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**THE ATTUNEMENT BETWEEN MANAGERS AND CONSULTANTS:  
A Pursuit of Harmony**

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## ABSTRACT

- Title:** The Attunement Between Managers and Consultants: A Pursuit of Harmony
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- Authors:** Fritz Winter & Oscar Stierncreutz
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- Key words:** Attunement, Knowledge Work, Interaction, Involvement, Relationship, Influence, Independence, Dependence, Management
- Purpose:** The main purpose of this study is to understand how managers and consultant attune to one another. Additionally, the purpose is to improve the understanding and development of traditional views on the management of knowledge work.
- Methodology:** Research was conducted as an explorative study, conducted through an interpretative and abductive approach.
- Theoretical perspective:** Previous research emphasizes the importance of autonomy in knowledge work, an absence of strict bureaucratic procedures and a lack of managerial knowledge/understanding in the work performed by subordinates. Consultants are also depicted as resenting managerial interference.
- Conclusion:** Established theory on the subject is flawed as it appears to be partially founded on a widely shared prejudice. In acknowledging this established theories can be revamped and/or improved. In turn, current theories can help overcoming challenges in existing knowledge intensive firms

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# 1. Introduction

When examining the historical development of organisations, one thing seems to have remained unchanged. Among the staff, managers appear to be pivotal in fulfilling the role of a guide towards success. As guides they are likely to carry out both managerial and leadership activities as these seem to be intertwined in organisations (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). While the meaning of leadership is subject to numerous understandings underlining its ambiguity, it can generally be stated that leadership is about influencing others (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). In short, managers are in the position to lead, supervise and control their subordinates. In doing so, their management can range from the exercise of authoritarian control that pervades every department and task carried out within organisations, to the commitment to support and unfold employees' full potential (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011).

However, when further considering the history of organisations, authoritarian and pervasive management has been most prominent in the past decades, through which tight control over employees was exercised (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). Yet, the past years have seen a rise in knowledge-intensive firms (Newell et al., 2009) characterized by the majority of employees being invested in the “creation of new knowledge or the application of existing knowledge in new ways” (p.24). In theory, these so-called knowledge workers should be given a high degree of autonomy as the nature of their work requires creativity and problem-solving skills (Alvesson, 2004; Newell, et al., 2009). In their position they are said to be in the situation of “...having the best general insights into the problem area as well as being the person (or team) with most familiarity with the specifics of the actual problem.” (Alvesson 2004, p.23). Consequently, they are also considered to be “the most appropriate people to decide how to initiate, plan, organize and coordinate their major work tasks” (Newell et al., 2009, p.32).

Managers on the other hand, are said to possess more overall experience and overview “but have less understanding of what can and should be done in specific situations” (p.23). Therefore, knowledge workers should have the freedom for judgements and decision whereas management seems to lack the incentives to deny such autonomy (Alvesson, 2004). Hence, “management is typically not in a position to directly control or even manage knowledge work processes” (Newell, et al., 2009, p.33). Nonetheless, management in relation to knowledge work bears various ambiguities as it remains unclear to what degree management should influence knowledge work carried out within organisations (Alvesson, 2004; Newell, et al., 2009).

The tendency to an abstinence of managerial influence suggested by established literature is bound to be challenged by the knowledge-intensive firm studied for this thesis. As one of the world's largest consulting firm, Vivaldi has not been facing any specific problems in its pursuit of becoming the undisputed leader in consultancy services. This seems surprising when considering some of the key findings of our empirical research which contradict established literature as it will be shown over the course of this thesis. Firstly, the organisation of knowledge work seems to be characterized by a strong hierarchy that defies the organisational configuration of an adhocracy which is considered ideal for a knowledge-intensive firm. Secondly, managerial involvement in knowledge work turns out to be a lot higher than suggested by the literature. Thirdly, managers appear to go even further and extensively influence the knowledge work conducted by their subordinates. Thus, there appears to be a theoretical problem considering that the established literature on knowledge work does not seem to be open or adjusted to the conditions at Vivaldi. Considering these findings, it will be of interest to explore how managers and knowledge workers attune to one another in this context.

The term attunement shall describe the interplay between both parties through which they adjust to, support and influence each other. Associating this interplay to that between a conductor and an orchestra shall help a further clarification. In order to find the perfect harmony within the orchestra the conductor has to take the individual characteristics of each musician into account. In order to deliver a flawless performance, the conductor and the musicians need to be attuned to one another in order to sense and react to the slightest changes or they might risk dropouts of individual performances. Therefore, an interplay between the two parties needs to happen that brings both conductor and musicians closer to perfect harmony. Presumably, this interplay passes through several stages. In the beginning, the roles within the orchestra need to be made clear. Through initial, proactive input by the conductor the latter then gets to know the orchestra better whereas the orchestra familiarizes itself with characteristics and preferences of the conductor. Upon a certain point of closure and routine between two parties, it is more and more up to the conductor to detect and react to deviations from the aspired harmony.

In a transferred sense, managers will have to consider the characteristics or strings of their knowledge workers and their particular work in order to facilitate a harmony between managers and consultants that is meant to foster knowledge work at Vivaldi. The concept of harmony shall help contrasting this approach to the applications of mere adjustments. The latter could very well fix certain issues but an adjustment itself does not imply the pursuit of harmony. It

merely means achieving a fit that can please certain interests whereas harmony refers to a state of mutual agreement. For example, managers could reduce the monitoring of knowledge work to adjust to a change in their agendas. However, that might not find agreement among knowledge workers as discussed further in chapter 5.2.

Relating to the afore-described tuning process helped to come up with 5 subsequent levels that could be drawn from the empirical studies. They shall elucidate the way to understanding even the intricacies in the interplay between managers and consultants as explained in the following sub-chapter.

**1.1. Research Purpose/ Outline**

The 5 levels of attunement between managers and consultants introduced above shall structure the literature review, the presentation of empirical data and their discussion and analysis. These levels mark the number of steps in the gradual immersion of this attunement. This immersion shall be outlined by the figure below. The levels will be explained in this introduction for a better understanding of the succeeding chapters and the overall purpose and aim of this thesis.

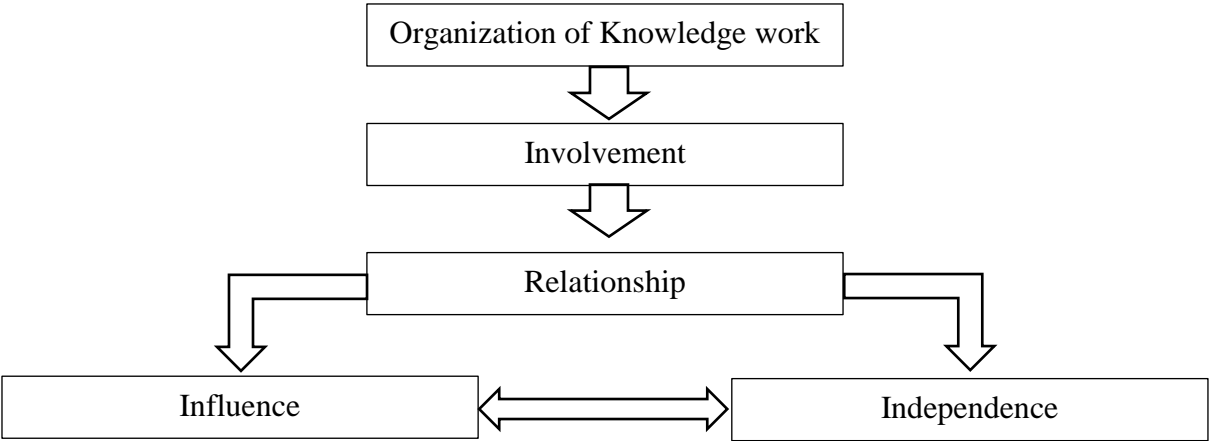


Figure 1

The first level shall treat Vivaldi’s organisational structure and the way knowledge work is being coordinated. It is meant to illustrate how consultants and managers organise their work with each other and their respective colleagues on a more technical and superficial basis. The next level is meant to show how this organisation leads to managers actually becoming involved in consultancy work by guiding and supporting their consultants. The level concerning ‘relationship’, that follows directly afterwards, will show how this involvement can result in a form of reciprocity through which managers and consultants become attuned to each other on

a more personal level. Both involvement and relationship can then be regarded as the main contributors to a mutual influence among managers and consultants, and the basis for consultants' independence from, or dependence on their managers. Challenges regarding the interplay between managers and consultants will be presented in chapter 4 as they will be part of the discussion and analysis in chapter 5.

## **1.2. Research Question**

*How can managers and knowledge workers become attuned to one another?*

## **1.3. Aim**

Through the five subsequent levels introduced above we intend to elucidate how management and knowledge workers are attuned to each other in a real-life case in contrast to given theory. In doing so we hope to widen the range of opinions on, and theories about the interplay between knowledge workers and managers. Through investigating these different levels of attunement, we furthermore aim to explore potential deficiencies or challenges that are faced at Vivaldi, which could be overcome through possible convergences of theory and real-life practice. Hence, we would also like to point out where an application of theory could benefit the knowledge work at Vivaldi. In short, our research is meant to result in both theoretical contributions and practical applications.

## **2. Methodology**

This chapter will be dealt with in four subchapters. In the first one, the research approach will be described to provide an idea of how the research was conducted as this will help a better understanding of the following sub-chapters. The second chapter shall then reveal our epistemological considerations in handling the interviews. Thirdly, the limitations to our research will be presented. Lastly, we will discuss the credibility of the input from our interviewees.

### **2.1. Research Approach**

In our research, we utilized an abductive approach as we intended to turn the interpretation of individual empirical findings with given theory into a process that was meant to lead to a intimate and credible understanding of the attunement between management and knowledge workers. This understanding is in turn meant to refine both our empirical data and the relevant



theory applied in this thesis. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). With this approach we were able to categorize empirical data according to their correspondence with the given theory. Our actual empirical research was approached in the following 3 steps.

### 1. Defining Population/ Target Group

Considering the purpose of our research we intended to interview consultants and managers to gather points of view from both parties meant to attune to one another. In addition, we wanted to get input from at least one member of HR who was expected to have a more neutral view on the interplay between the two parties. The final interview partners were partially chosen and approached directly by us and partially presented by our contact at Vivaldi.

### 2. Data Gathering

Empirical data was gathered through semi-structured interviews that allowed all interviewees to provide input that was individually different from that of their colleagues. By keeping the interviews semi-structured, we hoped to capture as many different points of view as possible. In aiming for open, non-standardisable outcomes in our interviews, our approach to data gathering was meant to reflect qualitative research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). The idea behind this approach was that independent perceptions of consultants and managers would be more valuable for the process of understanding the attunement between management and consultants at Vivaldi. In contrast, their perceptions were believed to be more suggestive than our preconceived ideas which were bound to originate merely from course literature due to our lack in relevant work experience.

For our research a total number of 8 interviews were conducted. Three of these were conducted with consultants of different hierarchical levels at Vivaldi. Four were conducted with either managers or senior managers at the company. The final interview was with a HR partner of the firm. Four of the interviews were conducted through Skype-calls with both writers present. The remaining four interviews were conducted via phone, whereas both writers were present at two of them. The remaining two interviews were conducted by one person. All of the interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematised, which allowed us to examine similarities as well as contradicting statements. These themes and transcriptions were later used as the basis for our in-depth analysis and discussion in chapter 5.

Overall, the interviews were conducted over a period of one month and ranged from 40 minutes to one hour. While we had prepared individual sets of questions for consultants, managers and

HR respectively, our semi-structured approach allowed us to alter and add questions when we deemed it necessary. The questions were open and gave the interviewees space for interpretation and thus provided them the opportunity to put individually different emphasis on subjects they were asked to talk about. This in turn resulted in a greater variety of input to be utilized in for this research.

In the beginning of each interview we started with a few minutes of small-talk and the exchange of pleasantries, in hope of building rapport with the interviewees as we had to consider that they had never met us before. In general, we gained the impression that participants were comfortable and responsive, although the answers given to us by some of the more senior employees and managers were deemed too politically correct at times. Conversely the answers provided to us by the consultants tended to be more honest in depicting the company and its practices.

### 3. Data Analysis

In congruence with the fairly open outcome we aimed for in our interviews, we took a hermeneutic approach to our data analysis as we intended to recognize and utilize the possibility that the input of each interviewee could have multiple and at times conflicting meanings. Our measure in utilizing this input was the categorization of the interviewees' statements. In doing so, we intended to conduct our studies in accordance with the hermeneutic circle. This means that we aspired to evaluate, understand, and ultimately categorize each statement in the context of the given theory on knowledge work, management and leadership. Conversely, we used each statement individually to further our understanding of the attunement between knowledge workers and management (Prasad, 2015). Since the hermeneutic circle would theoretically involve infinite movements between the context as a whole and the content of individual statements (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009), we ended this process when we deemed our comprehension of the given empirical data sufficient enough to analyse and discuss them with the given theory in the proper sense of the aforementioned abductive approach.

### **2.1.1. Reflections**

We consider our study to be of explorative nature, as it is meant to reveal new views on the interplays between managers and consultants that shall contribute to finding new approaches to advancing given theories. In addition, our study shall explore how possible challenges in regards to attunement, that are found in existing firms, could be overcome. That is why we did not aim to generalise our findings but instead intended to make analytical generalisations.

