Towards Tangibility:
Developing Management Consulting Services by Identifying Customer Expectations

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Abstract

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The number of service providers in management consulting is increasing. To stand out from the competition and to satisfy customer needs, it is vital to understand customer expectations. The case company of this thesis is a management consulting firm specialized in organizational change. Their objective is to develop their services through enhanced customer understanding. Ultimately, the goal is to advance their service marketing in order to increase their sales.

The aim of this thesis was defined together with the case company. The aim was to identify customer expectations from two different perspectives: how customers choose and evaluate the relevance of management consulting services for them and what customers expect from client-consultant relationships. These questions are observed in the knowledge base especially through Customer-Dominant, and Service logics and the formation and management of customer expectations. All in all, the multidisciplinary approach of the theories lies in the intersection of business and marketing logics, service marketing, organizational change, and management consulting. The purpose of the thesis was to draft a service concept tangible enough to make the service more understandable for customers and thus facilitate their decision-making while choosing service providers. A service design approach was used in this research-oriented case study to solve the development task. Within the framework of the Double Diamond (Design council 2019) several qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, workshops, customer personas and journeys and service advertisements were implemented.

The findings of this study demonstrated that customers evaluate the relevance of management consulting services from the following perspectives: added value of external help, compatibility of consulting firm with the consulting needs, the credibility of their service offering, trust in the consultant’s ability to bring about the desired change, implementation plan including methods used, and the results of the consulting. Expectations towards client-consultant relationships were identified through three customer personas: “the Partner” desiring a partnership, “the Outsourcer” looking for an extra pair of hands together with an outsider’s perspective and “the Expert seeker” in need of specialized competence.

The final concept was co-created with the case company. It is based on the above-mentioned findings. The customer expectations identified in this case study offer valuable considerations especially for small management consulting firms for their service marketing.

Keywords: customer expectations, management consulting, service marketing, service design

Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu **Tiivistelmä**

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Kohti konkretiaa: Liikkeenjohdon konsulttipalveluiden kehittäminen asiakasodotuksia tunnistamalla

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Liikkeenjohdon konsultoinnin palveluntarjoajien määrä kasvaa ja asiakasodotusten ymmärtäminen on yhä tärkeämpää, jotta palveluntarjoajat erottautuvat kilpailijoista ja pystyvät vastaamaan asiakkaiden tarpeisiin. Tämän opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajana on organisaation murrostilanteisiin erikoistunut liikkeenjohdon konsultointiyritys, jonka tavoitteena on lisätä asiakasymmärrystä ja sitä kautta kehittää palveluitaan. Pohjimmiltaan toimeksiantajan päämääränä on kehittää markkinointia ja tällä tavoin edistää palveluidensa lisämyyntiä.

Opinnäytetyön tavoitteeksi määriteltiin yhdessä toimeksiantajan kanssa asiakasodotusten tunnistaminen kahden eri näkökulman kautta: Millä perustella asiakkaat valitsevat konsultointipalveluita ja miten he arvioivat näiden palveluiden soveltuvuutta omiin tarpeisiinsa sekä toisaalta minkälaisia odotuksia asiakkailla on konsultteja kohtaan asiakassuhteen aikana. Tietoperustassa näitä tutkimuskysymyksiä tarkasteltiin erityisesti asiakaslähtöisen liiketoimintalogiikan, palvelulogiikan sekä asiakasodotusten muodostumisen ja hallinnan kautta. Kaiken kaikkiaan tietoperustan monitieteinen näkökulma sijoittuu liiketoiminta- ja markkinointilogiikoiden, palveluiden markkinoinnin, organisaatiomuutoksen ja liikkeenjohdon konsultoinnin risteykseen. Opinnäytetyön kehitystehtävänä oli laatia palvelukonsepti, joka konkretisoisi palvelun asiakkaille helposti ymmärrettäväksi ja siten helpottaisi heidän valintapäätöstään. Tämän kehitysorientoitunut tapaustutkimus hyödyntää palvelumuotoilun Double Diamond -mallia (Design Council 2019). Kehitystehtävän ratkaisemisessa käytettiin useita kvalitatiivisia menetelmiä, kuten teemahaastattelut, työpajat, asiakaspersoonat, asiakaspolut sekä palvelumainokset.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että asiakkaat arvioivat liikkeenjohdon palveluiden soveltuvuutta itselleen seuraavien näkökulmien kautta: ulkopuolisen konsultoinnin tuottama lisäarvo, konsulttiyrityksen soveltuvuus kyseisiin konsultointitarpeisiin, luottamus palveluiden laatuun sekä konsulttien kykyyn aikaansaada haluttu muutos, toimeenpanosuunnitelma ja siihen sisältyvät metodit sekä konsultoinnin tuloksellisuus. Asiakkaiden odotukset konsultteja kohtaan asiakassuhteen aikana jaettiin asiakaspersoonien kautta kolmeen ryhmään: kumppani, lisäresurssien ja ulkopuolisen näkökulman tuottaja sekä erikoisosaaja.

