-client interaction seemed relevant as we will try to combine this analysis with theories on organizational work.

If we choose Alvesson (2004), what are we not considering? We are not considering what Fincham (1999) calls the structural perspective on consultants. He refers to the above line of reasoning as the strategic perspective. The structural perspective views consultants in a bigger picture and questions their ability to spread knowledge and innovations. This is not the consultants fault however; it is the nature of the clients. It is also the nature of the clients and the global market that creates the demand for these types of service providers. From this perspective the power in the relationship is more in favor of the client. Canbäck (1998) tries to explain the nature of consultants using transaction theory and thus seem to support the notion of consultants and their firms as (Fincham, 1999:340) “by-products of larger corporate forces”.

Fincham (1999) continues to recognize the compatibility of the strategic and the structural as each one is too simplistic. We agree with this and again feel that Alvesson (2004) is a suitable theoretical approach as it recognizes the macro variables in the interaction between consultant and client.

### **3.1.2 The socio-politics of knowledge work**

Alvesson (2004) describes the socio-politics of knowledge work and we see two sides to this dimension. The first concerns relations between the PSF and its clients between projects, in keeping and attracting clients. This includes the assurance of the PSF's claim to knowledge through carefully associating the firm to universities, think tanks, publications and other “objectively” recognized wellsprings of knowledge. Further, the maintenance of the individual and collective networks of the PSF employees, with present and possible clients, to some extent secures income, but also provides word of mouth marketing.

This aspect of maintaining trust and good relationships is something that is also referred to in the article by Maister et al (2000) on how to become a trusted advisor. The authors propose four different kinds of trust, as sequenced steps of becoming a trusted advisor, which is the closest relationship a client-professional can hope to achieve. Maister et al (2000) express attributes, such as curiosity and problem-solving skills, as typical for a trusted advisor. The relationship can then lead to future business, without the advisor having to prove him/her all over again.

The other part in socio-politics, according to Alvesson (2004), concerns the interaction between the knowledge worker, the consultant, and the client during the project. This involves the collaborative definition of what the problem is (Løwendahl, 2005), project resources and time frame. The quality of the exchange between consultant and client executive(s) responsible for ordering the service is important to the expected outcome of the project. On top of this the support from decision makers needs to be secured. This is especially important when the client needs to pull the main weight of the project effort with the consultant as support functions. Here the politics of management consultancy projects become a priority. The client company has limited resources, as does any organization, and allocating man-hours away from tending to customers and the everyday operations of the firm might not be a popular idea with the people, managers, not involved in the project (Alvesson, 2004).

The “power” in the relationship between client and consultant is delicate, as discussed by both Alvesson (2004) and Løwendahl (2005). As mentioned above, the client representative who orders the service might not always be the one to work with the service and this puts the consultant in the middle of two potentially opposing interests. The official superior will of course be the one with power over the financial assets, but implementation of the service often requires a benevolent operative client representative. The power dynamics are thus interesting and important when studying this relationship and can be viewed as a balance board. At one end the consultant has the power through the “knowledge” he/she possesses that the client needs. At this end the result of the project might also be hard to assess as expert work only can be assessed by other experts (Løwendahl, 2005).

In the other extreme the client has the power through the role of commissioner of the project and can order the consultant to fall in line and do what they are told. The way in between is a more symmetrical relationship where the two parties are committed to deliver the best

possible outcome by being open and receptive to one another's ideas. The main difficulty here is how to express the expectations from both parties in order to secure a successful service, thereby avoiding losing money and reputation (Løwendahl, 2005). If the project is too intertwined with internal politics, the PSF would be wiser not to engage in a contract, according to Løwendahl (2005). If the former mentioned relationships (Alvesson, 2004; Maister et al, 2000) are preserved, the likelihood of engaging in projects will increase even with other internal issues are present (Løwendahl, 2005).

## **3.2 How to engage in organizational change**

If we move to the second part of our theoretical framework, the concept of organizational change, we will start with a few notions of the main aspects that needs to be considered in order to explain why we have chosen the theories in question.

Organization change (Cummings and Worley, 2005:2) "can apply to any kind of change, including technical and managerial innovations, organization decline, or the evolution of a system over time". As pointed out in the introduction there are many reasons for change, as to external factors, and then different internal issues are to be dealt with, such as HRM and reaching goals in quantity as well as quality (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). Different theoretical perspectives have been trying to tackle this in different ways, which can be divided into three groups: technical-bureaucratic perspective, political perspective and cultural perspective (Dawson, 2003). The first one of these is more instrumental, influenced by a functionalistic view of organizations, whereas the second one is focusing on relationships, power and conflict theory within the organization (Dawson, 2003; Hardy and Redivo, 1994). Finally, the cultural perspective is concerned with meanings and values (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008).

### **3.2.1 Basic concepts**

By going back in history we will look more closely at some of the most influential bodies of knowledge within this field, starting off with Organizational Development (OD). OD is one form of organization change but should be differentiated from change management. Even though they may seem similar in that they both plan for organizational improvements, they

differ in their value base. OD is based in behavioral science, while change management has a more narrow focus on cost, quality, and schedule (Cummings and Worley, 2005). A definition of OD by Beer (1980) is quoted in Cummings and Worley (2005:2):

*“a system wide process of data collection, diagnosis, action planning, intervention, and evaluation aimed at (1) enhancing congruence among organizational structure, process, strategy, people and culture; (2) developing new and creative organizational solutions; and (3) developing the organization’s self-renewing capacity. It occurs through the collaboration of organizational members working with a change agent using behavioral science theory, research, and technology”.*

One of the first developers of OD was Kurt Lewin (1951). He focused on change on group level and proposed a three-step model of “unfreezing-change-freezing” (Lewin, 1951). As is suggested by the quote above, OD is a planned form of change, typically initiated from the top-down, in order to improve effectiveness, social conditions, facilitating problem solving for the future, and usually achieved using an external change agent (Dawson, 2003). Some critique has been raised against the normative nature of the perspective, indicating that there is no “best way” practice for solving all organizational changes. Still, this is the model used in business schools and also the prevailing image of how to achieve change.

Another perspective on organization change is the Socio-Technical Systems theory (STS), developed by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in the 1940’s and 1950’s (Dawson, 2003). The researchers wanted to improve technical issues and the social conditions of work simultaneously (Dawson, 2003; Appelbaum, 1997). STS see the organization as an organic open system, but has received critique for focusing too much on internal relationships, forgetting about the external environment (Dawson, 2003), something the contingency approach is very careful to point out.

The contingency approach has a view on organization change as an adaptive process, in which there is no best way, but it is important and possible to fit the organization into its context (Dawson, 2003). This perspective has been criticized for lacking practical application, being too abstract or theoretical (Dawson, 2003).

Except for the three main streams presented above, there are many “management gurus” out there trying to influence how organizations should be managed and changed. Some that are often mentioned are Peters and Waterman with *In search of Excellence* as well as Kotter and his eight steps to successful change (Dawson, 2003; Kotter, 1996).

After this rather broad notions of change perspective we will move on to the four dimensions, which Dawson (2003) proposes developers of change concepts usually combine in order to characterize change: timeframe of change, scale of change, political dimension of change and substantive element of change. The timeframe of change are often defined on an axis of two extremes, for example: revolutionary or evolutionary; radical or incremental; episodic or contingent (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Weick and Quinn, 1999). Something that is very important to note is the description of change as an episodic matter, that organizations are stable units that occasionally needs to change, which is what OD and STS work with, or if there is a continuous process of changes as suggested in the contingency theory (Dawson, 2003).

As the names of these extremes indicates they can be very sudden and initiated with force, revolutionary and radical, or coming from below, as evolutionary and incremental. These notions also refers the scale of change, who or what parts are involved in the organizational change and also from where the initiative comes, and if the decision is strategic or operative (Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007). The origin of the change proposal is also essential when it comes to a discussion of how or if you can be prepared for change. Kotter (1996) points out the importance of creating a “sense of urgency” to make people understand the necessity of changing, as a means of making it easier to form committed teams to lead the projects.

The potential conflict of interest arising from the different parties involved in change is something that is in focus in the political dimension. Here the attitudes of the involved parties are an important factor. As discussed in the beginning of this part, this has been focus in a lot of studies, for example through the political metaphor by Morgan (1997). Sandberg and Targama (2007) also underline the importance of perceptions, when they argue that how the individual in an organization understands the work task constitutes the quality of the result.

Finally, the content of the change is of course fundamental for the perspective of change. There have been many discussions during the years of, not only the aim for change, but how

deep it can reach, and also what is possible to study. Some people claim that you can only change people's behavior, while others are saying that we should (and could) try to change attitudes in order to achieve an organization wide change (Sandberg and Targama, 2007). Culture is the third form of change, either as the main purpose for change if viewed as a separate unit or as an important influential factor (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008:44) think a cultural change is hard, but possible, to achieve and requires "receptiveness amongst the collective for new ideas, values and meanings". This implies that the depth a change can reach depends on the level of analysis. Cultural change, ideas, values and meaning is hard to separate completely from other aspect of working life (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008).