A final observation that we were able to make in our empirical research was the difficulties of coding our gathered material. Throughout the interviews several themes were conveyed. However, allocating the given statements from our interviewees to these themes proved to be quite challenging. Through reflection on the final amount of empirical data collected, we managed a distinction by focusing on the part of the statements that turned out to have the highest congruence with a given theme. Smaller congruences with the remaining themes were noted and kept in mind for discussion in chapter 5 with the intention to underline how the levels in the attunement are connected to each other

## **2.2. Epistemological Considerations**

The approach to assessing and interpreting our interviews was bound to be shaped by our epistemological positions (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). As researcher, one has the possibility of choosing different epistemological perspectives when approaching research. The approach chosen by us will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent paragraph.

Epistemology is described as the theory of knowledge, depicting what we know about the world as well as how we know it (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Additionally, epistemology questions the nature of the relationship between the subject(s) of interest and the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A key question recognizable in terms of epistemology is to what extent it is possible to make objective observations and whether it is achievable to reach the ‘complete’ truth (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). This approach was adopted by us, and an emphasis was put on the assumption that observations cannot be objective, since these observations are shaped and influenced by social constructions of reality. Thus, each statement and observation becomes loaded with subjective interpretations (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Further we intended to approach our research with epistemic humility, as we neither claim to state certain facts, nor do we claim to have overconfidence in our knowledge (Schaefer, 2017).

### **2.3. Research Limitations**

We acknowledge that there are certain limitations, partially out of our control. First of all, we recognize our focus on Scandinavian consultants and managers. Therefore, we also acknowledge that some cultural differences may occur if we were to compare Vivaldi to similar firms in, for example, other Western countries. The differences could be reflected in different opinions on the importance of hierarchical structures, for example. Secondly, the given time limitation affected the research as a whole since it limited the extent to which we could conduct our research. The timeframe we worked with proved to be challenging as it affected the number of employees at Vivaldi we were able to contact and interview. Due to our ambition to thoroughly analyse the empirical material we settled for 8 interviewees, which naturally limited the range of opinions we could hope to get. A final challenge we encountered during the process was the geographical distance, which led us to conduct the interviews via phone and Skype. These situations provided us with little time to build rapport with the interviewees, and it may have influenced the answers given to us. It remains unknown whether our interviewees actually were comfortable with the situation as we had not been acquainted before. Another limitation was posed by our decision to only focus on consultants as a group of knowledge workers. In doing so we hoped to reduce the complexity of our research topic to a level that we could hope to handle within the given time frame.

### **2.4. Validity/ Credibility, Source Criticism**

Credibility in qualitative research relates to the reliability of the source and the authenticity and accuracy of the information obtained (Beck, 1993). In this context, qualitative research is characterized by a prominent amount of subjectivity (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2009). As our qualitative approach emphasizes the interpretation of empirical data gathered through interviews, it is relevant to provide some insight to whether our research can be deemed credible or not. In assessing the credibility of the conducted research, there are a number of things to consider.

Firstly, a use of multiple methods for data gathering, also known as triangulation, can be used in an attempt to validate the results (Beck, 1993). Although, observations could have been used in addition we refrained from this approach for the following reason. Arguably observations could only reveal insight in a more superficial interplay between both parties, since, starting from the more supportive part of involvement, the attunement process was mostly supported by

people's perceptions which we could not observe. Additionally, we deemed our preceding knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon to be insufficient for us to draw legitimate and justifiable conclusions.

Secondly, Noble and Smith (2015) argue for a thorough demonstration of methods and strategies used for data collection and analyzing. In our research, a presentation of these methods will be provided in the next sub-chapter. Additionally, the process of choosing and approaching our interviewees is also depicted. Furthermore, Beck (1993) states that in order to increase credibility, readers are to be provided with rich excerpts from the transcripts. We will therefore provide the reader with an extensive amount of excerpts deducted from our empirical material.

Finally, it is stated that, to improve credibility of a qualitative study, the codification of empirical material should be performed by more than just one researcher (Beck, 1993; Noble & Smith, 2015). In our case the entire empirical material was coded by both authors, which contributed interpretations of empirical data from two perspectives. Additionally, we strived to present both similarities and contradicting statements as a further contribution to our research. The risks associated with personal biases can further be reduced, not only because the research was conducted by the two of us, but also due to the fact that we continuously consulted and reviewed our findings with our supervisor who was able to provide not only guidance but also new perspectives. Thus, he helped us shed light on aspects on the material we could have overlooked.

In an attempt to further solidify our research credibility, we intend to elaborate on source criticism, as we feel obliged to question and ultimately determine how relevant and credible the sources and their statement are for our research. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) define source criticism as the question of how to evaluate and interpret data. Therefore, we intend to examine the sources, meaning the interviewees, used for this research more closely, and keep in mind how their position in the company may have influenced their responses.

In regards to these criteria, a certain amount of scepticism was adopted when examining the answers of the employees, due to the fact that they were likely to portray the organisation and their individual input and role in a favourable way. Thus, a certain bias favouring the organisation was presumed. This presumption implied that we were not to take their statements at face value. Due to the chance of bias, a more critical approach was thus adopted.

Besides, the interviewees and their statements could be seen as completing each other, like the pieces of a puzzle, where each piece contribute to the understanding as a whole. In that sense, information were more likely to be deemed accurate if the relevant statements from interviewees were congruent with each other. Ascertaining this congruence was rather easy as we could simply compare the statement within the context they were given. Additionally, the interviewees complemented each other in terms of knowledge and experience.

### 3. Literature Review

As explained in the introduction, the following presentation of literature, necessary for a profound discussion of empirical data in chapter 5, will be divided into the following categories as shown in the figure:

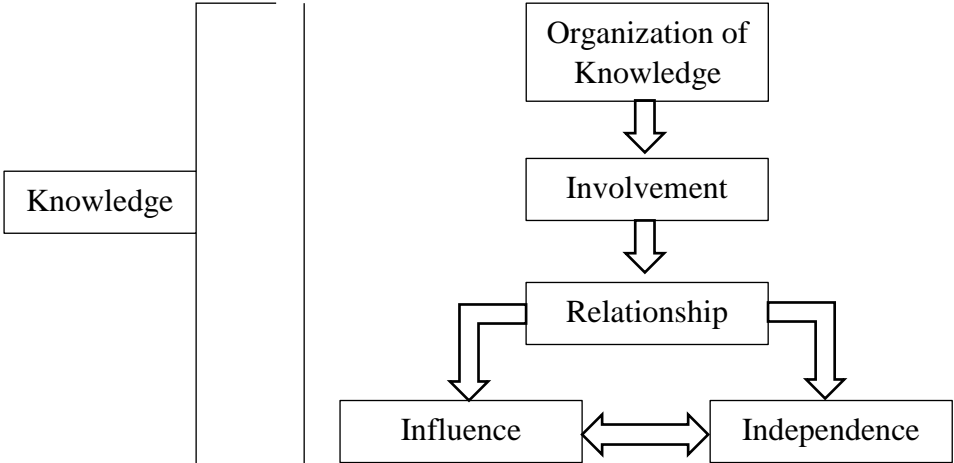


Figure 2

Since the topic of this thesis revolves around knowledge work and knowledge workers, theory on the explanation of knowledge itself has to be introduced at first to complete the theoretical set-up for the discussion of the given empirical findings. Theory on knowledge work and knowledge workers on the other hand will be introduced throughout the remaining categories as they are a concrete and somewhat palpable element of the attunement that is meant to be explored in this thesis. Knowledge itself on the other hand is more abstract, thus requiring further elaboration.

### **3.1. Knowledge**

Knowledge has been described as the things we know, constituted of understanding, learning and interaction. Additionally, knowledge also explains how we do things and answers the question ‘why’ (Alvesson, 2004; Wilson, 2002). Knowledge presents itself in a variety of ways, since it is dependent on the situational context (Blackler, 1995). In attempt to define knowledge, one can distinguish between two epistemologies that deal with and discuss the characteristics, scope and origin of knowledge, namely the epistemology of possession and the epistemology of practice (Cook & Brown, 1999). The epistemology of possession views knowledge as the personal property of the individual who is capable of drawing meaning from information and data due to his or her own preceding understandings, views and experiences. The individual can then pass this property on to others (Newell, et al., 2009). On the other side, the epistemology of practice sees knowledge as being created through a process of social interactions. Therefore, it is inseparable from local social practices and situations that are being performed by people who in turn put this knowledge into practice through their particular way of collaborating (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Gherardi, 2001; Orlikowski, 2002). According to Alvesson (2004), both views on knowledge constitute each other.

### **3.2. The Organization of Knowledge Work**

According to Newell et al. (2009), knowledge intensive firms show a tendency towards flatter more flexible organisational approaches that are meant to support the work in teams. They consider teamwork the common form of knowledge work as the latter seems to be carried out more successfully through a collaborative effort. In this respect, they argue that knowledge work is usually the outcome of combining different types of pre-existent knowledge. Building upon the work of Mintzberg (1999), Newell et. al (2009) propose adhocracy as the organisational structure that is deemed most suitable for knowledge intensive firms. It stands for a minimization of hierarchical structures. Control over work performances is done through the adherence to professionalism and shared organisational values. In absence of formal rules and procedures, employees are freer to organize their teamwork, are given the chance to make decisions and share ideas more easily. The level of independence granted by adhocracy marks a shift of power towards knowledge workers in a team. According to Sinclair (1992), this shift is necessary to allow for the exchange of information, interaction, and the realization of creativity necessary in knowledge work. Most importantly, however, it grants every team

member the power to contribute to constructive discussions so that the most suitable outcome can be achieved.

However, Mintzberg (1999) also argues that with increasing size, knowledge intensive firms are compelled to focus more and more on efficiency which causes them to change their structure into that of a professional bureaucracy. It is characterized by the adherence to numerous levels of hierarchy within organisations. Functional groups carry out work processes while abiding by an extensive number of formal procedures, policies and rules. Employees are being subjected to direct supervision by their managers who enforce the decisions made by few key players within the organisation.

### **Coordination/ Interaction**

According to Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson (2017), group work as a common enabler of knowledge work requires all members to adjust to one another, since individual actions affect the whole team and team members are likely to be dependent on each other's performance. The members of a successfully performing team should complete each other with their knowledge and capabilities. Furthermore, they are to interact with everyone outside the team who is affected by their work, to optimize their performance and disseminate their output more effectively (Newell et al., 2009; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In this respect, Newell et al. (2009) propose the use of cross-functional teams arguing that through synergy, a diverse range of employees are capable of realizing ideas that would be beyond any individual. This is further corroborated by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and Nonaka and Konno (1998) who argue that the change from tacit to explicit knowledge, that is meant to be combined for knowledge work, requires team members to frequently socialize over longer periods of time. Further support of this theory comes from Cohen and Levinthal (1990) who point out that such interactions over longer periods of time allow team members to share knowledge that goes beyond the input required for an assignment from each member. Sustaining synergetic interactions among people with different areas of expertise can furthermore stimulate creative thinking and lead to shared understandings as team members can share more information than what is required for the particular assignment (Dougherty, 1992; Leonard-Barton, 1995; Newell, et al., 2009).



### **3.3. Involvement**

Managers' involvement is generally considered to consist of control and monitoring (Maccoby, 2000). In the context of knowledge work, this role poses several risks. Control can cause members in a team to comply with the preferences of managers as they are to pass judgement and are thus in the position to shape the output of knowledge workers from the beginning on. In combination with given time pressures and the urge to reach consensus on issues within the team work, decisions tend to be made quickly and mistakes or possible opportunities are being overlooked. Therefore, managers' involvement in knowledge work should be subjected to certain restrictions. They are to refrain from establishing best practices as this is likely to stifle innovation. The innovative behaviour of consultants can furthermore be constrained by rigorous monitoring as the strict adherence to meticulous time plans deprives consultants of the time needed to learn and create new knowledge (Newell, et al., 2009; Nonaka, 1994). On the other hand, knowledge intensive firms' necessary strive for competitiveness can require the involvement of managers to ensure efficient performances of employees. This causes tensions between independence aspired by knowledge workers and efficiency where managers are to ease the workers' resentment towards any direct control and monitoring of their work (Newell, et al., 2009). However, House (1996) argues that managers, in accordance to his path-goal theory, are to engage and be involved with their subordinates by complementing their shortcomings and by providing clarification when needed. According to Barker (1993), managers' controlling involvement can even benefit knowledge work. He argues that if consultants are given full control over their teamwork, they are likely to introduce a more repressive level of mutual control that can reduce creativity in knowledge work for the sake of a strict adherence to team rules. Hence, managers' involvement can actually help knowledge workers to focus on their job. In addition, the administrative work they are to fulfil traditionally can further facilitate knowledge work as it can take over the allocation of resources (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017)

### **3.4. Relationship**

The relationship between managers and subordinates is encompassed by and reflected in psychological contracts, which stand for reciprocal expectation between managers and consultants that revolve around topics such as personal development, support and care. These expectations need to be fulfilled by both parties to uphold the psychological contract (Robinson, 1996). While implicit, these so-called contracts are still psychologically meaningful for the employees as they present the relationship between manager and subordinate exactly as they see it (Newell, et al., 2009). Newell et al. (2009) further explain how employee motivation and commitment is bound to increase if their expectations are met.

Flood, Turner, Ramamoorthy and Pearson (2001) elaborate how a breach in the psychological contract may cause the relationship to end and the employees to leave.

In this context, trust is an important aspect that has been recognized by Von Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka (2000) as an enabler of interactions meant to facilitate the sharing and creation of knowledge. Newell et al. (2009) state that trust is about dealing with unpredictability and accepting vulnerability. In this context, Dodgson (1993) ascribes great importance to the creation and sustaining of personal relationships among members of a team as they need to feel assured that every member is capable of and committed to collaborations.

Newell et al. (2009) share a similar view, stating that trust is of considerable importance to enable cooperation among individual people and groups.