Lopullinen palvelukonsepti luotiin yhteistyössä asiakasyrityksen kanssa edellä mainittujen tutkimuslöydösten pohjalta. Tässä lopputyössä tunnistetut asiakasodotukset tarjoavat hyödyllisiä näkökohtia palveluiden markkinointiin myös muille, erityisesti pienemmille liikkeenjohdon konsultointiyrityksille.

Avainsanat: asiakasodotukset, liikkeenjohdon konsultointi, palveluiden markkinointi, palvelumuotoilu

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1 Introduction

"*Services are what we do and consume*": in today's world 80% of gross domestic product (GDP) consist of services in most developed countries and their importance seems to be ever increasing (Johnston, Shulver, Slack and Clark 2021, 57). Customers are more empowered than ever when it comes to choosing their service providers, thanks to the increasing number of service providers and the transparency brought by technological progress (Heinonen and Strandvik 2018). For instance, with only a few clicks *the word of mouse* can reach even millions of people via pictures, songs, and videos communicated in today's digitized world (Johnston et al. 2021, 549).

However, at the intersection of various information sources and interactions, the customer's world is becoming more and more complex when it comes to choosing service providers (Heinonen and Strandvik 2018). This difficulty holds true especially for management consulting services: customers feel uncertain about their choice due to the lack of tangible service attributes, because they can only rely on consultants' service promise (Gabbianelli and Pencarelli 2021, 2). Also, multifaced and intangible by nature, the successful transaction of management consulting services is unsure (Veres and Varga-Toldi 2021, 1090). In addition, the whole industry is characterized by ambiguity, complexity, and low level of regulation (Nikolova, Möllering and Reihlen 2015).

From the service provider's perspective, the challenge is to respond to new forms of competition and changing customer behaviors: the question is how to get noticed in the first place and then to be chosen (Heinonen and Strandvik 2018, 1). In management consulting, competition may also come in unconventional forms: for instance, artificial intelligence (AI) can decipher a complex issue cost-efficiently and thus defy more traditional consulting (Libert and Beck 2017). The question is then, what is the role and the value of the consultant-client relationship. Furthermore, management consulting firms seeking for growth through new customers are challenged with the Covid19 pandemic: 68 % of clients declare themselves less likely to purchase consulting services from new service providers (Source Global Research 2021). Consequently, consulting firms are urged to shape a distinct and compelling description of how they generate value (Source Global Research 2021). Additionally, companies can facilitate customers' decision-making by rendering their service offering more tangible (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler 2021).

As to customer expectations, their recognition is the first and probably the most important step in providing good-quality service: these expectations serve as a mirror against which a customer evaluates the quality of the service (Wilson et al. 2021, 63). Consequently, it is important to understand the underlying expectations behind customers' reasoning: how they choose and evaluate the relevance of management consulting services for them. Through this understanding, it is easier to stand out from the competition. In fact, the number of different types of management consulting firms in Finland increased by almost 16% between 2017 and 2020 (Statistics Finland, no date). In this study, the intense competition in the field is illustrated by the following quotes:

> *They [management consulting firms] contact me all the time: there is a fierce competition in the field. If I said yes to all of them, I wouldn't have the time to do my own work at all (customer interview).*
>
> *There is a huge number of consulting firms. Every week minimum 20 to 100 [management consulting firms] contact me: through e-mail, LinkedIn and sometimes even to my personal e-mail account. It is always the same agenda: we would like to come and listen what you do and if we could find time together. But this would be impossible (customer interview).*

Nevertheless, winning the first step of becoming chosen by the customer is not enough: the question is also, how to be preserved as the customer's partner (Heinonen and Strandvik 2018, 1). Therefore, marketing should continue in a consultant-client relationship; during the management consulting process and even after its ending (Gabbianelli and Pencarelli 2021, 2). Without clear expectations as a reference point, the success of a consulting engagement cannot be evaluated: expectations management and clarity of communication are a gateway to customer satisfaction (Veres and Varga-Toldi 2021, 1091, 1098).

