



**UNDERSTANDING THE AMBIGUITIES OF ‘PROFESSIONAL’  
SERVICE DELIVERY BY MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS AND  
THEIR MEANINGS FOR ‘SUCCESS’ IN A CONSULTING  
ENTERPRISE**

**Masters Thesis for Programme In Managing People, Knowledge and Change**

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This research experience was a remarkable opportunity to learn, to learn.As a great thinker had once said, that perhaps, the most useful thing to learn in life, was the ability to unlearn, what was untrue: Challenging preconceptions, questioning conventional wisdom, being hungry for truth - We owe this to our Supervisor.No bold talks, no crude instruction, it was a great collaborative process that we experienced and We could not thank her enough.

We also share our great sense of gratitude, for our research participants, many our colleagues and their associates in London, Paris and Frankfurt.If we have been able to question some of their assumptions,We are assured that, they would recognise our purpose in doing so.We are confident, that collectively, the industry will see the light of greater academic discussion and usher in a new era of introspection, across the industry.

We strongly believe that, by accomodating criticality and by facilitating greater debates in how we think and act as consultants, We can develop a living ideosyncrasy for this sector, that should help develop our inner hunger, for knowledge, for wisdom, for higher consciousness.We are confident that efforts such as ours, should benefit not just the industry and consultants, but also, the academia, helping them attain grounds for further research, along the lines of our work.

## **Section 1:**

### **1.1 Background:**

Ethics and morality are pillars of the world's ideal social governance. The idea of fairplay and equitable justice for all, is enshrined by principles of democracy, equal opportunity and non discrimination, the world over. However, the business world continues to be replete with occasions of, as the famous Ex-Chairman of the US federal reserve, Alan Greenspan called it, irrational exuberance and greed, leading to chaos and the so called economic meltdown. On a macro level, this irrationality leads to market collapse and a few 'cunning' corporate heads making a clean sweep out of shareholder trust and increasingly, finding solace through State sponsored bailouts. But, on a micro level, the same practices continue to leave long lasting effects on not just the companies, but also on the people who work in them.

The effects go further from mere economic indicators of success and efficiency, but pervade deeper realms of relations, conducts, consciousness that affect finer human notions of ethics, morality and righteousness. These effects create traditions of deceit, that justify compromise for equity, rationality for impropriety and positions pragmatism as more nourishing than hardcore performance measurement, declaring all forms of external criticism, as a wasteful exercise.

To take an example of these effects on a particular industrial sector of management Consultancy, it can be seen that some of the gory definitions of imperviousness, merky business practices ,shady deals, compromise, self service, competitive morality and many other forms of euphemisms, appear loud and resplendent when studied through client consultant relations. The most pertinent of all these images, is that of a confused smart group of people, bound by self deceit, engaged in self triumphalism and the desire to be recognised as worthy. The many different features of these people, therefore ,become the target of this thesis.

## **1.2 Introduction:**

The growing industry of management consultancy and its unique ambiguities have come under serious academic criticism (e.g. Shapiro et al.1993; Micklethwait and Woolridge 1996; Pinault 2001; Byrne, 2002; Clark and Fincham , 2002; Kitay and Wright, 2004; Kihn , 2006). It is interesting how management consultants create avenues for exaction, treading on a strange path in the midst of trust and nepotism, fairplay and collusion, rent seeking and domination and many other dizzying range of combinations and permutations, that often lead to strange outcomes for the clients ( Covin and Fisher 1991; Lister and Pirotta, 1996; Weiss, 1996; Schaffer, 1997; Czander, 2001; Price and Stone 2004).The overall impact is not just on the quality of the deliverables, but under such circumstances, it becomes very difficult to qualify the outputs, objectively (See, Applebaum and Steed, 2005; Klenter and Mollgard, 2006).

This difficulty to qualify an output easily, encourages the client as well as the consultant group, to invent solutions that target the contingent demands of the consulting enterprise and to somehow search for objectivity.But, since there is little evidence to suggest that neither the clients nor consultants tend to readily qualify their engagement as good or bad, this process exposes their inner appetite for the ad hoc, their fascination for ambiguity, and their desire to sell to each other, their ideas of the so called bounded ethicality.This is a characteristic feature for any knowledge intensive organization (Alvesson,2008, Kipping and Engwall, 2002).

This discussion is on management consultancy as a profession and it is therefore clear , that the onus lied with the consultants, to demonstrate professional sensitivities to the client's needs. Therefore, a professional management consultant is someone, who had the capacity, to engineer customised solutions for their clients and help bring about substantial and positive changes for their people, organization and processes. In the absence of this characteristic feature, the consultants are diagnosed as underperforming.Following the notion that management consultants rarely perform,

several researchers write vehemently against hiring them and oppose the consequences of their recommendations for organizations (e.g. Byrne, 2002; Sorge and Van Witteloostuijn, 2004). The irony is, that amidst growing criticism of management consultants, of their ability and willingness to deliver meaningful solutions, there is such little explanations to understand and measure their performance (Seidl and Mohe, 2005:6). This thesis attempts to explore the ambiguities of a management consultant's service delivery. It tries to explain how definitions of professionalism takes its all new meaning among the consultants and how this notion affects client consultant relations and the overall productivity regime.

There is a severe shortage of academic literature, on how to understand underperformance or failures of consulting exercises (Schaffer, 1997). However, there are commentators that have identified some methods to diagnose failure of a consultancy. Some of these methods are, "the 5 fatal flaws of management consulting (Schaffer, 1997), "the cardinal sins" (Weiss, 1996) and "the 15 pitfalls for the client advisor" (Sobel, 2004). But, as Sedl and Mohe (2007) note that, without a large survey pool, the use of these methods can seem to be unacademic. Regardless, these methods are useful to understand the general trends of a poor consulting process (Armenakis and Burdug, 1988). Some consultants may claim that, despite their many efforts, "and good intentions, many of [their] techniques and interventions fall well short of desired goals". (Warren 2004, p 347). Many client managers suggest that, consulting assignments have a failure rate between 25 and 50 percent (Czander, 2001) and they also claim that more than 80 percent of all consulting assignments fail (Zackrisson and Freedman, 2003). There have been several studies on the performance of consultants by several leading organizations. Some of these reports can be mentioned here.

A study on project management efficiency of consultants, report that, "the majority of projects achieve their goals only partly and with considerable delays". (Klenter and Mollgard, 2006, P 141). A study of over 100 client managers of telecom companies, reporting on the performance of their consultants reveal that almost 60 percent of all consulting assignments have rendered with rather poor performance. (Applebaum and Steed, 2005). In a major survey conducted by Smith (2002) on a large multinational

company revealed that, more than half of all consulting assignments were either unsuccessful or poorly delivered. Sedl and Mohe (2007) note that, the lack of extensive empirical studies on consulting failure being so sparse, that most critical assessment of consulting performance, comes in the form of a rather abrupt causality. For example, some studies would say, poor internal communication was responsible for poor consultancy (Pries and Stone, 2004) while others, attribute this to poor client consultant relationship management (e.g. Fullerton and West, 1996).

In order to refine their focus, researchers tend to differentiate the consulting system into three parts: the client system, the consultant and the client consultant contact system. But, Sedl and Mohe (2007) note that, while discussion on the client and the consultant systems can be carried out to understand their respective traits and determinations, it is the contact system between the two groups, their ways of dealing with each other, is what should be studied more (Luhmann, 2005). This way, it will help understand, how the notion of success of a management consultant, is lost to ambiguities of professionalism and productivity by how clients and consultants read each other's importance to their relationship and how they establish their importance to each other.

Perhaps, the most important outcome of this exercise is that it helps recognise, there was a difference between productivity and professionalism within the client consultant interface. But, since the realm of client consultant relations was so ambiguous and where both groups associated different meanings to success and failure, it is very difficult to establish this difference, and in a way that was agreeable to both groups. However, since this thesis is on management consultants and their ideas, meanings and reasons to act and behave the way they do, it was useful to concentrate the discussion on issues like consultant's responsiveness to client needs, their attitude to problem solving and their capacity to be transparent and accountable for their actions. Consultants' responsiveness to their clients' needs will be critically discussed throughout this thesis.

By responsiveness, we refer to the attitude of consultants to address the client's call for assistance. Sedl and Mohe (2007) comment that, most consultants lack adequate skills to communicate with their clients and address their specific needs. Further, even if they had

these skills, researchers note that, the nature of the client consultant contact system being such a strange one, it was almost impervious to any direct communication from outside. Regardless of whatever communication came in from the consultants, the client contact system would react to their own logic (Von Krogh and Roos, 1995; Seidl and Becker 2006). So, the organization is seen as a much closed system, which “condenses the broad system of communication around it into highly selective and routinised codes”. ( Kieser 2002, P 216).

As a result, a consultant’s communication may be transformed into a different meaning when it reached the client (Luhmann, 2005). The deductions of these researchers is that, there was a strict boundary between the client and the consultant groups, and regardless of any form of coziness between these two groups, the two systems (i.e. the client system and the consultant system), cannot be treated as an overlap ( Kubr, 2002; Kitay and Wright, 2004). There is an obvious distance between the two camps and it is perhaps this distance that gives rise to the many issues that affect the professionalism of the consultant and the productivity of their engagement with the client. (See, Mohe 2003, pp. 333–340; Mohe, 2005; Königswieser and Hillebrand 2005, pp. 36–37). Therefore, a consultant’s voice can be often interpreted by the client as a perturbation ( Luhmann, 1995), or a noise ( Seidl and Mohe, 2007) and their responsiveness can be treated as not a “ difference which makes a difference” for the system (Bateson, 1972, p 315).

In such environments of suspicion, neglect and deprivation, Luhmann (1995) comments that, consultants are left to move into a state of individualism. On being affected by the socio political aspects of the client, on being faced with the clients’ resistance to accept the consultant’s solutions as favorable, the consultants’ responses to the client’s needs, become unresponsive to perceptions of the client’s internal systems (Seidl and Mohe, 2007). Consultants tend to consider more that, regardless of their efforts, the success of any consulting assignments was a product of the client’s own decision system and “ implementation by others”, was just a fabricated notion. Consultants do not want to share any direct responsibility for the implementation of their solutions (Kipping and Armbruster, 2002, P.221). Accordingly, instead of shared responsibility , management

consulting increasingly appears to be a profession where, consultants were not ready to take any responsibility for their efforts.

In this thesis, we try to analyze how consultants compete with their clients for control over the organization. We try to understand how consultants demand that they were assigned equal footing in the client's own environment. We question consultants' assignment of many different meanings of productivity for their engagement with the clients. We criticize how consultants could restrict management consulting to delivery of services only and discuss the moral distances they assign, between their personal and professional meanings for success. We question their emotional involvement with their client's welfare; we question what makes them management consultants.

The attitude of consultants to distance themselves from the client's real welfare, to maintain an arms length distance and their justifications for limited liability for any successes or failures of the client, may be indicative of their ethical deficiencies and lack of care for the client. The empirical studies establish further, that consultants associate their professionalism as their being in business and this limits their productivity. We question this issue, throughout the thesis. The principal aim of this thesis is to enlighten management researchers, especially those who study consulting, that there was such little material available to measure, test and certify professionalism of management consultants. It recognises there was indeed such limitation to understand productivity of management consultants and their real worth to clients.

Therefore, this thesis resolves to enquire into the ambiguities of the consulting profession, by exploring the many meanings of being a management consultant. The thesis aims to understand the expressions of success, priority, control and authority of management consultants and seeks to understand what consultants attribute to themselves as being a part of this profession. Accordingly, the many meanings of success that consultants create for themselves are carefully studied and these meanings help understand their ethical constructs and further, qualify these constructs as free or bounded, by self interests, self righteousness and by self justification: the common orientation of consultants. The thesis questions are aptly designed to qualify the various



meanings of these key notions, to create a critical perspective on the consulting profession. The questions designed are :

*.What is so special about client consultant relations that creates the structure of bounded ethicality and forces either groups to evolve conflict of interests, which in turn encourages them to impose a regime of compromises within the deliverables?*

This question seeks to find out whether the very nature of client consultant relation had any effect on the constructs of bounded ethicality of management consultants and whether, a poor client consultant relation led to a poor professional service by the consultant.

*.What makes consultants behave the way do, in terms of ethics, morality and devotion and is there a way to rationalise their conduct?*

Drawing from the various literatures and from the empirical studies conducted to find out why consultants behave the way they do, this question tries to bring out, consultants' version of ethics and morality. It tries to understand how such definitions could affect the idea of professionalism within the consulting sector.

*.So, with real world examples and case discussions with several management consultants in three different countries, how do the thesis propositions hold truth?*

This question tries to sum up , all the findings, from literature reviews to empirical work and critically reflects as to how the thesis proposition that, consultants do not know how to define their own professionalism, holds truth.

*.On the basis of this research project, what can be predicted for the consulting industry of the future?*

As practitioners themselves, the authors of this thesis, try to make use of their research experience to establish future trends of the industry, on the basis of this thesis. It tries to sum up the theoretical and the practical implications of their research.

### **1.3 Structure :**

To answer the research questions, this thesis is divided into five sections. While Section 1 served as the introduction to the background, ideas and notions to be tested in this thesis, section 2 will deal with the region of client consultant relations. This section will bring forth key points in client consultant relations, that affect their ethical attitudes towards each other. Section 3 will shed light on these attitudes and develop the idea of bounded ethicality, a concept that helps understand, how client consultant relations may suffer from ethical ineptitude and how both groups had their input in this phenomenon. This section will elaborate on, how both groups, contribute to the mutual trust deficit and co-produce the spirit of mutual deception, often leading to unethical compromises for each other. Section 4 will enumerate case discussions on various interviews conducted among management consultants. Section 5 will present the empirical evidence and use them to answer the research questions. Finally, Section 6 will sum up all the key findings and present them as conclusion of this research process.

The research findings will test the thesis proposition that , *management consultants do not have a clear way to understand, measure and enunciate their devotion towards their client. Professionalism to a successful consultant meant their being in business. The attitude to judge monetary growth to productive engagement with clients, spell out a severe sense of self righteousness where moral, ethical and professional standards are all neutralised to one regime of self justification. This is a disorder and this needs to change, to change the image of this important industry. The onus is with the consultants for only they were capable of qualifying this highly self standardized profession.*

### **1.4 Methodology:**

This thesis attempts to conduct critical analysis of the subject , employing a reflexive attitude.

