

APPROACHES TO EDUCATION IN THE FIELD OF MANAGEMENT, MARKETING AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING

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Abstract: By their nature, consulting companies – as operators of the consulting services market – represent professional firms. Strategy for education and personal development of consultants should be a part of the consulting company strategy. Educational activity in the field of management, marketing and environmental consulting represents a continuous process that is factually and logically linked to other corporate processes. It requires strategic and systematic approach.

Keywords: consulting, education, strategic approach, consulting skills.

1 Introduction

The effect of environmental issues on companies' activities and solving these issues are the most debated topics of today. Issues related to environment lead, on the one hand, to the increase of business costs. On the other hand, they create new business opportunities and possibilities for creative and innovative companies to enter new markets.

Companies can address these issues individually or use the services of external consulting companies. In addressing environmental issues they can use the services of economic consulting (e.g. environmental accounting or accounting for sustainable development), services of management (e.g. circular business models) and marketing consulting (environmental marketing [5], [16], environmental attitude and behaviour of consumers, environmental marketing strategy, environmental marketing audit, environmental product, its packaging and trademark, environmentally oriented price, reverse distribution, environmentally oriented communication, circular marketing, eco-innovations, start-ups etc.) and/or environmental consulting services (assessing strategic documents, assessing the effect of business activities on the environment, environmental audit and due diligence, environmental management, environmental planning, environmental monitoring and the like).

The aim of this contribution is to point out the importance of strategic and systematic approach to education and individual development in the field of consulting while focusing on the approach of consulting companies towards the education of consultants in the field of management, marketing and environmental consulting.

2 Strategic planning model of education in consulting

2.1 Principles of education in consulting

In general, consulting means providing services and/or passing on the know-how in some field by qualified experts or by specialized consulting companies. It is carried out on the basis of the rigorous systematic and conceptual procedure using the diagnosis of relevant fields, activities and problems and consequent assessment of different options of solving the given problem or task.

Consulting is a profession with the following essential characteristics:

1. Existence of a systematic theory which serves as a base for practical dimension of a profession – this means that acquiring a profession is connected to the mastering of the adequate theoretical preparation. Graduation from a university is the inevitable requirement for pursuing a profession. A certificate testifying the obtained

qualification (a diploma) is the inevitable requirement for granting a privilege (a permit, a license etc.) to carry out professional experience.

2. Professional authority – it is based on mastering such expert knowledge which an ordinary person (a layman) does not have. An expert is able to specify what is good for a client, what decision should be made etc. In the given field, experts have monopoly on competence.

Consulting services and individual consultants represent consultancy and provide consulting services. As professionals, consultants monitor major trends in theory and practice. At the same time, they create specialized group with its own approach to work, individual set of behaviour standards and working procedures. Consultants diagnose, analyse, plan, assess, suggest, manage, implement and coordinate. To manage all these tasks on a professional level, they have to complete the corresponding university education based on mastering a systematic theory.

By their character, consulting companies, being the operators of the consulting services market, represent professional companies which are characterized by 4 features [14]:

1. More than 50 % of employees are professionals.
2. Great emphasis is put on professional intentions including altruistic solutions of clients' problems.
3. High respect of professional standards is being shown.
4. Great emphasis is put both on producing and application of knowledge.

Consulting activities have their own requirements on expert education and professional development. Many consulting companies earn their good reputation exactly thanks to quality education of their consultants based on strategic and systematic approach.

2.2 Strategic framework of education in consulting

It is obvious that the strategy of education and personal development of consultants has to be a part of corporate strategy of a consulting company. Together with knowledge-based strategy, they form part of the human resources management strategy.

Strategic aspects of corporate education in consulting

Human resources management strategy as a superior strategy provides an answer to the question whether there are corresponding posts established in the organizational structure of a company and in what ways the incongruity between the demand for posts and the real qualification of staff has been and will be solved [3]. Human resources management strategy is a starting point for strategic management of human resources which is a process of decision-making on intentions, goals and methods for their achievement, concerning people as a substantial part of an organization [6]. Strategic management of human resources can be therefore considered as an approach for solving long-term matters concerning people. It deals with those personal activities which serve as a support for competitive strategy of a company [1].