Furthermore, they elaborate on how trust is vital for sharing tacit knowledge and, thus, also for the creation of new knowledge. However, they also state that building trust can be complicated, as trust will not necessarily develop merely because one works together with others. Jones and George (1998) additionally argue for the difference between and development of conditional and unconditional trust. Conditional trust is often established in the beginning and develops into unconditional trust over time. The latter form of trust is more permanent and is argued to be of vital importance when it comes to more efficient cooperation. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) further argue that for trust to develop, there must be a situation of uncertainty where the parties involved have to trust each other to accomplish the task or assignment.

A form of trust established on the basis of urgency or the necessity to engage collaboration with little preparation, swift trust is considered to be important for knowledge-creation as team members often do not know their partners before the work begins (Meyerson, et al., 1996).

A final aspect of the relationship between managers and subordinates that is of importance is the fact that it is likely to be asymmetrical (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017) whereas managers exert comparably more influence. Ospina and Sorenson (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006) on the other hand regard subordinates as active contributors to the nature of their relationships with superiors.

Aside from vertical relationships between managers and subordinates, relationships are also formed on a more horizontal and collegial level. Dodgson (1993) argues that this is essential to create personal relationships within the team to enhance the transfer of knowledge and resources.

### **3.5. Influence**

Influence can be divided into both vertical and horizontal influence, depending on how and between whom it is exerted. Managers have the ability to exert vertical influence on their subordinates, as depicted by Schein (2004) who states that their formal position enables them to enforce working approaches among subordinates that reflect their own values. Managerial influence is however more than simply reinforcing processes and values. Due to the autonomy knowledge workers should enjoy, managerial influence may be further necessary to ensure that the independence is used in a beneficial way for the organisation (Walton, 1985). In this context, knowledge sharing among consultants as a necessary part of knowledge work can be stimulated by managerial influence on consultants' level of commitment. High levels of commitment can cause employees to have a positive perception of their firm which in turn encourages them to engage further with their colleagues (Thompson & Heron, 2006).

Moreover, managerial influence is important when it comes to attracting skilled workers and integrating and retaining them in the organisation (Newell et al. 2009). In this context, influence can be exerted by creating an elite identity consultants are very likely to identify with (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). The elite identity has been found to correlate with both the attraction and retention of top talents and the generation of promising clients (Alvesson, 2004; Newell et al. 2009). However, Willmott (1993) points out that instilling an identity in subordinates' minds can make managerial control even more pervasive as it can cause them to subconsciously align all their actions with corporate interests.

In contrast, Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017) propose a concept called reflexive followership in which subordinates significantly influence managers. They do so by thoroughly reflecting on their part in the relationship with managers. According to this view, the managers

will be receptive to implicit reflections which in turn will affect their emphasis on certain aspects of their managerial work. In support, Newell et al. (2009) further state that motivation and commitment rather comes from the subordinates themselves than from the managers.

Knowledge workers are not only influenced by their managers on a vertical level as horizontal influence among peers is also present at all times. Numerous variables affecting the influence can be recognized in the literature. First of all, group polarization has been identified as influencing on a peer level. Decisions made in teams tend to be more drastic compared to someone making decisions individually (Newell et al. 2009). Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017) state that people working in teams are strongly influenced by those they are surrounded with, and further argue that things such as work morality and standards do not necessarily come from managers, rather from norms constructed in the group or team. The underlying reasons they suggest is that the members of the team may be equally good at solving a particular issue. Individuals thus influence each other based on knowledge and expertise, not necessarily based on hierarchy or formal authority. Additionally, they also state that teams and groups may influence people more than managers can do on a vertical level, as most people conform to group norms.

### **3.6. (In)dependence**

Independence is characterized by people capable of performing their job without the need for constant support and instructions (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). According to Foley (2010) nothing confers a feeling of accomplishment and fulfilment as much as independence. Ciborra (1998) argue that independence is required for knowledge workers to achieve success, granting them the freedom to improvise. Additionally, it is argued that the independence knowledge workers enjoy is a consequence of the fact that managers do not always comprehend what they are doing, and also because of the difficulties in observing parts of the actual knowledge work (Alvesson, 2004; Newell et al. 2009). Moreover, Newell et al. (2009) argue that this circumstance grants knowledge workers more independence to regulate their own work. This independence furthermore allows consultants to cooperate with their peers and pursue their own development more freely. This strive for independence is supported by Davenport (1997) who argues that many activities associated to knowledge work such as cooperation with peers and self-development need to be done voluntarily by consultants.

A complete independence is however hard to achieve, as knowledge workers are mostly granted the freedom to work independently within a given framework that marks managerial control

(Bailyn, 1985). However, independency still appears to be what managers and knowledge workers should strive for, as the success of a project may require freedom to improvise (Ciborra, 1998). In this context, it is argued that the asymmetrical relationship between managers and subordinates is likely to produce tensions, as it can involve a reduction of independence (Alvesson, et al., 2017). However, Newell et al. (2009) propose that knowledge workers will always retain certain level of independence as their skills and knowledge put them in a favourable position to pick their employer.

## **4. Empirical Data**

In the following, we will present the empirical data gathered from Vivaldi. The beginning will be made, however, by an introduction of the company in order to provide a context the reader can relate to for a better understanding of the findings presented in the subsequent sub-chapter. The presentation of empirical data in 4.2. will be structured according to the given levels of attunement that will be put in the context of this chapter.

### **4.1. Company Case**

For a better understanding of how managers can attune to an organisation's consultants, it is vital to present the environment and context in which they operate.

Vivaldi is a globally operating consulting firm employing over 200,000 people. With operational activities in 150 countries it is one of the largest consulting firm in the world, serving customers in knowledge intensive areas such as tax, auditing, financial advisory and business consulting among others, thus making it a home for numerous highly skilled knowledge workers. Additionally, Vivaldi is prominent in solving complex issues related to innovation and transformation, among others. Aspiring to be the undisputed global leader in consulting services, Vivaldi has been recognised as both one of the 100 best places to work for and the best place to launch a career. Due to these ambitious aspirations as well as the success the company has had, it is of interest to explore how managers attune to consultants in a company of this magnitude.

Despite a challenging and competitive global environment Vivaldi has managed to almost double their revenues in eight years, from low double digit billions to significantly higher revenues. Evidently, the company is doing something right. Vivaldi is not currently experiencing any specific problems - at least none were expressed to us during the research. Instead it appears, based on the numbers, interviews and additional data, that they are doing a

great amount of things the correct way. However, Vivaldi has ambitious goals and plans for the future. As it is most often managerial responsibility to carry out orders given by those at the top of the hierarchy it is of interest to examine what they are doing to achieve the objectives set by the company. According to the company the organisational structure is a great source of strength, enabling them to be present on a global level and simultaneously providing their clients with local and expert knowledge.

**Contextual Risk**

The fact that the company has evidently done so well and is not facing any problem points to the possible risk that it might be blinded by its success and overlooks potentials for improvements in its management of consultants.

**4.2. Findings (Codification)**

As explained in the introduction, the following presentation of empirical data will be divided into the following categories as shown in the figure:

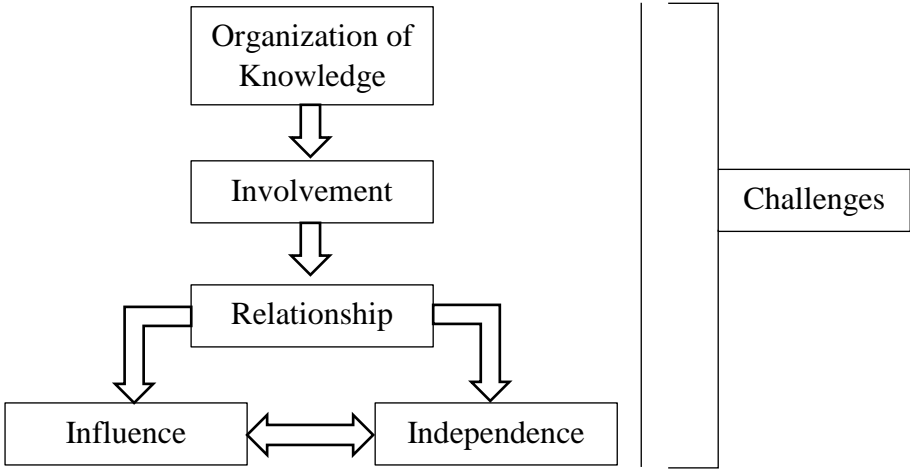


Figure 3

While some categories may certainly seem overlapping, we choose to present the empirical findings according to this structure as the levels depicted in the figure above are essentially connected, each providing a foundation for the subsequent level. Aside from the levels presented and discussed so far, the empirical data pointed to several challenges Vivaldi’s consultants and managers are facing. That is why there has to be an additional sub chapter to 4.2. Before moving on to the findings a list of all interviewees will be presented to avoid any confusion with theory which will be completely absent in this chapter.

The following people were interviewed for our empirical research:

**Taylor Drift:** Consultant

**Timmy Fendrix:** Consultant

**Denise Choplin:** HR partner

**Burt Kobain:** Senior manager

**Britney Houston:** Senior manager

**Saul McCartney:** Director

**Rick Tagger:** Senior manager

**George Farrison:** Consultant

#### 4.2.1. The Organization of Knowledge Work

Vivaldi appears to be characterized by a ‘flat’ organisational structure which is claimed to be “...*not present at all...*” in the daily work as there are “*no doorsteps or thresholds*”. This in turn was expressed to us through the following statement: “...*you don't have to be afraid to go talk to someone, you can ask anything and there are no stupid questions*” (Fendrix, 2017). More importance is ascribed to what is referred to as “...*a classical american way of having the stairway, where you start at one level*” (Choplin, 2017). A traditional career ladder is visible here, with clear steps for progressing within the company. This further means that individuals’ titles are more important as a reference to their level of experience:

“...*if you know that this person is a senior consultant, then you know basically what kind of experience that person has because that’s typically a person that did work for 3-4 years and well has got to some expertise in her or his field and can also lead others in the operational business*” (Choplin, 2017)

Such labelling is apparently meant to provide a sense of what the individual is capable of and what can be expected from him or her. Therefore, in teams, “*you refer more to the hierarchy in that respect than the actual organisational structure*” (Choplin, 2017). In this respect, “...*a consultant would, if there is any problem, first, of course approach a manager and then go to senior management, a partner and so forth*” (Choplin, 2017). The adherence to this stairway implies that there can be thresholds after all. In contradiction to the afore-stated claim to have a flat hierarchy, the stairway implies that consultants should not simply “...*talk to anyone...*” (Tagger, 2017), but instead use personal judgement and/or get the consent of their direct superiors before bothering higher-ups. In this sense, a hierarchy is discernible in which different

levels of knowledge and experience are meant to match varying levels of problems and enquiries.

Internally, this hierarchy is important as the different levels respond to varying levels of learning. This circumstance shall support the idea that people on one level teach those on respectively lower levels. In this sense, “...*the hierarchy helps the development of people...*” (Tagger, 2017).

This development is furthermore meant to be facilitated by the hierarchy when it comes to the cooperation among employees. Having inexperienced junior consultants work with seniors might cause tensions as the consultant is likely to “...*get stressed that they have to create the super perfect work, and the senior manager can't be expecting something that he is used to*” (Tagger, 2017). Hence this hierarchy “...*helps growth and it helps that comfort zones for both levels*” (Tagger, 2017). Nonetheless, this approach can be disadvantageous for the development of some consultants as they all seem to be expected to follow the same learning curve.

The hierarchy or stairway within Vivaldi does not only have its application internally. Similarly, and more importantly, the levels of experience and knowledge are also needed “...*in order to serve clients with a very complex issue and matters that we're dealing with*” (Houston, 2017). Therefore, the whole organisation of Vivaldi “*is more built around the client's assignment than based on our operation structure...*” (Choplin, 2017). This means that employees work a lot in cross-functional teams that reflect different levels of experience. The different titles in Vivaldi's classic American stairway are thus necessary to pull a suitable team together and pick a suitable leader necessary for the coordination of work.

### **Vertical Coordination/interaction**

Interaction among consultants and managers, as well as peer level colleagues is highly present throughout most of the interviews. The interaction, or communication, does not only consist of formal request or orders, but rather consists of both formal and informal patterns of communication. Additionally, it is notable that the interaction and communication consist of everything from phone calls, emails, Skype-calls and both formal meetings and informal conversations at the office corridors.

Throughout our material, a managerial interest in completing the task or deliverable is present. The communication and interaction is evidently directed towards the asking of questions and delivering responses to said questions. Drift (2017) also continued on the same path by illustrating the situations in which she is approached by managers:



*“...it can be that some tasks have been left undone or that I have done something wrong or missed something, or that something emerges that has to be fixed. That’s usually when you hear from them.”*

Managerial interaction is thus clearly goal-oriented, and it is also implied how managers only reach out to their subordinates in a specific set of situations. In general, the consultants all, in one way or another, emphasise how managers appear to focus on deliverables and client assignments. Managers can further be seen as responsible for the coordinating mechanisms that are required to keep the team focused on achieving their goal and generate a final and flawless deliverable.

The interactions among managers and consultants appear to be constant, often on a daily basis. Not only is this the preferred amount of interaction among managers in particular, but also an aspect of the interaction that is challenging to replace. McCartney (2017) expresses his thoughts in the following way: *“...the main reason for interacting is that ... there is a tangible outcome that we need to take a look at”*. Communication and the interaction that follows is thus not only something involuntary that comes with the work itself, it is required as the work performed demands coordination to produce the expected results. In general, managers coordinate tasks through *“...check-ins or discussion”*, with the purpose of *“...going through a number of questions, what they are working on”* (McCartney, 2017). Managerial coordination is evidently both present and a regular part of the work the consultants perform. All consultants also expressed that it is mostly up to management to coordinate the work they perform, which is supported by McCartney (2017) who states that a significant amount of his time is spent on coordination. This view is supported by Fendrix (2017) who expresses how he has up to six or seven managers at the same while some managers admit to handling up to 20 consultants. This evidently supports the claim expressed by both managers and consultants that they both need to spend a considerable amount of time on coordinating. In the following paragraphs, we will dive deeper into the interaction and coordination among colleagues on a peer level.