Reflexivity in research has found mention from several managerial thinkers.(e.g. Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Alvesson and Wilmott, 2003; Boje,2001;Czarniawaska,1988/2006).These commentators have actively sought that researchers engage in a tradition of questioning their research, employ criticality and

venture deeper, than conventional ways to reason would permit them. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) assert that, being reflective was being able to interpret interpretations. Such inward introspection would ensure that researchers discovered the fiction of facts and moved from building theories to crafting mysteries. (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). Reflexivity allows researchers to challenge theories, question their psychological plausibility, address their formal elegance and debate their empirical accuracy. (Astley, 1985). Reflexivity encourages researchers, to evolve a culture of Critical reasoning, to dig deep, it makes them critically reflexive. To understand critical reflexivity, it is important to explain reflexivity and Critical Analysis and explain their connectedness under Critical Reflexivity (See, Alvesson and Deetz, 1999; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

Reflexivity is a research process, as Calas and Smircich (1992) explain, where practitioners were able to assess their interrelatedness with their research and thereby, achieve the purpose and objectives of such a process. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) advise, that reflexive researchers should engage with their research process, to establish meanings between the different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements, that are woven together in such a process, and this they claim, could create an inclusive and a wide body of knowledge. They should dig deep to comprehend, how empirical matter is organized, collected, documented and understood. Alvesson (2009) extensively asserted that, no researcher was immune from their internal biases and affinity towards subjectivity and discursivity. Therefore, they should tap into their natural inclinations, internal propensities and use them as a valuable resource, for creating new knowledge. They need to be more critical, more challenging of conventional wisdom and adopt an attitude to go beneath the surface. Their ways to analyse information, phenomena and people, thereby becomes critical.

By Criticality or Critical Analysis, researchers refer to applying the methodological perspective of Critical theory in their research investigations and also in their theorising process. Critical theory is a unique philosophical tradition with its special features. (Rasmussen, 1994; Rush, 2004). Several researchers have commented to its historical overviews ( e.g. Held, 1980; Wiggershaus, 1994). The principal contributors to

this approach have included Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas, all representing the Frankfurt School (See, Scherer, 2009). The purpose of Critical theory is to analyse the status quo, to criticise unjustified use of power, influence or might, and to change the status quo that allows human emancipation from subjectification, dependency and suppressions (Scherer, 2009).

A move beyond social theorists, Critical theorists do not just understand and explain a social condition, they attempt to establish through their research, their affinity and belief in notions of justice, equality, fairplay, fairness. (Scherer, 2009). They understand the deficits of a strictly technocratic approach of bringing about a means ends causality, as Horkheimer (1937) claimed, that social science cannot produce objective and value free knowledge of social reality. (See, Scherer, 2009). Horkheimer and Adorno (1947a) therefore assert that, to challenge the positivist science model, Critical analysis was needed to achieve the enlightenment ideal (Scherer, 2009). Whereas, critical theorists do not represent any particularly homogenous understanding on this area, they have three major notions in common to their works. (Held, 1980; Wiggershaus, 1994; Scherer, 2009). First, they question the dialectics of enlightenment and conventional ways of creating knowledge, which essentially serves the interests of powerful elites (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947a). Second, as Alvesson and Wilmott (1996) point out, Critical theorists, criticise the unidimensionality and consumerism of individualistic, capitalised societies, that were designed to create unreflective and allegiant consumers, incapable of the natural reasoning to crave for alternatives (See, Scherer, 2009; Also, Marcuse, 1964). Third, Critical Theorists strongly criticise technocracy and the fetish for means ends causality that denies researchers, their natural relevance for ethics (See, Scherer, 2009; Habermas, 1971). Fourth, by emphasising on communicative action, critical theorists question the use of a certain kind of language. Assertions, comments, statements by research participants can be used to understand their ways to reason their reality and this, the critical theorists find very useful. (Habermas, 1984; Scherer, 2009).

So, bringing Critical theory, Reflexivity together, critical reflexivity is achieved through critical analysis of a social phenomena. This is done by interpretive understanding on a

certain phenomenon and the researcher's genuine attempts at questioning the established values and normative claims on a certain system, in this case, management consulting. (Habermas, 1984). It also has an emancipatorial interest because of the desire to establish the notion of fairness and for the reason that the researchers were themselves practicing consultants, the stakes are even more serious. (Stablein and Nord, 1985). The objective behind adopting this approach, is the researchers' attempt at adding to the interpretive repertoire, of the wide and enriching field of critical management studies. The mission is to help explain its interactions with the subject of management consultancy.

Critical reflexivity in this thesis process is a way by which, the researchers involved, make an humble effort, to diagnose, define and analyse some of the most common conventions of management consulting, viz. Smart consultants, indispensable to clients, high self worth, extremely professional, successful, and believers of the up or out culture. Reflexivity in the critical analysis helps understand, how management consultancy as a profession is bound by complacencies and subjectivities. It helps understand how management consultancy struggles to attain meanings for success, of successful client consultant relations and of professional service delivery by consultants. The intellectual symmetry between the theoretical assumptions of what led to consulting discrepancies, with the empirical, will help reveal some interesting features of the consulting trade and more so, the management consultants. The success of the critical analysis is that it helps uncover the trails of conventional wisdom, of established ideas of professional success and assists in bringing out new meanings for this profession and to research on this profession. This thesis aims at doing just that.

### **1.5 The Method:**

The authors of this thesis being practicing management consultants, securing participants into the research process was not that difficult. There was no attempt made, to become prejudice free as that would restrict greater reflexivity. As members of this industry, the researchers had every possibility of being exposed to the same predeterminations as did the Research participants. Accordingly, the researchers made no attempt to neutralise their critical outlook, in order to stay aware of their contribution to the " construction of

meanings throughout the research process and ..... to explore ...[ and understand how their] involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research. (Cromby et al. , 1999, P 228)

Critical reflexivity ( See, Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000) afforded the researchers , the ability to question their preconceptions,throughout the research process.This way, they could afford to venture deep into conventional wisdom and question the assumptions,that they had shared for a long time.By doing so, they could achieve a critical analysis of these assumptions ( See, Alvesson and Deetz, 1999; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

Within the three month project period, several unstructured and semi structured interviews were conducted in various locations across Europe.The researchers understood the dynamic nature of consulting and the fact that consultants being interviewed were too busy and internationally mobile, to be all invited to one place and time for a structured interview.They realised that, the personal initiative taken, to reach out to the participants, and accommodate their time constraints, besides bringing them closer to the research process, would also help the researchers,in establishing meanings between the various social, political, linguistic and cultural elements that were deeply grounded in the participants.Such accomodations would allow reflexivity to thrive and allow their natural instincts to show through their responses.(Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000)

Most interviewees were industry seniors, some their associates and others fellow colleagues working in or running their own consulting practices.The referee network was tapped in and to bring in greater objectivity, consultants previously unknown to the researchers were also interviewed.The introduction of these additional voices also added to the vividness of the data.

With an eye for innovation, new ways were developed, to engage with the subject and with the interviewees.In total 3 principal consultants of the finest niche firms and around 6 of each of their associate senior and senior partner consultants were studied.Following reflexive traditions (Alvesson,2009), Criticality was brought about, by designing questions that targetted the individualism and consumerism of the participants.This way,

their affinity for their profession, their understanding of their relations with the clients and their obligation with themselves, would appear raw and wild. The purpose of critical analysis is to achieve in bringing out the inner meanings of what people say and do and by doing so, breaking the means ends technocratic causality, that would appear on a mere interview process. (See, Alvesson and Wilmott, 1996; Also see, Scherer, 2009)

The premise of the research being, testing consultants' sense of ethics and factors that bound it, a triple fold filter was used to verify the quality of the responses. In all instances, a long but informal face to face interview session, was followed by a structured telephonic interview. A set of questions were later sent to the consultants for them to fill out and return in their leisure. The responses from the interviewees, especially in light of the thesis questions were very interesting. The interviews were conducted in three major European cities. As pointed above, the consultants were met over informal meetings, often over lunch or high tea. This was followed by semi structured telephonic conversations where they were questioned on the same issues as had been in previous occasions. This was done to test their consistency in responses and often to help reveal any additional information or new thoughts.

In effect, 21 management consultants were interviewed. But, applying the snowball effect, many other voices also came through. They shared their views on the consulting profession, through their vast experiences being insiders, clients, ex clients and advisors in various parts of their career. This also enriched the process with insider information. As indicated earlier, three Principal Consultants (often termed as Presidents of large consulting companies) were interviewed and six each of their Associate senior partners were interviewed. The three companies included an financial advisory to the investment banks, a large market research and lobbying company specialising in PR and a major European strategy consultancy.

The three principals will be referred to as John, Tim and Bill. Similarly their senior partners and Associates will be referred to as Associate to John or Partner to Bill. The snowball effect brought in several insider voices and they were young or low level workers whose voices came through during the face to face interviews. These voices

deserve presence in the thesis, however their names need not be put separately. They will be presented as in special quotes.

The data collected included, responses to questionnaires in text form, recorded conversations, and commentaries from observations during face to face interviews. They were carefully collected and analysed through the 'reflexive' funnel (See, Alvesson, 2009). Resting on the Reflexive model, these various informations were later used to understand the theoretical propositions of Section 2 and 3 and to understand and analyse their distances or closeness with these academic assumptions. These comments appear in section 4 as case discussions and as condensed answers to the thesis questions, presented in section 5 .

This section defined the methods, the methodological approach adopted in this research process. The following section will start the literature review, beginning with client consultant relations and grounds for compromise.

## **Section 2: Client consultant relations and grounds for Compromise**

The purpose of this section, is to understand client consultant relations and to realise the underlying factors behind unethical compromises that consultants and clients enter into, in the course of their association. The aim is to analyse and contextualise collusion within the client consulting interface.

The following section tries to investigate, how lack of information, monetary considerations and trust deficit forces clients and consultants into a strange collusive relation and how this limits productivity of their engagement. This section starts with analyzing reasons behind collusion in client consultant relations. This discussion then leads to classifying the nature of collusion into categories of exploitation , control and victimhood in which, efforts are made to describe how the client or the consultant, accedes to such territories of powerplay. This is followed by a section that seeks to define how knowledge difference between the client and the consultants , leads into their power imbalances and how they contribute to the overall consulting enterprise.



## **2.1 Reasons for Dilemma: Collusion and Confusion**

It is a reality that many consultants are subject to acute information deficit, at the beginning of their consulting exercises. Consultants are faced with the need to frame problems and to design interventions on the basis of the limited data they have. There is a limit to their capacity to do them perfectly and to achieve optimum results for the client. The premise is often that, clients were incapable of solving their problems and were unable to locate and define what these problems were and so needed a consultant to help them in such a process (Werr et al. 1997; Werr 1999; Armbrüster and Kipping 2002; Ruef 2002). Therefore, the most important factor that associates a consultant to the client, is need. A client's needs are improvement and efficiency, whereas for a consultant, the need is to exist in the profession, on the basis of superior performance. This need to not just perform but to deliver superior services and that, to the wishes of the client, often poses a difficult challenge for consultants.

Therefore, consultants devise various ways to not just justify the quality of their outputs, they also rationalize to the clients, the very reason why they should be hired. They qualify their 'need' to them, thereby sustaining their performance and their profession. Glucker and Armbruster (2003) assert that, the confusion and mystery around the need factors is a product of two forms of uncertainties: First, market uncertainty, due to the lack of institutional structure and systems to qualify results of the consultants, second, transactional uncertainty resulting from lack of transparency and accountability of consultants, towards their clients and their profession. Both forms of uncertainty impose limitations on institutional capacity to qualify the consultant's performance. (Zucker 1986; Giddens 1990). The 'need' for consultants is an area that deserves discussion here.

There are two ways to understand the 'need' for clients' sourcing external consulting support. One, where the clients were lacking the expertise to understand their issues and were unable to resolve them independently and hence requiring additional support, and two, broadly defined in terms of the transaction cost approaches (e.g. Kehrer and

Schade,1995; Kaas and Schade, 1995,See Glucker and Armbruster, 2003). As Glucker and Armbruster (2003) refer that, clients take calculated risks on their transactions with consultants, quantifying their need to hire, as in terms of Williamson, asset specifics, frequency and market uncertainty. To sum it, clients decide to hire external consultants when asset specifics, frequency and uncertainty of such transactions were low. Clients hire consultants from the market on purely commercial terms. So, the argument that management consultants are solely hired out of their perceived quality is not true for there were other economic considerations behind such processes.

Consultants are perceived as cost effective and economically viable additional voices. This is a very interesting aspect of client consultant relations. So, it can be assumed that, need for a consultant is based on the client's assumptions on the consultant and their perceived low economic cost for the organization. Consultants are invited to work within the available resources and with an expectation that they were well informed of the clients' whereabouts. This implicit expectation to perform from day one and a situation where, either groups had a strange imbalance in their mutual purposes, presents conditions and restrictions on consultant's ability to affect their desired changes to the clients. (Schein, 1988; Glucker and Armbruster, 2003).

Client Information deficit or, lack of information on the client's whereabouts, is a reality for consultants<sup>1</sup>.This deficit often constrains consultants' service delivery, especially in times of immediate requirement for solutions and in case of highly demanding clients who want fast solutions. This pressure to manufacture super fast solutions, often causes distortion of information, and consultants produce interventions that were far from their productive optimum (Krantz et al., 1990, Also See, Krantz, 1997).Rice (1963) comments that, "What appears on the surface, as a simple organizational problem may often be found to have underlying it[,] deep-seated and largely unrecognized emotional conflicts....A solution to the overt problem may not provide relief; indeed it may exacerbate the underlying difficulties by removing a symptom, attention to which has provided a defence against the anxiety of having to face the real causes. In the extreme, a

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<sup>1</sup> This may not apply to consultants engaged in long term consulting engagements like multiyear contracts,however, client environment may have have many issues, unknown to consultants, regardless their length of engagement with the client.

client may well wish to keep the overt problem alive and unsolved as a means of containing the anxiety inherent in its solution. (p. 274). This presents further challenges for the consultant. Perhaps, this innate imbalance between the client's authority and the consultant's ability, is what creates difficulties for a consultant, to define the problems and solve them effectively (See, Krantz et al., 1990). Therefore, as discussed earlier, the consultant's inability to act with full information on the client, the pressures of a very narrow timeline to deliver and a non cooperative client, all encourage the consultant to employ some hard tactics, or, evolve compromise to save mutual interests, somehow. (See, Mitroff and Featheringham, 1976). They become anxious about their performance.