Education and development of employees is a planned effort with the aim of teaching employees to behave in a way that would lead to the increase of their performance. The education itself is goal-oriented, based on experience, it influences the behaviour and learning and changes it brings are relatively stable [22]. Mihalčová characterizes education as a continuous process during which a person not only acquires, but also develops new knowledge and skills and simultaneously adapts to changes of work behaviour [13]. Koubek perceives the education of company's employees as a personnel activity that includes adaptation of employees' occupational skills to requirements on a post – deepening the qualification (further training); increasing the employability of employees on different posts – expansion of occupational skills; retraining processes (retraining); adapting

occupational skills of new employees to specific requirements of the given post, used technique, technology, work style in a company – employee orientation (adaptation); forming of employees' occupational skills at work exceeding the limits of professional competence [10].

In current modern practice of human resources management, a distinction is sometimes made between education (that concerns the development of skills needed for better performance at the current job) and development (that is more extensive and often beneficial for the future professional growth not only in the company but also out of it). In some publications, both concepts are being referred to with the term corporate education [6].

Education of employees is an inevitable need of every company, but its extent, depending on the need of a company, always differs. However, it has to create appropriate conditions for organized and systematic education carried out in a repeating cycle. This cycle of education and development of employees includes activities: identification of needs and goals of employees' education and development, planning the programmes of employees' education and development (methods, supervisors, equipment, and venue), implementation of employees' education and development using specific education programmes and methods, monitoring and evaluation of employees' education and development [9].

Substance and specifics of corporate education in consulting

We define corporate education as a summary of education activities arranged by a company or its department assigned to that. The aim of corporate education is to pass knowledge and skills on to employees and upgrade their qualification, experience and competence. However, it should not be aimed merely at changes in the structure of knowledge and skills leading to higher efficiency of work performance. It should also be focused at changes which lead to the creation of conditions allowing self-realization or development of personal and work potential of employees and which result in using the possibilities of continuous development as the most effective motivational and stimulation tool.

People forming consulting teams are engines of a consulting company and have an impact on its success. Because of that, corporate education in the field of consulting focuses on the preparation of consultants in a way that would increase their capability to effectively reach the set goals, approaches and processes. Individual goals for self-realization of each individual consultant are closely connected to that.

Corporate education of consultants includes not only work-based training – internal type of education, but also outside the workplace, i.e. external type of education. Its primary and determining intention is to bring the qualification structure of consultants into accord with current requirements of professional activities and practice. In that sense, corporate education is one of decisive strategic personnel processes that is, in successful consulting companies, connected to other personnel processes. According to Tureckiová, those processes are [19]:

- Human resources planning.
- Acquisition and selection of employees.
- Formation and deployment (internal mobility) of employees, i.e. particularly by motivating, stabilization and changes in working positions.
- Employee evaluation and remuneration.
- External mobility.

Prusáková summarized some motives for corporate education in a similar way [17]:

- Expected change – e.g. hiring new employees, implementing new management' approaches.
- An opportunity that presents itself – e.g. a budget for education.
- Maintenance of strong points – motivating employees, strengthening strong points of a company.
- Education is required and mandatory.

From the point of view of strategic approach, corporate education is regarded as being an investment into people's development in a consulting company. It significantly helps to reach the elementary goal of strategic management of human resources, i.e. attract, prepare and keep highly qualified and motivated consultants in a consulting company who are moreover eager to align their own personal goals with the goals of a consulting company they work for. In that sense, corporate education fulfils not only the function of education and development, but also orientational, adaptation, integration and retention function. It is a tool that jointly affects to the benefit of fluctuation measures and leads to the development of performance, effectiveness and competitiveness of a consulting company as a whole, to the development of employability of individuals, and not only within the internal, but also external mobility. That is why it is possible to view the corporate education in the context of the lifelong education of consultants.

Strategy of education and development of employees depends on the human resources management strategy. Numerous authors present many approaches to the classification of this strategy. One of such approaches, which we consider as the most relevant from the point of view of education and development of employees and their employment in a consulting company, is the classification of the strategy of employees' education and development according to three lines [8]:

1. Line: Organizational development strategy – Strategy of individual's development. Development of an organization and its people lead to higher performance of a whole company. It is not possible to separate them, focus at one and eliminate the other.
2. Line: Differentiation strategy – Strategy of integration. Differentiation supports achieving high performance, whereas integration focuses on creating a space for common sharing, knowledge and skill building and sense of responsibility.
3. Line: Big jump strategy – Strategy of continuous improvement. Their choice decides how the change, that learning in an organization brings, will be reached.