1.1 The aim, purpose, and structure of the thesis

As previously stated, understanding customers is ever more fundamental. Hence, the aim of this thesis is to identify customers' expectations for management consulting services. The purpose of this thesis is to create a service concept based on these expectations. Ultimately, the service concept is wished to be tangible enough to benefit the case company's service marketing efforts and thus promote their sales. It can be concluded that this thesis is a research-oriented development case study considering its objective to develop a workplace (Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti 2014, 18, 52), namely the case company.

The questions guiding the research were iterated in co-operation with the case company during the process. The questions guiding this research observe customer expectations from two different perspectives and are thus interrelated:

1. How do customers choose and evaluate the relevance of management consulting services for them?

2. What are customer expectations in client-consultant relationships?

As to the structure of the thesis, this first chapter introduces the topic, the case company, the limitations, and the key concepts of this study. In the knowledge base (chapter 2), the research topic is observed in the light of business and marketing logics, service marketing, organizational change, and management consulting literature. The thesis author justifies this choice with the objective to gain new perspectives by using interdisciplinary approach: business and marketing logics provide a wider philosophical context by illustrating the emergence of focus on customer understanding (chapter 2.1.). Next, customer expectations are discussed: how these expectations are formed and to which extent they can be managed through service marketing efforts and client-consultant interaction (chapter 2.2). In the third part of the knowledge base, this thesis is anchored in the context of management consulting and organizational change: reasons for choosing or not choosing external consulting, consulting change cycle and client-consultant relationships are discussed (chapter 2.3). To conclude the knowledge base, the main features of the theories are synthesized and their affiliation to research questions is demonstrated (chapter 2.4.).

More concretely, the thesis author strives for answering the questions guiding this research by implementing various service design methods (chapters 3 and 4). Service design approach was chosen, because it emphasizes practical solutions through collaboration and iteration (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence and Schneider 2018) which was considered relevant for this development task together with the case company. The aim of this thesis was to understand customers by identifying expectations instead of producing statistically relevant generalizations: thus, the nature of the study is qualitative (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 98). Methodological approaches are discussed in more detail in chapter 3.1.

All in all, the development process took six months (September 2021 – February 2022) and its main steps are illustrated in figure 1. The research was carried out in three main steps: discover, define, and deliver (chapter 3.2.). In the discover stage, desk research, benchmarking, interviews, a workshop, and stakeholder map were used as methods. Next, content analysis of the interviews, customer personas, customer journeys and a workshop helped to define the development task further. Finally, different solutions were developed through iteration of service advertisements into service concepts. At this stage, small-scale workshops were also held in addition to asynchronous working with the case company before reaching the final design outcome.