Consultants try to address their performance anxiety, employing several techniques, using their research and analytical strengths and applying several methodologies, often evolving new ones depending on the client needs. Every organization has their patented methods and many also employ universal techniques for common problems. Some approaches include self-report methods, survey instruments and various other ways to secure access to as much client information as possible. They have to gather as much data from within the organization as possible and there may be problems in accessing certain types of information that the client would not want to be discussed (Chua and Poullos, 2002; Greenwood et al. 2002). But, even if they had access to data, they are often incapable of extracting the core organizational assumptions that were external to the 'obvious' awareness of the informants, from whom the data were sourced. In other words, consultants cannot be sure of, that, what they gather from within the organization was real or not. (Nisbet & Wilson, 1977; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977).

As it happens in qualitative research, the dependence on human expressions are so natural, that it is hard to distinguish between what was real and what was superficial voice. This presents serious challenges for a researcher who may want to provide the client management a solution, which their organizational members try to sabotage. Therefore, much of the data collected from such dissenting employees within the client organization, may be crafted feedback, designed to hurt the consulting enterprise, which they may see with suspicion.

This notion clarifies that, whilst the general inclinations of an otherwise cunning consultant to provide the client fast solutions and take the money and run (Kitay, 2004), one must also consider, the plight of a genuinely professional consultant, devoted to bring goods to the client who is restricted by information deficit and poor understanding of the client environment. This is the reason why consultancy and consulting results, are so ambiguous; to decide between a good and a bad consultant as hard as the difference between a demanding and an oppressive client, is an equally challenging task.

On the basis of the above discussions, it can be stated that the success of consultancy, is not judged merely by the deliverables, but according to the perceptions of the client. This notion has profound implications for the quality of the relations between the client and the consultant and this will be discussed at greater lengths in various parts of this thesis. For now, it is useful to understand, the ways in which the consultants struggle to ascertain meanings for the organization by extending their projective identification of the organization and its concerns. This discussion will be highly useful to understand the constructs of Exploitation and control games that take place between the client and the consultants.

## **2.2 The struggle for consulting authority: Projective Identification**

Consultants building on their usually abrupt and dormant assumptions of the client organization, try to make sense of their clients' psyche. The idea to understand the client's wants, needs, fantasies and leads to a form of self subjectification. In simple terms, consultants try to make sense of their clients' perceptions, by trying on their shoes. Klein (1975a) refers to this as projective identification. Bion (1961) posits that, when, a therapist (in this case, the consultant), tries to induct themselves into patient's ( in this case the client) inner image of the World, then, there are chances that, "the analyst feels he is being manipulated so as to be playing a part, no matter how difficult to recognize, in someone else's fantasy" (p. 149).

The consultant's inner struggles are to come out of this quandary, as the dominant power, capable of taking charge of their collective engagement with the client. This is the ground

for collusion, fashionably termed as adjustment, mutual understanding, client needs accommodation, responsiveness and many other forms of euphemisms. Early researchers who have studied this nature of collusion have included Bion (1961), who studied this collusive shared mentality, as an extension of the so called projective identification of both the clients and the consultants. This process is a means by which these groups try to project to each other, their awareness and understanding of the organizational priorities and their shared stakes in addressing them. Jacques (1955) and Menzies (1970) have in their early works, analyzed how individuals use projective identification, to adjust and naturalize their complex feelings within communitarian atmospheres.

It is clear that consultants make greater efforts to be seen to be doing things right than to just be doing things right. The urge to be seen to be industrious, diligent and committed to client improvement as opposed to being so in truth, creates an aura of fabrication around the consultants (See, Perner and Werr, 2005). Consultants' projective identification therefore becomes their effort, to convince the clients of their value and justify the clients' expenses in hiring them. There is very little evidence to understand and test the sincerity of the consultants in honouring their commitment to the relationship and therefore, their obvious image Projection, attracts only a critical interpretation at the hands of researchers.

Projective identification is a very important way to understand individual and group Phenomena, especially within a client consultant interface. Consultants like clients and other organizational members, tend to enact or represent, certain projected elements that relate to each other. There is a very high tendency that, this act to establish relatedness, makes consultants and their target audience (clients, organizational members and others), as Krantz calls it, repositories of a certain behaviour. Common consequences of such projected identification occur in terms of role differentiation (Gibbard, Hartman and Mann, 1974; Wells, 1990), role suction (Redl, 1963; Horwitz, 1983), and scapegoating (Jacques, 1955; Gibbard, Hartman, and Mann, 1974; Dunphy, 1978). The general implication for such projections is the creation of a certain animated organizational reality, where natural instinctual characteristics of neither the clients nor the consultants, are available to themselves. This is undoubtedly the foundation of mutual deception.

### 2.3 Client Consultant relations and Mutual Deception

The ground for mutual deception is replete with instances, where the consultants and the clients, as Krantz notes, mutually maintain projective identification. Such relational identification, often evokes mistrust, suspicion and causes difficulties in achieving real outcomes. Often, the consultant's feigned<sup>2</sup> projection for concernedness is matched in kind by the client, in their overt approval of the consultant's version of the problem definition and also the bespoke solutions, designed for the client. The relatedness between the client and the consultant is nothing but the client's image or picture-in-the-mind of the situation (Senge, 1990; Lawrence, 1979; Money-Kyrle, 1961) rather than to the situation itself (See, Krantz et al., . 1990), finding voice in the consultant's expressions. This process can be seen as compromise ridden and an exercise to achieve a sort of mutual agreement to a solution. This process yields a form of shared reality, like a shared social field, presenting to the client consultant relations, its load of distortions (See, Krantz et al., . 1990). The irony is that the idea of hiring a consultant, is to get rid of these distortions, rather than to invite new stakeholders who accept it or even, compound it. That is why, by preempting and conditioning the consultant's views to the whims of the client, often creates more problems than solutions for the clients.

As Bain (1981) comments that, the "denied aspect of the presenting problem, i.e., the personal link that connects the presenter and the problem, is at first projected into the role that is desired for the consultant". So, clients, in seeking from the consultant, the exact same solution as that desired by them, often contribute to ever greater confusion and oversimplification, adding to client consultant collusion. The consultant's differences in opinions, difference in understanding on certain matters, ideological and experiential differences with the client management, can only assist in insuring errors. The differences between clients and consultants when expressed freely and frankly is a healthy practice and should be encouraged. But, by demanding 'devoted' consultants, to fabricate real issues and 'solve' them to the whims of the often 'less informed' clients, can only cause

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<sup>2</sup> Not all consultants are cosmetic, but the premise of the argument being critical, it is obvious that the comment here is for the majority of the synthetic lot of consultants, who have nothing but coe commercial interests in their clients. Hence, the expression feigned has been used.

confusion and weak results. To understand this phenomenon, the nexus between the client and the consultants, their power play, their attitudes towards each other, need to be understood.

#### **2.4 Between Exploitation, Control and Victimhood :**

This nexus between the consultant and the client, creates room for underperformance for the consultants. This is especially prevalent among consultants who have been tried and tested by the client in previous occasions, or, those who have had special relations with the client management. In such arrangements, many of the promised results in consulting projects never materialize (de Caluwé & Stoppelenburg, 2003) and ultimately have profound impact on the client organizations (O'Shea and Madigan, 1997). The sense of complacency in the client management, not to rigorously analyze and evaluate the consultants' performance, deprives them of the capacity to understand what the consultants can do and cannot do (Werr & Perner, 2005).

Researchers also differ in how they see the purpose of the client consultant relation. The normative literature espouses tremendous faith in building the so called relation of trust and closeness among the clients and the consultants and define it as the key to the consulting exercise ( e.g. Kubr, 2002; Schein, 1988). But, as Perner and Werr (2005), note, that a more critical literature, rejects this notion of trust and assert, that, the trust in client consultant relation is often an illusion manufactured by a cunning and manipulating consultant, who knows their way through the client's considerations.

Perner and Werr (2005) have further argued that, the available literature on management consulting is roughly divided among two general perspectives. One group, the functionalist group, determine the success of the client consultant relation solely on the effectiveness and quality of the deliverables (See, Block, 2000; Greiner & Metzger, 1983; Kubr, 2002; Also see, Fincham & Clark, 2002; Kipping & Armbrüster, 1998). The other group, contribute to the critical consulting literature, who see the defects of the functionalist approach, for the reasons it rests the success of consultancy, merely on the perceptions of the client. The idea that clients were immune from being convinced into a certain reality by the consultants, of the clients being persuaded to consider and own a

certain value perception, given the consultants' higher technical knowhow and 'high' human skills, is something that the critical thinkers find hard to dismiss ( See, Greiner, et al. 1983, Schein, 1988).

Schein (1988), further elaborates on this relation of consultation through examples of three common forms of client consultant relations, like Purchase of expertise, doctor patient relation and process consultation. Peter and Werr (2005) argue that that, of the three classifications, the client is the buyer of services whose position is that of a customer, but in the other two instances, the client is more of partner in the consulting process and the illustrations below further help understand this process.

A table shows this different categorisations better:

	The Customer	The Client	The Victim
The Buyer	Purchaser of a well defined service	Insecure and in need of help , unable to define or solve the problem independently	Anguished, Pressed by impossible demands of the managerial role
The Consultant	Provider of delimited expert advice or resources	"Helper", in possession of superior expertise and sills	Skilled Manipulator creating his/her own market



Relation	Arms length, temporary	Close, Trustful	Close, manipulated by the consultant
Party in Control of Relationship	Buyer , can hire or fire ; Critically evaluates results	Consultant – Due to superior content and process knowledge	Consultant

Table1 : Different Images of the consultant Purchaser in management literature

Source: Perner and Werr, 2005

The above figure clearly shows the variations within client consultant relation and the ways this relation manifests in the client and the consultant assuming different roles throughout their engagement. These roles sometimes makes the client a purchaser, sometimes a mere receiving end of the consulting stream; the more interesting side is the situation of a client turning into a victim in this relationship. In the same way, the figure also shows, how the consultant acts as a provider of specialist knowhow in the first instance, and acting as a helper in the client consultant relationship. In the third instance, we see the consultant as a shrewdster, who manipulates his ways through the relation, exacting as much benefits as possible, often turning the client as the ultimate victim in the relationship.

To understand the real authority of the consultant and their ways to exacting critical influence on the client and to determine the capacity of a consultant to affect the relationship, it is very important to understand the affairs of the client. Therefore, the following passages will describe the various academic nuances and contributions of key thinkers on this unique relationship, with a focus on the client. Efforts will be made to categorically define the position of the client as the buyer, the mere client and finally as the victim and this will help understand the real authority of the consultant, in creating and asserting meanings and values of their consultancy, to the clients. This discussion will help enrich the research on the intricacies of the client consultant relation.

## **2.5 The Buyer client , the partner Client and the Victim Client: Three roles of the client**

Pemer and Werr ( 2005) have written exclusively on subdividing the client's role into that of a Buyer , the Client and the Victim, within the client consultant relation. This is in line with Schein's (1988) methodology, that espouses similar classification, to determine the exact authority of the consultant to affect the client's position within the relationship, viz. the buyer, the client partner and the victim( See, Kubr, 1993; McGonagle & Vella, 2001; Greiner et al., 1983).

The **buyer** role defines the client as the rational buyer of consulting advice. The buyer client is well apprised of the whereabouts of the consultant, and is fully aware of the results that are expected of the consultant. This position is perhaps the strongest one for the client, where they know what to expect of the consultant. The buyer client dominates over the consultant, throughout the consulting exercise, making strict demands off them, to comply with conditions set forth by the client. Use of consulting jargons, high fees to justify worth and pushiness are strictly avoided by the buyer client, and the client is in a position to hire or fire any consultant 'at will'<sup>3</sup> ( Edvardsson, 1990; Kubr, 2002; McGonagle et al., 2001; Maister, 1993). The buyer client often enforces their authority

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<sup>3</sup> Refers to the termination clause in a contract that allows the client to fire the consultant with reasonable justification, whichever pleases them, at any instance within the consulting time frame. In such situations, the consultant is no position to seek any form of legal remedy for such a termination. This clause puts the client in a far superior control of the relationship than that the consultant.

over the consultant, by not always cooperating and often criticising the consultant's work, out of mere suspicions or the desire to keep the consultant in control, often in case of large consultancies who are on a long term project ( Greiner et al., 1983; Kubr, 2002; Schein, 2002).So, we can see that,in this case, there is tremendous pressure on the consultant, to deliver not just what is required, but also to the desires of the highly demanding client.This pressure is a source for the consultants, devising various ways to bring a balance of power and hence, contribute to the overall collusion process.

The role of the client as a **client partner** comes next.As Perner and Werr ( 2005) define it, the customer buyer,as discussed in the preceding section, was in a more powerful position than the client buyer.They say that, this is because, the customer buyer is aware of the exact deliverables and employs the checks and balances within their client enterprise to exercise control over the consultant.This may have several effects on the overall collusion process, but that is not the point here.The point to note here, is that, the buyer client is in control of the client consultant relation.But, the client partner is one different situation where, the client does not know, the exact deliverables and was therefore dependent on the consultants, to steer them through the outcomes.

Schein (1999) speaks on the notion of client's dependence on consultants that, "Many cultures emphasize self-reliance and put a value on solving one's own problems. For a person to seek help and make herself temporarily dependent on another person is a de facto confession of weakness or failure, particularly in Western, competitive, individualistic societies"( P 44). This argument builds on the fact that, by mere admission by the client, that they needed specialized external consultant support, was indicative of lack of specialized know-how within the organization, and more importantly, exposed the vulnerability of the client to the consultant. Greiner and Metzger (1983) have stated that, "For a prospective client to admit that a consultant is needed is a difficult decision. Many executives view this decision as a sign of self-defeat – that they themselves were unable to solve the problem. It is not easy for a vice president to go to his or her president with a request for outside assistance". (P 41).So, the consultant arrives to the client, with the idea of their indispensability to and of their exclusive position in the client organization. The consultant understands his presence as the result of the client's skills differential and

that their induction to the client was a result of the client's knowledge deficit or a certain expertise.