As discussed in the introduction and here above there are different ways of viewing change. In this study focus will be on planned change, based in OD, and the model developed further below will be a so-called n-step model. The reason why we chose this perspective is simply that our empirical material tells us that this is the way the consultants in question, and clients, view and talk about change. The change studied is often radical, episodic and the plan is to improve structure and processes to solve problem, as in line with the definition of OD above (Cummings and Worley, 2005). What is important to point out before moving on to the next part is the critique that has been put forward in later years of the planned models (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). The n-step models proposed by some researchers (Kotter, 1996; Beer et al., 1990) are according to critiques too simple, and (translated freely, Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007:254) "the real complexity connected to change is often reduced to some simple advice that hardly helps us to understand the depth of the processes". Today organizational researchers have started to focus on the process, on what is happening in between the steps of planned change (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Weick and Quinn, 1999). This rationalization of change is also something we find interesting and hopefully we can give some empirical examples in our analysis of both congruencies and incongruencies with the theory. First we will present the key concept of the n-step model (Beer et al., 1990) and then the political dimension with the help of Hardy and Redivo (1994).

### **3.2.2 Six steps to successful change**

In an article Beer et al. (1990) point out the reasons to why they believe different change projects fail. The failing attempts, they believe, are due to two common assumptions from top management: that companywide programs will transform organizations and (Beer et al.,

1990:158) “that employee behavior is changed by altering a company's formal structure and systems”. They say that this is a false assumption and that a corporate renewal process cannot be accomplished by a formal organization structure or systems, instead the change should start in the periphery or at division level and be led by general managers of those units, not by the CEO or corporate staff people.

Through a process of 'task alignment' you need to focus the energy for change on the work itself, and not on (Beer et al., 1990:158) “abstractions such as 'participation' or 'culture’”. The managers in charge can do a lot without support from top management, even though such support is beneficial and even necessary, especially for implementation in the company as a whole. The CEO’s role is not to lead the change, but to indicate the general direction. He or she has to be prepared to change his or her own work as well, in order to assure a lasting organizational change.

### **3.2.2.1 Working with change**

Beer et al. (1990) believe that the most appropriate way of working with change is to start with people’s behavior. According to them the best way to influence this behavior is not to work with attitudes, as some theories claim (Sandberg and Targama, 2007), but to put people in (Beer et al., 1990:159) “a new organizational context, which imposes new roles, responsibilities, and relationships on them”. Through working this way people are influenced by their roles and thereby change their attitudes and behavior at work, according to the three authors. Beer et al. (1990) also claim that the most effective approach is to set high standards for production and hold managers accountable for the results, at the same time as they are responsible for how they use their employees. This will make managers think twice about how to keep up the good work, without over-using their resources.

Beer et al. (1990) think that there are three important and interrelated factors that are necessary to revitalize an organization: coordination or teamwork, high levels of commitment and new competencies. The authors think buzzwords of management have taken over and made managers ignore the importance of an understanding of the details in business. Instead they have worked out a *critical path* with six steps. They are pointing out the importance of sequence, since timing is everything in the management of change.

The steps are as follows (Beer et al., 1990:161ff):

- Mobilize commitment to change through joint diagnosis of a clearly defined business problem.
- Develop a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness. Once a core group of people is committed to a particular analysis of the problem, the general manager can lead employees toward a task-aligned vision of the organization that defines new roles and responsibilities.
- Foster consensus for the new vision, competence to enact it, and cohesion to move it along.
- Spread revitalization to all departments without pushing it from the top. The organization and management must be organized in a way that supports the new roles and authority.
- Institutionalize revitalization through formal policies, systems, and structures.
- Monitor and adjust strategies in response to problems in the revitalization process. The purpose of change is to create a learning organization capable of adapting to a changing competitive environment. The organization has to know how to continually monitor its behavior, to learn how to learn.

### **3.2.2.2 The role of top management**

As stated above, Beer et al. (1990) claims that the role of top management is to make sure that these six steps are incorporated at all plants, divisions or branches. To know where to start it is essential to initiate change in units that are most likely of success and then make sure that this unit receives the support and resources necessary. Then use this unit as an example, when implementing change in other parts of the organization. This last step is essential in order for the whole change process to succeed and it is very much the responsibility of the CEO and the management team. The persons at the top really need to adopt the behavior and attitudes they have been preaching in order to make the effort credible and facilitate further change. To sum up, the key to success is to (Beer et al., 1990: 166) “emphasizes process over specific content, recognizes organization change as a unit-by-unit learning process rather than a series of programs, and acknowledges the payoffs that result from persistence over a long period of time as opposed to quick fixes”.



### **3.2.3 The importance of power within organizational change**

Hardy and Redivo (1994:29) points out the importance of power in organizational change, since they are saying that “change is a political act which needs power to make it happen”. Due to changes in distribution of resources, reporting relationships and other structural changes, people might feel threatened and make resistance to the process. Power issues are at stake in order to hinder this resistance or encourage change. In the article (Hardy and Redivo, 1994) they set out to provide a framework for linking different types of power to different types of change. The different types of change:

- Behavioral change – short term, task oriented productivity improvements. Success is a measurable change in the desirable direction of what is to be changed, i.e. forms handled and production waste.
- Attitudinal change – a different understanding of situations. Whereas behavioral change is working with volumes, attitudinal change concerns working “smarter”, by working in a different order you might increase your work capacity or create time for service mindedness.
- Cultural change – adopting new assumptions, norms, and values in a system-wide change, which can also result in behavioral and attitudinal changes.

The different dimensions of power presented by Hardy and Redivo (1994):

- The power of resources – conditioning, in the psychological sense, where you create desired behavior through incentives (rewards) or disincentives (punishments). The power is held by an individual with the positions to control these resources.
- The power of process – used to restrict access to formal decision making areas and agendas. As opposed to power of resources, this power relies on inaction and is a way to maintain the status quo. The power can also be used to opening up areas of decision making, allowing new perspectives.
- The power of meaning – by manipulating symbols, structure and values the aim is to redefine reality so that change is perceived as legitimate and unavoidable. Programs within this field use language, rituals, and symbols. This dimension of power is deemed necessary for radical change, even if nobody has exclusive control over it and outcomes may differ from the intentions.

These dimensions are then put together into a grid with nine possible combinations, out of which Hardy and Redivo (1994) say three are likely to become effective while the others are an inappropriate match. The perfect couples would, according to them, be: behavioral change – resource power; attitudinal change – process power; cultural change – power of meanings.

### **3.3 Finding the link between knowledge work and change projects**

When we started off this study we were curious to see what it was consultants were really doing, since all literature we had read seemed to present this as something highly ambiguous. What we found was that the empirical work conducted in this study revealed two elements of consultancy work within the case company. One related to organizational change literature, the functions of the change as presented in n-step models. The other was a political, more subtle interaction between client and consultant. This made us interested in trying to combine these two elements. We tried to do this by introducing the different notions of politics and power into our chosen organizational change theory. Organizational change theory, especially n-step solutions, are often criticized for ignoring the process focusing on the steps and not the “walking”. We think that these processes are the implementation phase and are different every time the n-step model is used. This difference depends largely on the context, i.e. the client-consultant relationship. In this relationship, as in all relationships, there is power and compromises thus politics is a suitable perspective. The close interaction between client and consultants is influenced by larger contextual issues, as presented in the socio-politics by Alvesson (2004) and Løwendahl (2005), but also by other means once the change work is commenced, between the individual consultant and the client representatives. We therefore feel that it is essential to bring in both theories of change as well as knowledge work(ers) in order to explain why the situation plays out the way it does, the work within change.

## 4 Analysis

In this chapter we will first introduce our main empirical source, namely the company Botox. Then we will make a combined presentation of the four different companies where we conducted interviews. This is made in order to give a good background for the reader before moving on to a comparison between Botox and the other four companies. Through this analysis we try to describe the interaction between consultants and clients with regards to our theoretical framework.

### 4.1 Botox

#### 4.1.1 Relationship background

##### 4.1.1.1 Description and history of the company

The first client firm, here called Botox, is a small factory manufacturing products for industrial use. There is one product made for the private market but this constitutes a very small part of the total output. The factory is part of one of two divisions within the main organization and the only factory situated in Sweden. There are two other production sites within the division in Europe, two in the States and one in China. Our factory of study is therefore competing not only with other industries but also with their own sister-companies.

There were about 150 employees in Botox before the initiation of the project discussed. The factory had been in business for several years but had the last few years felt the need to show better results to be able to keep the production in Sweden, instead of placing it in the large factory in China. They therefore needed to cut back on staff and increase efficiency, to reach company goals. This has been done before both in 2003 and 2005. Botox is running a program for constant improvements that started about five years ago. They felt that this did not gain enough ground any longer and turned to Consult for an analysis of the company's potential. The recently employed operation manager also may have felt the need for change, according to one of our interviewees:

*“he had probably had his hundred days, without much happening. And he had the pressure to do something. And then it was time to do a real overview?”* (OMT<sup>1</sup> member)

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<sup>1</sup> OMT, Operational Management Team

#### **4.1.1.2 Bringing in Consult**

In September, after an initial analysis, or pre study, two consultants remained at the client site. Presentations were made to local, national and international management and union representatives. The decision was made to employ Consult but there were several restrictions in the project, called “The Lift” (we learned later that the naming of project is an essential part of Consult’s strategy, see 4.3.1.4). The consultants were limited in what they were allowed to change and who they were allowed to talk to. These restrictions were made in order to secure the fourth quarter production which is very important for Botox. Consult were operating under somewhat different circumstances, as one consultant put it:

*“We couldn’t even enter the production site, since they didn’t want to risk any interference. So it was like working undercover”* (consultant 1)

Another interviewee points out the difficulty in not being able to talk freely and refers to the “secret meetings” the consultants and key client individuals had outside the factory site, in order to plan the initiation and implementation of The Lift. These meetings included the development of the new organization and the identification of new management and key production personnel. This was an extraordinary way of conducting the early parts of the project for Consult. They navigated their way of doing things in relation to the client’s particular requests.