### **Horizontal Coordination/ Interaction**

In all the interviews, it is apparent that literally everyone is talking about their colleagues and teams in the form of ‘us’ and ‘we’. It appears that the colleagues become an ingroup and the ones they identify with, which exhibits the significance of teamwork. In general, there is evidence of a lot of coordinating going on among colleagues. This is especially present in the way Fendrix (2017) describes how he is *“...a member of up to 15 teams”*. Being a member of

multiple teams requires a lot of coordination, something the managers cannot always be responsible for. Additionally, the importance of coordination is clearly visible in how Drift (2017) expresses that consultants “...often review a company in teams, because if the company is slightly larger you cannot do a complete review alone”. Apparently, some tasks are deemed too demanding to complete on your own. Thus, the need for peer level coordination and communication. Coordination at a peer level appears to take place as a result of the need to distribute tasks among the members of the team, but also as a result of the different sets of skills present in the cross-functional teams.

#### **4.2.2. Management's Involvement**

Management's involvement in the consultancy work conducted at Vivaldi shows many facets ranging from being impersonal to the setting of a basis for a deeper professional relationship with individual consultants as it will be discussed in chapter 4.2.3. On a formal and impersonal level, managers make sure that assignments are being completed on time. In addition, they are to enforce internal regulations and standards that are continuously subjected to possible alterations by Vivaldi's external environment. In this sense, they make sure that consultants meet the formal requirements to carry out their job (Houston, 2017).

#### **Guidance**

However, a lot more relevant and prominent are managers' personal involvements with the organisation's consultants. On the one hand, this involvement is expressed in the guidance of consultants. On a superficial level, managers monitor the work process. Aside from keeping managers updated, one could furthermore interpret the daily monitoring of consultants as a preventive measure aimed at keeping consultants from becoming laidback or lacking in their performance. The control of consultants' output such monitoring entails is reflected in the company's principle that “*there's always four eyes that have examined the work*” to ensure the avoidance of “*any mistakes*” (Fendrix, 2017). Any doubts about managers' qualification to properly assess such output can arguably be eased when considering that most managers have a consultancy background and evolved within the firm. Due to their experience that granted a rise within Vivaldi (Choplin, 2017), managers happen to understand the approaches to clients' assignments “*...better than I do*” (Fendrix, 2017). Within Vivaldi, this lead in knowledge justifies and solidifies managers' role to guide their subordinates. This is particularly important for the more junior consultants who “*...need guidance on how to do their work in a good way*” (Choplin, 2017). While this point of view implies a lack of independence among the less

experienced consultants it can also be valued as an educative pre-emptive measure that eases the necessary control of client deliverables and teaches a sensitivity for a quality standard aspired within Vivaldi. In addition, it implies that this guidance becomes less and less prominent the more experience the consultants gain. In turn, experienced consultants are challenged in “...*how to be even better*” (Kobain, 2017) by analysing their performance. The implication that active guidance of consultants is meant to be reduced over time is corroborated by the notion that a major aspect of management’s involvement is about “*setting direction*” (McCartney, 2017). Guidance is thus mostly necessary in the planning phase of an assignment (Choplin, 2017). According to McCartney (2017) a direction can be set by “...*discussing and agreeing on the results, making sure that we have the right information and the right connection with the client*”. Such involvement points to the role of managers as support of consultancy work. As Tagger (2017) illustrates when he talks about the needs of his subordinates, showing how he is personally involved with his subordinates: “*they need support, they need guidance, that's what we're here for, to kinda guide and help them on every step, as they grow and things they aren't sure about. And also to communicate deadlines*”

### **Support**

As one of the most prominent parts of their involvement, managers appear to support consultants in realizing their full potential. This intention is reflected in a collaboration with consultants that aims at “...*trying to find some good fits for the employees, so that they feel like they have some good connections to the company and to me as well*” (Kobain, 2017). In doing so, managers “...*try to set the expectations together with the employees*” (Kobain, 2017). In this sense, consultants are given a realistic picture of how far they can advance at their current level. Furthermore, managers collaborate with consultants when engaging clients’ assignments. They seem intent to find agreements discussing “...*the way forward*” (Kobain, 2017). This means that they take the input and opinions of everyone involved in the assignment into consideration in an attempt to reach a consensus. In the true sense of the word, collaboration causes managers to be both proactive and reactive towards consultants.

In being proactive managers engage with consultants to discuss their approach to assignments, possible hurdles, time and organisational frames. In doing so they seem intent to understand how consultants “...*are thinking, how they are going to do things, how they are sort of dissecting a problem, what kind of analysis they perform, how they talk about this...*” and what is going to be “...*the potential outcome of this or the conclusions*” (McCartney, 2017).

According to McCartney (2017), this level of proactiveness is rooted in his “...*personal passion and interest...*” which implies that the involvement of other managers has chances of being less proactive. In this respect, the notion that the management style in the organisation is predominantly proactive “...*because that’s the way we lead our teams*” (Choplin, 2017) might not reflect the reality in the company.

When being reactive, managers intend to position themselves as point of contact among their subordinates who can be easily reached and approached. Their role is described as “...*senior advisor, assisting the teams in the deliverables, reviewing materials, helping them out*” (Kobain, 2017). Great significance is ascribed to the notion that managers are part of a team of consultants. In this sense, it is “...*important for the teams to know that they can reach me easily and that they can ask question as they go along. And with that I try to be physically present as much as I can*” (Houston, 2017). Thus, consultants seem to be encouraged to consult with managers regarding ideas or questions they might have, or problems they might be facing. This poses quite a challenge for managers as consultants usually raise “*complex issues that they don't know about*” (Tagger, 2017). Hence as a manager “...*you have to know more than them...*” (Tagger, 2017). However, such challenges can also be considered opportunities for managers to solidify their position and reputation as senior advisors. When positioned suitably within a team of consultants, managers can thus be as involved through reaction as they would be through proactiveness.

Yet, their involvement is not only required upon demand of their knowledge. When consultants happen to be deep into problems or questions, it seems to be up to managers to set the focus and make sure “...*that they don’t miss the bigger picture*” (McCartney, 2017). Hence, managers’ position as senior advisor cannot only be solidified through knowledge but also through experience. Interestingly, in this context managers’ involvement appears to begin as reaction to consultants’ enquiry and shifts to proactive behaviour when guiding the subordinates towards the bigger picture.

Aside from contributing knowledge and experience, managers’ reactions are also required “*when things start falling through the cracks and deadlines aren't being met...*” (Tagger, 2017), in case of issues with colleagues or when “*somebody is not performing at their level*”. That is when they have to direct their subordinates and become “*a bit pushy*” (Tagger, 2017). The interesting aspect of this statement is that managerial support, be it proactive or reactive, is usually meant to facilitate, and not pervade the work of consultants. As such pervasion is usually seen in the planning phase the need to be pushy can thus either be seen as the result of

lacking support or consultants' failure to honor the given support. After all, consultants are expected to improve through managerial support: "...if I'm investing my time I want to see some results" (Tagger, 2017). Both the guidance and support of consultants can generally be seen as an investment from the managerial side. In making sure that this investment yields the expected return, managers also seem to be involved with consultants on a more personal level. When it comes to their work, consultants shall feel "*comfortable doing it*" (Houston, 2017). This is achieved by "...taking care of the people..., making sure everyone is happy..." (McCartney, 2017). This is why managers regularly have personal discussions with their consultants on how they are feeling "*or if they see any challenges coming up, just to understand that they feel comfortable*" as this is "*rarely something that they think about*" (McCartney, 2017). Such interactions can advance managerial involvement to a professional relationship between managers and consultants as "*the more contact you have with your managers the more comfortable you become with them*" (Drift, 2017). This relationship shall be further elucidated in the following chapter.

### Transition

In this chapter, managerial involvement in knowledge work has been illustrated. As the involvement contains both guidance and support that both require a certain amount of personal interaction, it is likely that a relationship of some kind will develop. Being approachable, supporting and guiding can act as a foundation for the facilitation of a relationship among consultants and managers, which will be further elaborated in the following chapter. While the previous chapters have focused on a managerial perspective, the following chapters will also include the perspective of the subordinates as we perceive this to be of importance for the understanding of managerial attunement to knowledge work.

#### **4.2.3. Relationship with management**

Consultants' relationship with management, as well as the development of this relationship, can be seen as affecting the work performed. Based on the empirical data it is evident that there are multiple factors affecting the relationship between managers and consultants, but also numerous examples of why this is of importance. It is described how the frequent interactions with one's managers can improve the relationship between consultants and managers, as they become more comfortable with each other the more they interact. As illustrated by Houston (2017) when asked about her relationship to her subordinates:

*“... it's good to get to know your manager at least to a certain degree, ... know what their values are and what they enjoy in life and what their drivers are. ... if they're having a bad day, everyone needs to ... act up in relation to the problems or the task ... regardless of wind and weather. ... grasp of who you're dealing with and how they function, and where your work comes together. That's where you have common ground.”*

There appears to be an interest in getting to know the consultants on a more personal level. The communication and interaction is also evidently quite familiar as it takes into account a personal aspect as well. The aspect of getting to know the subordinates on a more personal level could serve a self-improving purpose from a managerial perspective. By communicating and getting to know subordinates on a more personal level, managers have the possibility to develop the way they manage and lead their subordinates. Additionally, it appears that, at Vivaldi, no one should be afraid of raising their voice as not bringing forward problems could be detrimental to the firm at some point. Therefore, showing a certain degree of openness appears to be endorsed from an organisational perspective.

Although the relationship is said to be open in that anyone can be approached, it is also notable that the relationship is influenced by the emotions and personality of the managers. The following quote from Drift (2017) describes her relationship to her closest manager, as she states that *“depending on her mood we get along with her differently”*. It is therefore apparent that the relationship can affect the performance of the subordinates if they feel that their managers are not as effortlessly available or approachable. Finally, there are also clear signals of how the subordinates want to feel valued, recognised and praised for the work they perform at the company. Additionally, this also shows a certain intended physical proximity to managers.

Another aspect that can be considered to be of importance in relationships is trust. Not only does the the interaction among consultants and managers serve a purpose of coordinating work, but apparently also building rapport with each other. The interaction is used as a method of creating a relationship in which trust and understanding is of importance, as can be seen in the following quote from Kobain (2017):

*“... important part ... to be able to really build trust between me as a manager and my employees. ... to have that peace so to say. (...) it's important to be able to build the trust based on the knowledge and what we actually can accomplish together, .... ... a mixture, it's really*

*important to get to know the employees on a personal level and to be able to be open and to have good conversations and learn from each other.”*

### Transition

It has so far been illustrated how the relationship among different parties affects the work performed. In a relationship, it appears that people are induced to influence each other, which is why we will further introduce the vertical and horizontal influence among consultants and managers at Vivaldi in the next sub-chapter. Involvement and relationship both contribute to the mutual influence among consultants and managers, and by exploring it more thoroughly we will be able to approach managerial attunement from an even deeper perspective.

## **4.2.4. Influence**

### **Vertical Influence**

Managerial influence on consultants is exerted through managers' daily behaviour and actions. In this sense, influence can be described as *“the essence of involvement and relationship”*. One apparent way of exerting influence is by encouraging consultants to imitate managers' approaches to dealing with for example assignments and problems. Seniors at the company thus happened to describe themselves as a *“walking example how you can be if you make a career within Vivaldi”* (Choplin, 2017). In this respect, *“...managing people is a lot about using examples”* (Choplin, 2017). This implies, however, that consultants are to adhere to given approaches and should rather refrain from applying their own style when handling assignments. On the other hand, this is understandable in the context of quality assurance as these given approaches evidently turned out to be successful when considering the Vivaldi's growth in the past years. After all, managing consultants at Vivaldi goes along with a developing process. The notion that *“...people can grow and everybody has the opportunity to realize their potential”* (Choplin, 2017) implies that there has to be a solid foundation for growth that can explain the exemplification of consulting approaches applied by the firm's seniors. Once consultants are able to engage an assignment as exemplified by their superiors, they can try to improve and develop on their own. Reaching this stage reflects the seemingly most important aspect of consultants' management which is *“about constant building of confidence in the firm”* (Choplin, 2017). Confidence is meant to make them *“feel bold in the task, in the engagement or in the internal development task”* (McCartney, 2017) so that they *“feel ownership”* (Tagger, 2017) about their work. The empowerment of consultants can be seen as a way to develop and

prepare them for more independent ways of working that benefits not only the consultants but also managers as they will eventually have to invest less time in tending their subordinates. The alleged loss in managerial control is in fact being welcomed as in Vivaldi's field of work consultants shall be induced to find "*ways to solve a problem and make sure they feel ownership of the situation*" (Tagger, 2017). Considering that each consultant represents Vivaldi and is to uphold or even improve its image, it is in the managers' interest to have subordinates at their best possible performance who are able to independently engage, adapt to, and solve assignments. Having consultants fulfil this role also implies the necessity, however, to have consultants shaped to the extent that they behave according to the firm's interest. There also appears to be a focus on developing the subordinates. This further appears to be a question of mutual growth where both parties can learn and grow from each other. Aside from aiming at the development of subordinates, the purpose of vertical influence exerted by managers can also be that of improving the company as a whole. Due to the low thresholds described in the organisation of knowledge work (4.2.1.) it can be expected of consultants to bring problems forward as soon as they emerge, providing the company with valuable time to react.