Therefore, it can thus be assumed that, the consultant, having realized and understood the client's knowledge deficit, is in a position to affect the psychodynamics of the relationship (Schein, 1999). McGonagle & Vella (2001) have commented that, "Today we are in what is being called a "golden age of consulting". And while there are two sides to every consulting relationship it seems that the consultant side of the equation has most, if not all, of the tools needed to create and control that relationship". (P 1) The comment clearly shows that, in a situation where the client is relatively unsure as to the nature of his problems and has little understanding of the possible solutions, their dependence on the consultant's specialized knowledge makes them weak. This is the reason why most accomplished management consultants assume tremendous control over their clients and their consulting relationship with their clients.

This overwhelming control of the consultant, renders the client a **victim** and the dependent one, in the relationship. Under the circumstances, the consultants' rhetorics and many verbal formulations, are good enough to control the client and to convince them of the value of their consultancy ( Alvesson, 1993; Clark & Salaman, 1996). The intellectual high brow of the consultant, building on the knowledge deficit and confusion of the client, converts the once buyer, dominant client, to a partner with little understanding of their whereabouts, and finally into naïve spectators of the consulting process. Several researchers have commented on this sense of victimhood of the clients ( See, Block, 2000; Bloomfield & Best, 1992; Clark et al., 1996). The position of the client manager becomes very difficult under the circumstances. Not only are they under constant pressures to perform, they are left with little resources or ways, to take charge of what the others, (i.e. the consultants), are doing to achieve the organizational objectives. This reflects an even greater quandary for the clients, adding to their victimization (See, Watson, 1994; Huzynski, 1993).

The client management continuously struggle to improve or maintain their certain managerial identity in dealing with the interventions brought in by the consultants ( Clark

et al., 1996). They struggle to make sense out of their own identity strife, and more, compounded by their apparent inability to take charge of the consultants' intellectual superiority (Sturdy, 1997; Kieser, 1998). Consultants often take advantage of such situations and as Bloomfield and Vurdubakis (2002) note that, with innovations in managerial tools and methods, the sheer knowledge divide, allows the consultants to be even more sought after, making them more powerful in this relationship. The dependence of the clients on the consultants, thus becomes so immense, that the consultants, often take full charge of not just assigning meanings to the problems faced by the clients, they also become proponents and translators of the solutions, often convincing the clients of the immutability of their consulting advice ( See, Czaniawska, 1988; Clark et al., 1996).

Towards the end of Section 2, it can be concluded that client consultant relations are as ambiguous as are ways to test the successes of a client's engagement with a consultant. It is understood that, there were constraints on the ability of a consultant to deliver as there were limitations of the clients to test the quality of the services bought. On top of this, the overarching requirement to design fast, economical and ready to go solutions, add further conditions to this relation. Consultants, with their natural flair and analytical prowess try to provide what they can. Wherever they are met by harsh conditions (oppressive client, client with superior or comparable knowhow, very tight timeline) or are met by optimal opportunities (client with poor knowhow, no fixed deadline, overt flexibility), consultants embrace opportunity to colluding with the client, to rationalise their various shortcomings, in the interests of an acceptable compromise.

The most important aspect of this relation is the consultant's relative strengths over the client, in terms of their awareness of their position and the reasons behind their presence in a client organization. Unless the client was with relative knowhow and with a clear performance appraisal mechanism to test the consulting advice they were getting, the consultant is always in a far more powerful position, to define, illustrate and convince the client of their advice. There is thus, a ground for exploitation of one group at the hand of the other and in which clearly, the consultant has an upper hand. This is the ground for professional ethics of the consultant to redefine itself to suit the interests of the consultant and create the notion of bounded ethicality – an idea that will have profound

implications for the client consultant relations. Section 3 will deal with this concept at greater lengths.

### **Section 3: Bounded Ethicality**

Bounded ethicality as a concept is a very broad one and stretches to the wide realms of fairness, ethicality, conflicts of interest when dealing with the contingencies of managerial decision making. Several seminal works have contributed to this notion namely, Simon (1983), Moore et al. (2003), Loewenstein, Tanlu and Bazerman (2003), Kahneman and Tversky (1973/79), among many others. The idea of this essay is not running a commentary on all possible sources of this notion, but to reflect on the criticalities of the idea of ethics, its key features<sup>4</sup> that affect and condition, the bounded aspects to ethicality in consulting practices.

#### **3.1 The concept of Bounded Ethicality:**

Managerial decision making involves many different attitudes towards fairness; different people have different idiosyncratic traditions to comply with and their modus operandi, their *raison d'être*, their general ways to doing business reflect their ideas of fairness. As Chugh et al. point (2005) that, in order to understand how psychological processes work within decision making environments, one must understand the rationale behind the reactions of individuals, against personal and occupational expectations, when faced with conflicts of interests. Three strands of literature, shed light on the limitations of the conscious mind. They are, Herbert Simon's theories on bounded rationality, Kahneman and Tversky's ideas on what deviations from rational choice mean for conflict of interest and finally, the extensive literature from various Psychoanalytical commentators, who speak profoundly about the limitations of the conscious mind that gives rise to the various conflicts of interests and the inability of many decision makers, to effectively address them (See, Simon, 1983; Moore et al., 2003, Kahneman and Tversky, 1973; for Psychoanalytical commentary, see, Arnaud, 1998).

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<sup>4</sup> Features refer to : key points

It can be argued that as Chugh et al., (2005), point out that, conspicuous displays of interests and explicitly dishonest practices are not the only areas where rational choice provokes critical discussions as to what was fair, what was compromiseable fairness and what was unfairness. They argue that, tacit and guarded activities, such as favoritism, nepotism, non transparent associations between client and consultant groups, should be targeted for critical inquiry.

Therefore, the following sections will present a literature review on some very interesting commentaries on this concept. The idea is to cover the broad expanse of rational choice of personnel<sup>5</sup>, and to shed light on the reasons behind such choices.

### **3.2 Bounded Rationality in Various literatures:**

Herbert Simon (1983, P 34) referred bounded rationality as a “behavioral model [where] human rationality is very limited, very much bounded by the situation and by human computational powers”. Simon argued that alternative to common economic commentaries, human beings were naturally irrational and designed to suffer from acute biases. He challenged the normative doctrine, that humans were rational creatures and could make right and appropriate decisions at all times. Thaler (1996) furthered that idea, commenting that, “[Human beings] were dumber, nicer and weaker” than what economic theorists would represent to the society (p227-230). He adds that Human beings were naturally impressionable, weak and prone to self interest and self justification oriented actions. Kahneman and Tversky (1973/79) have commented widely on the behavioral patterns of decision makers, in ways that compel them to as Chugh et al., (2005), put it as, deviate from optimality or rationality. These researchers have made profound contributions in the field of behavioral decision sciences and in explaining the limitations of the human consciousness, and the resulting irrationality in human attitudes. (For more, See, Moore et al, 2004).

Limitations of human perception, inability of the human mind to achieve rational choice from a range of dizzying alternatives, the apparent control and automaticity of human

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<sup>5</sup> Personnel refers to both clients and consultants. Personnel denotes a decision making individual within an organization.

attitudes towards external influences in social life, have been covered by Kahneman (2002), Bargh and Wegner (1999) and Bargh and Chartrand (1999) among others, who have also connected the role of the unconscious mind to affect human decisions.

Bargh and Chartrand (1999) have claimed that the power of unconscious mind is considerable in everyday human decision making. They term this involuntary movement as the unbearable *automaticity of being*. Greenwald and Banaji (1995) have advised that the power of the unconsciousness in shaping personnel attitudes, had to be studied by employing indirect measures.

Researchers have therefore cautioned that, measurement of unconscious processes and their effects on personnel choice making, was indeed a very difficult task. Chugh et al. (2005), refer that, response latency methods are useful in measuring the relationship between the speed of response and the strength of cognitive unconscious associations, measured through millisecond level response durations, with the help of computer programmes. Other methods include, Lexical decision task (See, Macrae, Macrae, Bodesnhausen, Milne and Jetten, 1994), Sequential Priming Task (See, Fazio et al., 1995), Word completions using Unobstrusive Priming (See, Gilbert and Hixon, 1991), Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz, 1998).

The many methods used to analyse implicit or unconscious thinking, with explicit thinking or conscious thinking, aim at explaining the consequent actions taken by the personnel, according to their frame of mind. For example, an unconscious thinking process or frame of mind, will precipitate an explicit action, whereas a conscious thinking process or frame of mind, will produce a more assertive explicit action. But, as Bargh (1997) comments, that, despite credible assurances of the role of the unconscious in shaping many actions and responses of individuals, there is far less research that can help establish the connection between the unconscious system and personnel behaviour. This quandary demands a very deep research into the anatomy of bounded rationality, to explain and understand, the core structure of personnel decision making and why rationality is bound by personnel's deep psychiatric determinations, which ultimately play a role in their choices, between rationality and irrationality, morality and immorality,



ethicality and unethicality. The discussion in the following passage will help understand what binds ethicality and will also shed light as to what makes personnel behave the way they do, especially in regards to their decision making within corporate environments.

### **3.3 Anatomy of Bounded ethicality:**

Banaji and Bhaskar (2000) advocate bounded rationality as an approach to address and achieve decision making. They assert that human cognitive deficiencies harbour generic stereotypes that lead to ethical errors. Such errors “ reveal how the interaction of specific social experiences and a boundedly rational cognitive architecture jointly shape thought and behaviour” ( Banaji and Bhaskar, 2000, pp. 154). Chugh et al., (2005), have widely commented that, ethnic, social, cultural environments that were innate to the personnel, create ethical quandaries for them. This process often ‘binds’ their ethical dimensions, allowing their inner unconscious self to take control of their decision making processes. Their sense of morality is thus qualified by a bound ethicality and this unique situation allows the decision making individual, to traverse through a highly contagious arrangement of temptations of treating competence and deservingness in the same line; Such a condition encourages that one moved for a certain kind of right or a certain notion of profitability or a certain doctrine of fairness. Chugh et al. (2005), therefore assert that, the creation of an ethical blind spot arises from personnel merely ‘observing’ their relations with what was moral, deserving and self righteous - the spirit of immutability descends and ultimately, this renders the notion of conflict of interest as irrelevant and this is where the problem resides.

The problem is not that personnel rarely understand that their unconscious self, as Chugh points, preserves their bounded ethicality and projects qualities that they ‘should possess’, to prevent conflicts of interest. The problem is that, this concern for self projection and projection of what is popularly righteous, creates a situation where the projector is left unawares, of their so called *totalitarian ego* (Greenwald, 1980). This ego is incapable of establishing the projector’s real inclinations for the righteous, and is responsible for making them a part of the so called totalitarian political system. Such a system is where, “ it is necessary to remember that events happened in the desired

manner ... and if it is necessary to rearrange one's memories or to tamper with written records, then it is necessary to forget that one has done so" ( Orwell, 1949,P 176). This totalitarian ego further corrupts the personnel's awareness of their inner selves, and remarkably leaves them unconscious of this internal dilution ( Greenwald, 1980).

Therefore, as Chugh et al.(2005) claim, that it is this totalitarian ego that corrupts memories of the personnel and presents them with the doctrine of 'relevant to me'.In other words, selective knowledge, internalised stereotyping, and a very acute condition of the so called egocentric ethics , violate the personnel's natural ability to make not just a

rational choice, but an ethical choice between what was fair and what was unfair.(Epley and Caruso, 2004; Caruso, Epley Bazerman, 2006; Also see, Bazerman, 2006).So, to study the deeper effects of this corruption on the self, three strands of reasoning have been chosen.They are ways in which the 'self' assumes features that it wants to project and not necessarily what it was capable of establishing.These images are, the self as the moral, the self as the competent and self as the deserving (See,Chugh et al.,2005, Messick and Bazerman, 1996; Also see, Shapiro, 1991; Babcock, Loewenstein and Issacharoff, 1997).

### **3.4 Role of the Self and its interactions with Ethicality: Establishing Righteousness and Justifications for self observance**

#### **3.4.1: Self Righteousness**

Where the personnel wants to project themselves as honest, trustworthy and more ethically fair than others , they often tend to glorify their ways of being fairer than others.This is a notion where they want to be seen to be doing things right than doing the right things , without any attached publicity or social gratification (Baumhart, 1968; Tenbrunsel, 1998; Messick and Bazerman, 1996).As Shapiro (1991) points out, that, people justify their engaging in ethically questionable behaviour, as if through self defence.Armor (1998) therefore suggests that, personnel project their illusion of objectivity wherever, they find themselves accused of ethical discrepancies, regardless of being externally educated of such phenomena occurring around them.Kronzon and Darley

(1999) studied this attitude of personnel as their vulnerability to their own objectivity. Griffin et al., (1990) add that, it is this blinded objectivity that prevents decision makers from making appropriate predictions of not just others behaviour but also their own. Unrealistic self justification and the shallowness of unbridled objectivity, often force personnel into overconfidence and this creates room for ambiguity which is counterproductive to their business enterprise (See, Wade – Benzoni, Thomson and Bazerman, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1999; Festinger, 1957). Therefore, self recognition, self assessment and self awareness, howsoever carefully cultivated, leaves the nodes of self serving biases that are extremely difficult to completely remove (Babson and Loewenstein, 1997).

Therefore the self that projects itself as the right, does so, out of a preference for a particular outcome engineered out of their self interests, and designed to impose their version of fairness on others (Messick and Sentis, 1993). Therefore, the ethical irrationality is a result of not mere lack of commitment to or devotion for fairness, but, a biased adultery of information ( Diekmann et al., 1997). Jon Haidt (2001) comically comments that, this was indeed a condition of the paradox, of an emotional dog and a rational tail. The self may try or appear to be trying to reach a certain moral high ground through careful rational choice of ‘fair’ alternatives, but, their inner self interests, biases and stereotypes, corrupt their ethical terrain, leaving them as a mere extension of their objectivity. The self gradually loses interest in establishing their credentials for righteousness, but moves into a territory for self justification.