Another important aspect of The Lift was that the plant manager was replaced early in the project. This was a part of the change effort but as no satisfying successor could be found inside the company a temporary plant manager was hired for the duration of the project.

#### **4.1.2 Interaction**

In the beginning the project was kept a secret until the new organization was decided. This was presented to the site management team at the time, which had been kept in the dark about the project. As one consultant said:

*“When we had what we thought was a finished proposal [of the new organization] we dropped the bomb to the site management team. And we know what usually happens then [...] as some of the people there have been actively involved in developing the organization we had at the time. So it was pretty tough, but after a few adjustments and some structural thinking we managed to get it on track”* (consultant 2)

This was followed by a notice of layoffs and in February the negotiations with the union could begin. There were a lot of discussions going on as to who would be a part of the new organization and the distribution of authority. The old structure of the company involved team leaders on the production floor, a function that was eliminated and the people occupying this function were laid off, demoted or promoted to production leaders. This process took a few weeks and in the mean time Consult tried to start working with the resources and employees whose future in the company was secure. In March the OMT roster was complete and workshops in leadership, meeting structure and control systems were held.

The new organization came into effect in April and the implementations of The Lift could begin. The introduction was a large presentation of the change plan to all people in Botox. The presentation included current problems and suggested solutions to these problems and how certain individuals were to be involved in the forefront of The Lift. These were the OMT.

#### **4.1.2.1 The Meeting**

Meetings are an important part in the implementation of The Lift. These meetings are based on a new information structure where all operational managers relay information up and down the organization. One meeting is held every morning for every production line to discuss the possible improvements or problems from the day before. One meeting is held every week to discuss the overall project and the previous week’s ups and downs and the goals for the coming week. In addition to these there are meetings in every sub project held every, or every other week.

What we were able to observe was a meeting in a sub project that dealt with logistics, material and planning routines. The overall atmosphere of the meeting seemed very relaxed and informal. While people were settling in they were telling jokes and anecdotes. There was a very distinct demeanor of subtlety in the way the consultants interacted with the client

representatives. The internal project leader headed the meeting going through each item on the agenda that consisted of issues that needed to be addressed. Each issue was designated a time frame, a priority and a person who should see to that the issue was handled. Anyone at the meeting could suggest who should be in charge of each item. Naturally the competencies required to complete the task were of most importance, so when it came to items that the people present did not feel they could master others were named. Two things became visible to us here. First the fact that the managers attending the meeting did not feel they could force their co-workers into accepting the project related tasks.

*“How do we get him to understand this?”* (internal project coordinator on the possible troubles of assigning a specific individual a task)

This did not seem to present a huge problem but we felt like there was a tone of skepticism with regard to the individual in question. It was left to his immediate superior at the meeting to handle.

The second thing was the method by which the consultants interacted with the client at this stage of the project. The two of them sat quietly and listened to the conversation, the problem and solutions debated, and initially only inserted themselves in the discussion to ask open ended questions which either brought in new perspectives to a problem solving debate or fueled the discussion:

*“Who will be responsible?”* (internal project coordinator)

No response

*“Who will be most affected if it does not work?”* (consultant 1)

*“Project leaders, X, and....”* (internal project coordinator)

*“I feel this can be something worth investigating. How do we do that?”* (consultant 2)

Nobody answers

*“Can we do it ourselves?”* (consultant 1)

*“No, yes...maybe...”* (different voices raised)

*“Is this in argument for purchasing machine X?”* (consultant 1)

*“No, but it will reduce volume....”* (material planner)

As the meeting turned to an area where an attendant of the meeting seemed to be very knowledgeable the dynamics changed. This knowledgeable individual, Ted, had a lot of things to do already and did not cherish the notion of leading any work at all, which was suggested by his superiors. One of the consultants started to ask questions with the, perceived, end of getting the meeting to openly support this man and to create a space where he could express his true feelings on the subject. Ted did not strike us as someone who needed this kind of help, but whether the consultant acted from a “script” or he felt that in order to keep the man on the projects “good side” he had to defend him. To us this reveals a political and pragmatic side. After the meeting the internal project coordinator and the consultants had a short conversation about this man:

*“Ted thinks this is hard”* (consultant 1)

*“Yes, I know. That is why I joked around”* (consultant 2)

*“We need him, we need his knowledge”* (internal project coordinator)

*“Yes, but not to lead...”* (consultant 1)

They were all in agreement that what Ted knew had to be utilized and that they could ill afford to alienate him from the project by pushing him too far.

#### **4.1.2.2 Other tools**

Together with the meetings there are two other instruments of implementation that caught our attention as they were simple to understand and frequently used: the action board and measurements of production. The measurements were both simple, general productivity measurements and “custom” developed ones that incorporated specific figures that needed to be highlighted. These were then used to both identify snags in the production for further improvements and to win over skeptics with black and white numbers of the improvements.

The action boards were placed at strategic places inside the factories and the information from the daily production meetings was presented there. These replaced old boards that had been used in a similar way, specifics are unclear however. We observed these boards during a tour of the plant and it was obvious which ones were used in the new and the old way respectively. Every suggested improvement and details of its implementation was visible and constantly

updated. This way of institutionalizing a new structure can also be linked to Beer et al.'s (1990) last three steps.

At the observation one consultant informed the others of an inquiry made by the production staff:

*“the operators have started to ask about the measurements”* (consultant 1)

*“music to our ears”* (consultant 2)

At the time of the observation we considered this statement as a factual one, merely relaying something they had been asked. After further interpretation we have begun to see possible other underlying intentions. The meeting, and the project it handled, was occupied with problems and the consultants might have felt a need to point out real changes in the way the changes were perceived. The statement could have been made in order to lift the spirits of the meeting. This interpretation can be supported by a comment made by one of the consultants during an interview subsequent to the observation:

*“I feel that the implementation of this sub project is not going as fast as I would like”* (consultant 2, on the quality of the meeting)

This is in line with our previous reasoning on how the consultants interact at the meetings. Then again the statement could just have been a repetition of the asked question.

### **4.1.3 Results**

It is generally hard to evaluate the success of consultancy work (Alvesson, 2004). One more immediate reason that it is hard to present results of the project is that it is an ongoing engagement. From what we observed in the meeting there seems to be things well under way and others that are of greater concern.

We have however been made aware of positive thoughts about the general outcome of the total project even if there are some sub projects that will need to get an extended time frame. The consultants from Consult have pointed out in our interviews that they are convinced that they will reach the set goals regarding an increase in productivity (about 15 % increase), but



that other parts of the process might take longer than expected. It is the implementation of the effort that slows down the process and so the structure has been developed inside the change project and will be dealt with within Botox. Therefore this does not mean that Consult will stay on longer at the site.

Another concern for the future is the new plant manager that is coming onboard in the beginning of June. Here Consult seems a bit worried about how he will relate to the project:

*“We do not know yet if he will stand on the side line and look at this spectacle or if he will take the standard and run”* (consultant 1)

## **4.2 Previous clients: Yacht, Ferry, Cruiser and Dinghy**

### **4.2.1 Relationship background**

#### **4.2.1.1 Description and history of the companies**

This section is a compound of four client companies to Consult that we have interviewed. All interviews were conducted with the client’s equivalent to the consultant, the so-called project leader. Differences between these four companies will be introduced as we move along. In the next part we will compare these founding to what we observed in Botox, trying to find the Consult way of working.

The companies are:

- Yacht: An old Swedish production industry that has become a small international business group with almost 6000 employees globally and one fifth in Sweden, 1200 at the client site. The products are industrial, as with the other companies introduced here.
- Ferry: Also an old chemical company with over 25 000 employees in the world that still has corporate head quarters in Sweden. The production unit in question has about 250 people working there.
- Dinghy: Is a company delivering parts to several of the largest automotive companies in the world.

- Cruiser: Is a sister company to Dinghy but delivers parts to the semi industry.

The companies all experienced a need for improvement with productivity or efficiency. Yacht and Ferry both had new management who experienced a sense of contentment within the organization and wanted to shake things up.

*“...he felt like shaking the factory up and create a state of shock”* (internal project manager, Yacht)

Ferry had experienced a lot of changes in the past and according to our source the new manager wanted to establish new ways of working and a new organization and management.

*“At least as big [a reason] according to me as increasing productivity with 15%. To get a new way to lead and a new way to think”* (internal project manager, Ferry)

#### **4.2.1.2 Bringing in Consult**

Dinghy was the first of the two sister companies to involve Consult in a change process. This was initiated by a perceived need by the internal project manager and his former knowledge of Consult led him to start up a project. This in turn led to the later project within Cruiser about a year later.

In all these projects the change involved productivity improvements as well as a strong focus on organization and management. In some of the projects there were other concepts already in place that needed to be incorporated or at least taken into account, in initiating the new project. In the case of Yacht and Dinghy there were companywide programs that were incorporated into the Consult change process approach.