Human resources management strategy influences the knowledge strategy. Its character depends on skills that are preferred by a company. In case of codification knowledge strategy, explicit knowledge, that means formalised and such which can be formalized, is being worked with. Personalized knowledge strategy is based on tacit knowledge that can be formalized with difficulty. It is applicable in cases where a company is oriented on meeting individual, unique and original needs of clients. A combination of both knowledge strategies is convenient for consulting companies whose focus changes according to current preferences of consultants and their clients.

2.3 Implementation of the education strategy in consulting

Every strategy needs to be put in practice. Corporate education strategy has to be devised in a way that would help it to be implemented in corporate environment, accepted by all interest groups (owners, management, employees, clients) and has to be compatible with the whole-company strategy and objectives in all activities of a company. Its correct implementation is a base for reaching higher performance and desired changes in consulting companies.

The following systematic algorithm is a precondition for successful implementation of the corporate education strategy:

- Allocation of sources (financial, human and technical).
- Identification of key tasks, necessary for ensuring the success of the strategy.
- Planning the priorities in the field of education strategy.
- Adaptation of the organizational structure to the needs of a new strategy.
- Drawing up the standard of the new working procedures.
- Implementation of new elements of a corporate culture linked to the new strategy.

- Creation of new elements of personnel agenda, particularly motivational system, adaptation programme and forms of employees' supervision and evaluation.
- Provision of relevant information system and mechanisms to support the processes.

For the sake of implementation, it is necessary to specify the corporate education strategy, namely the operational steps, tasks and programmes and choose appropriate implementation tools. Main tools of the education strategy implementation include [3]:

- Competency models.
- Managing according to competence.
- Managing the work performance.
- Balanced Scorecard.
- Knowledge and talent management.
- Project management.
- Incentive mechanisms.
- Career management.
- A learning organization etc.

Corporate education strategy needs to be monitored and evaluated. For this purpose, consulting companies can use the following tools [3]:

- Management methodology according to competence.
- Process of managing the work performance.
- Balanced Scorecard methodology.
- Application of competency models and tools for measuring the competence level.
- Methods and techniques of evaluating the employees and their work performance.
- Management methodology according to objectives.
- Methodology of tools for 360° feedback.

In this process, intuition, creativity, the knowledge of educational and developmental needs of a consulting company, as well as needs of its clients, play their role.

2.4 Education system in the field of consulting

Educational activity in the field of consulting represents a continuous process that is factually and logically linked to other processes in a company and consists of the analysis of educational needs and their identification, planning, implementation and evaluation of the educational activity. Education system is based on a corporate strategy of a consulting company, its objectives, sources and organizational needs, as well as requirements for the education of its consultants (diagram №1).

Diagram 1: Education system in a consulting company



Source: authors' own processing

Analysis and identification of educational needs. It is the most important stage of the education planning in a consulting company. At the same time it is a stage with the highest error rate from the point of view of planning activity in the area of education and personal development of consultants. It is based on collecting information on the current state of knowledge in a consulting company, competence and skills of consultants as company's key employees, performance of individual consultants as well as consulting teams. The data obtained are being compared with their desired level.

Identification of educational needs. It answers the following three questions:

1. Is the employee motivated enough to apply required competence and skills?
2. Does the management support the required behaviour of consultants?
3. What barriers do exist in the area of consultants' performance?

Planning the educational activity. It concerns planning the specific educational events and programmes. Its result is the education plan that should include not only planned activities, but also consider potential problems and barriers in the field of consultants' education. Education planning consists of several stages:

- Preparation stage – includes specification of needs, analysis of participants in the educational activity and setting the objectives.
- Implementation stage – represents processing the individual stages of educational process into specific educational projects. It contains determination of a process that will be followed in the course of education of consultants and suggested forms, methods and techniques, by means of which the education will be carried out.
- Optimization stage – includes continuous evaluation of the individual stages of educational programmes in relation to the given objectives and correction of deficiencies.

Implementation of educational activity. It means using appropriate tools, methods and forms of education of consultants. Trainings represent an important tool in the field of education and personal development of consultants. They play a significant role at the time of taking up the employment and adaptation on the one hand and during the employment as such on the other. Training and lifelong education is important not only for newly recruited, but also for experienced long-time consultants. The aim of such trainings should be continuous improvement of necessary occupational skills and boosting consultants' loyalty to the employer. At the same time, trainings fulfil a significant communication function that is important particularly during the adaptation process, but also later after consultants' integration into a regular work routine.