### **3.4.2: Self Justification**

There is a noted tendency among many personnel that they try to assert their skills such as cooperativeness, decision making, negotiating, rationality and others, as superior to others ( See, Kramer, 1994). This self promotion and assertiveness of the self as the followers of the preferred performance standards is a very interesting phenomena (Dunning, 1999). A sense of positive illusion enables them to believe that they were performing better than others and as Chugh (2005) points out, this creates unique biases that may foster a belief of a certain ‘holier than thou’ attitude among individuals within

a group environment. Taylor (1989) suggests that, most people view themselves as more competent than others. Taylor and Brown (1988) also add, that sometimes positive illusion can create positive outcomes like self esteem, confidence and ability to manage contingencies. But, what is important to note here is that, such positive illusions are put to crude tests when these individuals are met with ethical decision making contexts.

As Allison et al. (1989) comment that, optimistic illusions are inconsistent with objective data available to justify their viability in managerial environments. In other words, there is very little evidence to suggest that self congratulatory positivist attitude does really translate to organizational performance (Also, see Bachman et al., 1986). As Chugh (2005) points that, it is this self justification, this internal worship of self capabilities that often pushes people to unquestionable self righteousness and this is dangerous, for them, for the organization they work for, and also for others that they work with. Ethical challenge is only compounded where the personal self engages in heedless personal observance and deters the inner conscience to question such acts. The idea of deservedness loses itself into a complex determination of self promotion. This causes ethical improprieties.

The above discussions clarify how psychological constraints such as unconscious biases, conscious choices of self promotion and importantly, inability to diagnose natural inclination for certain determinations, often prevent organizational members to take the right, the ethical or the moral judgement call. As Chugh et al. (2005), point out that conflict of interest are of two kinds, the visible and the invisible. Whereas the visible conflicts of interest arise out of self righteous actions, the more insidious and invisible conflicts of interest arise out of deeply grounded biases of the individuals and these need to be studied in the light of managerial environments, particularly how personnel make decisions and the ways they manage their relations with other groups.

Section 4 will discuss further, through case illustrations, the various ramifications of bounded ethicality for client consultant relations, in how it shapes conflicts of interest and deception. The various case discussions will help understand, how and to what extent the

literature on bounded ethicality, conflicts of interest and client consultant relationships, hold truth in real world situations studying 21 management consultants in three different geographical locations across Europe.

#### **Section 4: Case Discussions**

As pointed under methods in section 1, Tim, Bill and John are the Principals of companies where interviews were conducted. Tim, is the Principal of a major consulting company in the investment banking sector. He is a seasoned banker himself and has many clients, working in the derivatives market. He is based out of Paris, France. Bill, is the Principal of one of Europe's largest strategy consultancies with hundred of clients spread across the world. Bill is based out of London, U.K. John heads one of the largest PR companies in the world in their strategic divisions based out Frankfurt, Germany. As explained in the methods section of section 1, six associate and senior Partners each of the three companies were interviewed. That is, 3 Associates and 3 senior partners. So, in total 21 management consultants were interviewed. However, applying the so called snowball effect, many other voices also emerged. For the sake of focus, these voices will be presented in the discussions, without any additional categorisations. John, Bill and Tim are all Pseudonyms and the same approach will be applied while citing their Associates and senior Partners.

##### **4.1 Case Analysis:**

The informants (the consultants) presented some unique similarities in their perceptions of the consulting industry and the ways they responded to their clients' various needs. Dominant thoughts that came out of the consultants were, their self interest for reaping considerable financial dividends for their work. Their overarching assertion was that their clients were knowledge starved and were incapable of solving their own problems and hence the demand for consultants (See, Armbruster and Kipping, 2002; Ruef, 2002). Other important considerations for these established consultants were, their desire to have their ways with the client and to be accepted as right and just. The consultants spoke about their various experiences handling clients of several kinds,

working in several sectors and in many different geographical areas, but they never mentioned any positive lessons they learnt out of their consulting exercises. Never did they mention anything positive about their clients. It was disappointing to note, from the various experiences cited by the consultants, that their principal motivation of consulting was to achieve professional success out of delivering solutions, they thought were best suited to their clients. They often asserted their professional success, in terms of their monetary gains and their general outlook of consulting success was, how fast they brought about their desired changes and more, got all recognition for such performances. These responses will be presented below under set headings.

For sake of clarity, the key correspondents have been given Pseudonyms. In Principle, 21 management consultants were interviewed. But, applying the snowball effect, many other voices also came through. These were from insiders, clients, ex clients and advisors who also enriched the process with insider information. As indicated earlier, three Principal Consultants (often termed as Presidents of large consulting companies) were interviewed and six each of their Associate senior partners were interviewed (i.e. 3 Associate and 3 Senior Partners). The three companies included a financial advisory to the investment banks, a large market research and lobbying company specialising in PR and a major European strategy consultancy. The three principals will be referred to as John, Tim and Bill. Similarly their senior partners and Associates will be referred to as Associate to John or Partner to Bill. The snowball effect brought in several insider voices and they were young or low level workers whose voices came through during the face to face interviews. These voices deserve presence in the thesis, however their names need not be put separately. They will be presented as in special quotes.

#### **4.2 The idea of Management consulting:**

The theoretical constructs of 'professional' consulting were discussed in earlier sections. The discussion revealed that the very nature of the profession being ambiguous, the idea to quantify productivity and to qualify professionalism, was not an easy task (Alvesson, 2008; Kipping and Engwall, 2002). These theoretical constructs resounded with the empirical findings, when the consultants interviewed, presented their unique

definitions for the trade. Their responses revealed the fundamental ambiguity surrounding this profession, especially in discussions on professionalism and productivity, on who was more important and on what consulting was all about. Tim, the consultant to the investment banking sector, defined consulting as a “ commercial association with a client,” while another consultant John, the Principal to a major Market research and PR firm, termed it as, “a sale of consulting products” to the client “customer”. Bill, Principal of one of Europe’s largest strategy consultancies, defined a consultant as, “ anyone who is hired to provide a set service to the client”. Associate to Tim, asserted consulting as an arrangement where, “a consultant brings life to the client’s affairs. A client keeps the consulting trade alive. So, this is a mutually inclusive relation”.

The more interesting contributions came in from Senior partners who dwelled on the question of who was more important in this relationship. Alan, senior partner to Bill, said, “ the client’s satisfaction was more important,” but often defected this when challenged by questions like, if political neutrality was better than intelligent integrity or not. Management consultants almost overwhelmingly, rejected the notion of political neutrality saying, that there was no such a thing possible in the course of a relationship , which was as ‘commercial’ as it was, bounded by constraints and where there was no ready measure for the ideal relation. As Luhmann (2005) asserts that, it is because personnel<sup>6</sup> were so prone to qualifying their success, merely on the basis of their being in business, this commercial aspect of their relation with their clients, is what gives them the reason to assume subjectivity. They equate professionalism to “earning money!” They increasingly resort to individualism (Luhmann, 1995).

This individualistic pursuit often gives rise to confusion. From a position of trying to understand the client’s needs, consultants adopt a strange aggressive posture of impressing on the clients, what they ought to consider as their needs. Bion(1961) refers this as the therapist, who by trying to induct themselves into the patient’s position, feels being manipulated. Bion further asserts that, the therapist was constantly aware that, their self subjectivation to the patient’s reality, was indeed like dreaming someone else’s fantasy (Bion, 1961). So, the consultant is always self assured that, their business was not

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<sup>6</sup> Personnel refers to Individuals within decision making environments.

personal and hence required an intellectual and moral distancing to the object of the decisions (See, Bauman,1993).This moral distance,coupled with a growing fetish for self service, would translate moral instincts into calculating instincts.(See, ten bos and Willmott, 2001).Therefore, personnel develop an attitude, to create a moral neutrality through a hierarchal and a personal distance ( Muhr, 2009).

Such an attitude, would influence consultants, to create and maintain a space between their personal objectives and their professional objectives.Their ethics would be bound by their personal visions of success, their professional requirements of being 'seen' to be of use to the client and their moral reasoning to establish a balance between their professional and personal objectives.(Chugh et al., 2005) Any questions on professional integrity, client dedication, and personal fulfillment could stir the disingenuous consultant.The interviews achieved in just that.

Most of the interviewees showed a very high degree of angst when asked on their ethical consistency.For example, P1 nearly staged a walk out when asked to define his professional ethics, twice.While the researchers did this to establish their consistency, the interviewee consultant was so infuriated that they questioned the use of,"such a stupid question".John and their associates reponded with strange precision often resorting to one liners like, " That is a very subjective question" or, " Please do not turn this into some academic discussion.We do our work and that is professionalism for we get paid for our services and we do deliver to the clients needs".Perhaps as discussed in section 2, the consultants suffer from a sense of projective identification(See,Bion, 1961) of their perceived worth to client.This worth extends to the industry when they naturalise and contextualise their personal worth to their professional stature ( See, Jacques, 1955; Also see, Menzies, 1970).To them, their professionalism comes as their natural behaviour ( See, Gibbard, Hartman and Mann, 1974; Wells, 1970) and this is where the problem resides.They extrapolate their consulting careers as something that encapsulates their measure of professionalism and of productivity. Bill summed it up quite well as ,"We are in the industry for 30 years.These questions on professionalism and productivity do not apply to us.We have been around and done all that!" The other issues that were questioned on was, their relations with their clients and how they managed it.



The participants would often avoid going into details about their relations with their clients. As discussed previously, projected identification (Pemer and Werr, 2005), may have had an impact on how they had performed their tasks and had customised their consulting role ( Redl, 1963; Wells, 1990) .This would have led to experiences of role suction (Redl, 1963) and Scapegoating ( Jacques, 1955; Dunphy, 1978).To explain these experiences would be to embrace a lie detector test! This the consultants would not entertain.Accordingly,when consultants were asked to give examples of specific incidents that helped them understand their client better and how they had rated their performance, the consultants often provided very abrupt answers.There was a remarkable symmetry among them in their assertion, that it was the consultant who brought “life” to the client environment.Such assertions could only put forward their projected identification of their high worth to the client. It was clear they believed and asserted equally strongly, their control over the client and on their performance. As Eril , associate to Bill, referred, “ We know we are good.If we are not good, we know that.There is no sense in celebrating it”.

All in all, most interviewees came up with a very structured and mostly animated responses to how they saw their association with their clients.From the interviews conducted, it was clear that, consultants had their unique definition for this profession.They recognised that there was “ give and take” in this relation, but as one consultant John , pointed out, “ the giver is not actually giving away and the receiver is not just taking in”.To sum it up, the empirical data helped build the argument that most consultants understood the commercial aspect to the relation, which established a system of give and take.Their argument furthered that, the receiver was also a giver of a certain product ( e.g. the client was receiving a service and was giving out pay to the consultant).Similarly, the giver was also receiving something ( providing consultancy and receiving pay).The proposition is that management consulting was nothing but an “ exchange of things”, between two parties, presumably conducted on a level playing field.However, the very fact that the consultants were armed with “ superior political and technical knowhow” to affect this process of exchange , they were at a stronger position to as one consultant referred, “ qualify the judgement as to who receives what, how and when”.

The consultants interviewed explained, that they employed many ways to qualify their judgement of their clients. They expressed that it was in their discretion to shape their service delivery, organize and develop their understanding of the trade, establish their professional commitments and appropriate their knowledge of what was acceptable and what was not. The most important thing that gradually emerged out of this discussion was, that consultants had a hard time balancing their personal and professional goals and this affected their understanding of this profession. The idea of self projection and taking proprietorship of this profession, can give rise to notions of exploitation, control and victimhood. Such discussions should be based on the ways consultants understood their clients and addressed their various needs. The following passages will address this issue.

### **4.3 Understanding the client: The consultant's attitude**

When asked what made a consultant's work easier, an interviewee replied that, "A listening client who had the guts to make decisions based on the consultant's advice, howsoever unconventional such advice may be". To the same question, another participant responded, "A client that knows he needs us for the solutions to their problems". When the same question was asked, to three associate partners to some fine consulting companies, there was a close similarity in their responses. They all agreed that, a listening client, a less demanding client, a less questioning client and a more flexible client was what made their work easy. The shocking responses came from the more informal meetings with two senior partners in a major European consulting organization, in their answer to what made a good client and what did not. One answered, "an over indulging client is very offputting", while the other claimed that, "I know what to do when I find a talkative client. I give them something to talk about while I do my job".

The responses conveyed that, trust in a client consultant relation, was perhaps a manufactured notion, created by a technically superior, 'cunning' consultant, who had the ideological will and the intellectual capacity to sell their many euphemisms of success to their 'needy' clients ( e.g. Kubr, 2002; Perner and Werr, 2005, Also see, Kehrer and

Schade, 1995). The other important notion that emerged was that consultants were aware of the ambiguities associated to qualifying their services, which would make it even more difficult for their “less informed” clients, to measure their performance. In such a situation, the clients could be “handled with polite disregard”. This attitude of the consultant finds thorough criticism under the Critical consulting literature, which as a move away from the functionalist approach, questions the idea of judging the consultant’s success, merely through their service delivery ( See, Fincham and Clark, 2002; Kipping and Armbruster, 1998, Greiner and Metzger, 1983).

Following the critical approach, Perner and Werr (2005) differentiates between the buyer client who has the capacity to handle the consultant and to exercise an effective control on them, the Partner client who could somehow manage a level playing field with the consultant, but would remain open to the consultant’s various manipulations and the Victim client, who was in total control of the consultant. The responses from the consultants interviewed, put all three categories as “controllable”. With remarkable profanity, interviewees brushed aside the question, as to if they had an emotional relationship with their clients. Further, they claimed that, having understood the client’s knowledge deficits, they were capable of challenging and controlling the psychodynamics of the relationship (Schein, 1999; McGonagle and Vella, 2001). Their comments further solidify this notion:

*As Management consultants [We], focus on working while keeping the emotions out of work and office. People are paying huge amounts for our work, we are not here to joke around and we know that we have to perform. The client should see that we mean business. ( Tim, 42 year old, Principal consultant to one of the finest niche consulting firms assisting Investment Banks and has clients in the derivatives market also ).*

A sense of strange seriousness came out of this response. It was ironical that the interviewee assumed they had to keep emotions out of work but towards the end of the comment, referred that, the client should witness this seriousness. The comment shows that consultants equate professionalism as a technocratic vocation where service delivery was all about performing certain tasks. The effort of the consultant had to be to present a

picture that matched the values and meanings of a certain situation faced by the client. As long as this was done, professionalism was maintained. The cost sensitivity of the consultants also stand out. They really know they are worth their time!