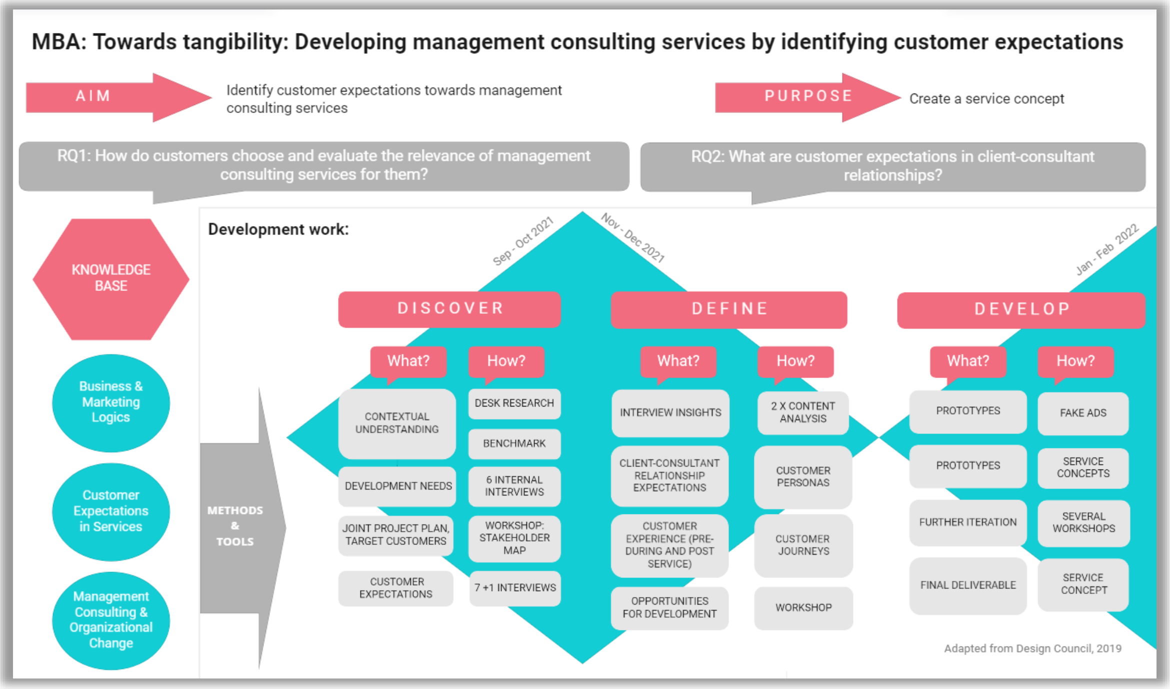


Figure 1: An overview of the Master's Thesis

The final chapter (5) consists of reflections from different viewpoints: conclusions are deduced based on research findings. Also, the scalability of the findings is assessed (chapter 5.1.). Next, the reliability and the development setting are evaluated (chapter 5.2.) and recommendations for further research are pondered through hypotheses formed during this study (chapter 5.3.). Lastly, ethical and privacy protection issues are discussed (chapter 5.4.) before closing remarks by the author (chapter 5.5.).

1.2 The case company and the context of development

The case company is a management consulting firm situated in Finland, specialized in organizational change with a human-centered and holistic approach (internal interview). In their view, organizational change is always a multi-faceted process encompassing cultural -, competence-, and attitudinal aspects together with structural considerations related to hierarchy, systems, and ways of working (internal interview). Hence, the company describes their business followingly: "people as a part of communities and networks". The clients of the company consist of both big and small companies in private and public sectors; 25% of turnover comes from international organizations (internal unpublished material 2021).

Currently the company has seven consultants of which five participate in the client projects on a full-time basis. In addition, they have a person working as Head of Communications and Marketing. Each of the consultants has an area of expertise related to leadership, business foresight and organizational development, change and transformation (internal interviews 1-6).

The company was founded in 2014 and some of the consultants have been working with the same clients for several years. However, the company presumes that their external service marketing may seem too unclear for a new potential customer. The challenge is, if customers don’t really understand the content of the service offering, they don’t buy. Now new customers are acquired mainly through word-of-mouth referrals and the case company wishes to increase their sales also through other channels. Furthermore, clear service concept(s) would be beneficial also internally: promoting services would be easier for all consultants even without an in-depth knowledge of the expertise areas of others if consultants had a coherent picture of their offerings. Consequently, the company has started a project to bridge this gap by focusing on their internal service development (internal interview).

The figure 2 illustrates the (old) services on the case company’s webpage (28.9.2021). These services were called: Meaningfulness, Innovation Capacity, Customer-Centeredness, Foresight, Organizational Self-Governance, Capacity for Renewal (unofficial translations from the case company’s website by the thesis author).

Figure 2: The case company’s services in September 2021

Through multiple iterations, it was decided that the development project of this thesis focuses on customer understanding by identifying customer expectations with the objective to develop a service concept.

1.3 Delimitations of the thesis

In management consulting “client” is a heterogenous group and their needs and expectations vary greatly e.g., according to their organizational role (Mattila, Tukiainen, and Kajalo 2019). Similarly, Hodges (2017, 36-37) stresses that a proper definition of a “client” within the organization is important, because knowing who *the client* is, makes it easier to delineate the consulting assignment and choose the right process and interventions. However, in this thesis the concept of client does not consider the heterogeneity of clients within the same customer organization: customer expectations are studied only through the eyes of one interviewee representing the whole customer organization. Consequently, it may be that other interviewees from the same customer organization would have different expectations.