Coaching is another important tool used in the field of education and personal development of consultants. It represents long-term instruction, explanation and notification of remarks. Regular supervision of a coachee is the part of it. The point is continuous incitement and guidance of a coachee to reach the desired performance and take his/her own initiative. The aim is to make a coachee look at his/her own behaviour in a different light. Coaching activates person's ability to increase one's own performance of its own accord. As opposed to other educational methods, coaching focuses on attitude and is directed at the character of a person. Coaching focuses on the future – past serves for the development of the future solution only. Coaching is a kind of guidance "on the road", while the coach gets to know the coachee and supports his/her own individuality. Coaching creates an atmosphere of openness and cooperation, it makes people develop, be competent and apply their own decisions.

In the context of educational procedure in consulting, it is also possible to come across the term supervision. It represents a method, which, by means of mutual interaction between a supervisor and the person supervised, makes people revise their work and helps improve the professional competence of their work and performance. In the area of consulting, supervision plays an important role in the improvement of their consulting competence and skills.

Facilitating means supporting the processes or activities focused on improving the performance. It represents targeted management and guidance of negotiations, meetings or discussions of smaller or larger groups. In connection with consulting, it can be applied in the consulting process itself, during business negotiations of the consulting contract, when solving the subject matter of the consulting etc.

Evaluation of the educational activity. It concerns comparison of the objectives with the results in the field of education. A consulting company should decide on the progress of it already during the planning stage. It is a complex process the goal of which is to measure the effects of the specific educational activity in the field of andragogy (pedagogical and didactic), as well as in the field of economy. The evaluation of the corporate education is a process that determines whether a problem was solved. It is the integral part of the corporate education.

2.2 The contribution of education and its tasks in consulting

One of the key tasks of consultants' education is providing them with longitudinal and transversal flexibility. The majority of activities aimed at the improvement of consultants' professional competence focuses on self-education in their own field. It is this exact area which creates a common base for further consultants' professional growth and development. Many further-training and development activities in consulting companies are focused precisely on this objective. Practice has shown that initial training, of beginner consultants in particular, is just a first step in the development of the know-how of the respective consulting company. The second is the preparation of the development of consultants' career that comes with the need to apply broader approach and improve new professional competence of consultants in other fields as well.

In consulting, an individual holds the main responsibility for his/her professional growth and development much more often than in other professions. Probably no other group of professionals is confronted with information explosion to such an extent as consultants are. Professional growth of a consultant develops individually and the results achieved will depend mostly on his/her own ambitions, determination, perseverance and intellectual capacity. For consultants, learning is a life-long work and a categorical obligation. A consultant can at least of all express the opinion that old methods and procedures are still useful.

Consultant's task is to help the client implement progressive changes in his/her company. All proposals and changes, suggested by a consultant, should directly or indirectly contribute to the improvement of the quality of managerial work and performance of the company. Reaching these goals promote a complex of knowledge, abilities, skills, experience and characteristics, known as professional competencies. This term was used for the first time in 1982 by Boyatzis for defining personal qualities, motives, experience and behaviour characteristics according to different classifications [4]. Competencies are soft skills which differentiate the effective performance from the ineffective [23]. They represent the ability to perform some activity, the know-how and the qualification in the respective field. Consultants are competent in case they meet these three requirements [12]:

- They are mentally equipped with characteristics, knowledge, skills and experience which they inevitably need for such behaviour.
- They are motivated to behave that way, i.e. they regard such behaviour as valuable and they are eager to make effort to follow this direction.
- Have an opportunity to behave that way in the given environment.

It has to be emphasized that consultants are competent when they meet all three requirements.

Competencies are classified differently in the bibliography. One of the approaches, relevant also for consulting competencies, is the classification into two categories according to the performance of the specific post [18]:

1. Threshold competencies – also called basic competencies. Every employee needs them as a minimal base for performing the given post.
2. Differing competencies – also known as high performance competencies. They differentiate above-average performance from the average performance.

In connection with the consulting profession, it is appropriate to mention another classification of competencies, mentioned by Tyron [12]:

- Management competencies – conflict resolution, negotiation, time management etc.
- Interpersonal competencies – communication skills, presentation skills etc.
- Technical competencies – collection and analysis of data, diagnostics, creation of a budget etc.