John, the 50 year old Principal consultant to a specialised market research and consulting firm, responded to the same question that:

*Emotional involvement here is only [that I ] am emotionally attached to the changes that I want to bring for the client. To see those policies enacted is indeed an emotional demand.*

John, established that, consultants were keen to see, that their policies and strategies were implemented and that they pressed as a major demand off their clients. But, another consultant, a 32 year old Associate consultant to John, came out with a rather candid statement. He asserted that:

*To be frank I simply don't care. Offcourse, our reputation depends on how clients see us. But, most client managers are either our previous colleagues, or seniors we have worked with or juniors in our previous roles in some organization.*

This comment is a classic example of a consultant's natural response to a question on emotions. It is clear money is the attachment and the consultant makes it very clear that, by knowing insiders in the client organization, their professionalism was already certified and unquestionable. The following comment also sounded the same tone:

*We are objective workers tied to services we work hard to provide and We are judged on how we do our work. There is no time or energy left for this form of romance. (Bill, 42 year old Principal Consultant to one of Europe's largest strategy consultancies)*

The next comment however outshone all others.

*Well, you could expect we are emotional. We get emotional when we have stakes in the client, otherwise, it will be a lie we claim we did. (45 year old Senior Partner to Bill)*

This comment is one of the most interesting ones. The consultant clearly builds on the line of the thesis argument that professionalism for most consultants, ended with service delivery. By stakes, the consultant could allude to many things. This may include their pay, their professional success but this could also include their reputation to the client and to the industry. In all circumstances, the attachment was personal: *What am I getting out of all this?* As long as this question found adequate answers, the consultant would continue with their engagement with the client. Their focus was on Professionalism, on being visible, on being in business and being known as consultant. But, as this thesis argues, how can professionalism translate into productivity unless the consultants demonstrated they had active stakes in their client's welfare? To this the Tim, Principal consultant to a large consultancy serving Investment banks and clients on the derivatives market referred:

*Emotional as in, what do you mean?*

This response revealed a sense of technocratic, objective driven philosophy of the consultants, that placed any 'human' attachment to the client and the work environment, as one consultant put "pitiful irrelevance". Consultants claimed that their purpose was, to arrive at a client premises, with a set of methodologies that were to be customised to the client needs, and solutions were to be implemented over a set period of time. Involvement with the client is inherent in the relation and since this relation was result oriented, there was no need for any additional "sentimental embellishment". Consultants interviewed claimed their emotional attachments was to their service delivery and to ensure that certain products were delivered. They rejected the notion of making any personal investment in the client affairs as they opined, that was simply not beneficial for the consultant and also detrimental to the client's interests.

So, from the discussions above it is clear that consultants from our research, appeared to adopt a very technocratic style of service delivery. The notion of practising consulting at arms length from the client's deeper psychological constructs, was purposeful for it

helped as one consultant said , “develop a very objective solution for the client”.This was a bit hard to realise considering, in almost all interview sessions, consultants were very emphatic about how much they had to contribute to the client’s cause and how the very commercial nature of their association, forced them to be so objective.The findings under this section revealed how consultants, saw that their professional commitments and conventions, should “numb [their] moral impulses and dehumanize them”.(Kaulingfreks, 2005, p. 38). It helped realize that, consultants had a sense of intellectual dishonesty which was evident when they were asked to describe their understanding of ideal professionalism and what made them great consultants.Specific examples were sought and these examples brought out some serious questions on their real motives behind being in this profession.

#### **4.4 The client consultant relation and ideal professionalism:**

When questioned as to how the consultants defined ideal professionalism, Tim,the Principal to the large consultancy within the Investment banking sector, responded:

*People are paying huge amounts for our work,we are not there to joke around and we know that we have to perform.Equally, clients need to understand we are not magicians.we may have our own discrepencies and issues and we need space when we work.I hate interference and too many questions when I am designing solutions.I can entertain input when I am discussing the problem.I know what to do when I know what to solve.*

The comment above sums up a seasoned consultant’s attitude to work.It impresses the consultant’s need for independence during their assignment.It was clear,that the consultant would not ‘tolerate’ any meddling with their work from ‘anyone’.So, the idea of a client consultant collaboration, is lost to the consultant’s attitude, who assumes that such collaborations cannot be entertained for the cause of proficiency. So, the spirit of collaboration suffers from a crude caution from the consultant, that their client’s involvement could hinder their own proficiency. Proficiency as the consultant believed, had to be coined by them.In this case, proficiency demanded independence and non

interference in the consultant's work. Within such a definition, the client simply did not have the capacity to quantify a consultant's worth, it was the consultant who would enunciate its meaning to the client.

To get a different perspective, Tim's senior partner was asked the same question, to which he replied:

*[My professionalism is my ] ability to manage my personal expectation while offering the client what I am being paid for..In other words, I am justifying my profession so I am professional.*

But, when asked to cite some examples, he said:

*Many and I cannot just list them for you. You must understand that my affairs with my client is as private as are the specific incidents in my consultancy.*

The idea of making a solemn, nuanced answer to a question as trick as defining professionalism is followed by a blunt refusal to give specific examples to establish that being said. This could allude to many things. The consultant may have been caught lying of their sincerity towards their clients, or, the consultant may be fiercely secretive of their professional details (such details could be altered to prevent privacy but outright rejection was a different thing), and this could be another part of their understanding of professionalism, or lack , thereof. More importantly, their solemn quiet, reservations for opening up and to answer, was indicative of their intellectual dishonesty. Further, three answers to the same question come from other Associate consultants to Tim, John and Bill as:

*[Professionalism is ] getting the job done and getting your pay on time! ( Associate consultant to Tim, 30 year old )*

*[Professionalism is ] Getting your worth and offering what you ae paid for - that is professionalism.(Associate to John)*

*Performing as a professional consultant, you demonstrate that you are not a kid in the block. (Senior partner to Bill)*

In all the three comments above, consultants define their professionalism as some form of a constrained rationality, that Herbert Simon (1983) refers to as bounded rationality. The one liners represented a sense of condensed belief systems and a sense of immutability of a certain kind of faith. As Simon argues, human beings were naturally irrational and suffered from several biases. So, in spite of overt shows of belief in a certain kind of rationality (e.g. pay, independence, control on client), consultants tend to deviate from optimality or ideal rationality (Kahneman and Tversky, 1973). Such limitations of human consciousness expose the irrationalities of human decision making. Bargh and Chartrand (1999) refer to this as the automaticity of the being. The consultants may consciously claim to be considering the client's needs and appropriating their problem solving skills as their professionalism. But as Greenwald and Banaji (1995) assert, that, it was the working of the unconscious mind that would force human decisions. The consultant would be forced to behave the way they would behave, by their internal biases, unconscious constructs of values or lack thereof and with a commitment to fulfilling their commitment to being a consultant than being a consultant 'for' the client.

As Tom, Associate to Bill, explains: *Professionalism is all about performing as a seasoned professional. Deliver a fine service with no room for errors and in case you made mistakes, depending on your client, either keep shut or say it as it is. Put it simply, a successful consultant cannot make mistakes.*

This comment also revealed a characteristic feature of the consulting trade. The consultant's sensitivity for their projected identification (Chugh et al., 2005) with the high brow problem solver, makes them assert, that they were immune to making mistakes. Their audacity extends beyond measures when such a consultant assumes, they could almost play God! This is revealed when Tom says, "I simply cannot make mistakes and If I do, then only I can find out and it is I who chooses what or whether to do anything about it". As Bill, Principal Consultant one of Europe's largest Strategy firms says:



*A professional consultant is someone who knows how to use his client to his advantage. After all how else would you identify a successful management consultant : One who runs after clients or one who clients run after?*

The two comments above, made some clear indications. Consultants equated their professional success based on their control over the clients. Their ability to plant ideas and politicise the clients' psyche ( Muhr & Whittle, 2010), to make them choose the merits of a certain product , to accept the consultant's words as some gospel truth, was what identified a really successful consultant. Professionalism, according to the interviewees was their ability to remain unquestioned of the quality of their services. Such assertions, while exposing the arrogance of the consultants towards the clients, also reflected their acute insincerity towards their professional commitments – They were clear they were not assigned to “ serve the clients”, they were “ hired to assist the clients achieve certain objectives”.

So, as discussed in the preceding sections, the case discussions help understand further, that consultants show no regards for making any deep personal investments in understanding their clients more and to help generate a system of mutual benefit in their relation. The overemphasis of “ We are doing”, is indicative of consultant's sense of distancing from the clients' environment and often presenting a confusing picture of the professionalism, which they claim is all about reaping benefits out of their engagement, which otherwise, had to be a system of mutual benefit.

This presents grounds where the consultants' inherent motives could be questioned.

#### **4.5 Motives behind consulting:**

Through various questions on professionalism, consultants expressed their sense of distance from the clients' affairs. They often tried to establish that, the purpose behind consulting was to deliver services and stay away from any involvements in the client's internal affairs. When they were asked about specific examples as to how they realised

their motives in consultancy, some amazing facts came up. The following comments by interviewees help understand further:

*I remember working with a client once upon a time, where, inspite of my extraordinary performance, I faced some groups of managers, who always kept distance from me and at times made my work difficult. So, the next time I went in, I made sure, I taught them some hard lessons. (Tim, Principal to a consultancy serving major investment Banks)*

The comment makes a strange revelation. A consultant's struggle for control over the client's affairs as explained in Section 2 and 3 of this thesis, find reflection in the words of this correspondent. It is clear that, the consultant did attempt at creating a positive illusion of their involvement in the client's affairs. As Perner and Werr (2005) posit, this consultant cites an occasion of a clear breach of trust between themselves and their client. The consultant's words are indicative of the lack of their ethical considerations for their client. So, as Banaji and Bhaskar (2000) refer that, human cognitive deficiencies harbour generic stereotypes that lead to ethical errors. Chugh et al., (2005) further add that, ethnic, social, cultural environments that were innate to the personnel, would bind their ethical dimensions. As Chugh et al (2005) comment that, this situation creates a blind spot where a consultant would merely observe their relations with their client, but, will be unable to distance from their internal biases and constructs of morality and therefore, become always keen to assert their self righteousness. Greenwald would call this the totalitarian ego (1980). This ego is what corrupts ethics, forces consultants to selective memory and robs them of their natural ability to choose between the fair and the unfair (See, Epley and Caruso, 2004). When a consultant says that they returned to an old client to settle old scores, it exposes their fragmented ethical constructs, their professional poverty and their corrupt morality.

Another similar response came from John, the Principal consultant to a large consultancy into Market research and lobbying:

*I was once consulting to a major non profit group and man, it was pathetic. This lot had never hired consultants and were keeping every account of every cent they were spending on me. I was really pissed all throughout.*

As Perner and Werr (2005) would categorise, the client in this situation had been a buyer client, who as Schein (1988) would define, was in a very strong control of the consultant. The consultant naturally, had such a dark explanation for his experiences with them. The idea that a demanding client could enforce such stringent authority over their administrative outlays, irked the consultant. The consultant does show angst and a sense of emotional involvement with the client and the organization; however, this involvement is for their autonomy and not essentially transferrable to genuine interests in their client's welfare. The consultant positions their argument where they present their self as the moral, competent and deserving of the laurels, due for them. This was the spirit of self righteousness; professionalism had once again been positioned as the consultant's prerogative. Bounded ethicality was served so bluntly! (e.g. Messick and Bazerman, 1996; Shapiro, 1991).

Another interviewee also commented on their specific experience where they had issues implementing their professionalism:

*I was retained by a large IT consulting firm with operations in more than 75 countries worldwide. I was very young then and it was one of my earliest projects. I struggled to manage expectations of some old farts who would question everything I had to say to them. Even the pay was shitty. What kind of professionalism is when you are underpaid and expected to deliver? I left it prematurely. (Associate to Bill, the Principal to one of Europe's largest strategy consultancies )*

This comment makes it very clear about the motif of the consultant; It is no surprise that the consultant resorts to use of expletives while describing their old clients. Professionalism had lost to emotional outbursts, internal biases of the consultant were beaming through.

When asked what made them become a consultant in the first place, some of the responses were as follows:

*I am the consultant for people consult me to achieve what they want to achieve.I like to consult because I enjoy my privileges and the power this gives me to do something great.I like the joys of leaving a long lasting legacy on an organization and its people.I like the global travel, the perks and ofcourse the cool contacts I get.( Associate to Bill, 45 year old)*

This comment is strange because of several issues.Not only does the consultant make an objective stance on their presence in the organization, they also explain the source of their behaviour.Client consultant relations may well be conducted on a level playing field but as Schein ( 1999) would categorise, the consultant here would be more of the transactional and careeristic kind, treating the professional rewards of the trade, as a direct translation of their high net worth.Consulting affords them the luxuries few can ‘dream off’ and hence, that was the real motive behind being in this sector.The idea of moving mountains as it were , for clients simply had no substance to them.Consulting was a source for perks, to ‘live a dream life!’”

The following three comments below exposed another trend among consutants:

*I am more of a mentor than a consultant.I bring revolutionary changes in how organizations think.I hypnotise them, I make them do what I want them to , I make them think what I want them to think. ( Senior Partner to John’s firm)*

*I make or break the client’s goals.Power, money and fame and above all, authority to affect change that I want , on people I choose.what more can you expect from a profession?(John)*

*I like the power my role brings me.In case I have a client that wants me to negotiate on my power , then I know what to do to them.(Senior Partner to Bill)*

The three comments above express self righteousness and self justification in a rather crude fashion. The consultants present a sense of self triumphalism. Griffin et al., (1990) call this blinded objectivity, while, Amor (1998) explains, that this attitude instead of presenting their strengths, exposes the inner vulnerabilities of the people acting in such a way. Babson and Loewenstein (1997) clarifies further that, self recognition and self justification to the extent that appears in the above comments, creates self serving biases for the consultants and they become extremely hard to remove, especially after prolonged periods of time. Biases graduate into arrogance and consultants affected to such conditions, develop a tendency of closure and they tend to impose their version of fairness on others ( e.g. Messick and Sentis, 1993). Aply, another interviewee responds:

*Why should I tell you this? What kind of interview is this? Do you want me to tell you what you want to hear?(Associate to Bill).* Associate to Tim also sounded along the same lines.