Also, this thesis attempts to recognize customer expectations holistically at different stages: pre-, during and post-service but customer expectations are studied only at the time of the interview. However, these expectations can evolve over time (Hodges 2017, 213; Nikolova, Reihlen and Schlapfner 2009) and studying customer expectations in their authentic stage might have given different results. This and other possible limitations related to the development setting are illuminated further in chapters 5.2 and 5.3. while introducing additional research suggestions and evaluating the reliability of the study.

1.4 Key concepts and notions

Key concepts and notions presented in this chapter provide the reader with an overview of the standpoint of this research and thus facilitate the contextual framing of the thesis topic.

Client/customer

The word customer envelopes also companies and other organizations (Strandvik and Heinonen 2015, 112). The words customer or client are used interchangeably by referring to the case company’s customers which in this thesis are large organizations both in private and public sector (cf. EU’s definition of small and medium sized enterprises which is less than 250 employees, OECD 2005).

Customer expectations

“Customer expectations are beliefs about service delivery that serve as standards, or reference points against which performance is jugged” Wilson et al. (2021, 63). More specifically, this thesis focuses on customers' *wants* and *desires c*oncerning management consulting services. Customer expectations are presented more thoroughly in chapter 2.2.

Business and marketing logics

In this thesis, four different logics are introduced: Goods-Dominant logic (GDL), Service-Dominant logic (SDL), Service logic (SL) and Customer-Dominant logic (CDL). Although the degree to which they differ from one another varies, the common denominator of these business and marketing logics in this thesis is considered "a fundamental shift in worldview" (Vargo and Lusch 2004b, 2): a re-orientation of a philosophy that concerns all marketing offerings: intangible (services) and tangible (goods) ones. Chapter 4 comprehends a discussion of these logics including a consideration of their relevance for this thesis. Moreover, based on Foglieni, Villari and Maffei (2018, 13-14) the thesis author sees the evolution of business and marketing logics towards customer focus as the origin of service design, an approach used to reach the purpose of this research, the service concept.

Services

The notion of "services" can be observed through four different characteristics. When compared with products, the *intangibility* of services makes it hard to see and touch them in the same way. Since services are about performance, typically carried out by people, two service deliveries rarely are identical, resulting in the *heterogeneity* of services. The characteristic of *inseparability* refers to the fact that most services need to be produced and consumed at the same time (Wilson et al. 2021, 15-17). Grönroos (2015, 50) highlights that this simultaneous service process consists of *series of activities* and involves the customer at least to some extent in the service production. Finally, the *perishability* of services means that most services can't be saved or returned. All these features have implications for service marketing (Wilson et al. 2021, 17-18).

Tangibility /Intangibility

McDougall and Snetsinger (1990, 27) define tangibility as "the degree to which a product or service can provide a clear concrete image" and see tangibility as a crucial element of service marketing. Tangibility differs from "tangibles" which refer to the physical evidence of the service such as facilities. Even though tangibility has both physical and mental components, tangibility is this context refers to "the ability to picture the service" (McDougall and Snetsinger 1990, 30-31) and to the transparency of the service so that customers can understand what the service is all about. This is vital, because the *intangibility* of services results in customers' higher sense of risk, the difficulty to evaluate the service and the tendency to rely more on the recommendations of others (McDougall and Snetsinger 1990, 28). The intangibility of services is discussed in chapter 2.2.

Service marketing

"Service marketing is about promises – promises made and promises kept to customers" (Wilson et al. 2021, 18). To observe a third aspect, Bitner (1995, 247-248) emphasizes that enabling promises is also essential for successful service relationships. Making promises concerns external marketing: the more typical ways of marketing such as advertising, but also features like the service process shape customer expectations. Both outspoken and implicit service promises influence customer's desired service level and on the other hand, what it considered adequate service (Wilson et al. 2021, 71-73). As to enabling promises, employees need be able to deliver the service promised. In practice, it can be a matter of recruiting the right employees, their training and providing them with right kinds of tools. Finally, from a customer's point of view maybe the most crucial aspect: the service promises given need to be kept (Bitner 1995, 246-248).

In his service marketing triangle, Grönroos (2015, 58; cf. also Wilson et al. 2021, 18-19) labels these aspects as external marketing (making promises), interactive marketing (keeping promises), and internal marketing (enabling promises). The author sees that the development task of this thesis focuses more on external marketing with the objective to draft a service concept. However, the thesis covers also aspects of interactive marketing by studying through customer expectations how change management consulting process could support customer value.