The internal project leader at Cruiser pointed out during the interview that he felt a bit cautious in the initial phase:

*“As usual when there were consultants, you were a bit cautious in the beginning. Our CEO was positive, but it would be financed with money from my budget”* (internal project leader, Cruiser)

## **4.2.2 Interaction**

Yacht experienced secrecy in the introductory phase as information, project goals, only was communicated to the OMT. This is not something we have found in the three remaining interviews. We think that this was on request from client management and not a method of Consult.

### **4.2.2.1 Meetings and workshops**

The internal project leaders referred to above are people that are the closest day-to-day link within the client organization to Consult through the whole change process. Within Yacht they took it one step further by choosing some individuals to become internal consultants, each assigned to coach and support a lower level manager:

*“The purpose was to follow the manager and study his behavior and afterwards have a dialogue, all the time, continuous”* (internal project leader, Yacht)

We have not found any more accounts of internal consultants like these, but many of our interviewees have mentioned the constant coaching and support by the people from Consult:

*“I spent at least half my work day together with him”* (internal project leader, Ferry)

*“They coached the management team very, very hard”* (internal project leader, Cruiser)

*“So it became a real strength with the two of them being a team”* (internal project leader, Yacht about the consultant and the production manager)

The trouble of securing resources for this was one reason for the slow start of the project in Yacht, according to our spokesperson there. A similar reluctance can be seen within Dinghy, where Consult wanted a particular person from the client organization in the position as internal consultant.

*“I felt it unnecessary, but Consult forced me to it. Now he is the engine, the driving force behind development”* (internal project leader, Dinghy)

In Yacht the consultants interviewed the client individuals that they deemed relevant to the initial part of the project. This included most managers and union representatives. One hour interviews were conducted by Consult to identify problem areas and the information was then cataloged in a workshop to minimize the topics and make the information ready to communicate. Participants in this workshop were the consultants as well as the internal equivalents. The communication however was only meant for management and not “down” the organization. Similar communication practices have been reported from Ferry who took it upon themselves to inform the entire organization. In Cruiser the selective communication were perceived as a mistake and corrected through a monthly meeting where all employees were informed. Dinghy seems to be an exception from these tendencies.

Cruiser held many workshops on roles and responsibility on the management level. The internal project leader said that the inefficiency experienced was not due to the production staff but:

*“It was our [management’s] own acting that hindered the process. There were a lot of changes in areas of responsibility”* (Internal project leader, Cruiser)

That these obstacles for change were removed also became apparent when a workshop was held in Cruiser after the initial plan and goals were achieved. The first goals had seemed impossible to many managers but now:

*“After the first surprise to have reached the goals we held a workshop where people got to pick out their own ideas. Then funny enough the goals were set to 48000-50000 units [before no more than 44000]”* (internal project leader, Cruiser)

We have found that in general a meeting structure was introduced into all the companies to secure a continuous follow-up procedure. These included daily meetings in order to control the ups and downs in the production as well as weekly meetings concerning the previous and upcoming weeks overarching issues. The internal project leader at Ferry comments that it is the right meetings that will generate the sought after effects.

#### **4.2.2.2 Other tools**

The internal project leader in Yacht pointed out that one of the key success factors were the development of ratios. This consumed a lot of one of the consultant's time and made it possible to measure any progress of the changes made. This is also true in Ferry:

*“To find the right ratios and to measure them and to find the right activities to improve.”*  
(internal project manager, Ferry)

The internal project leader of Cruiser points to something that we think should be mentioned under this topic. The hard work that came with the project led to the “tightening” of the management team. This might be something intentional by Consult, but we do not know that.

#### **4.2.3 Results**

From what we have learned in the interviews the projects have been very successful, reaching the set goals or exceeding them. This is not surprising, of course, since we only gained access to successful previous clients. Still, the results seem to be more than expected in many cases and continuing to improve:

*“There is always a down turn, and that is also the case with us. That you lose momentum and so on. But still, we continue to build on most of what we implemented [...] so it is a permanent change of the organization, how we work and how management works.”* (internal project leader, Ferry)

*“The structure of working with to-do-lists works [...] problems are escalated earlier than before, so we catch them, we see them earlier and we do something about them earlier”*  
(internal project leader, Yacht)

*“It wasn't the same pressure, wasn't the same focus, but we stayed at the same speed. We had introduced a new maximum level”* (internal project leader, Cruiser on the differences between having Consult at the site and after they left)

The internal project manager at Ferry also says:

*“It is much easier to implement things now than before. It is also a much more passionate organization because everybody is aware of the goal. Everybody know the underlying strategy, and what goals are in play for the factory, what ratios we have and how we measure them on a daily basis”* (internal project manager, Ferry)

By these statements we feel that there has been sufficient implementation of the new organizations, since the changes are used as stepping stones for further development. The person at Dinghy pointed out that Consult came back a few times to make sure that things were working out. This is reported from other clients as well.

## **4.3 The Consult way of working**

### **4.3.1 Relationship background**

#### **4.3.1.1 Initiating contact**

Alvesson (2004) talks about the marketing efforts needed in a successful PSF were the uncertainty of client needs and the multitude of seemingly identical service providers creates ambiguity. According to him, the PSF needs to convince the client that they are the firm to solve their problems. One way to reduce the client’s ambiguity and the sales effort put in by the PSF is to create long term relationships with clients. The firm of Consult is reportedly in contact with every Swedish company once a year, thus putting great effort in trying to identify possible future clients. Many client representatives that were interviewed referred to an internal change force within the company as the reason to engage Consult. This could be new directives from the board or a new top manager wanting to shake things up, as in the case of Yacht and Ferry. To us this seems to imply that it is not luck or good timing that determines whether they are hired, but this constant “checking-in” with the client which will eventually pay off by them being there at the moment a perceived change reveals itself.

When a potential client expresses a willingness to employ Consult, for whatever reason, there is still one more step before a project can be initiated. This is a pre study phase where at least two things happen. From what we have learned during interviews the first is the identification of possible improvements that can be remedied by Consult. Here the client is very much in

the background and the people from Consult usually roam free in production area and meetings to gather information. The other thing that happens is at least a byproduct of this pre study process, something that has been known for a long time in the literature on the topic, the creation of uncertainty. Some authors argue that this is the very business the management consultants are in (Alvesson, 2004).

The clients that we have encountered however had not experienced this in their initial dealings with Consult. The literature would suggest (Alvesson, 2004; Løwendahl, 2005; Maister et al, 2000; Clark, 1995) that possible reasons for this are that there was a previous relationship with the individual consultant, individual sales skills of the consultant or that there was not any uncertainty creation to speak of, that Consult delivered what the client had ordered and that the client was very well aware of their own needs. We feel that it is very much a question of being clear in discussing the aims and expectations of the project that results in this less ambiguous relationship. The transparent approach from Consult in what they can offer and how they propose the change should be initiated and pursued helps the clients to feel certain of what they are embarking on. In some cases a representative from the client organization had been dealing with Consult before and were then more clear in what to expect, but also for others the situation seems more unambiguous than suggested in literature.

Our interviews reveal that clients who commissioned a project were of two stripes. The first kind was the ones who had tried and failed in changing on their own and thus needed help. This is something Clark (1995) mentions as one of the key reasons to employing consultants, from the manager's perspective. This would imply that the very presence of a PSF reveals knowledge void inside the client's organization, that the client cannot be totally aware of their problems or at least how to solve them. If so they would not need Consult, or any other firm.

*“It is not just that you, [the client] has known for six or nine years [that there is a problem] but that you have tried a few times and not succeeded. And now we come along and say that ‘well it is a difference because now we are going to do it’”* (consultant 2)

The other kind was the ones where top managers felt that the organization, a factory or a production line, was content with itself.

*“...we are already as good as we can get”* (internal project manager, Ferry, on the general attitudes of the factory before employing Consult)

Looking at our interview material we argue that the reason for initiating a project is a combination of things stemming from client, consultant and context. The client’s knowledge of their needs, their ability to communicate and defend these needs to the consultant is important not only because there has to be a clear picture of what the project entails but it gives them a chance to put pressure on the consultant with regards to time frame and limits to access. This is something linked to the socio-politics discussed by Løwendahl (2005) regarding the potential information/knowledge asymmetry.

*“I said that I wanted the project completed in 16 weeks. This was a shorter time than usual but that was what I offered”* (internal project leader, Dinghy)

Above we have commented on why the client engages Consult. After the pre study Consult presents a possible change package to the financially responsible individuals within the client organizations. This, however, is only done when Consult feels that they can deliver a result that is satisfactory to both them and the client. If the pre study does not reveal sufficient possible improvements then this is presented and no project is launched. This is consistent with the definition of the practice of a professional presented by Løwendahl (2005). As suggested above this professionalism leads to trustworthiness in that the client really can believe that Consult will deliver what they promise, since they will not embark on projects that they deem “impossible”.