From a wide range of formal , informal, structured and unstructured interviews conducted across a range of consulting companies and a range of locations within Europe, among consultants operating among different sectors, it was amazing to see a strange sense of homogeneity in the responses. Interviews in most occasions agreed to the same notions of their superiority to clients, emphasised their demand for independence in the engagement and asserted their ability to *make or break* the clients, as it were. Such forms of overt shows of arrogance only helped establish our thesis proposition that, neither consultants nor their clients had a clear way to understand, measure and enunciate their devotion towards each other. But since this was a discussion on management consultancy, the onus lied with the consultants to ensure that they delivered services that suited the clients. The thesis supposed that perhaps , it was the ethical ineptitude of consultants that led to the lack of any standard measurement to test the success of any consulting performance. The various interviews conducted throughout a wide range of senior industry leaders, presented an astonishing similarity in the ways in which consultants spoke the same voices of - their understanding of the profession, their understanding and attitude towards the clients and above all, their motives behind being in this profession.

The ideas of bounded ethicality and client consultant collusive practices that were discussed in the earlier sections found amazing reflections in the various case examples obtained through the empirical research. They were explained in this section through the various interviewee responses. In the following section, all core theoretical concepts discussed in this thesis, will be brought together with the research questions outlined, in the very beginning of this thesis.

### **Section 5: Empirical Evidence and Thesis Questions**

The case discussions in section 4 clearly show that the perception of high profile consultants towards their clients was far from devotion. Successful consultancy was defined as merely a profession, where delivery of set outputs was the best measure of successful consultancy. The more powerful element in these responses were the ways in which the consultants treated their relation to their clients. Ethical parameters were never discussed and all that the participants showed affection for, was adherence to their so called professionalism. In the words of a consultant, “We go to a client to do our job. We do it and there is nothing more to that. There is no need to take this into some serious academic romance. This is business and let us stick to that”.

Therefore, to summarise the key issues discussed in the prior sections 2 (client consultant relations and grounds for collusion) and 3 (Bounded ethicality in client consultant relations), clients and consultants are equally responsible for ethical discrepancies in their relationship. The ability of a cunning consultant to deceive a technically inferior client is compounded, when that client was unengaging with the changes that they were paying for. Similarly, a committed consultant genuinely devoted to assisting clients achieve their desired outputs can be restricted by an overambitious, uninformed client, who may have a long wish list of deliverables, but may lack the creative vision and the flexibility to adopt and implement the solutions advised by the consultant. Therefore, this makes the clients and the consultants, both stakeholders in the resulting productivity regime in the organization. But, since the thesis recognised that consulting was a self censoring

profession, the discussion had to focus on the consultants, on their definitions on consulting and as to how they performed their standardization process.

So, to answer the thesis questions :

***.What is so special about client consultant relations that creates the structure of bounded ethicality and forces either groups to evolve conflict of interests, which in turn encourages them to impose a regime of compromises within the deliverables?***

As discussed in sections 2 and 3, bounded ethicality as Chugh et al.(2005),describe in their works, is a product of both clients and consultants forcefully rationalising their individual stances thereby diluting the ethical constructs of their collaboration.As discussed in the previous sections, bounded ethicality is a wide concept which commentators would define as, any limitation of the decision maker or someone who aides decision making process (in this case that of the client's) that led into deviations from not just rational choice but a deviation from ethical choice.While deviation from rational choice would lead into retarded productivity, deviations from ethical choice would lead into unprofessionalism ( Simon, 1983; Moore et al., 2003; Loewenstein, Tanlu and Bazerman, 2003).The absence of any extensive, thoroughly interated and universally acceptable professional standard to measure consultant's sincerity for their clients and to ensure proficient service delivery, makes it very difficult to measure consultant's performance and to successfully define professionalism.

As discussed in the sections above, that because of various limitations, be it , projective identification ( Bion, 1961; Jacques, 195; Menzies, 1970) arising out of Information deficit and the resulting power play, to creation of a regime of compromises where both parties were involved, client consultant relations are bound for the shared destiny, that clients and consultants are encased within.Ethicality is bound when consultants start pleasing clients by telling them things they want to hear than what they should hear.They become repositories of a certain behaviour (See, Gibbard, Hartman and Mann, 1974; Krantz et al. 1990) Alternatively, economic pressures, demand for quick fix and immediate solutions, often force knowledge deficient clients, to absolve the consultants

of their doings and accept solutions that may not be ideal for them. The obvious consequences include poor service delivery, and retarded productivity (de Caluwe and Stoppelenburg, 2003; Werr and Perner, 2005).

Therefore, it can be concluded that, it is not pure deficiency of trust that results in corruption of ethical control in client consultant relations. The speciality of this relation (Schein, 1988) is that, in spite of high awareness of both clients and consultant, of their limitations and their sensitivities to certain issues, they still were susceptible to accept their stakes in a collaboration of bounded ethics (Perner and Werr, 2005). In such an arrangement, clients take consulting solutions for granted, not for their pure quality and but for that they were convinced of their perceived worth! The consultant somehow emerges as the party in control of the affairs. Compromises are not really in terms of accepting poor services from consultants, compromises are when clients accept a consultant's words to equate their high proficiency. Checks and balances are needed to ensure there was professional anxiety for consultants to perform and this is more required for familiar consultants working for retainerships or renewable long term contracts ) See, Kubr, 2002; Schein, 2002; Greiner and Metzger, 1983).

***.What makes consultants behave the way do, in terms of ethics, morality and devotion and is there a way to rationalise their conduct?***

As discussed in the sections 2, 3 and then analysed in section 4, it is clear that consultants in most occasions, are subject to a state of projected identification of their high worth (Chugh, et al., 2005). They are in a position where they feel in control of, their importance for their client and to their profession. The notion that they play the 'savior', 'doctor', 'artist', 'leader' and many other roles for the clients, give an impression of their self serviced importance. Their importance for consulting was profoundly selfish. It is so because having conducted the literature reviews and the following multi layered interviews, the most prominent voice from the many consultants was their commitment to their profession. In many instances, this commitment sounded more like their commitment to fulfilling their self interests with use of expressions like, 'high revenues', 'international travel', 'financial rewards' and 'power' in the industry.



With a few exceptions, our research could not locate even a single consultant making a consistent, committed and a sincere expression to their clients and no where did we locate the language of devotion. Expressions like, “ I really care about my client,” “ We miss our client”, “ We suffered losses and worked extra hours to save our client’s interests”, “ We went out of our commitments to help our client” – These expressions were never found. The closest expression of care received from consultants was, “ We did not sue our client even after a delay of three weeks to our payment”.

So, it can be said , that consultants behave the way they do, for they believe that consulting was a typical trade where objectivity, decision making and ability to manufacture bespoke changes for the clients was all that was important. The illusion of their objectivity (Armor, 1990), would force them into overconfidence about not just themselves, but of their clients (Griffin et al.,1990), and in such technocracy, they will discard any romance for the clients and affection to their genuine welfare. To reiterate the common voice of the interviewees : Consulting is policy oriented activity, the real outcomes of any policies lies in their actual implementation by the client management and client workforce; this was not the consultant’s ‘headache’!

*.So,with real world examples and case discussions with several management consultants in three different countries, how do the thesis propositions hold truth?*

The thesis assumed that clients and consultants were in the same boat so far as mutual awareness and sensitivities to their relations was concerned. The premise was to assume that consultants were as good or, as bad as the clients. The literatures on client consultant relations were studied to understand the factors that affected their relation adversely. These factors included, individual interests, need to project positive identification leading to fabrication and effects of factors like information deficit, trust deficit and knowledge deficit in between the clients and the consultants, resulting in compromises and collusive practices. Following Bauman’s idea of moral distance, consultants’ responses can be read

as their bounded ethics which undermine essential personal morality by creating moral distance from the object of their decisions( Bauman, 1993; tenBos, 1997)

The interviews clarified that the consultants were far too powerful with their ability to not just manufacture changes for the clients, but to convince the clients that they were of their perceived worth. This framed consciousness of the consultants, their power play to assume dominance in relations (McGonagle & Vella, 2001), politics of planting new ideas into the client environment and to engineer changes for the sake of it( Muhr, S & Whittle, A, 2009), all create an aura of deception around them. They create moral distances (Bauman, 1993) from doing things right, and resorting to a sense of self righteousness as one consultant would put it: “ I have been around for over 30 years and I am no kid”.

The ideas of self justification, self righteousness and self projection as discussed in section 2 , co-create the notion of bounded ethicality described in section 3. When translated through the interview responses in section 4, it was clear that it was this ambiguity in bureaucratic ethics led into bounded ethicality (Kaulingfreks, R.,2005; Chugh et al., 2005), which expressed itself as projected identification of high self worth, translated itself into self justification and the net product was the true meaning of productivity lost to a compromise ridden connotation called professionalism. Professionalism that had no ethical import, no emotional construct, no rational substance and no moral control, would be an occupation whose standards everyone would be oblivious to. This would corrupt any prospect the clients had for a productive engagement from their consultants.

It is clear that the research establishes that, *management consultants do not have a clear way to understand, measure and enunciate their devotion towards their client. Professionalism to a successful consultant meant their being in business. The attitude to judge monetary growth to productive engagement with clients, spell out a severe sense of self righteousness where moral, ethical and professional standards are all neutralised to one regime of self justification. This is a disorder and this needs to change,*

*to change the image of this important industry. The onus is with the consultants for only they were capable of qualifying this highly self standardized profession.*

Having studied in details, the literature on client consultant relations (Kehrer and Schade, 1995; Kaas and Schade, 1995; Glucker and Armbruster, 2003, Zucker, 1986; Giddens , 1990; Schein 1988 and others), the various factors that affect this relation( discussed in Section 2 and 3) and how they bring about a regime of compromises( illustrated through case discussions in section 3), was understood. It was clear further through the interviews and case discussions that, consultants' self perceptions and ability to exercise greater autonomy and control over their relations with the client, led to a highly technocratic, transactional approach to their relation. By no means, the thesis aims to present the client as the martyr to situations, economics and constraints, but, it can be thoroughly supported that, the onus was with consultants, to take leadership and responsibility for the client's welfare. There was no absolute requirement for consultants to display affection for their clients but, the fact that they had to establish through their action, their principled commitment for the clients, had to be prioritised. The thesis establishes the importance of emotional association with professionalism, it does not advocate emotional involvement with the client's business.

The aura of deception, as it were, could only be removed if the consultants emerged as principled partners in the clients' overall success story. Self interest, mere commercial relations were not helpful to change an image, that was better changed to give a new meaning to this industry and to this profession. Hence, the thesis proposition was successfully justified.

***.On the basis of this research project, what can be predicted for the consulting industry of the future? Are there any prescriptions for clients to make better use of the consultants and make their relationship a more fruitful one?***

This thesis established that professionalism for a consultant would traverse through varied images - bounded ethicality, client consultant collusions over a certain meaning of success for the organization, consultant's acute information deficit on the client's real

implementation strategy - this would starve them of resources to understand their clients better and retard their prospects for optimal problem solutions.

The attitude to fabricate information, produce distortions, implant causality to a certain solution and often making overambitious claims of the solutions, makes a consultant deceptive. This further develops into the practice of not explaining, but explaining things away. Max Black in his title essay in the *The Prevalence of Humbug*, discusses the intellectual manifestations of this attitude, what he calls questioning the humbug! In this article, Black reports how Harry Frankfurt in his articulate work titled *On Bullshit*, comments on how people adopt deceptive misrepresentation, as a deliberate attempt at lying and trying to establish a certain causality, in place of truth. He argues that, deceptive practices extend not just in fabricating verbally but also through actions.

When a consultant says, “I have done enough for the client”, that is a show of certain awareness of their bullshitting. They are aware of their limitation. But when they add further, “We know our worth. We know our client needs our help and we are here to assist. Pay us more and we will do more for you. Don’t expect romance for free”, then there are several sordid implications. First, the consultant is a humbug, second, the consultants *bullshit* on their care for the client’s welfare. But, third, when they raise the pay more do more context, it clearly points at their version of professionalism.

The thesis makes it clear that consulting was a highly personalised profession. People do business because they trust each other. The absence of any external standardization model makes it an imperative on consultants that they rise above petty commerce and redefine their protocols of associating with the clients and establish a norm of conscientiousness. The professionalism for a client, this thesis argues, is to rise above bounded ethicality to establishing ethical decision making, which when translated in terms of professionalism, was to act in complete transparency and accountability with the clients. Ideal responsiveness, this thesis argues, comes when clients do not need to judge consultants on their actions; it comes when consultants themselves become their staunchest critics, delivering not just professional services but emotionally connected professional services. The move towards productivity is the order of the day.

Productivity for management consultancy is a system where clients and consultants could rise above core commercial transactionalism to a higher emotional attachment, where a client's welfare becomes the consultant's prime responsibility. The onus is for the consultant to show direction to the client, for management consultancy as a trade surely needs this change of attitude. It is important to note here that there were serious limitations on measuring the productivity of service firms. There are some studies that express the many limitations (See, Hjerns, 1990; Stanback and Noyelle, 1990; Mellander, 1992; Gummesson, 1991; 1992). Management consulting also falling within the service sector, suffers the same measurement challenges (See, Lowendhal, 1997). While professionalism can be understood through several tangible factors that can be quantified by following conventional HR metrics like attendance, timely delivery, delays in reports or a measure of inputs and outputs, productivity is increasingly seen as a measure of several intangible factors (Itami, 1987). Drucker (1991) rightly says, "The single great challenge ... of the world is to raise the productivity of knowledge ... This challenge will ultimately determine the competitive performance of companies and the very fabric of society and the quality of life in every industrialised nation". (P. 94).