Due to the influence managers have on shaping their subordinates, the managers ascribe great importance to being physically present in their teams. In doing so they try to fulfil their goal of being "*...reachable, showing trust and also giving support and giving positive feedback, showing, making sure that they know what I consider good quality*" (Huston, 2017). This statement points at the two major aims of vertical, downwards influence. Firstly, managers appear to make their subordinates feel comfortable by sending out signals that they are open to approaches. Consultants are thus given the feeling that they can advance an assignment as far as possible on their own and learn from mistakes since they can always consult with their superiors on possible hurdles. Secondly, managers intend to motivate consultants to improve even further. They do so by setting the tone in the teams and making everyone feel engaged, welcome and involved. In addition, they try to make their consultants understand why their work is important. When questioning both consultants and management there seems to be a mutual agreement that consultants do exert influence on management through feedback on managers' performance. According to McCartney (2017), he appears to appreciate:

*"honest feedback to what I could do better. ... if there are people in my team that don't feel comfortable and express that they don't really like the task or the work or the way I communicate, that really makes me think about how I manage and how I lead people. That would be the key influencer I would say"*



Such feedback is either expressed explicitly or in more subtle ways as managers learn from subordinates' reaction, by seeing where:

*"...I make them feel good, and where do I do it the wrong way where my leadership style make them feel uncomfortable, performing less good for example. So I think that yes, it's subject to influence." (McCartney, 2017)*

However, consultants also influence more proactively by issuing suggestions for improvements or changes. Yet, in many cases this influence seems to be limited to reaching a consensus with and questioning their managers in matter of communication. Indeed, managers' receptiveness to consultants' influence *"...varies from person to person"* (Tagger, 2017). This implies that consultants can only exert influence with the consent of their managers. Thus, the roles in Vivaldi's teams seem to be clearly allocated which does not need to have a negative connotation since it proved to be viable within the firm to have those with the power to guide others. Nonetheless, most managers questioned left little doubt that they are the sole and unchallenged leaders within the teams of consultants. This conviction seems to become increasingly solidified the longer these managers work in their position: *"the more senior you get in a consulting organisation, you get more and more responsibilities, not only team development but also the sales side and the client relations. That also means that there is less and less time and more distraction to the actual leadership elements of the job"* (McCartney, 2017).

### **Horizontal Influence**

Judging from the interviews conducted, consultants appear to influence each other mostly on a personal level when considering given statements that *"there are colleagues that I get along with better..."* which are *"...those that I have more in common with. I think they influence me the most, they are people I feel comfortable with"* (Fendrix, 2017).

Colleagues in the teams can thus influence each other by creating a *"good atmosphere"* (Fendrix, 2017), that boosts consultants' working spirit. Aside from that, *"their role in my work is sparring, help and assist me but also, in the way that I learn"* (Fendrix, 2017). Although such help might seem comparable to the educative influence of managers, one can argue that it is less pervasive as colleagues on the same level neither have the time, responsibility nor the allegedly necessary level of experience to take on the role of raising and nurturing other consultants. In this sense, such help is more likely to contribute to a good atmosphere the

majority of interviewees seem to value. Additionally, the influence shown through assisting or helping one's colleagues is something that can be expected of those you work closely with. Moreover, as has been illustrated previously, consultants interact to quite a high degree, further supporting the view that interaction generates influence which is used for consultants to learn and develop.

When it comes to the growth within the firm as it is aspired in Vivaldi, consultants appear to accept on their actual work mostly by managers only, which might be due to their evident lead in knowledge and experience as symbolised by their title. However, this circumstance does not prevent colleagues from being able to exert horizontal influence within a team as they have basically “...*the same influence on the team spirit and the team delivery because you need all to perform in order to make the delivery happen*” (Choplin, 2017). The power that is granted to the individual in these cases creates an interesting dynamic in Vivaldi's consultancy work. While the power difference between management and consultant in the daily life leads to a more vertical influence, managers within or outside an ongoing teamwork seem to matter a lot less as the prominent influence becomes more horizontal.

#### Transition

Managers are evidently involved in the knowledge work of Vivaldi. Through involvement a relationship is formed, in which influence generally is exerted, both horizontally and vertically. The influence is often aimed at empowering the consultants through development and growth, thus preparing them for more challenging tasks and assignments, as well as their ability to deal with these more independently. Influence can however be exerted to create certain dependencies as well. Influence can thus be seen as a basis for independence from, or dependence on managers, which is why we approach the final layer of managerial attunement by analysing independence and dependence.

#### **4.2.5. (In)dependence from/on management**

##### **Independence**

At Vivaldi, consultants appear to be granted a fair amount of independence. Literally all of the consultants emphasize how a majority of their work is performed independently, as illustrated by Farrison (2017) who state that “...*If we say that it's a 10 hour project, I would say that I work for 7 hours completely alone and then we'd go through it together*”. The same consultant also continues by explaining how “*it's one of the best things here, you get to work independently*”

*a lot*". Tagger (2017) elaborates how there is a *"big big push to work independently ... that's part of growth. If you don't push people to grow, if people don't become independent it's hard for them to grow. You're not going to be there all the time"*. Not only is independence desired by consultants, it also appears to be an agenda of Vivaldi. McCartney (2017) further elaborates by explaining how *"it's not about being too much in control, telling them exactly what to do, rather letting them find the ways to solve a problem and make sure that they feel ownership of the situation"*, hence highlighting how managers also push for their consultants to become independent.

The independence however comes with certain restrictions. Tagger (2017) elaborates how *"you give them the freedom, but if they're not performing that's when we start getting pushy"* indicating that independence is granted as long as the work gets done. Additionally, the independence is set within certain frames from within the consultants are able to work independently. As Tagger (2017) explains how he is *"rather focusing on setting the end goal, this is what we want to accomplish. By doing this, one can use different inspiration, ... it's really up to them to choose their way of working or performing the work. But I want to see something like this at the end"*, thus illustrating how independence is granted in regards to how the actual work is performed but not in terms of outcome. Moreover Choplin, (2017) states how the consultants are those *"actually creating the value the company is selling"*, which can be seen as an indication for granting consultants independence. Fendrix (2017) illustrates how managers still remain involved, even though the independence is granted:

*"We have a principle that states that if there's always four eyes that have examined the work, then there shouldn't really be any mistakes"*

As has been demonstrated previously a considerable amount of consultancy work is carried out in teams. These teams are also granted independence, as *"consultants are free to delegate tasks to re-arrange and reorganise their work on an assignment"* (Choplin, 2017), thus highlighting a certain independence within the teams. Moreover Choplin, (2017) continues by explaining how managers are needed more *"in the planning phase of a project"*, after which consultants can take a more independent approach.

Furthermore, independence quite clearly correlated to experience, as Kobain (2017) also elaborates how *"...people with more experience ... are more self-caring, they really know what they are doing"*, thus indicating how less managerial control needs to be exerted the more senior consultants are. Not only is this stated by managers, this view is also shared by consultants.

Farrison (2017) illustrates how *“it was different in the beginning but now I already notice that I’m capable of working alone”*.

Although independence often is stated to be of importance for knowledge workers, and also desired, there are signs of the independence being unintended. As Farrison (2017) elaborated previously he works alone for 7 hours out of 10. While it shows signs of independence, there is a possibility that his managers simply are too busy to actually monitor the work he performs. Another aspect that justifies the consultants’ independence appears to be the fact that *“it’s always about doing what is best for the client and we really want to make an impact or difference that matters to the client”* (Kobain, 2017). The client is evidently number one, and therefore consultants can choose to exert a certain independency to achieve what is best for the client. If the consultants choose to exert their independence, they can go out of their way to satisfy the customer, and thus also subtract from the dependence on managers.

### **Dependence**

Although independence appears to be a crucial part of knowledge work, consultants are still dependent on their managers to a certain extent. Based on the material it appears that an underlying reason for the dependence is the consultants’ lack of experience and knowledge. As Tagger (2017) illustrates, *“consultants don’t know all of the answers ... you as a manager is kind of like their first person to go to”*. Dependence is additionally highlighted by the fact that *“leadership and also managing people is a lot about using examples”* (Choplin, 2017). The use of examples imply that consultants are adhere to a given approach and cannot handle an assignment independently, neither apply their own approach or style. Furthermore, consultants depict how their managers are leading the teams, *“when there is a manager I do as the manager tell me to do, the manager leads”* (Fendrix, 2017). The style of her manager is apparently commanding, leaving the consultant depending on her manager to make decisions.

### **4.2.6. Challenges**

The first challenge mentioned by the interviewees revolved around the issue of time management. Due to competition on the market, multiple tasks need to be finished in a very limited amount of time which means that *“...keeping schedules and doing things quickly enough...”* (Drift, 2017) is was considered most challenging by the interviewed consultants.

The stated challenges for managers are manifold. Consultants handle several assignments in relatively short periods of time and tend to get a different team for each assignment. Therefore, members of a team “...don’t know each other from the start...”. It is up to managers to “...bring the team together and make everyone understand the task that the team has and the role that each individual has” (Choplin, 2017). Aside from that, consultants work with clients which results in a “main challenge within the consultant industry ... that you don't meet your colleagues or the people you are managing on a daily basis” (Kobain, 2017). In parallel, managers have additional occupations and can be in charge of several teams which is said to make it difficult to keep a focus on all teams and their developments. Hence, considering management’s aforementioned aspiration to lead by example, the intention to be “...present and transparent...” (Houston, 2017) could prove quite a test. This intention seems to be link to an allegedly new trend “...where you try to share as much information as possible and trust people to make most of the decisions in relation to it” (Houston, 2017). This trend seems to correspond with the apparent circumstance that “...consultants want, and require, a high pace in their personal development and they want a constant flow of new challenges coming to them, and they also want recognition and being recognised for what they do” (McCarthy, 2017).

As main influence and contributors to consultants’ personal development within Vivaldi, managers could use honest feedback on their efforts from subordinates. However, as the interviewed managers had observed, junior consultants shy away from being honest due to what can be phrased a fear of being killed as the messenger of bad news.

### 4.3. Summary

<b>Organisation of Knowledge Work</b>
Emphasis on the importance of hierarchical levels
consultants mostly learn from their managers; the hierarchy helps the development of people; helps creating comfort zones for individual levels
great emphasis on team work and the inclusion of different levels
consultants work in multiple, ever-changing teams for relatively short periods of time per project
Individual team members might be constantly communicating, but not necessarily with each other – remaining issues to be solved with managers

formal and informal communication
managers appear to focus on deliverables and client assignments and can further be considered responsible for the coordinating mechanisms

<b>Management's Involvement</b>
managers' involvement extends to guidance as well as proactive and reactive support due to lead in knowledge and experience
Consultants need guidance on how to do their work in a good way; Guidance is thus mostly necessary in the planning phase of an assignment
major aspect of management's involvement is about setting direction
Support is to set the expectations together with the employees
Great significance is ascribed to the physical presence of managers in a team of consultants
the overall managerial involvement is meant to ultimately retreat to a point where managers mostly support their subordinates.
As supportive advisors, managers need to have more knowledge and experience than their consultants
Involvement shall make consultants feel comfortable to encourage the approach of superiors

<b>Relationship</b>
there are multiple factors affecting the relationship between managers and consultants
Managerial interest in getting to know the consultants on a more personal level
relationship between managers and consultants shall bring about and maintain a feeling of comfort and mutual trust that shall help upholding consultants' psychological contracts

<b>Influence</b>
Influence is the essence of involvement and relationship
managerial influence through the encouragement to adopt demonstrated approaches to given problems and assignments. This implies the necessity of a solid foundation for consultants' further growth and development
Influence is highly welcomed by consultants
build-up of consultants' confidence appears to be done by managers only and seems intent to cause consultants to work more and more independently
Influence through rhetoric praising the superiority of consultants

Strong physical presence of managers is meant to encourage consultants to independently advance and improve as far as possible as they can immediately consult with their superiors when facing hurdles

consultants shaped to the extent that they behave according to the firm's interest.

consultants appear to be able to exert influence on managers through formal and informal or emotional feedback on their performances

managers' receptiveness to consultants' influence varies from person to person

team members seem to mostly influence each other by contributing to a good atmosphere that boosts consultants' working spirit.

### **(In)dependence**

great importance appears to be ascribed to granting independence to consultants in their work

When it comes to handling assignments, consultants are given the freedom to take their own approach upon preceding instructions given by their managers

consultants need lesser instructions the more experienced they get

consultants are dependent on managers' knowledge in order to learn, develop and, at times, carry out a given assignment

managers' solidified position and role in Vivaldi's knowledge work seemingly encourages consultants to actively seek their superiors' feedback and consent.

## 5. Discussion & Analysis

In the following, the theory and empirical data will be discussed on the respective level of attunement they belong to. In addition, the theory on knowledge introduced in chapter 3 and Vivaldi's challenges presented in chapter 4 will be incorporated in the discussion as illustrated in the figure below.