#### **4.3.1.2 Bringing in Consult**

If there is room for improvement and the two parties agree that the presented course of action is a good starting point, then the project is initiated. Beer et al. (1990) initiates their 6 steps with a similar notion. One main difference between Beer et al. (1990) and what we have learned from the field is that only after the presented proposal can there be any negotiations of the project’s content. Above we discussed *why* a project is initiated; now we move to *who* to involve. Worth pointing out is also that these negotiations of the content, if there are any, only include the client’s top management, who are financially responsible for the client’s operations. This is a large difference between Consult and much of the change literature (Beer



et al. 1990; Ekman Philips and Huzzard, 2007), which seem to imply that the change initiative should come more from the bottom-up. This is a difference in opinion of who to include in the information generation, the results however are used much in the same way. One employee of Consult also said:

*“if you pick some you put a lot of wheels in motion down there. Why him? What is it that I don’t do and understand? And then there are a lot of conundrums...”* (consultant 2 on why not involving “the floor people” in the analysis)

Thus it is time and financial resources that limit the involvement of “the floor level” employees in this stage of the project, for Consult, at the same time as this supposedly minimizes uncertainty at the lowest level. Consult trusts that the information gathered from the management levels will be sufficient in locating the problem. There is however an alternate explanation, that it is at this level, the management level, where the problems are and needs to be remedied. As we will see later on, the implementation of structure for information flows is tightly connected to middle management, which is where information needs to move both up and down “seamlessly”. A proper implementation at this level, we feel, is therefore necessary in order for the whole project to succeed.

*“It was not really about the productivity but the management. It was our own actions that hindered the process”* (internal project leader, Cruiser, on where the problem lied)

The first step in Beer et al. (1990) of mobilizing commitment through joint diagnosis is conducted differently in Consult. The difference is that Consult conducts this step almost without involvement and top management is presented with results on which to comment. At times the entire start up is kept a secret.

*“I experienced it as pretty tough. That was the pre study. Then they presented a proposal: this is what we could do to make this and that. But like I said for a long time in the beginning there was a lot of giving and little received”* (OMT member, Botox)

We have received similar information from another client who however claimed to understand the psychology behind this method. What we ask ourselves is what tradeoffs do Consult make when keeping the initial step a secret? Do they create an unnecessary upward

slope in which to work or do they benefit in the end? We will come back to this in the summary of the analysis.

#### **4.3.1.3 Project Politics**

The political support from the top level of the client organization is something that Beer et al. (1990) and Alvesson (2004) identifies as important from the beginning of the project. That the “project patron” is supportive of the project throughout its existence and involved at the political level is vital for the success of the engagement.

*“...where the client thought he bought himself free from all responsibility. It is pretty fascinating. A position as manager and buys a service to avoid dealing with problems”*  
(consultant 1, on reasons for a problematic Consult project)

We observed this need for continued political support at a meeting where Consult was implementing changes together with a group of core competency individuals. There was a substantial amount of things to be done and no one was arguing their relevance. What was problematic was the fact that parts of the client organization that were not directly involved with the implementations at hand had voiced their concerns of “poaching” of their resources to aid these changes. After a discussion of the politics involved, including hierarchy and affiliations, the solution was that the internal project coordinator and one of the consultants would meet with the top manager that had commissioned the project and discuss resource allocation. This solution by bringing in the “big guns” is something that we can find in the theoretical notion of power of resources by Hardy and Redivo (1994), where the access to necessary assets is pointed out as the key to behavioral change. Here we see another dimension of the described power, namely the “height” of the power. There are several levels, people, with resource power within an organization and these may differ in strength. So a further reason for having a corporate officer as the commissioner of the project, besides him/her having financial control, is that these kinds of situations can be resolved through appealing to that officer.

#### **4.3.1.4 Client’s project**

Something that might be derived from the discussion of the political involvement expected from Consult is that any project that is embarked on is the client's project. Consult are very careful with naming each project, without reference to Consult, and insisting on that it is the commissioner and the internal project leader that has to be a driving force behind the initiative. The fact that it is the client's project, and not Consult's, is something that will further highlight the fact that the client organization needs to be highly aware of the aims and measures for the project and can not only nod and go along, but needs to act accordingly. It will also "force" the consultants to take a more passive role later in the implementation, acting more as an advisor (Maister et al, 2000), than operational force. We have been made aware of the need for an isolating level between the level of the commissioner of the project and the level of change.

*"What is important is that the commissioner of the project is not the person you work most with [...] it is a lot about control and management and then there is of course opinions about the current management. If then that manager is also the commissioner it is a problem"*  
(internal project manager, Yacht, on political issues)

On a more functional level the formation of an OMT consisting of key individuals from the client is vital to the projects development. The OMT are selected by top management after "nominations" by Consult. The people chosen will be positive to the project and capable of leading the organization into the future, therefore the epithet standard carrier. The OMT will consist of the competencies needed to deliver and sustain the change. For example the OMT will consist of head of production, line managers of the production, logistics, purchase and planning personnel etc. That they are chosen in dialogue with Consult can also be related to the ideas presented by Clark (1995) on managers' need of support in identifying which competencies that are essential in the future organizations. Depending on the number of people available inside the client organization this can be individuals already in mid and low level management positions or totally new managers. People who are deemed to be dragons, that is resistant to change, or incompetent will be removed from their current positions if there is someone available to replace him/her. If not, more energy must be put in to persuade and turn this dragon into a standard carrier.

Usually one or more internal project consultants or coordinators are assigned to work closely with the implementation of the change. These are typically above the line people with some

managerial experience as they are supposed to be heading the project after Consult is gone. However, as with the OMT, deviations can occur as the fit with the project and function is primary. These are expected, and instructed, to involve themselves in the project and are to be treated as the internal extension of the consultants from Consult. They are not responsible for any one operational change, which is the task for the OMT individuals, but to coach their peers in the client company. These individuals are not always easy to find both due to lack of interest and because this task lies on top of any regular responsibilities this person might have. Here again top management's support can be pivotal for the project in freeing an individual of some operational duties to focus on the change. The power of processes (Hardy and Redivo, 1994), we think, is then used in both giving access to the new arenas for decision making and authority as seen here, but also to shut people out that are not deemed competent, as exemplified in the previous section.

We see Beer et al.'s (1990) second step as divided into two parts. The first part, of developing a vision, is performed by the same group as step one. Consult does not involve more people until it is time to task-align the organization with newly defined roles and responsibilities. It is here the OMT usually becomes involved.

*“Some companies have extremely detailed, other have none at all. They say that ‘we don’t want any because if we tell people what to do we also tell them what not to do’. In this case the situation was so unclear [...] and chaotic that we said we would do it, we will define basic job descriptions for the new organization”* (consultant 2 on the usefulness of job descriptions)

So, we feel that the step proposed by Beer et al. (1990) can be modified by situation, at least with regards to the implementation of the task-aligning.

### **4.3.2 Interaction**

The third step of Beer et al. (1990) argues that the vision needs consensus, competence and cohesion, something closely connected to step two based on our experience with Consult. Workshops are the “weapon of choice” for Consult and they can be constructed around any topic that seems necessary to the project, as we have seen from the different companies above. This usually revolves around subjects such as leadership, working as one production line or factory etc. A frequently used technique is to let the operating managers develop their own

version of how to reach the set goals, as seen in the case of Cruiser above. Initial results usually reveal mixed ambitions among the OMT, not seldom using loop holes to avoid the task assignment. This gives an indication of the slope that lies ahead. The consultants together with the internal project leaders then have to clarify the task and reinforce the fact that it is the client's project, they are responsible for its success. This can take some time and after developing their own, feasible, implementation programs the group is closer together and more supportive of the change.

*“we had to divide the activities in thing you can do on your own, things you can do with the help of other and things where you are totally dependent on others, we call them A, B and C activities. [...] In the beginning they had not proposed any own activities but only things others should do. Then I had to intervene: ‘well you need to have 70% in A activities, then you can have 20% in B and maybe something for someone else. That way you could influence the thinking, to start thinking that others won’t do things for you, but you need to identify improvement on your own”* (internal consultant, Yacht, on the actual “self help” development employed)

In the subsequent implementation of these change efforts the quoted internal consultant functions as support to the OMT individual. Her role was sitting in on the information meetings and to give feedback on possible improvements while not infringing on the individuals managerial role. This we see as an example of how the internal consultant or in other cases even the project leaders can be a support to the OMT in keeping focus on the new structure and thinking. These internal consultants were trained by the people from Consult and acted, as they do, as advisors. Here again the role as teacher or advisor instead of operational force becomes apparent after the initial steps are concluded.

#### **4.3.2.1 Meetings**

This structure of information exchange can be found in many of Consult's projects and seems to us to be an important part of the structure. Looking at Hardy and Redivo (1994), this use of meetings as a way to implement change by changing information flows, can, as discussed above, be seen as using the power of process. The replacement of the old ways of communication and decision making with a new more structured model is thought to generate new inputs to these processes. This is a redistribution of power of sorts (Hardy and Redivo,

1994), but also a reference to the idea brought forward by Beer et al. (1990) about changing attitudes via behavior, by putting people in new contexts.

We think that we observed the way Consult acts in meetings in order to get the client to become “owners” of the project. By standing on the side lines and subtly influencing the direction of the meeting and defusing possible situations they allow the client to take charge and act themselves as a support. They push the project forward by asking questions indicating possible solutions, but also help to solve problems by showing a new perspective. As one consultant puts it:

*“We do not direct the layout. We do not lead a mapping. We do not make the calculations. They do it! Then we take upon us to point out why they should do it. [...] Without mandate, argument is all we have got”* (consultant 1 on implementation)

It is definitely about getting the people involved to learn how to think in different situations and also, just as important, to act and take initiative within these situations. As stated above we think this is in line with some of the thoughts by Maister et al (2000), in that Consult takes a role as advisor and not a leading position as the project move from step three in Beer et al (1990) into the next step.