Successful consultants are experts who manage the consulting process to make clients achieve measurable results. They should be equipped with every single competence we listed and which we specify as follows:

- Intellectual ability – the ability to learn quickly and easily, observe, select facts, good judgment, creative imagination and original thinking.
- The ability to work with people – tolerance, politeness, networking and the ability to anticipate people's reactions [7].
- The ability to communicate, persuade and motivate – being able to listen to other people and express oneself well. One of the preconditions of a good relationship between both participants of a consulting process (consultant – client) is communication and the ability of a consultant to use it in a consulting process. In the field of evaluating the expert and professional ability of consultants, communication skills and competencies are required. Communication skills comprise a summary of levels of verbal speech, emotional competencies and knowledge. Besides speaking, reading and writing, also listening and perception of a non-verbal communication are regarded as key communication skills [21] (Vymětal, 2008). Communication skills mean the ability to read and write with comprehension, express one's own thoughts so that others understand them, listen actively and observe critically.
- Presentation skills – An inseparable part of professional competencies of a consultant carrying out his function are presentation skills, also known as communication skills [15], primarily because the aim of the presentation itself, besides sharing information with participants, is obtaining a (positive) feedback. Another reason is the fact that the form of communication, i.e. the way of sharing the subject of presentation, represents one of the key factors of the successful presentation. Presentation is the most common part of the consultant's work and reflects the level and nature of the whole consulting process, as well as the relation between a consultant and a client, while the importance of the presentation constantly grows.
- Intellectual and emotional maturity – independence and impartiality at formulating conclusions and recommendations, self-control and self-restraint, flexibility, the ability to adapt to changed conditions.
- Creative competencies – consultants commonly use routine knowledge and skills and achieve desired results this way. Such work approach is reliable and effective, but far from sufficient. Consultants can rely on standard solutions less and less. That is why they should be equipped with a specific competence, which will allow them to find new ideas and unconventional solutions – creativity [11]. Creativity in consulting is related mainly to the process of changes, which bring many new information and also risk and uncertainty. Changes management is typical for proactive approach, mainly based on looking for new work methods. Strategy of changes is, on the other hand, the implementation of such a strategy, which introduces new patterns of behaviour, thinking and approaches of the key groups in the client's company. A strategic change is based on proposing, managing and maintenance of fundamental changes in a strategy, concerning the mission, products, markets, people, organizational structure and further attributes, resulting in new compliance of the client's company with its environment.

- Coaching skills – coaching is very often used in the process consulting, where client looks for the consultant's help to improve his/her own performance. The principle is that a consultant – in the role of a coach – observes and supervises individual performance of a client, provides him/her with a feedback on problems or behaviour stereotypes that constitute barriers to working efficiency and prevents a change to which a consulting process is oriented towards. At the same time, it helps the client gain new knowledge and skills which the character of his/her work requires.
- Management competencies – within consulting, one of the key roles is being played by the project management as well. It is a process, which uses specific principles and techniques. In current consulting practice, project management has a prevailing tendency. Consulting companies should have experienced consultants whose results and abilities qualify them for the posts of project managers. Their competencies also include negotiations on the preparations of new projects, preparation of initial overview of a client, coordination of the preparation of an offer for a client and finally, preparation of their own project. Interdisciplinary consulting projects should have been managed by experienced consultants and functional projects, on the other hand, by experts in the respective field (marketing, finances, production etc.). As it is time-consuming, high self-discipline and self-control is immensely significant in project management [20]. Besides project management, the ability of a consultant to manage and organize time, i.e. time management, is very important.
- Decision-making competencies – there are many more skills and competencies which create or should create a part of professional equipment of every consultant. We mention decision-making competencies that are important for a consultant regarding his/her own performance and services provided to a client, as one of them. Consulting process is constantly accompanied by the growth of number and complexity of decision-making problems which have to be rationally and effectively solved. Besides generally known complexity and demanding character, those problems are characterized primarily by inconvenient structure, lack or complete absence of unbiased information, weak ability to get formalized and uniqueness – in a sense they can not be repeated. Usually there are several options how to solve the given problem. It depends on the consultant's abilities and skills to pick the solution that would be the best for a client and beneficial for his/her company. By means of a decision, the consultant can achieve the situation that is desired. Within consulting, delegative decision-making can be applied. In that case, a consultant passes the decision-making competence and authority on to a client. Consultant's conclusions have the character of recommendations. In such cases, he/she usually acts as an external decision-making subject.