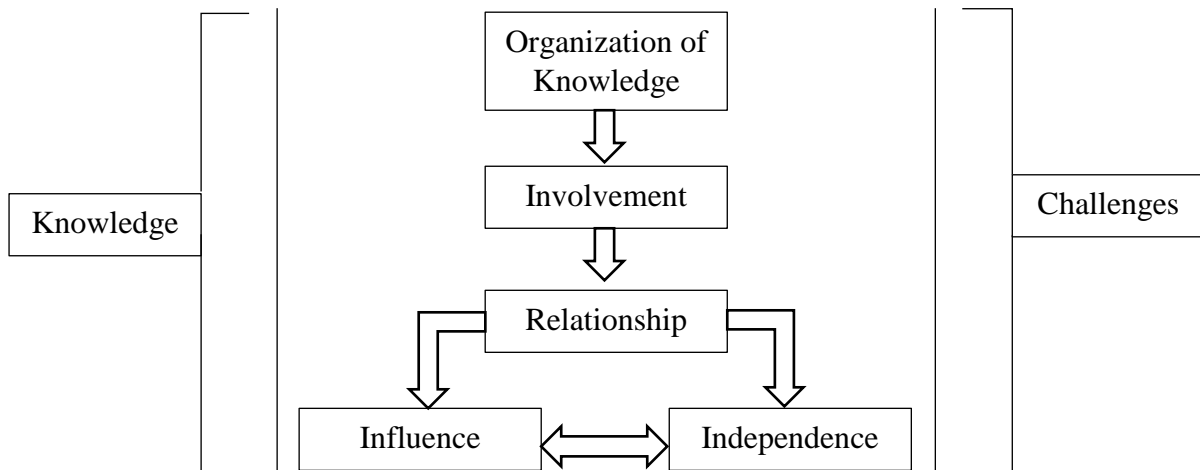


Figure 4

### 5.1. The Organization of Knowledge Work

Vivaldi was characterized as an organisation with a flat, almost non-existent structure that seems to remove barriers from communication and collaboration among all employees, be it knowledge workers or managers. At first glance, this organisational approach does not only seem to be in line with that of the fairly ideal knowledge intensive firms (Newell, et al., 2009), it also seems to match the characteristics of an adhocracy which is deemed by Mintzberg (1999) and Newell et al. (2009) as the most suitable organisational configuration for a KIF.

However, when relating the characteristics of an adhocracy to the empirical data presented above, one is encouraged to question if the way knowledge work is organized at Vivaldi really matches the ideal characteristics in the literature. At first, the minimization of hierarchical structures seems to be enacted. Yet, the great emphasis on titles within the firm seems to imply the opposite as they lead to what is referred to as 'stairway', on which each step symbolizes a respectively higher level of knowledge and experience. Consultants are to keep this levels in mind when approaching seniors meaning that they should always consult with those directly above them first. The apparent existence of hierarchical levels points to a shift from adhocracy



to what Mintzberg (1999) describes as a professional bureaucracy. In further reference to his work, it can be argued that due to its size Vivaldi is bound to have more bureaucratic structures. The existence of a bureaucracy implies a rather centralized decision-making process and a concentration of power. According to Sinclair (1992), this appears to be detrimental to knowledge work as consultants at the firm seem to be compelled to simply conform to the decisions of their superiors. Having these structures established, it is inevitable, and even desired within our firm, that managers organise team work. Due to their lead in experience, these managers tend to impose similar organisational approaches in all teams they are involved with and thus deprive knowledge workers, to some degree, of their possibility to fully organize team work themselves.

However, when adopting the view of Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), it can be argued that such a hierarchy is necessary for the organisation of knowledge work since only higher-ups seem fully able to judge consultants' skills and knowledge. Hence, they are the only ones to compose a team suitable for successful completions of assignments. When further considering the necessity for consultants to socialize (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), picking the right team of consultants in the beginning can further facilitate their knowledge work. The evident deviation from an adhocracy in this context does not only seem to benefit knowledge work, it also points to possible flaw in the concept of adhocracy. A lack of hierarchy, and thus bureaucracy, can compromise the quality and effectiveness of knowledge work carried out in a team.

In case of our firm, the hierarchy seems to further benefit teamwork as the involvement of both consultants and managers poses a greater variety of knowledge and experience that can match a greater range of problems and enquiries. When merely considering the idea itself, one can find support in the notion by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) that diversity in the team boosts knowledge work. However, when taking into account that the diversity in knowledge sets within a team is seemingly meant to be applied outside the team one cannot help but to identify some risks. When in the relatively short periods of time, that are usually allocated for team projects at Vivaldi, different sets of knowledge are combined (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), chances can be considered rather low that team members on their individual levels learn other sets of knowledge that are brought in. Considering that the learning process within a team, which can prove essential for knowledge work, requires time (Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Cohen and Levinthal, 1990), being deprived of this learning opportunity can turn out to be detrimental. In addition, missing out on the chance to utilize the combination of knowledge sets within the team can curb consultants' creativity (Dougherty, 1992; Leonard-Barton, 1995). This aspect

points to a deficiency in Vivaldi's management of consultants that will also become evident when discussing the following levels of attunement.

The epistemology of process as a way of gaining knowledge appears to be rather ignored although consultants' constant work in teams seems to be predestined for this approach. Yet, one could beg to differ in arguing that through teamwork consultants and managers put the knowledge they combine into practice (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Gherardi, 2001; Orlikowski, 2002). However, the learning process that should develop out of such team work is not given the time to develop. In taking Alvesson's (2004) view, half of the knowledge consultants could gain is thus being wasted.

In taking the firm's view on the other hand one could get convinced that consultants are most likely to learn most from the lessons they receive from their superiors as these appear to have more knowledge to offer. However, knowledge is derived from one's preceding sets of knowledge and perceptions and, thus, managers cannot pass on their complete knowledge to their subordinates as they will never be able to understand it fully (Wilson, 2002; Alvesson, 2004). Now, one can argue that knowledge being produced as a group will also inevitably be understood differently by everyone. However, it will add to the individual learning process nonetheless. In addition, one could claim that one's own experience with a group will result in more knowledge than a mere lesson by managers as one will most likely experience the process of attaining that knowledge as well. Besides, if consultants do not have to fully rely on lessons from their superiors, the tension that arise in our firm when seniors work with inexperienced consultants, can be reduced. On top of that, the point where juniors can effectively cooperate can be reached more quickly. In this context, the comfort zones that are meant to be established by the firm's hierarchy can become less salient.

As there seem to be interesting aspects in the organisational structure, the way the organisation of knowledge work is being executed is also worth discussing.

### **Coordination**

At Vivaldi, knowledge work is mostly carried out in teams. This circumstance is advocated by Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017) who in turn emphasise the importance of having all group members adjust to one another. At Vivaldi, such efforts can be discerned in the allegedly constant communication between all hierarchical levels involved in a team effort, since the process of adjustment arguably requires an exchange between team members of some sort. As this communication appears to take place on both formal and informal levels, it likely reflects

employees' interest in, and intention to adapt to one another. This argument can be supported when taking into account how most of the interviewees seem to consider themselves and their colleagues as part of a community. In relating this statement to the organisational structure of the firm's knowledge work discussed above, one can argue that the mutual intention to adjust stimulates the crucial activity of socialising to further advance knowledge work (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In this context, mutual adjustment further implies a greater acceptance of others' ideas which facilitates the important exchange of ideas (Newell, et al., 2009).

However, the notion to be part of a community tends to obscure the fact that this community seems to be quite large at Vivaldi in which consultants are part of up to 15 teams. These teams do not only serve as basis for an exchange of ideas but are also necessary to complete assignment for which every consultant has to carry out one particular task. Being occupied with tasks of their own and facing the situation of having to interact with a great number of colleagues at the same time, a continuous free flow of ideas that is deemed necessary for knowledge work (Nonaka & Konno, 1998) is likely to be as curbed as the constant communication with individuals. Individual team members might be constantly communicating, but not necessarily with each other.

This circumstance solidifies the necessity for consultants to interact with their managers to have problems solved and questions answered. However, the apparent fact that these problems and questions only relate to specific details implies that the communication and coordination among team members is fruitful to quite a large extent as they appear to solve most issues collaboratively. In addition, it can be argued that such interactions with managers will never become unnecessary in our firm as they have the responsibility of ensuring a flawless delivery to clients. Therefore, the learning experience might not have to be further developed. On the other hand, the implication that managers permanently need to fulfil the role of filling knowledge gaps can again point to a waste of learning potential within a team. In addition, managers do not have the time either to constantly communicate with their subordinates.

## **5.2. Management's Involvement**

From a classical point of view, the managers' involvement in knowledge work does not seem to exceed the role of controlling and monitoring (Maccoby, 2000). At Vivaldi however, managers' involvement extends from these classic tasks to guidance as well as proactive and reactive support.

At first, a deviation from the focus on control and monitoring seems to resonate well with writers such as Newell et al. (2009) who regard these managerial activities as detrimental to knowledge work. However, a further extension of involvement goes against their notion that knowledge workers such as consultants generally resent managerial involvement as it polarizes opinions and discourages them from sharing ideas. This point of view appears to reflect a prejudice, shared by the likes of Alvesson (2004), that managers lack the necessary skills and knowledge to make useful contributions to knowledge work. In the case of Vivaldi however, managers got to their position by having exceeded the level of knowledge and experience consultants are expected to have. Therefore, the conviction expressed in established literature that the pervasion of knowledge work by managers has negative connotation might be wrong per se, but seems to be rather short sighted. At Vivaldi, the involvement of managers seems to benefit consultants precisely because it extends further than the mere control and monitoring intended for the classic managerial role described in the literature. It is furthermore to be endorsed for it brings in an additional set of knowledge as it is advocated by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). This addition of knowledge seems to benefit every aspect of managerial involvement at Vivaldi. Having the necessary monitoring at the firm done by someone who is able to fully understand consultants' work and might find flaws, consultants at their level of knowledge and experience cannot discern is likely to benefit their learning process. While any attempt to guide consultants is usually seen as an unwanted confinement of their creative freedom (Newell, et al., 2009), managers' lead in knowledge and experiences causes consultants' to actively seek guidance as it helps them to develop a benchmark for their knowledge work. In accordance with House (1996), managers therefore justify their superior position by attempting to compensate for consultants' deficiencies and support their development. As stimulating as it might be to have someone show you how to improve, one cannot help but pointing out possible risks to this approach. In following and adhering to a given approach, consultants are given the opportunity to bypass the necessity to think critically about possible approaches to solving assignments. This in turn does not necessarily require consultants to reflect critically upon their actions as were proven to be

suitable by their superiors. In that way, consultants can be shaped to the extent that they merely apply given approaches for existing problems and assignments. In these cases, however, consultants' creative potential as an essential aspect of their knowledge work is being neglected as this is likely to require tapping into new fields of knowledge which mere guidance does not necessarily encourage. This could lead to a strict allocation of roles where consultants are degraded to mere followers of managerial guidance (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Guiding alone could therefore have the potential to result in a polarization of preferences and opinions after all and thus justify the criticism by Alvesson (2004) and Newell et al. (2009). However, such fears can be alleviated by the apparent fact that guidance in Vivaldi is mostly about setting direction and shall thus only be prominent in the planning phase of consultants' assignment. In addition, the overall managerial involvement at the firm appears to be intent to ultimately retreat to a point where managers mostly support their subordinates.

The tendency towards support can in this context be understood as deliberate counter measure to preserve and develop consultants' full potential. In addition, managers' role as advisors shall further facilitate the learning process. As discussed in the previous chapter, managers are most likely not able to pass all of their knowledge on to consultants due to individually different abilities to make sense of the given information (Newell, et al., 2009; Carlile, 2002). In consulting with managers, consultants can be considered freer to set their own learning pace being able to discuss open questions and thus benefit from a more sustainable learning experience. In addition, they are given the chance to collaborate with team members more freely for an assignment and thus develop knowledge that adds to and complement the knowledge sets of managers. Giving consultants the freedom to carry out knowledge work without being concretely guided, is likely to give consultants the confidence to continuously contribute to team efforts. These contributions cannot only help expanding the range of possible approaches to an assignment, it can furthermore help highlighting flaws in a team effort that are likely to be overlooked if consultants merely adhere to one dominant guide (Newell, et al., 2009). In turn, managers, in their position as advisors, can also prevent teams of consultants to take extreme actions by pointing out deficiencies in their current approach and helping them not to miss the bigger picture. Lastly, they can also use their lead in knowledge and experience to mediate in case of conflicts within teams and discuss an appropriate way forward. In being a support for consultants, managers solidify their place within knowledge work. However, this notion shall not insinuate that support alone is the ultimate form of involvement for an attunement between managers.

In the scenario of repression through mutual micromanagement among team members as drawn by Barker (1993), guidance or even control might prove necessary to reset the focus on knowledge work. Since any distraction from the actual work implies delays, such involvements can reduce the main challenge every consultant related to time management. Depending on the situation, guidance and even control can be considered equally if not more salient. Considering the characteristics of each of the types of involvement it can be argued that guidance reflects the element of control whereas support is rather meant to help triggering commitment among consultants. In reference to Newell et al. (2009) it can be argued that both control and commitment need to coexist as they complement each other, as argued before. At first glance, one is tempted to accept the writers' notion that this coexistence causes tensions as the elements are expected to contradict each other. However, one can argue that this tension only holds true if control is imposed against the will of consultants. At Vivaldi, it has become quite clear that consultants actually appreciated managerial involvement that included control. Once again, this circumstance seems to be owed to managers' lead in knowledge in experience. In a knowledge-intensive firm like Vivaldi in which the hierarchy is determined by individual levels of knowledge, leads in knowledge thus seem to enable levels of managerial involvement that defy established theories.

### **5.3. Relationship**

At Vivaldi, the aspired relationship between managers and consultants shall bestow a feeling of comfort as they get to know each other on a more personal level. Such aspirations seem to reflect to the intention to form a psychological contract with the consultants as it is advocated by Newell et al. (2009) and Flood et al. (2001). However, the idea that managers and consultants get closer to each other and become more intimate also bears some risks. A relationship binds the consultant even closer to the manager. A tightened involvement can cause consultants to rely more on the knowledge exchange with their managers. Due to the latter's lead in knowledge, their role as guide is thus likely to be justified which can once again bear the risk that consultants become mere followers instead of critical and creative thinkers. This would support Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, (2017) in their argument that the relationship between managers and consultants is likely to be asymmetrical. While such an asymmetry could be justified by managers' lead in knowledge, having such a relationship is likely to cause consultants to rely more on the knowledge exchange with their managers instead of their colleagues. This can reduce the potential to create knowledge or learn with the team of colleagues as it proposed by Brown & Duguid (2001), Gherardi (2001) and Orlikowski (2002).