Building on the notion of creating knowledge established consulting giants like McKinsey and BCG, emphasise on creating and transferring knowledge to the clients. These consultants would emphasise their knowledge superiority over their clients (Kieser, 2002), and as McKinsey publish on their website: "We invest significant resources in building Knowledge. We see it as our mission to bring this knowledge to our clients ... McKinsey and Company, 2010). Hence, building on the thesis discussions in sections 2 and 3, the consultants would focus on bridging the gap between their knowledge with that of the clients (Larwood and Gattiker, 1986). But, where they tend to undermine the client's internal control system to understand, define and establish their own problem definition. (Seidl and Mohe, 2006), they undermine the client's strengths to diagnose their own disorders. Such attitude becomes the norm of the conventional consultant, whose objective tends to be, to invent problems and create solutions. McGonagle & Vella (2001) calls this the golden age of consulting! This idea has attracted serious academic criticisms as outlined in Section 2 and 3 of this thesis.

As Kipping and Armbruster (2002, P. 221) have asserted, “ any process of change is always the client’s own product and implementation by others may be an oxymoron”, Management consultants need to tap into the skills and determinations of the clients, more, to give a new meaning to their consulting exercise. From claiming moral, technical and knowledge superiority over the clients, they need to adapt ways to co-produce mutually acceptable decisions that are naturally consumed by the client. Efforts to force feed them can only result in tensions and while professionalism can be assured by mere service delivery, without this essential ethical collaboration, of emotional and personal partnership, this special trade will continue to harbour the kind of negative press that it has so rightfully attracted to itself.

As the many consultants rightfully claim that,, the future of the consulting sector is one where clients will increasingly be self aware and be willing to invest internally in their knowledge assets. Organizations will devote greater funds to attract the very best specialists from the world over, to create an internal knowledge repository that could help them generate a strong research and development climate within the organizations. The need for externally sourced consultants will be greatly offset by the presence of multisectoral collaborations between client organizations to share and co-produce new knowledge. As practicing consultants themselves, the authors have a direct stake in such developments.

In the coming era, management consultants will have to redefine their strategies. They have to address their ways to changing their self assessments and turn attention from a professionalism driven to a productivity driven agenda. They have to get over their so called re-engineering myopia (Management consultants International, 1995b) and invest greater resources to analyse and assess their own intangible assets. McLaughlin and Coffey rightly put it, “ While intangibles may be an inherent problem, they are not excuse for avoiding productivity analysis... Intangibility makes measurement difficult, but it is seldom a reason to avoid measurement even if proxies must be used” (1990, P.47).

Productivity may be an ambiguous notion, but consultants will have invest more energy and resources into strenghtening their internal control procedures and create a system that realises their overarching dependence on their client’s wishes. They have to develop a

greater affection for their client's interests. This way the consulting trade will continue to service itself as one of the most interesting of all professions.

## **Section 6: Conclusion**

Towards the end of this thesis, it is time to reflect on the key findings of the research, to discuss and analyse the implications of these findings on the theories used. It is time to reflect on the arguments made through the literature review, the empirical work, the case discussions and case analyses.

This thesis adopted the critical approach and employed reflexivity in its ways to understand the consulting profession and to discover its many meanings for professionalism. As discussed earlier, Critical management theorists attempt at conducting research, that had emancipatorial ambitions. These ambitions can include, extension of knowledge, creation of new ways of doing things, challenging conventional wisdom and above all, attempting social transformation through new ways of interpreting and finding knowledge ( e.g. Tanton, 1992; Hooks, 1994; Boyce, 1996; French and Grey, 1996; Currie and Knights, 1999; Dehler, 1999; Holman, 2000). At the core of this knowledge creation process, lies the hunger of the thinking researcher, who wishes to achieve a creative salvation of their inner thoughts. This is a humanist dream, to transform the world through exercise of reason and through development of higher consciousness (Reedy, 2003). In such a spirit, the researcher seeks to challenge conventional ethics, question dominance of patriarchal interpretations of the world (See, Cotterill and Letherby, 1993; Griffiths, 1995) and strives to create knowledge, that is as broad , inclusive and inviting.

Applying reflexivity (Alvesson, 2009), this critical research attempted at producing, knowledge on a very ambiguous area. This thesis aimed at understanding what consultants thought about their relations with their profession and this was not an easy task, given that the authors were themselves a part of the research questions! It sought meanings of success from the practitioners. It never intended to be a historical narrative on the profession (Ricoeur, 1985) or, an ethnographic account merely iterating on the working

life histories of the participants (e.g. Ricoeur, 1985; Kearney, 1996a). Rather, using reflexivity, the researchers could afford to dig deep, to question the ethics of their representation, to ask questions as what made them consultants, why there were consultants and what they made out of their being consultants.

To understand what professionalism was to the consulting sector, the central features of the client consultant relations were discussed. These included discussing the reasons behind consultant's dilemma : to be doing right, or , to be seen to be doing right (Armbruster and Kipping, 2002). It emerged that, most consulting interventions produced rather weak outcomes. Further, with essential value differentials between clients and consultants, and the lack of balance between the consultant's ability to influence a certain kind of change , with the client's appetite for such changes, created an emotional distance between the two groups : this would create grounds for compromises (Krantz et al., 1997). Under such circumstances, consultants would seek projective identification (Klein, 1975), where they become repositories of a certain behaviour (Krantz et al., 1997). They would practice, self justification, employ self righteousness and thereby, collude with the client's knowledge deficits, to create a system where, their intrinsic sense of ethics, ability to perform and the commitment to serve the client's interests, would be lost to a crude celebration of self interest (Simon, 1983; Banaji and Bhaskar, 2000). They would practice bound ethicality, a condition where a sense of positive illusion would be represented through self promotion and assertiveness (Dunning, 1999; Kramer, 1994, Taylor and Brown, 1988).

The empirical part of the research took the researchers, to several locations across Europe. The idea was to accommodate the time constraints of the participants, who were 21 in number, worked in multiple locations and represented varied sectors and specialisations. Some consulted to investment banks while the others, to companies within sectors like market research and strategy. As practicing management consultants, the authors had several internal biases to confront with during in this process. The reflexive approach demanded that by challenging these established norms of good, the idea of fairness could be established. The face to face interviews were followed by telephonic interviews and the researchers went a step further to, asking them to return questionnaires



degined to get raw responses from them. The responses received through all the three methods were very interesting.

The most common aspect of the responses as discussed previously under case analyses sections, were the consultant's ideas of self justification and righteousness. Not only did consultants believe in their projective identification with the astute and the expert, this imagery, presented them as some immutable truth. That they were experts and hence worthy of their expertise and hence unquestionable - This was perhaps, one of the most powerful deductions of this thesis. Further, the consultants' consistent assertion of their exclusivity with their client's interests, portrayed their overconfidence with not just their own selves (Griffin et al., , 1990), but also presented their illusion of Objectivity (Armor, 1999). It was clear they were not objective driven but were objective ridden for they appeared to have lost their purpose to their service. Their otherwise positive illusions ( Taylor, 1989) could be useful to channelise their motivation into improving their service delivery, but , for their selfcentredness, such objectives would defy their 'shared' existence. A self centred, self righteous and objective ridden consultant, would soon lose their wider objective to being in their profession – their clients and their welfare would become mere expressions and worth their neglect.

Retaining the illusive notion of their sovereign self, as both the ideal and the sovereign to their relationship and the relatedness with their clients, Consultants would soon be forced into a strange arrangement of compromises, that would breed notions of collusion and distortion . This attitude would bind their ethicality and distance them from their clients' welfare and this is what the thesis investigates into (Simon, 1983). From a self serving self righteousness, the consultant would develop a totalitarian ego (Greenwald, 1980), which would enable them not just to tamper with their established wisdom, but to alter them to the extent that they lose their professional memory : their ideas about doing their work right! Violation of their inner memories , personal awareness and professional commitments would all be replaced by the doctrine of “ relevant to me”. Worse still, the consultants could be unaware of this invasive internal dilution ( See, Greenwald, 1980; Orwell, 1949; Bazerman, 2006). Self justification would become self deservedness , professionalism reduced to lipservice and objectivity reduced to a condition of an

emotional dog with a rational tail ( See, Haidt, 2001), who would confuse the clients, to accept their biased adultery of information ( Diekmann et al., 1997).This disorder the thesis recognises and challenges.

Theoretically, this thesis makes an original contribution to the field of management consulting, especially in the area of understanding consultant's attitudes to their profession. Through rigorous literature reviews, thorough case discussions and analyses, this research brought out especially through the empirical part, voices of some of the finest management consultants in Europe. These voices resounded with the thesis argument that, consultants do not have a clear way to understand, measure or enunciate their devotion to their clients; they may be aware of this deficiency but care very little to address this shortcoming. Their innumerable references to monetary gains off their clients, deciding and defining their professional success, represented a corrupt image of a devoted consultant, whose professionalism, should have extended well beyond, just a way of making money!

The thesis therefore recognises this industrial trend as a disorder which needs to be addressed, challenged and modified, in the wider interests of this profession and more importantly, to uphold the image of a management consultant. This thesis challenges that professionalism of consultants, cannot be merely their being in business. It presents a compelling account of the various reasons why management consulting fails to be professional. The thesis argues therefore, that true professionalism is a murky area, vastly misunderstood by consultants. It establishes that the arrogance of management consultants and their self serving totalitarianism was vastly eroding the substance of this profession. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the growing debate as to what made ideal professionalism, doing things right or being seen to be doing things right? This thesis argues that ideal professionalism required both. Not only should consultants do things right, they should believe in doing things and by doing so, be seen to be doing things right.

The most important aspects of achieving such a condition included, a culture of greater introspection, greater internal control and criticism, a more robust performance

measurement system in place to measure the deliverables and also, a refined attachment to the consulting profession – this demands greater accommodation for the clients' needs, greater transparency and responsiveness in the work culture and a nuanced observance of the self. Consultants can certainly be charismatic, smart and conspicuous, but their professional interests lied in, being more at one with their client.

The practical considerations emerging out of this thesis, is the need to evolve a control mechanism in this industry, to check the consultants' performances more rigorously. Performance anxiety among consultants need to be brought in, to challenge their self righteousness and to demand promised results from them. There needs to be a wider industrial awareness , that there was indeed a great deal of complacency surrounding the use of management consultants. There is equally the need to evolve a more a transparent environment within the client consultant interface, that encourages greater dialogues, greater understanding and more, greater collaboration among the two groups.

Further, the totalitarian might of the management consultants need to be challenged by a responsible, informed and engaging client, that knows their deliverables and can qualify them appropriately. It is therefore important, that both clients and consultants, recognise their indispensability for each other and understand and celebrate how this was central to the success of any of their consulting endeavours. A learned, proficient and more knowledgeable consultant has to be met by a strong, informed and engaging client. This requires that there was a greater degree of professionalisation of the clients themselves , to keep a check on their services being bought out of the consultants (Pemer and Werr, 2009).

Accordingly, management consultancy needs redefinition from a self controlled, self justification regime, to a more open system of best practices where client feedback was treated with utmost importance, to measure productivity. The ambiguities of professionalism and the traps of subjectivity and self righteousness of a consultant, has to extend to a more client centric discourse. A successful consultant has to be a pro-client, knowledge driven, revolutionary thinking person, who has the power, the skills and the

talent to move mountains for the client. Mere lip service to established norms, rehearsing to technical jargon and self justification would only push the otherwise talented and articulate knowledge worker into a bullshitter and whose intellectual worth was reduced to, as Sarah Muhr put it, “seduction to doing nonsense”.

Therefore, by targeting the intellectual worth of management consultant, this thesis helps create a new way of engaging with their idea of professionalism. Towards the end of the literature review and empirical research, it was clear that consultants’s claims to being in business, could not be readily treated as their qualification to being management consultants. Similarly, their success could not be established merely through their monetary growth. By employing a critical reflexive approach, this thesis could investigate conventional assumptions of management consultants and question their general attitude to assume authenticity and to express a projected identity, which was essentially bound, by ethical deficiencies. Critical Reflexivity allowed the researchers to go beneath the surface, to analyse the notions on professionalism in literature and the research participants. This result was an intellectual furtherance on what consultants think and do about their professionalism.

Whereas the thesis had several strengths as discussed in the above passages, it had some limitations.

First, to focus solely on the management consultant’s attitudes to the industry, the thesis adopted a careful approach not to include the client’s voices into the discussions. This was done to create more attention for the subject of the thesis, that is the consultants and their understandings of their work. This is a limitation in itself because, there cannot be a comprehensive client consultant discourse without substantial discussion of both groups. Sections 2 and 3, try to give a balanced picture of the ideas and understanding of both clients and consultants under the various headings and subheadings, be it client consultant collusions to the various discussions on the consultant’s self righteousness and their effects on the bounded ethicality and its interactions with the client. However, this discussion had limited client interface and this is indeed a limitation of this

thesis. Similarly, interviews with consultants also had a very strong focus on the consultants. A client's voice could have improved the discussion.

Second, this thesis did not go through a rigorous discussion of ethics and morality and its philosophical interactions with business. This was done, so as not to digress from the topic, which demanded a firm focus on the consulting trade, and any wide philosophical discussions on ethics and morality would have made it very difficult to quantify the empirical research, along strict lines of professionalism and productivity. However, it is understood that, a comprehensive discussion on ethics and morality and business ethics could have given a richer appeal to this work.

Another limitation of the thesis was that it did not cover a discussion on personality of the consultants. This area was a broad one where the consultant's personality, stereotypes at work, notions of understanding of workplace and several issues relating to topics like identity and image, could have been covered. This discussion could have further enriched the thesis discussion, giving it a more rounded appeal. Other ideas like gender, postcolonial sentiments could also be covered.

A prominent limitation is that the idea of workplace conditions, the nature of contractual obligations and fulfillment of objectives by the clients and the consultants, issues relating to payment usually faced by consultants, workplace hostility and discrimination – these many other factors in the consultant's working life could also have been covered to give this thesis a wider reach.

However, in spite of the many limitations, this thesis has made a bold attempt to establish the difference between professionalism and productivity in a consulting exercise. It has established through its rigorous research process, that the industry needs to redefine its attitude towards itself. It has to evolve new ways of doing business, to challenge its credibility and create a renewed agenda for a client centric discourse. Productivity for management consulting has to be professionalism plus emotional partnership with clients. The thesis attempted at encouraging the consulting discourse and criticisms on consultants and consultancy, to focus on urging the members of this profession, to move

beyond commercial transactionalism, to a more collaborative mutually beneficial existence. The result of such introspections would be that, consultants could position themselves as not merely resources, but as assets to the client's growth and development process.

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