Consultants are innovators and creative professionals who have acquired the newest knowledge, technologies and trends and are aware of different approaches towards achieving desired goals.

3 Research in the sphere of consultants' education in management, marketing and environmental consulting in Slovakia

3.1 Research project

Education of a consultant as a provider of consulting services definitely does not end with a basic university graduation. Many consulting companies have created a corporate education strategy based on systematic and continual effort to improve qualification, professionalism and professional competencies of their teams. We focused on the above mentioned in our research that we carried out in 2018.

Our research dealt with the education of consultants in the field of management, marketing and environmental consulting, whereas in case of marketing consulting we drew from its classification into general (i.e. consulting on a strategic level, e.g. marketing audit, marketing diagnostics, marketing strategy

etc.) and specialized consulting (i.e. consulting on operational level, e.g. marketing communication, marketing survey, online marketing etc.).

In the field of environmental consulting, we worked with two types of its providers:

- Consulting companies which have been providing it within the management and marketing consulting (e.g. circular business models, environmental marketing etc.).
- Consulting companies which have been providing it on the technical basis only (e.g. assessment of the impact of the building works on the environment, environmental monitoring of noise, air etc.).

A part of the sample was comprised of a group of consulting companies which provide consulting in all fields we mentioned (combined consulting). The research was carried out in two stages.

3.2 Quantitative survey

In the first stage, that took place in February and March 2018, we initially carried out a quantitative survey. We reached out to 200 companies, providing services in management, marketing and environmental consulting in the territory of the Slovak Republic. In the survey, 146 companies (n=146) of the following structure (table №1) took part:

Table 1: Overview of respondents according to their specialty

SPECIALTY	QUANTITY
Managerial consulting	48
Marketing consulting, specifically:	38
General marketing consulting	12
Specialized marketing consulting	26
Environmental consulting (technical activities only)	24
Combined consulting (all three fields)	36
In total	146

Source: authors' own processing

Respondents were executive directors or directors of the addressed consulting companies. All respondents who marked management consulting (48) and marketing consulting (38) as the core business in the questionnaire stated that they also deal with environmental aspects of management and marketing. Those who marked the environmental consulting only (24) stated that when solving environmental tasks within their consulting activities, they only deal with technical activities. Combined consulting services in all three fields of our research were provided by 36 consulting companies.

Regarding the size, microenterprises (employing 9 people at maximum), small businesses (with 10 to 49 employees) and medium-sized businesses (with 50 to 100 employees) were represented in the sample, as shown in the table №2.

Table 2: Overview of the respondents regarding their size

CATEGORY	QUANTITY
Microenterprise	27
Small business	81
Medium-sized business	38
In total	146

Source: authors' own processing

From the total sample of 146 respondents, 103 were Slovak consulting companies and 43 were foreign (those included branches and affiliates of foreign consulting companies) structured as follows (table №3).

Table 3: Overview of the respondents according to the country of origin

SPECIALTY	ORIGIN	
	Domestic operators	Foreign operators
Management consulting	33	15
Marketing consulting, specifically:	28	10
General marketing consulting	10	2
Specialized marketing consulting	18	8
Environmental consulting (technical activities only)	17	7
Combined consulting (all three fields)	25	11
In total	103	43

Source: authors' own processing

The aim of the quantitative survey was to explain and assess what approaches do companies which provide consulting services in management, marketing and environmental issues have towards the education of their consultants as representatives and providers of such services.

On the basis of the abovementioned, the main research problem was formulated: *What is the condition and level of education of consultants providing services in the field of management, marketing and environmental consultancy?*

By means of the structured genesis and on the basis of the main research problem, the following partial descriptive research problems were formulated:

Q1: What is the attitude and approach of consulting companies towards the education of their consultants?

Q2: Within the education of their consultants, what professional flexibility and competencies do consulting companies pay higher attention to?

Q3: What expectations do consulting companies have from learning and development activities for their consultants?

When formulating conclusions, we relied on hypotheses we determined on the assumption that consulting companies as professional companies perceive the education of their consultants as one of their strategic tasks and a source of potential competitive advantage.

Following the abovementioned we determined the following descriptive hypotheses, which were formulated in relation to the descriptive research problems:

H1: Consulting companies consider their consultants' education being a strategic objective.

H2: Consulting companies put emphasis on the development of longitudinal, as well as transversal flexibility.