The meeting structure continues throughout the project even after Consult has left. Therefore the content and intentions of the meetings shift as the project progresses. The meetings go from “fostering consensus” and “developing competence and cohesion” to “spreading and institutionalizing the revitalization” (Beer et al., 1990). Therefore we feel that the specific sequential order is not necessary or even possible to adhere to as these processes overlap. This is the inevitable effect of an n-step model but we think that the content of the steps, and the model as a whole, is a far too good description of what we have observed to be discarded as too vague. We do however feel the need to question the expression “pushing it from the top”, in spreading the change in step four. In the initial step it is the top management who is requesting the change and pushing it, but when it has moved over to this step it is the new organization that is pushing the issues and not the top management directly.

Keeping in mind that the projects are named in order to make it special for the organization, as opposed to “the Consult project” and that the meeting structure and also the action boards

(see below) are so important in the implementation, we feel that they can, in a sense, be linked to the power of meaning (Hardy and Redivo, 1994). There may not be a visible or tangible cultural change in these companies, but in the long-run the implementation can lead to changes in norms and values. An example can be seen in Yacht, where a quality system, used nationally within different companies, was incorporated in the new structure program GGG. After the implementation with Consult, issues concerning quality were referred to, not to the old system, but as part of the new program GGG. This, we feel, would imply that the language have changed in favor of the new structure.

#### **4.3.2.2 Visual aides and measurements**

Other important tools that were found in the observation as well as the interviews we conducted were the action boards and measurements, implying that they are a part of the methodological approach of Consult. The importance of finding the right ratios have been pointed out by both consultants and client representatives as a key to success. The constant follow-up processes implemented helps to keep focus on the continuous development, through making the results visible to everyone involved in the production process. This is, as we have understood it, accomplished by the action boards we observed at our visit to Botox.

The measurements are a factor that makes the results of the change effort more visible and therefore less ambiguous. The numbers the consultants can show off pretty fast is clear-cut “evidence” of things happening. As stated in the quote above, arguments is all the consultants have, something that often is pointed out in the literature (Alvesson, 2004; Løwendahl, 2005). They need to show that they are getting somewhere, that the organization is moving towards the set goals. The consultant who spoke of arguments also developed his line of thought as:

*”...then you make a comparison to things you have seen, develop new data, develop a certain type of information, make some mapping and then ask and argue why to do this and that [...] bring up a poster to show that 30% was almost correct at first transport. The rest was moved at least once more...”* (consultant 1)

He continues by saying that these kinds of argumentations are easy, but some, like leadership, are more complex. It is perhaps here that the rhetoric, so often brought forward in knowledge work literature (Alvesson, 2004), becomes apparent, but also the experience of the individual

consultant plays a big role in persuading people to follow the advise. The results will probably depend on both the individual relationship between consultant and the person in question, but also on the power issues and politics involved at the moment.

We believe that consensus is often fostered with numerical arguments, at least in most projects involving Consult. Revitalization is spread and institutionalized by using action boards on which information is largely based on these measurements. Finally, the monitoring and adjusting of the implementations uses the action boards to keep any efforts on track. This is how steps three through six are reconnected to the visual aides and measurements (Beer et al., 1990).

#### **4.3.2.3 Criticism**

One piece of criticism that we have encountered is the lack of formal training, or coaching, received by the leaders of the new production organizations. With the very hands on approach to change and consultancy, that we have observed and been told, we find it strange that certain parts of the implementation are left without supervision. Other criticism is that there in several instances have been made clear to us that information from the project group not always reach the entire way down to the production floor. As one internal project leader who had worked with Consult before said:

*“I think that this is a drawback with the model that Consult works with, that there is too little involvement of the floor”* (internal project leader, Ferry)

This criticism can be related to Beer et al. (1990) who argue that they miss this sort of involvement. We have previously criticized Consult for excluding most parties in the beginning of the project and discussed whether this is beneficial or not for Consult. This however, is different. We perceive this as a critique of the information flow to all levels. This problem has been pointed out by a lot of our interviewees, who also said that they themselves carried out this function, without involvement from Consult. This might imply that they are up to speed with the “owning” of the project that Consult relentlessly proclaims. Another way to see it would be that Consult purposely excludes this interaction letting the client feel like they have identified this need themselves. Either way it seems to get done. The people on the “floor” are however by no means neglected by Consult. We have experienced that



information from the floor is used as a counter point to the information gathered in meetings with management.

*“I have my allies on the ‘floor’. I talk to them ‘eye to eye’ and get information about how it works. There is where I usually get my fuel”* (consultant 1)

So the information available tells us that the involvement of the “floor” as a source of information is up to the individual style of the consultant. The proliferation of this information gathering practice in Consult is beyond our knowledge.

### **4.3.3 Results of projects**

We have been told by several of our informants that after the departure of Consult there is a visible fall in productivity and all project related matters. This is not surprising as the regular operations will gain priority without consultants keeping the focus on the change. From what we have learned the implementation of the new organizations and structures have been institutionalized as in Beer et al.’s (1990) last step and we have been told that future change processes have been deemed easier to initiate and complete as the success of the Consult project have made people more open to change. One reason for this openness can be that the individuals involved in the Consultant change have shared a common experience of a perceived successful change and have bonded as a team. Another possible explanation, or aspect, of this bonding process is the removal of unwanted individuals from the change effort. This openness to change is secondhand information so the real reason behind is hard to identify. The people left in the organization might have learned a lesson not to work against the management as they will be removed and thus accept the change without really supporting it.

#### **4.3.3.1 Good or bad**

In this section we would like to discuss what constitutes a good and bad consultant respectively, since we think this is an overarching deciding force of whether a project succeed or fail. After observation and interviews we feel that what constitutes a good consultant is the combination of the difficultly defined properties of technical skills, life and work experience, and the simply defined properties of recognizing that the client’s time is as valuable as their

own and having a disciplined and structured way of working. The latter ones may be obvious, but are apparently neglected as several of our interviewees have identified this as a characteristic of bad consultants.

The personal experience, private and professional, of the consultants from Consult are a huge factor in their perceived legitimacy. Having been line managers for an extensive amount of years they bring with them both technical skills and the ability to handle people and situations. The clients have on several occasions put Consult in contrast to the young, and therefore inexperienced, consultants who “only” hold an academic degree, but do not have experience from the field and by that are not gaining the respect from the client organization. In all cases, the comparison has been to the favor of Consult. The people from Consult have self-confidence which is helpful in their work as:

*“Then you have to respect authority but you can’t be afraid of it. After all, we have a project to complete within a certain timeframe.”* (consultant 1)

He points to this personal experience as central in his role as a consultant which is also something that Maister (2000), Alvesson (2004) and Løwendahl (2005) recognizes as important for advisors and knowledge workers respectively.

Consult has been described as both adaptable and not so adaptable. An added insight of these somewhat contradictory statements is that in most cases the perceived behavior, adaptable or non adaptable, has been presented as a positive quality by the clients. That the strategy differs between different cases could be related to the coming discussion of future business possibilities (see *Sticking to your methodological guns*). We can continue this adaptability line of reasoning by applying the theoretical notion by Alvesson (2004) and Løwendahl (2005) of information asymmetry. A strong client, with much information and knowledge of change processes, will be less adaptable to new methodology and structures, if not presented with much evidence of its function. We think this will put the focus to the technical skills of the consultants, which can be verified to some extent through the consultant’s background reducing ambiguity somewhat. In contrast, a “weak” client will need more support and structure and may then be more inclined to adopt the standard methodology as presented by Consult. There is then more room for ambiguity and therefore more power to the consultant.

If we were to identify strong and weak client's respectively within our studied firms we would say the Dinghy is a typically strong client as the commissioner was very knowledgeable in dealing with consultants in general and specific in what he wanted and how it should be delivered. In other words he kept Consult on a short leash. We see a weaker client in Botox, for one main reason. The size of the client site was smaller than usual in Consult projects. This meant that Consult performed tasks that the client company usually does, the actual reorganization of the firm leading up the change effort. Both in Botox and in Dinghy Consult, to some extent, became more hired labor than experts. This is because in Botox they did not have the internal resources to spare and in Dinghy because the client did not allow for internal resources to be diverted to the extent of Consult's requests.

Another issue that comes up several times from different sources is the fact that Consult employees are not guys in suits. They roll up their sleeves and really participate. This approach to work is present throughout the project, from analysis to implementation. The absence of suits in the consultant's attire is the visible manifestation of this approach. We have several accounts of the positive impressions this have left all levels of client organizations with. This might be one reason for the choice of not wearing a suite, that you get informal access to all the levels of the organization.

*"You can talk to people in all levels, from the floor to the CEO and all managers in between"*  
(consultant 1 on being a consultant)

So the rather mundane fact that they do not wear suits seems to be a part of a grander theme. To gain trust you have to be curious according to Maister et al (2000), and curious people go where the action and information is. To get informal access, formal access is granted by the commissioner of the project, you have to relate to the people with the information. This means that you have to walk the production floor which is not suit compatible. Typically, neither are the production workers. So there is a practical reason, and a more subtle reason to this behavior.