Management consulting

Management consulting can be defined as "advisory and/or implementation services to the (senior) management of organizations with the aim of improving the effectiveness of their business strategy, organizational performance, and operational processes" (consultancy.org, no date). According to Hodges (2017, 21) consulting is about creating such added value that organizations wouldn't be able to produce on their own. Through this project the thesis author realized the complexity of reasons why management consulting services are purchased and what is expected of them. This learning process is summarized into a definition "management consulting is about helping an organization to achieve value in their organizational change" which is used in this thesis.

Value

Simply stated, “value means that a customer, after having been supported by a service provider, is or feels better off than before” (Grönroos 2008 cited in Grönroos 2015, 12). Naturally, being or feeling better off depends on the context. In management consulting, it can be for example savings or satisfaction after a successful change consulting (Hodges 2017, 41) but a whole number of other aspects exist, discussed in chapter 2.3. Different viewpoints prevail also on how, when and by whom value is generated. For instance, is value inherent in the supplier’s offering or is it generated by the customer’s consumption (Grönroos, 2015, 13). In this thesis the assumption is that value is generated both through co-creation with the consultants as well as in the customer’s own world.

Organizational change

According to Hodges (2021, 23-24) it is relevant to focus on three aspects in organizational change: *content, process,* and *context* of *change*. The content of change can be either strategic (transformational) or operational (incremental). In its essence, strategic change encompasses transformations penetrating the whole organization and inter-organizational transformations. In comparison, incremental change takes places continuously due to the need to adapt. The process refers to the way the change is happening for instance, is it planned or unplanned. Finally, the context of change is the environment, in which the change the executed. In this thesis, the word change refers most of all to the planned *process* and *content* of change, both on strategic and operational levels.

Service design

According to Design Council (2015, 3): “Design has many different definitions, but at its heart it is about the process of translating ideas into reality, making abstract thoughts tangible and concrete.” Stickdorn et al. (2018, 18-19) have collected “service design” definitions from 150 designers and the common denominators deducted are creativity, collaboration, and customer focus to name a few. Additionally, service design can be viewed as a mindset, process, toolset, cross-disciplinary language, and a management approach (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 21-22). In this thesis, service design is seen most of all as an iterative and creative methodology based on collaborative mindset and customer focus.

2 Knowledge base

This chapter introduces three main perspectives: the evolution of business and marketing logics to understand the shift to customer focus (chapter 2.1.), customer expectations from the point of view of their formation and management through external service marketing and finally, interactive service marketing in customer-consultant interaction (chapter 2.2.). Next, reasons for choosing or not choosing external help through management consulting services, the change management consulting cycle and client-consultant relationships are discussed (chapter 2.3.). Lastly, main features of the theories are synthesized (chapter 2.4.).

2.1 Evolution of business and marketing logics – towards customer focus

An overview of different business and marketing logics

To grasp an overall view of this thesis topic in a wider context, four renowned business and marketing logics are observed: Goods-Dominant logic (GDL), Service-Dominant logic (SDL), Service logic (SL) and Customer-Dominant logic (CDL). In brief, the main characteristics in these business and marketing logics wrap around the differences in the roles of service providers and other actors in value (co-) creation/formation. The definition of the parties involved in the process and other terms depend on the perspective of each business and marketing logic. For instance, Heinonen and Strandvik (2018, 4, 5-7) point out that in SDL both providers and customers are seen as generic *actors* as a sharp contrast to CDL where the roles of customers and service providers are clearly distinguished. Moreover, Heinonen and Strandvik (2018, 2) state that these different logics reflect societal and business changes over time.

The thesis author finds it relevant to present all these four business and marketing logics, because their essence it best understood by exploring their mutual differences and similarities. First, a summary of their main features is presented table 1, after which each business and marketing logic is presented in the following subchapters.