However, considering the current organisational configuration at Vivaldi, an asymmetrical relationship seems to correspond with the development process intended for consultants. In this context, being close to their managers is likely to help the support of consultants as they also feel more inclined to approach their more knowledgeable superiors regarding any kind of question. Therefore, the aspired tendency of managerial involvement towards the role of an advisor is being facilitated. As long as this role suffices to fulfil consultants' expectations, the given relationship can be deemed capable of upholding the psychological contract.

Yet, one can argue that intimacy between managers and consultants enables managers to shape expectations of their subordinates. In this case, managers can instil an idea of a psychological contract that is convenient for them to uphold. In addition, becoming intimate with one or few key persons most likely leads to a relationship that's being affected by emotions and feelings about each other. Considering the asymmetrical relationship, the pressure can be on the consultants to keep their managers in the right mood to provide support. In this sense, a relationship can potentially have the negative connotation that consultants' support and development end up being at the mercy of their managers.

In agreeing with Dodgson (1993), the component of trust thus becomes very important to such a relationship. While consultants' trust compels managers to honestly support their subordinates and act in their interest, managers' trust encourages consultants to commit to performing at their best and improve in the interest of their superiors and the company. In relation to Vivaldi, for the statements that great importance is being ascribed to trust in the relationship between managers and consultants, two major reasons are discernible. Firstly, it is seemingly meant to alleviate uncertainties among managers and consultants. With trust, managers can feel more certain that their support and guidance are actually being incorporated by their subordinates. Hence, they are more likely to know for sure if they really contribute to consultants' present performance and their development. Consultants on the other hand can feel more confident that their enquiries are taken seriously, that they are really being helped.

The second reason relates to the challenge referring to the quick working pace at Vivaldi and the simultaneous work in ever-changing groups in which consultants' managers are swapped continuously. The focus on and fostering of trust helps both consultants and managers to rely on each other quickly and thus responds well with the way knowledge work is being conducted at this company (Meyerson et al. 1996).

## 5.4. Influence

### Vertical Influence

At Vivaldi, managers influence their subordinates by encouraging them to adopt demonstrated approaches to given problems and assignments. To continue previous discussions, adhering to demonstrated approaches might not only curb creativity and critical and independent thinking (Newell, et al., 2009). In being induced to refrain from applying their own approaches one could furthermore discern a preventive measure taken by managers to keep consultants susceptible to their influence.

However, once again these writers appear to have a rather prejudiced perception of managerial influence in regarding it as something knowledge workers will naturally want to escape. At Vivaldi, managerial influence of that kind is not resented but highly welcomed among consultants. Therefore, one could argue that the risk is not that consultants might resent managerial influence. Instead, managers are to fear that consultants adopt too eagerly thinking that it will bring about the development superiors are expected to see at the expense of any struggle to think more independently. Imitating an established approach can be a lot easier than creating your own.

In adopting Wilmots' (1993) view one could argue that this could only be in the interest of the firm as established processes are less likely to create mistakes. Therefore, such managerial influence can once again be justified. However, this contradicts Vivaldi's ambition to develop, nurture and grow consultants. Mere imitation would furthermore not justify the term knowledge work (Newell, et al., 2009), when describing the activities of consultants. Instead, managers at Vivaldi appear to utilize their position to support an environment that stimulates growth and development. In doing so they appear to enforce the firm's values (Schein, 2004).

However, one could also argue that abstaining from leading by example can once again be affiliated with the problems for managers to fully pass on their knowledge (Carlile, 2002). That might be why consultants are encouraged to improve and develop on their own the moment they are able and confident enough to apply established approaches. Apparently, this shall support consultants' building of confidence which seems to be the most important goal of managerial influence. The fact that managerial build-up of confidence alone is to cause for consultants to work independently points to a certain imbalance in the approach to develop consultants. In the spirit of Schein (2004), managers could emphasize and foster the learning



process within the team which in turn is likely to result in increasing confidence as well. In addition, it could bestow additional knowledge on the firm which could complement established approaches, as argued before. One reason why such considerations appear to receive less attention could be rooted in the hierarchy of Vivaldi. Considering the importance of levels within the firm, supporting the learning process and building of confidence within the group might not be in the firm's interest as it can lead to a defiance of managerial influence. A reason to avoid that is that each consultant represents Vivaldi which implies the necessity to reach a certain conformity in the firm's knowledge work. Arguably, such conformity can be enforced and maintained better if managers remain the only major influence.

One way consultants are shaped in that matter is implied by the numerous statements that consultants at Vivaldi are to be considered extraordinarily skilled. In accordance with Alvesson (2004) and Alvesson and Robertson (2006) it can be argued that such rhetoric helped creating an elite identity consultants willingly relate to. In turn, consultants likely want to uphold such an elite image and are thus likely to abstain voluntarily from taking experimental approaches that might be damaging the firm. In this sense, it can be argued that the rhetoric spread by managers resulted in both the control and commitment of consultants. According to Thompson and Heron (2006), commitment is likely to boost knowledge work at Vivaldi as it encourages the sharing of knowledge. In this sense, the pursuit of commitment can justify the advancement of classic managerial involvement consisting of nothing else than control and monitoring (Maccoby, 2000) to a position where managers actively influence knowledge work. However, as both control and commitment of consultants seem to be aspired at Vivaldi, one has reasons to side with Willmott (1993) in arguing that through the interplay of both, instilling and influencing commitment can make control more pervasive. In this case, influence can be regarded as a more pervasive form of classic managerial involvement enabled by managers' lead in knowledge.

However, at Vivaldi, such control is unlikely to be exerted to the extent that it significantly constrains consultants in their work and in their development. The main reason for this is the firm's interest to retain its consultants as they are considered to be the greatest resource and source of competitiveness. The risk to violate consultants' psychological contract thus has to be avoided in the interest of the firm.

Keeping that in mind, it can be easier to understand why managers ascribe great importance to remain physically present in their teams. It is meant to encourage consultants to independently advance and improve as far as possible as they can immediately consult with their superiors

when facing hurdles. As beneficial as that might be, one can argue that managers' physical presence also compels consultants to keep consulting with their managers. If these were not present, consultants might advance further on their own. In congruence with Walton (1985), physical presence can thus be seen as a measure to ensure that the alleged possibility to somewhat freely develop at Vivaldi is utilized in the interest of the firm. Consultants can progress on their own, but managers are always there to put them back in appropriate lanes. In picking up the discussion on polarizing preferences due to power differences, the managerial influence exerted through physical presence can either enforce or prevent polarization. In this context, it is likely to depend on the extent to which managers coerce consultants into these lanes that were paved for them. However, such coercive influence appears to be prevented by managers' alleged interest in consultants' feedback on their actions.

At Vivaldi, consultants appear to be able to exert influence on managers through formal and informal or emotional feedback on their performances. On top of that, consultants seem to be encouraged to influence more proactively by issuing suggestions for improvements or changes. Such actions taken by consultants resonate well with the idea of reflexive followership proposed by Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017). However, managerial encouragement implies that consultants can only exert influence if managers are open to that. This assumption can be supported by interviewees' statements that managers' receptiveness to influence varies, oftentimes limiting it to the mere reaching of consensus. One can argue that the alleged capriciousness in accepting consultants' influence is rooted in the hierarchical levels within Vivaldi as they can arguably cause managers to feel superior and thus encouraged to constrain or even reject influence from consultants. In this organisational structure, the realization of reflexive followership thus seems to be at the mercy of managers.

Apparently, managers need an incentive to listen to their subordinates. An incentive can be seen in their compulsion to uphold consultants' psychological contracts with the firm. Remaining open to influence is likely to stimulate consultants' commitment. Another incentive can be seen in the change in dynamics in team works where influence becomes a lot more horizontal. Since within a team, all members play significant roles despite their individual levels, managers are even more compelled to embrace feedback from their subordinates.

## **Horizontal Influence**

At Vivaldi, team members seem to mostly influence each other by contributing to a good atmosphere that boosts consultants' working spirit. As part of this effort they offer to be sparring partners for each other to apply and practice the approaches and knowledge they had learned. Again, such efforts resonate well with Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017) who argue that work morality in team is more likely to stem from peers than from superiors. However, they also argue that peers influence each other through their individual ideas and knowledge. At Vivaldi, such ideas and knowledge seem to be welcomed by consultants at times, when it comes to fixing minor problems. However, consultants appear to only accept influence on their actual work from managers at most of the times. In this sense, it seems that the learning process within the team is suppressed by the members themselves. Although this might seem like a deliberate decision, one could also argue that it is the result from managerial involvement and influence and the corresponding lead in knowledge. In this sense, it seems understandable that consultants rather want to be taught by someone with more knowledge and experience.

## **5.5. (In)dependence**

### **Independence**

At Vivaldi, great importance appears to be ascribed to granting independence to consultants in their work. In reference to Ciborra (1998), it can be argued that the importance of independence is rooted in the necessity for knowledge workers to adapt to, and apply knowledge in ever-changing situation as it is the nature of knowledge work (Newell, et al., 2009). As discussed in the following, consultants' independence can be discerned in many contexts concerning the interplay between managers and consultants.

When it comes to handling assignments, consultants are given the freedom to take their own approach upon preceding instructions given by their managers. They are then expected and trusted to use their own judgement to come up with solutions clients' enquiries. Consultants are therefore induced to apply and, to some extent, rely on their own expertise when handling assignments. Consequently, managers' guidance is mostly necessary in the planning phase of a project. Such grant of independence resonates positively with Newell et al. (2009) and Bailyn (1988) who argue that knowledge workers such as consultants should be subjected to less

control than other types of workers and thus be granted more freedom to fulfil assignments. Although one might feel encouraged to ascribe this grant of independence to managerial trust in subordinates alone, one could once again relate such actions to the managerial effort to retain consultants within the firm and adhere to existing psychological contracts. In the case of Vivaldi, this contract appears to encompass the possibility for an uncoerced development and ascension of the hierarchy. In taking Newell et al.'s (2009) view once again, one could furthermore argue that upholding psychological contracts is also necessary since consultants only voluntarily agree to seriously cooperate with their colleagues as it is necessary for the firm's knowledge work. In addition, it can furthermore be argued that consultants' self-development aspired within Vivaldi is more likely to succeed if consultants are willing to incorporate all the knowledge they receive from their superiors. The importance of pleasing consultants implies that they have the power to retain or, at times, even expand their level of independence.

At first, such use of power might have the connotation that an expansion of independence goes against the intention of Vivaldi's managers. However, considering the managerial intention to grow consultants, initiatives by consultants to aspire more independence is likely to be supported. In fact, the notion, that consultants need lesser instructions the more experienced they get, points in that direction. As the decrease in instructions can be associated to a rise in trust, consultants are likely motivated to learn and further train themselves. In the managerial encouragement of consultants to educate themselves, one can see another attempt to overcome the afore-discussed knowledge boundaries that hamper the passing of knowledge from managers to consultants (Carlile, 2002).

However, the support of consultants' learning processes is also linked to expectations at Vivaldi. A grant of independence also passes on responsibility to consultants to justify the trust managers express when reducing their influence and involvement. Owning a project, as it is intended by managers, implies that consultants can, at least partially, be held accountable for mistakes. On the other hand, success is likely to encourage consultants to grow further and become increasingly independent. This assumption can be supported by the notion from Foley (2010), that independence is the most important contributor to a fulfilling occupation. When further examining the afore-described managerial intention, one can discern an attempt to overcome the challenge to meet consultants' demand for a high pace personal development as mentioned during the interviews.

As positive as the support of ownership might be, one cannot help but to point out the risks in relation to knowledge work. Ownership might also induce consultants to refrain from sharing the knowledge they had gained in order to become superior to their colleagues and achieve a quick ascension within Vivaldi's hierarchy. However, this would go against the company's emphasis on knowledge sharing as part of collaborative knowledge work which is further advocated by Davenport (1997). Consequently, there are limits to such egoism to be found in the managerial expectation that subordinates are to develop into responsible consultants. Any misbehaviour in that context is thus likely to result in an increase in managerial involvement and influence. However, there are aspects about knowledge work at Vivaldi that are bound to grant independence even without the consent of managers.

Managers appear to be quite occupied by tasks that are unrelated to their consultants and are thus unable to be involved with consultants' knowledge work at all times. In siding with Newell et al. (2009), one can argue that this circumstance supports consultants' independence. Another circumstance arguably allows consultants to uphold their confidence more actively in that matter. The fact stated by interviewees that consultants create the value Vivaldi is selling is likely to grant them the power to negotiate a level of independence with their managers that they consider more desirable. Taking furthermore into account that Vivaldi prioritizes what is best for clients can move power from managers to consultants for the following reason. Consultants can justify actions that go beyond the level independence aspired by managers with the intention to act in the clients' best interest.