H3: Consulting companies expect that regular education of consultants will ensure their effective consulting performance.

3.3 Summary of the main results of the quantitative survey

Questions in the questionnaire were focused on the following areas:

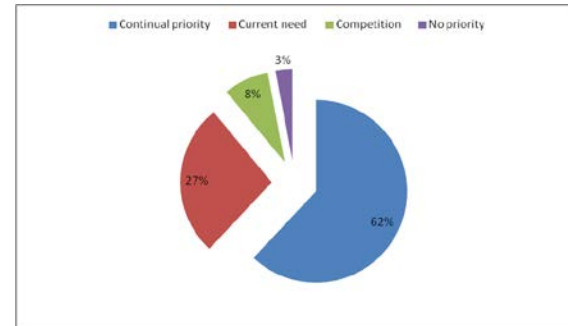
- System of the consultants' education in consulting companies and its implementation in practice.
- Specialty of consulting companies in the field of consultants' education.
- Expectations and results in the field of consultants' education.

System of consultants' education in consulting companies and its implementation in practice

All respondents (n=146) stated that education of their employees – consultants – is one of the key strategic objectives of the company.

Regarding internal company processes and systems, 62% of companies stated that the education is one of continuous priorities of strategy planning; 27% of respondents said that while creating the education system, they draw on current needs of their company, the market and the environment (e.g. change of laws); 8% of respondents stated they try to follow the competition and 3% that this area is not systematically involved in their processes (graph №1).

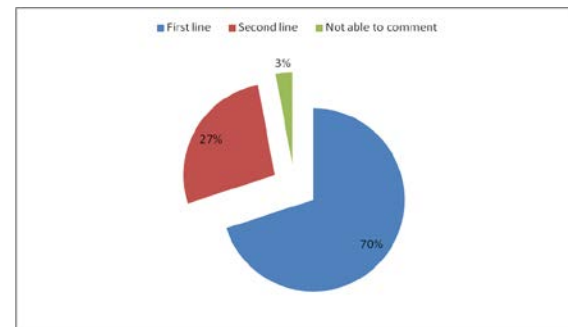
Graph1: Education as a priority



Source: authors' own processing

Majority of consulting companies that took part in the survey (70%) stated that within the education system of consultants they use the first line strategy (strategy of organizational development – strategy of individual's development); 27% of respondents stated they use the second line strategy (strategy of differentiation – strategy of integration). Only 3% of respondents were not able to comment (graph №2).

Graph 2: Education strategies

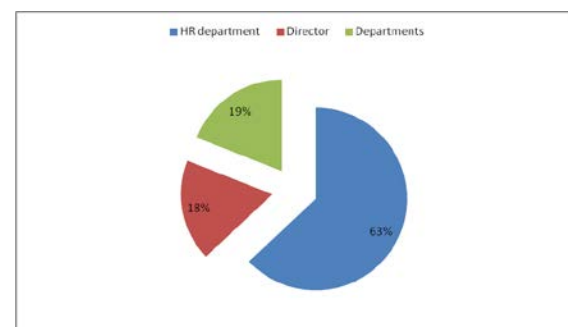


Source: authors' own processing

Almost half of the respondents (48%) have an education strategy worked out, while 80% of them stated that in creating this strategy, they draw on results of relevant analyses, clients' and market's needs (n=38).

The field of education, implementation and evaluation is within the competence of HR departments (63%) and directors of consulting companies (18%). 19% of respondents stated that this activity is within the competence of each department according to its specialty and needs (graph №3).

Graph 3: The field of education



Source: authors' own processing

Respondents listed the following as being the main tools for implementing the education (the respondents had multiple choice questions; table №3):

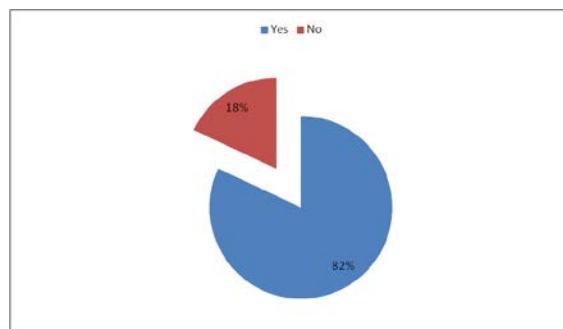
Table 3: Tools for education implementation

TOOLS	QUANTITY (%)
Competency models	87
Managing according to competence	12
Managing the work performance	65
Balanced Scorecard	7
Knowledge and talent management	12
Project management	100
Incentive mechanisms	100
Career management	92

Source: authors' own processing

What emerged from the answers is that almost 82% of the addressed consulting companies reassess the education system annually and 18% stated that they routinely repeat activities which proved to be useful in the past.