#### **4.3.3.2 Sticking to your methodological guns**

As mentioned in the beginning of the analysis part of this paper there are negotiations with the client regarding the rules. These include what is allowed to be touched in the current

organization, how the change process, OMT and internal consultants, will be organized. Also the time frame is set. The accounts we have from clients mainly say that there was some sort of middle ground found in these negotiations as Alvesson (2004) suggests is the common picture painted by consultants themselves. The quote in the beginning of the section *The Consult way of working*, where Dinghy gives Consult 16 weeks to finish, was from a firm whose sister company, Cruiser, later employed Consult as well. The social networks created in the first company might have been more valuable than the direct income from Dinghy, certain aspects of a central policy might therefore be sacrificed for future projects (Maister et al., 2000). Other instances of compromises have been where another development project has been in place at the client site already and it has been totally of bounds. Consult might be wise not to disturb an already established program but there is still the risk of this program being a part of the problem identified. The suggestion from Løwendahl (2005) would be not to enter a contract that is too intertwined with internal politics. In this specific case the other program commanded little time from the client and as an OMT member expressed it:

*“There is always a gap between what we [OMT] know and what everyone knows. The thing is to keep that gap as small as possible. Alpha [the other program] is a good bridge...things can be dealt with”* (OMT member, Botox, about running a separate parallel program)

Another situation that can occur is when the client wants to employ more drastic measures than were advised from Consult. The change effort called for the relocation of several employees who no longer matched the demands facing the client. These individuals were to be laid off had it been up to the internal project manager. For whatever reason this did not happen and one can only guess the reasons. The client could have been trying to make “whole sale” changes when Consult was at the site, changes not necessarily connected to the reason why Consult was hired. This would be a case of blaming the consultancy firm, or at least using them as cover to enforce controversial decisions. If this was the case then Consultant fought back and this larger change did not happen, perhaps indicating that Consult disapproved of the decision being made with the project as cover. The probability of a worsened working environment and the insecurity layoffs create among those left is also possible. However it is the big picture and the context of every individual case that seems to govern Consult’s choices of how to position itself with regard to the client.

#### **4.4 What have we learned and is it in line with theory?**

During this analysis we have tried to keep to the six steps proposed by Beer et al. (1990), since this seemed to be a good way of describing our empirical material. We have both found examples of what is suggested in the steps as well as incongruencies along the way.

Concerning the fit between the Beer et al. (1990) model and our empirical material in these initial steps we think that one limitation of Beer, possible due to the fact that it's an n-step model, is that the steps can be sub divided into smaller steps. Either involving different people all together than in the model or that the involved people differ during the process of the step. Everyone might not be useful during the entire step. Thus the power of processes (Hardy and Redivo, 1994) is used both in giving access to the new arenas for decision making and authority, but also to shut people out that are not deemed competent. It all seems to depend on where the project is at the moment. That the steps themselves are processes, not just "bullet points" is important to recognize.

In the case of Botox there was an extreme secrecy in the initial phase from what we have heard. Even though it also in Yacht seemed to be some concealment in the beginning, these cases appear to be the results from wishes by the top management and not choices made by Consult. We have however asked ourselves the question whether the methodology made by Consult not to involve all levels in the pre study is something they benefit from or not? Above, we have found the explanation that it is due to time and resources they do not interview everyone in the beginning. However, we do believe that they benefit in the long run. Firstly because this offers them stability and security in the project approach between different projects, something that if missing could create large difficulties. That is if they initiated every project in a new way. Here we see some benefits of standardization and examples of Hardy and Redivo's (1994) power of processes. Also we think that Consult is so confident in their method and themselves that they accept the upward slope they possibly create as they know they can climb it.

Beer et al.'s third and fourth steps can be fused, or seen as overlapping, much like one and two. In the beginning of the third step workshops and meetings are conducted to hammer in the new way of looking at production and management. In the case of Cruiser management were the focus and much time was spent at coaching and educating them. We think that it is

in the end of the third, beginning of the fourth step, that Consult wants the client to “own” the project themselves. Returning to Cruiser the process of learning and created a tight nit group who believed that the new way was the right way. Then Consult could step back further and continue to observe and be advisors instead of hands on (Maister et al, 2000).

Consult works with meetings to achieve a new understanding within the client’s production. The measurements, reported on action boards, possibly become part of the vocabulary of the staff in touch with the production. The projects are named to represent what the project should do for the client. These are things that Hardy and Redivo (1994) identifies as things to manipulate in order to achieve cultural change. We have not encountered the phrase “cultural change” during our field work but listening to the internal project manager of Ferry claiming that “change is much easier now than before the consult project” we wonder if this is not an account of perceived cultural change after all.

Step six (Beer et al., 1990) is composed of two parts. One is that Consult returns to the client site to “check in”. This is done with somewhat regular intervals during the following six months of their departure. The other part is what the project has developed. The meeting and information structures from the implementation of the project are kept, in various degrees, as part of the new organization. So the final stage of the client “owning” the project is the continued building and utilization of the developed structures. This shows that the project’s political support, (Alvesson, 2004), and the power of resources and processes, (Hardy and Redivo, 1994), are important for the change effort after Consult has left. To get full “bang for your buck” from a consultancy project, you as a client need to nurture the changes in order not to squander the investment. If new management, or even a single new manager, comes into the company and wants to leave his/her mark on the organization what the client created together with Consult risks being erased. This is however the same premises that brought on some of the Consult projects to begin with. So perhaps some sort of ecology or circular pattern is to be found.

That a change effort needs political support has become evident during our work. This is not a surprise as both Alvesson (2004) and Hardy and Redivo (1994) have said so. As Hardy and Redivo (1994) have a more processual view on power it is easier to fit with the n-step model of Beer et al. (1990). Different interactions during the project are facilitated with different types of power. Alvesson (2004) has a more theoretical approach to the politics within the

relationship between consultant and client. This view helps us get a clearer picture of the time running up to the project and its initial steps, the steps of Beer et al. (1990). We have said that when the project reaches a certain point the dynamics of the project changes and we have claimed that this happens sometime during the fourth step. After this Consult interacts with less control over what happens. Consult claims not to be in the driver seat at all but we think that when the change effort is instilled in the OMT through workshops, they are. However after the change is panned out to the entire client they really let go. At the same time Maister et al (2000) becomes more relevant at the cost of Alvesson (2004), since this theory is more based on practice during the interaction, according to us. The supportive position taken by Consult in the implementation then supposes the ability to let go of the more operative functions, something that might not be that easy when you feel that you know exactly what needs to be done. Instead the consultants need to use their rhetorical and social skills when guiding and coaching the clients to successfully institutionalize the change as instructed in the last step of Beer et al. (1990). Here we feel that the attributes often ascribed to consultants, such as experience and adaptability (Alvesson, 2004; Løwendahl, 2005; Maister, 2000), are essential for achieving this end.

## 5 Conclusions

What do we know today that we did not know before this study? We have learned that structure is vital to the way Consult works. Being able to work exclusively with the project in question makes it possible for them to “work harder”. Long hours, hard work and following the plan are what make the black box greyer or “spotty” to the clients.

We have learned that it, our empirical contribution, is the clients who are responsible for the differences in Consult’s way of working that we have seen and heard about. Responsible in the way that Consult is reactive in dealing with their clients, can oblige some requests and demands and adjust their method to these. But we have also learned that there is extensive standardization in their method and preferred tools of implementation. We have not claimed, neither has Consult, that they provide a totally unique service to every client. If you bend every which way to get that certain account you might have contorted yourself out of your element and made promises you cannot keep. This is the reason for standard approaches in consultancy firms, to provide security and a footing from which to leap from. As we do not think that we are capable of drawing any further conclusions here we will return to the topic of security and standardization under the section: further studies. Consult then seems to allow for more and more ambiguity, adapting to the situation, as the project goes on. They welcome more input from earlier “shut out” groups and individuals. Perhaps this is too late to have any impact on the project, the agenda and change goals are already set, and the input is only feedback on the implementation. Nevertheless, Consult is flexible to the needs of the commissioner, and the natural flow of the project, and appears to have a way of communicating with every level of the client organization.

In the introduction we presented that Consult claim to be very good in changing attitudes in their client firms. From what we have learned they do so, not by trying to impose companywide organization programs for changing culture, but by taking it step by step in a structured way. We believe that the key to Consult’s success is the fact that they are building on many years experience within the industrial productions industry as well as a way of working that is simple, understandable, yet effective to accomplish results. Introducing structure and systems for following up the production, through regular meetings and action boards, may seem as too simple a solution. However, the *production* of key measurements and the ability to argue the reasons for implementing the change is one part of the process that



the client has not been able to adapt on their own. Here again, hard work and tenacity make these tools effective in keeping the focus on the project. The support, both in providing the necessary knowledge and skills, but also the energy and focus needed in keeping up the effort, is the other part to make this process come through. In all instances a social capacity, built on experience and personal attributes, to work with all kinds of people and all levels is essential to be able to pull the implementation through. You need to be apt in dealing with dragons and finding the standard carriers to become a successful consultant. We feel that it is Consult's proficiency in working with structure, skills, support and social ability that produces high quality results.