Business/Marketing Logic	Goods-Dominant Logic (GDL)	Service-Dominant Logic (SDL)	Service Logic (SL)	Customer-Dominant Logic (CDL)
Emphasis of paradigm	manufacturing of goods: services are adds-on to goods.	philosophical: service as a foundamental unit of exchange in societies. Also goods provide a service.	managerial compared with SDL	customer experience compared with SDL and SL
Value is	inherent in goods, destructed by the use	co-created with actors	facilitated by the service provider, co-created in the interaction between customer and service provider, created by the customer	created in the customer's world
Focus is	on service providers, customer is viewed as a consumer	on all societal and economic actors	on customers and service providers	on customers

Table 1: Comparison of the selected business and marketing logics by the thesis author 2022

From Goods-Dominant to Service Dominant Logic

From historical perspective, Vargo and Lusch (2004b,1) argue that marketing adopted a "goods" dominant logic from economics as a model of exchange, focusing on tangible outputs and transactions. In GDL *services* were defined not with their innate characteristics, but in comparison with products. Therefore, services are labelled as intangible, perishable, heterogenous and inseparable. In other words, services are viewed as abstract and as such, impossible to store and separate production from the consumption. Also, the inevitable customization of services leads to their heterogeneity (Vargo and Lusch 2004b,1; Johnston et al. 2021, 4-7).

In 2004 Vargo and Lusch first introduced Service Dominant logic (SDL). In sharp contrast to GDL, SDL places the notion of service at the center: service is the fundamental unit of all exchanges, it is "a process by which one actor applies his or her resources for the benefit of others" (Vargo and Lusch 2004a, 87-88). It is noteworthy that in SDL, Vargo and Lusch distinguish the notions of *services* in plural and *service in* singular claiming that "services" in plural do not even exist (Vargo and Lusch 2004a, 88) in a way suggested by GDL. To clarify, in Service Dominant logic "service" in singular is exchanged only through service propositions and they can be direct, for example goods or indirect such as money (Vargo and Lusch 2004a). Therefore, the thesis author concludes that in SDL perspective, goods, and services (in plural) are only means through which a service is rendered. Yet another difference between SDL and GDL is the dimension of value: in the traditional Goods-Dominant logic the value is inherent to goods, in Service-Dominant Logic it is co-created with actors since an enterprise can only make value propositions (Vargo and Lusch 2004b, 10-11).

Moreover, Vargo and Lusch (2004a, 74-78) claim that in SDL, all economic and social actors are resource integrators and by combining different resources, they create new ones. Together, these actors form an ever-changing service ecosystem by service exchange. These actors are independent and yet interrelated: they are connected by a shared institutional logic. Hence, the thesis author deducts that the perspective in SDL is holistic: it is not only about customers since all economic and social actors participate in resource integration.

Service logic brings a managerial perspective to Service-Dominant logic

As opposed to GDL and SDL, Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) present Service logic (SL) in which value is created in customer-driven processes instead of value co-creation initiated by the service provider. In fact, as a practical implication of Service logic, Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) suggest that customer focus should penetrate the whole organization, not merely marketing personnel: since the value experienced by the customer is holistic, it requires a joint effort from all the functions of the company. Thus, the SL viewpoint is above all managerial compared with SDL. Regardless of the differences, both SL and SDL aim at emphasizing the notion of service. In addition, both SL and SDL share the centrality of interactions through which value is created (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014). In fact, Foglieni et al. (2018, 13) claim that Service logic is an *interpretation* of Service-Dominant logic.

The value spheres presented in SL delineate how value is facilitated and created: the provider’s sphere is closed from customers, the joint co-creation sphere between service provider and customers’, and the customer’s sphere closed from the provider (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014, 208-209). Figure 3 illustrates the different value creation spheres and their relation to one another. The thesis author sees value creation spheres as a new perspective compared with SDL, which focuses on value co-creation.

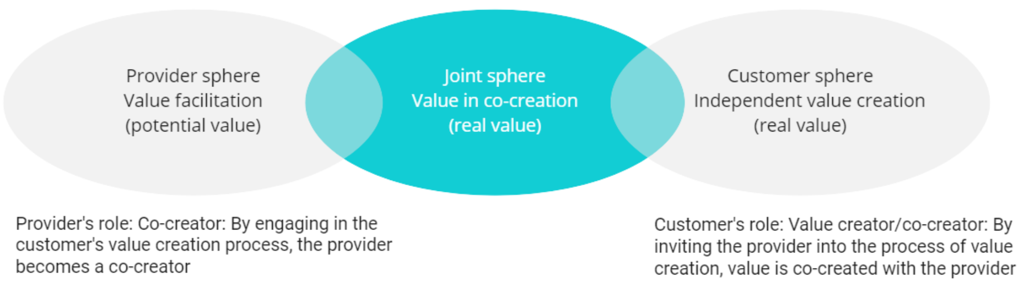


Figure 3: Value co-creation spheres adapted from Grönroos and Voima 2013, 141

To add to the complexity of value creation in the context of management consulting, von Becker, Aromaa and Eriksson state (2015a) that regardless of careful planning and the use of participatory methods, sometimes value is co-destructed - and both clients and consultants should be aware of this possibility. The same authors also found out (2015b) that value can be created in retroactive. Making sense of what happened may help to re-interpret a moment of value co-destruction.