### **Dependence**

However, adherence to clients can also encourage managers to apply the same logic when reducing consultants' independence. This circumstance seems to contradict the notion of Newell et al. (2009) and Davenport (1997) as it implies that aspects of knowledge work such as the sharing knowledge and cooperation with colleagues can very well be coerced, at least to some extent, if it serves the clients' demands. In this respect, managers are able to keep binding consultants to their influence and involvement. As opposed to possible attempts by consultants to maintain or even increase their level of independence, managers can bind their subordinates rather indirectly through their influence and involvement. At Vivaldi, this argument becomes plausible when considering the fact that consultants are dependent on managers' knowledge in order to learn, develop and, at times, carry out a given assignment. Through the creation of an elite identity discussed before, managers can arguably bind their subordinates even more subtly as they are likely to be intent to perfect their work on an assignment via the help of their

managers. The concerns expressed by Newell et al. (2009) that such dependence deteriorates knowledge work cannot only be alleviated by the fact that consultants seem to learn from being bound to their managers. In the case of Vivaldi, it can be argued that managers' knowledge and the resulting involvement and influence help consultants to handle their assignments more efficiently. This can increase their chances to fulfil these assignments more successfully which in turn is likely to boost consultants' confidence and development as discussed before. Hence, it can be argued that the dependence on managers can actually support consultants' pursuit of independence as it helps them to gain more knowledge and experience and master the challenges in their development process. However, this argument implies that there is a level of independence consultants cannot surpass as long as they remain below managers. One of the main reasons is the fact that, at Vivaldi, managers need to control the final output from consultants' knowledge work. That is why they need to stay on top of their subordinates' work. This argument is supported by Bailyn (1988) arguing that knowledge workers are usually not in the position to define their own goals for the knowledge work they are expected to perform. After all, managers at Vivaldi still carry the ultimate responsibility for assignments and the quality of the final product.

As last argument for consultants' dependence on their managers, it can be stated that managers' solidified position and role in Vivaldi's knowledge work seemingly encourages consultants to actively seek their superiors' feedback and consent. In this matter, mere physical presence appears to bind consultants to their managers. Any form of more extensive influence does not seem to be necessary.

## 5.6. Summary

<b>Organisation of Knowledge Work</b>
Implicit tendency/ shift towards bureaucratic organizational structures seems beneficial for Vivaldi since the lead in knowledge of managers puts them in the position to compose the ideal group for knowledge work
the involvement of both consultants and managers poses a greater variety of knowledge and experience that can match a greater range of problems and enquiries.
mutual intention to adjust stimulates the crucial activity of socialising to further advance knowledge work

Curbed learning process within the team due to quickly changing group constellations which can be potentially detrimental to knowledge work as consultants miss knowledge they could learn in the team

The implication that managers permanently need to fulfil the role of filling knowledge gaps can point to a waste of learning potential within a team.

### **Management's Involvement**

Extended managerial involvement successfully defies established literature due to managers' lead in knowledge and experience: The latter benefits consultants through every aspect of involvement

managers' lead in knowledge and experiences causes consultants' to actively seek guidance as it helps them to develop a benchmark for their knowledge work. Managers therefore justify their superior position by attempting to compensate for consultants' deficiencies and support their development.

The benefits of managerial involvement can potentially prevent consultants' critical and creative thinking and turn them into mere followers

Managers' gradual shift towards support allows consultants to set their own learning pace and stimulates and facilitates knowledge work in groups.

managers, in their position as advisors, can also prevent teams of consultants to take extreme actions by pointing out deficiencies in their current approach and helping them not to miss the bigger picture.

Commitment and control of consultants can support each support other and be appreciated by consultants

### **Relationship**

In defiance of the established literature, an asymmetrical relationship is likely to benefit consultants and uphold their psychological contrast as long as mutual trust is established

a relationship can potentially have the negative connotation that consultants' support and development end up being at the mercy of their managers.

With trust, managers can feel more certain that their support and guidance are actually being incorporated by their subordinates. Consultants on the other hand can feel more confident that their enquiries are taken seriously, that they are really being helped.

<b>Managerial Influence</b>
In contrast to established literature, consultants welcome managerial influence which helps supporting Vivaldi's ambition to develop, nurture and grow consultants
Managers counter consultants' temptation to simply adopt established approaches by utilizing their position to support an environment that stimulates growth and development
Due to knowledge barriers consultants are encouraged to improve and develop on their own the moment they are able and confident enough to apply established approaches.
Despite an apparent imbalance in the approach to develop consultants, managers seem to abstain from fostering the learning process within the team. A reason can be rooted in Vivaldi's hierarchy arguably aimed at shaping consultants' way of representing the firm.
The rhetoric spread by managers attempting to sustain an elite identity arguably resulted in both the control and commitment of consultants. Control is unlikely to be extended at the expense of a violation of the psychological contract
Commitment can justify the advancement of classic managerial involvement consisting of nothing else than control and monitoring to a position where managers actively influence knowledge work
Physical presence can be seen as managerial measure to ensure that the alleged possibility to somewhat freely develop at Vivaldi is utilized in the interest of the firm
Managers are induced to embrace consultants' feedback
Consultants challenge established literature as they appear to only accept influence on their actual work from managers at most of the times

<b>(In)dependence</b>
The grant of independence is arguably rooted in both managerial trust and the managers' compulsion to fulfil psychological contracts.
The importance of pleasing consultants implies that they have the power to retain or, at times, even expand their level of independence.
In the managerial encouragement of consultants to educate themselves, one can see another attempt to overcome knowledge boundaries
Managerial expectation from consultants' development passes responsibility on to consultants but also provide another opportunity to increase independence
there are aspects about knowledge work at Vivaldi that are bound to grant independence even without the consent of managers



managers can bind their subordinates rather indirectly through their influence and involvement
Dependence through the creation of an elite identity discussed before
consultants seem to learn from being bound to their managers
managers can actually support consultants' pursuit of independence as it helps them to gain more knowledge and experience and master the challenges in their development process.
there is a level of independence consultants cannot surpass as long as they remain below managers since managers still carry the ultimate responsibility for assignments and the quality of the final product
managers' solidified position and role in Vivaldi's knowledge work seemingly encourages consultants to actively seek their superiors' feedback and consent. Mere physical presence appears to bind consultants to their managers. Any form of more extensive influence does not seem to be necessary.

### **Overarching Key Takeaways**

Managers' lead in knowledge appears to mostly benefit consultants on each level of attunement
Managers inability to pass all their knowledge onto consultants potentially curbs consultants' learning progress
On almost all levels managerial actions can be discerned to overcome this knowledge boundary
Implied ignorance towards epistemology of process
managers will always have to be involved and bind consultants to some extent as they carry the responsibility for final delivery to clients
Theories on interplay between management and knowledge workers appears to be based on preconceived prejudice and narrow-minded views (see opinions on managerial involvement, vertical influence)

## **6. Conclusion**

Our research set out to explore how management and knowledge workers can become attuned to one another. Through an explorative case study, we aimed at making analytical generalisations, as well as generating concepts in regards to the attunement between managers and knowledge workers. An abductive approach was used as we intended to begin with empirical observations in order to interpret them with suitable theories. Our empirical data consisted of input from members of almost all hierarchical levels of Vivaldi. In this chapter, we will begin by summarizing key findings over the process of answering our research question:

*How can managers and knowledge workers become attuned to one another?*

Afterwards, we will elucidate how the discussion of the gathered empirical data can contribute to the given theory and find practical fields of application

### **6.1. Answering of Main Question**

In many ways, the thesis has kept parallels to the interplay between conductor and orchestra whose symbolization in the introduction of this thesis was meant to clarify the process of attunement. The first level of the attunement process, that has shaped the entire thesis thus far, appears to serve the purpose of clarifying the relevant roles within Vivaldi. The hierarchical levels within the firm are meant to solidify a clear distinction in terms of knowledge, experience and associated tasks and responsibilities. In this sense, bringing both managers and consultants into same teams shall in turn show how they both need one another in order to fulfill a task. However, the roles shall make clear who is the conductor and who is the receiver and what both are to expect from each other in the beginning of the attunement process. This clarification eases the beginning of the manager's involvement in the activities of the consultants.

At the beginning of the involvement, the manager controls, monitors and above all guides the consultants to the extent that they can carry out fundamental activities by themselves. In this phase, the manager mostly provides input and merely has to ensure that the consultants learn and incorporate this input in their work. The moment consultants' performances reach a certain quality level, managers gradually shift from a proactive to a reactive involvement whereas consultants have reached a level of independence where they can become proactive in consulting with managers in the context of assignments or their personal development within Vivaldi. The continuous exchange between managers and consultants does not only continue

the development of consultants until a point where a manager can trust the subordinate's performance. In turn, the consultant has learned to trust the manager as an advisor. This trust marks an important element of a relationship that has developed between manager and consultant. This relationship does not only bestow comfort upon both parties, it also makes them more susceptible to mutual influences. The transition towards influence highlights an important change in the dynamic between superior and subordinates. The fact that consultants need to be encouraged in some way to further develop induces the manager to react to consultants' responses on any attempt to exert influence. In reference to the interplay between an orchestra and its conductor, one can say that the pursuit of a harmonious sound requires the conductor to become increasingly dependent on the orchestra's responses to find deviations that need to be fixed. In juxtaposing influence to independence one can say that independencies mark the areas within the interplay in which trust justifies an abstinence of managerial interferences. The areas of influence on the other hand mark aspects of knowledge work that continue to require an interplay with management for the following two reasons. Within a hierarchical organisation, knowledge workers will most likely always be dependent on managerial consent to some extent. More importantly, however, the process of attunement in its pursuit of perfection can never be complete as long as a human component impedes the achievement of a quantifiable result that could actually prove perfection.

Considering the success of Vivaldi, one can conclude that a high level of attunement has been found because it has become clear among consultants and managers where the latter shall intervene and where they should stay back. In addition, Vivaldi appears to have fulfilled preconditions that allowed the successful challenge of established theories. This topic leads over to the next part of this conclusion.

## **6.2. Theoretical Contributions**

If this research has made one thing clear it is the fact that a whole collection of theory can support each other in their misconception of the management of knowledge workers as it can happen in real life. That does not mean that the theories consulted for this thesis cannot have their application in reality. Our thesis has rather shown that these theories seemed deliberately limited by certain prejudices of the authors. In this sense, we would like to make theoretical contributions by showing where certain theories could be revamped or advanced by taking a change of preconceptions into account.

The major misconception that was revealed by our empirical studies is the apparent fact that managers can have more relevant knowledge than the actual knowledge workers. In acknowledging that, multiple authors could be given an approach to further improve their theories so that they become even more compatible with real-life cases such as Vivaldi. Several examples will be given in the following.

Considering that the case of Vivaldi seemingly disproved Maccoby's (2000) idea of managerial involvement could encourage Alvesson (2004) to move from the generalizing statement that knowledge workers resent managerial involvement. Instead he could support a juxtaposition of two general reactions on involvement that are rooted in preceding assessments of managers' relevant knowledge. In this sense, managers would become more of an active variable in predicting knowledge workers' reaction on their involvement. When it comes to the topic of tensions between commitment and control, Newell et al. (2009) could instead explore the potential of an interplay between control and commitment. In this context, an idea would be that managerial control of knowledge workers' commitment to development could result in a company-wide accepted plan to further improve the organization of knowledge work. In this context, the authors could furthermore accept an apparent openness to managerial influence and investigate in which ways this influence can actually benefit knowledge workers.

Similarly, Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017) could use the evidence that asymmetrical relationships seem to be welcomed by consultants, to set the focus on how knowledge workers could capitalize on the comparably higher input of knowledge and experience from their superiors. By further acknowledging that a managerial lead in knowledge can make up a functioning hierarchy in defiance of Mintzberg's (1999) and Newell et al.'s (2009) suggestion, Alvesson, Blom and Sveningsson (2017) could further advance their progressive concept of reflexive followership. Considering the imbalance in the approach to develop consultants at Vivaldi, the authors could explore why consultants could be prevented from learning the knowledge produced in a team in order to adapt their concept to organizational configurations as they exist in firms like Vivaldi

*The apparent issue that consultants at Vivaldi seem to be prevented from growing on knowledge created within a team shall lead to the next sub-chapter.*

### **6.3. Practical Applications**

At Vivaldi, an abundance of knowledge relevant to consultants' knowledge work appears to exist on both managerial and consultants' level. However, as it has been implied throughout the thesis, consultant can hardly grow on the knowledge they help creating in teams. In this case, established theories can help suggesting possible solutions for this problem. First of all, in congruence with Alvesson (2004), it can be noted that through the epistemology of process, the knowledge accessible to consultants for their development and daily work could expand significantly. As will be shown in the following, managers can play a significant role in realizing this potential.

As much as they benefit knowledge work in its preparation by selecting the best possible team, they could play an equally if not more important role in storing the knowledge created. In a sense, they could harvest the knowledge created in order to allow consultants to learn and grow on it. In that way, the intellectual capital created could not only benefit Vivaldi's clients but also boost consultants' development. Since Vivaldi's consultants only team up for short periods of time managers can harvest the knowledge so team members can build upon that when meeting again. Being enabled to access previously generated knowledge could dramatically increase the chances for consultants to learn from colleagues beyond the necessity to exchange task-relevant information (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). In addition, consultants could bring in this knowledge into new teams and thus stimulate collaborative knowledge work right from the beginning.

In general, having knowledge stored and accessible could give consultants the chance to independently reach a complete understanding of new sets of knowledge for the following reason. As they could theoretically access these sets as much as they want, consultants would be given the time to apply their preceding sets of knowledge and perceptions to make better sense of new knowledge. In this respect, consultants could also be freer to set their own learning pace (Wilson, 2002; Alvesson, 2004; Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). The consultation of stored knowledge is most likely to facilitate and improve the dissemination of knowledge among Vivaldi's consultants. In turn, managers would be less occupied by constantly filling their subordinates' knowledge gaps and the implicit waste of learning potential among teams would be reduced. Being given an additional source of knowledge, consultants could furthermore work and collaborate more independently as they would not necessarily have to refer to managers to learn something new. Having a collaborative learning

experience could also cause consultants to influence and teach each other more as they continue to exploit new sets of knowledge together.

Considering the asymmetrical relationship between consultants and managers at Vivaldi, it will ultimately be up to the managers to start fostering the learning experience within the teams of consultants.

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