Is there nothing that Consult does wrong? We have talked about the pros and cons of keeping people out and their problems with some top-down information flow. This can be criticized from a people perspective as some individuals might be treated unfairly. We see this from two perspectives. In line with the client "owning" the project Consult might think that it is up to the client to administer this. At the same time the client might have misunderstood that they should own this part of the project, for whatever reason. If this is the case Consult, as supporters, should pick up the slack and push forward. Thus there can be communications difficulties but also some shoveling responsibility back to the other party. The client can perhaps be excused from this but surely not Consult. The client might be supposed to "own" the project but it is Consult's job to get them there. The "nagging", asking the same question over and over, and applying pressure is essential.

We can safely say that our understanding of consultant client interaction, at least in the implementation, has grown. The understanding of the consultant's role as an advisor became more apparent when we saw how they became more support for than replacements of management, in the change effort. Through this understanding we think that we also have come to appreciate possible difficulties in other types of methodologies where the client is told directly what to do. What should be remembered is that our methodological standpoint is not to provide a complete picture that can be generalized, only to describe how we interpret the situation. Another reason why the box will remain grey is that there are too many different factors involved in the interaction, if one factor changes there will be a totally new situation.

Regarding theories on knowledge work we feel that our contribution will be limited, but our aim was not to provide the field with revolutionary ideas, but to take advantage of our access

and give empirical examples. We do however have some thoughts. In theories about knowledge intensive firms we have found that focus is often put on the individual attributes. We do not dispute this, on the contrary we think that we confirm the importance of experience in this thesis. But these attributes are hard to pin point and generalize, by definition. What we have found here is that, in Consult, methodology is also very important. For the client to feel at ease they need to be able to get a grip of what the consultants are doing. A transparent work method can reduce the ambiguity, which might benefit both the short and long term results. Short term in that implementation becomes easier as an enthusiastic client lubricates the process. Long term benefits could be both the longevity of the changes and the much valued client relationship. There seems to be a trust established between the parties due to a common understanding of experience and goals. If the consultants would become less mysterious and open their black box to clients the results perhaps would benefit. The magical appearance then becomes a choice made by the consultancy firms in order to protect themselves.

The time factor of consultancy work is also something we have found to be interesting. The relationship, most importantly that of power, between client and consultant changes during the project. The literature recognizes that power relationships exist, what factors are involved, and that they roughly can be pointed to on a scale. However, once decided, the relationship seems to be considered static. Our experience is that this is not the case, depending on where the project is in time and what is in focus this relationship is dynamic.

We think that our chosen theories about knowledge workers have some merit in relation to the organizational change theory. It is the experience and social skills of the consultants that makes the adaptation of the strict n-step model possible in the different situations provided by the clients. Concepts of power and relations are provided by the knowledge work theory something that is necessary to provide an adequate model. The content of the model has been reflected in the empirical material that we have gathered which is not that strange due to the inductive work we have adopted. However, nuances in the steps of the model, both in terms of chronology and involved individuals, is needed. The power, and politics, that is present during a consultancy project are not taken into account. The model, like other n-step models, is too simplistic in their approach to implementation. Verbs like foster and institutionalize are all good and well but the process of doing that is indicated by a verb is missing. We are not alone in this kind of criticism but we think that we need to point it out all the same.

The n-step model is built on grass roots participation and initial involvement in the change. We have become skeptical of the kind of initiation during our study as some of the change efforts, today perceived as a good thing by many, would not have come to pass under those conditions. We are not saying that it is impossible for change to start at the lowest level of the organization, as the n-step is intended to describe, but that the model can describe a more managed change as well. In the previous sections we have referred to the client “owning” the project several times. We think that this is the key to be able to adapt the used model to our studied firm. The political aspects involved in this process of getting the client to be the owner is an essential part of the interaction studied here. The initiators are not the same since the studied examples are all change efforts from the top, so called planned change. The process becomes a little different as participation and commitment are starting variables in the model but come a little later in our studied examples. However successful change is, as has been said many times before, dependant on involvement, support and enthusiasm of the people involved. Thus the functions of the n-step and our empirical material are much the same.

As noted above we find the importance of consultant methodology very interesting. However the consultancies methods are often kept secret possibly because it is impossible to get a patent. To keep the competitive advantage it is therefore not revealed to an outsider. The only way of studying it is what we have done here, trying to put together a picture from bits and pieces. The result is that the black box will always, at least, be grey, since it will be impossible to reveal all the “magic” inside. Even though we in the beginning criticized the theories about consultants for exactly that, being too vague and abstract, we have to confess that it is very hard to describe what is taking place, without using stereotypes and clichés. We do hope however that we have brought in some examples of what can happen in an interaction between consultant and client. What we have worked with here is mainly words and statements from the observation and our interviews. Thus is it the language of the people and its representations that we have studied. We have observed a small part of the consultant’s practical work, which is separated in time from the effects it has on the client. That it is separated to a large degree would imply that a more longitudinal study is necessary to see the real practical work being done.

Concerning our own method with observation and interviews, we feel that choosing these techniques were correct. However, the observation may not be sufficient, it would have been

helpful with more occasions to study the actual interaction. This might make our empirical material a bit thin, even though we feel that the interviews have supported our observation. As observations are the only original source of empirical material in the field we wanted to study, more is always better. So the fact that we gained access to one observation grants more trustworthiness to our study than if there had been none. The possible sensitive nature of meetings in this particular field might make observations nearly impossible to gain access to. Thus, what is really interesting to study may be off limits.

We think that the box at least can be perceived as “spotty”, where knowledge use and tacit understood interaction are the spots. The “magic” might not be the “show” but the construction of the stage. This construction enables the work that is hard and tiresome to seem impressive with a touch of magic. To the clients working closely with the consultants, the black box becomes more light grey, and also for us the black box has lost some of its colors and we know see a lighter or at least “spottier” box.

## **6 Further studies**

We mentioned above that standard methodological approaches provide security. We would like to explore some possible further studies in relation to this. The security we talk about also extends to the client. Just as it is easier to sell and provide a standardized service, it is safer to purchase a standard service. The buyer can compare the service to the need and to different service providers as well as looking in to the success history of the chosen service. At the same time client wants a tailor made solution to their problem. In the tradition of limited rationality a study looking in to the purchasing behavior of consultant services would be interesting. What factors are included in the decision, is there a process that can be said to approach rationality or are client's at the mercy of the famous consultant sales capacity?

We think it would be interesting to study the correlation between the structure of the implementation of the change and the structure of the following changed organization. Is there any point to mimic the structure of the change, meetings and information flows, in the organization that the change creates?

Further studies that might be interesting are: the comparison of two different consultants from the same firm, thus with the same methodology, but with different backgrounds. This would be interesting, to weigh firm methodology and individual consultant background, to see which of these are prominent in service delivery. Of course, the differences in client conditions would need to be accounted for.

Something else that might be interesting would be the longitudinal study of a client of more than one consultancy firm. How is one change program helped or impeded by other implemented programs?

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# Appendix 1

## Intervjuguide (Interview guide)

Presentation – inspelning – anonymitet – syfte

*Presentation – recording – anonymity - purpose*

## Personen (The person)

- Vem är du? (*Who are you?*)
- Vad är din arbetsuppgift för närvarande? (*What is your current work description?*)

## Företaget (The company)

- Berätta lite kort om företaget och dess historia (*Please, tell us about the company and its history*)

## Consult

- Kontakt (*Contact*)
  - Under vilken tidsperiod genomfördes det, det första, Consult projektet här?  
(*During which period of time was the first project with Consult initiated here?*)
  - Vad var din uppgift under detta Consult projekt, som du deltog i?  
(*What were your responsibilities during this project, in which you participated?*)
- Projekt (*Project*)
  - Vad var anledningen till projektet? (*What was the reason for initiating the project?*)
  - Berätta om upptakten till projektet (*Please, tell us about the start up of the project*)

- Berätta om de första mötena med Consult (*Please, tell us about the first meetings with Consult*)
  - Vad var agendan? Vad innehöll mötena? Hur var de strukturerade? Vilka deltog? (*What was the agenda? What was the content of the meetings? How were they structured? Who participated?*)
- Attityder (*Attitudes*)
  - Berätta om hur era anställda ställde sig till projektet (*Please, tell us how your employees perceived the project*)
    - Ändrades inställningen under projektets gång? Varför, tror du? (*Did the attitudes change during the project? Why, you think?*)
  - Hur upplevde du projektet personligen? (*How did you experience the project personally?*)
    - Problem (med processen)? Motstånd? Lösningar? Resultat av projektet som helhet? (*Problems (with the process)? Resistance? Solutions? The result of the project as a whole?*)

Vill du ha en kopia av den färdiga rapporten? Är det okej att vi återkommer med eventuella uppföljningsfrågor per telefon eller email? Kontaktuppgifter?

*(Would you like a copy of the finished report? Is it alright if we come back with potential follow-up questions through phone or email? Contact information?)*

## **APPENDIX 2**

- Vad anser du kännetecknar en bra konsult? (*What do you believe characterizes a good consultant?*)
- Vad tror du kunder anser vara viktigt? (*What do you think the clients perceive as important?*)
- Hur ser ett misslyckat projekt ut för er? Vilka faktorer bidrar i större del än andra? (*How does an unsuccessful project look like to you? What factors contributes more than others?*)