Graph 4: Evaluation of the education



Source: authors' own processing

Respondents (n=120) listed the following as being the methods of evaluating the education (the respondents had multiple choice questions; table №4):

Table 4: Methods of evaluating the education

METHODS	QUANTITY (%)
Management methodology according to competence	27
Process of managing the work performance	31
Balanced Scorecard methodology	7
Competency models	87
Management methodology according to objectives	69
Methodology of tools for 360° feedback	12

Source: authors' own processing

The most common form of education are trainings (92%).

Specialty of consulting companies in the field of consultants' education

All respondents (n=146) stated that within the consultants' education, they engage in the development of managerial, interpersonal, as well as technical skills. Among the managerial skills, project management (100%), business negotiations (92%), time management (58%) and decision-making (47%) prevail. In case of interpersonal skills, respondents most commonly referred to the education in the field of communication and presentation skills. Education on technical skills differed depending on the specialty of individual consulting companies.

Expectations and results in consultants' education

Almost all representatives of consulting companies we addressed agreed that they expect improvement and consolidation of the knowledge base, information and higher work/consulting performance as the result of their consultants' education. They assume that consultants will be able to respond to trends and competition and will be better than competitors. They also assume that consultants' work comfort, satisfaction and loyalty will be improved.

The validity of hypotheses has been confirmed.

3.4 Qualitative survey

In the next stage (in May 2018), we carried out a qualitative survey, using the interview method on a sample of 40 respondents out of those representatives of consulting companies who participated in the quantitative survey.

In the qualitative survey, we chose the procedure of constant comparison of the examined phenomena in which we did not establish the hypothesis. We wanted to know more about the frequency of consultants' education in the three fields we mentioned and how the education focus of consultants involved in management, marketing and environmental consulting differs.

Within the interview, the so-called selective recordings were made. To support the validity of the qualitative survey, we chose the following triangulation:

- Two research methods: interview and observation.
- The situation examined had been observed by two researchers.
- We assessed the obtained results with respect to consulting companies and clients' needs.

The interview was based on the prepared scenario. Recordings were initially processed individually (a set of selected "representative" interviews was analyzed by means of qualitative analyses – generating codes using the GTM method), then, all interviews (n=40) were analysed and structured once more to provide comparable results. For data analysis, contingency tables with Pearson's chi-squared test were used.

3.5 Summary of the main results of the qualitative survey

The results showed significant differences regarding the focus of educational activities of consultants in the fields mentioned (management, marketing and environmental consulting). While managers and marketing consultants attend educational activities in their field of specialization as well as in cross-sectional fields equally, environmental consultants are primarily involved in education in the technical and legislative fields.

Within cross-sectional fields, management and marketing consultants primarily engage in learning languages, interpersonal competencies and legislation, whereas environmental consultants learn managerial competencies and languages.

The frequency of education differs according to individual consulting companies. It is based on existing strategies, consultants' personal development plans, development of the external environment and the interest of consultants on topical issues. They also respond to the needs and demands of their clients in solving their tasks and consulting projects.

The results of the survey encourage suggestions for further research in the field of education and consulting. They enable meaningful conclusions to be drawn for both consulting companies and universities, and their focus on the training of consultants already during higher education.

Summary

Consulting activity is multidimensional and complex. It has to be efficient and effective, and therefore provided by highly qualified professionals. This requires strategic and systematic approach to the education of consultants.

Consulting companies in Slovakia pay attention to the education of their consultants as an integral part of their strategic planning. They are aware of the necessity of this process and its benefits for their own activity, as well as for their clients.

In spite of the positive attitude towards educational activities in the examined field, it is worth to point out certain limits and barriers that eliminate potential effects resulting from the educational activity in the field of consulting. We believe that in our conditions it will be necessary to increase the professional competencies of consultants in their field of activity. In case of consulting companies, there are obvious possibilities for

systematization of learning processes and better and more intensive use of educational and development tools. Also, universities can play an important role here, which together with consulting entities can contribute to the enhancement of basic university studies for future consultants, as well as to their further – specialized training aimed at expanding and deepening of consulting competencies.

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