Customer-Dominant logic emphasizes customer's world

Customer-Dominant logic (CDL) was introduced in 2010 by Heinonen, Strandvik, Mickelsson, Edvardsson, Sundström and Andersson with the purpose to offer a new strategic mindset. Heinonen et al. (2010, 531-533) claim that Goods and Service-Dominant logics have focused on the service provider's viewpoint. The authors consider that in Service-Dominant logic service providers think of customers as partners, but this point of view is still provider-centric. In practice, provider-centricity is illustrated through research methods like service blueprints which wrap around customer interactions controlled mainly by the service provider.

To compare their CDL approach with a provider-centric approach, Heinonen et al. (2010, 357-542) highlight the role of the customer. Firstly, it is the customer involving the service provider in the customer's own context and not vice versa. Secondly, the customer controls value creation formed in the customer's world. As to the word "customer", Heinonen and Strandvik (2018, 4) highlight that it is applicable also to collective of consumers: to "the unit making choices regarding what to acquire/purchase to achieve its own goals". Moreover, the authors emphasize defining "customer" according to the contextual relevance – in business-to-business context (B2B) it might be a department instead of the whole company.

In CDL, value-in-use is generated in customer's own life. As a matter of fact, this value formation may be partly invisible to the service provider: value can be experienced outside visible touchpoints; before and after service encounters (Heinonen and Strandvik 2018, 6). For instance, a pleasant memory of the service creates value for the customer. CDL takes into consideration these types of mental experiences and reactions encompassing also non-interactive processes in the concept of value-in-use. Value-in-use is interpreted and assessed by value-in-context which is shaped by not only the customer's social position and role, but also by their past experiences (Heinonen et al. 2010, 357-542). To summarize, it can be concluded that the service provider has only a limited visibility to the customer's complex context and broad value-formation timeframe during which value is created.

In CDL, customers make individual choices in their ecosystem which in addition to other actors, encompasses also immaterial resources. This customer's ecosystem is related to a specific service (Strandvik and Heinonen 2015, 119, 121, 123) and it includes both the position in the service provider's system and in the customer's own ecosystem (Heinonen and Strandvik 2018, 5). Thus, the thesis author concludes that in CDL every customer has a unique context for framing their choices and creating value for each service.

Customer needs versus customer experience in CDL

CDL draws our attention also to the language used. For instance, the word "need" implies a marketing gap that could be filled with service provider's offering. The underlying idea in CDL is to look even further behind the customer logic to understand how the offering could complete customer's world amongst other offerings and resources (Strandvik and Heinonen 2015, 115-117; Heinonen and Strandvik 2018, 7).

Translating CDL into customer understanding, the service provider should grasp customer's activities, experiences, and desires in addition to their objectives. Furthermore, customer's reasoning should be understood both in the planning and in the delivery of the offering as well as its potential use in customer's context. As to innovating something new, it is suggested to picture the desired outcome within the customer's world. Naturally, the elements of customer's value-in-use should be studied to adjust the service provider's own value formation process according to customer needs (Strandvik and Heinonen 2015, 119, 123-124).

Consequently, a company led by Customer-Dominant logic allows customer-related matters prevail over other aspects of service production (Heinonen and Strandvik 2018, 4). In contrast, Gummesson (2008) ponders how realistic a pure customer-orientation is and suggests balanced-centricity referring to the importance to consider multiple stakeholders' needs. However, considering customers' freedom of choice between different service providers, it is vital to understand the criteria behind customers' choices. From service providers' point of view, this means that the customer's reasoning behind purchase decision should be understood even better (Strandvik and Heinonen 2015, 111-112; Heinonen and Strandvik 2018, 1-3). Correspondingly, customer experience should be explored beyond service encounters with the service provider since these interactions are only a part of the overall service experience. Figure 4 illustrates this need for a holistic understanding of the customer's world in CDL compared with Service Dominant logic and Service management.

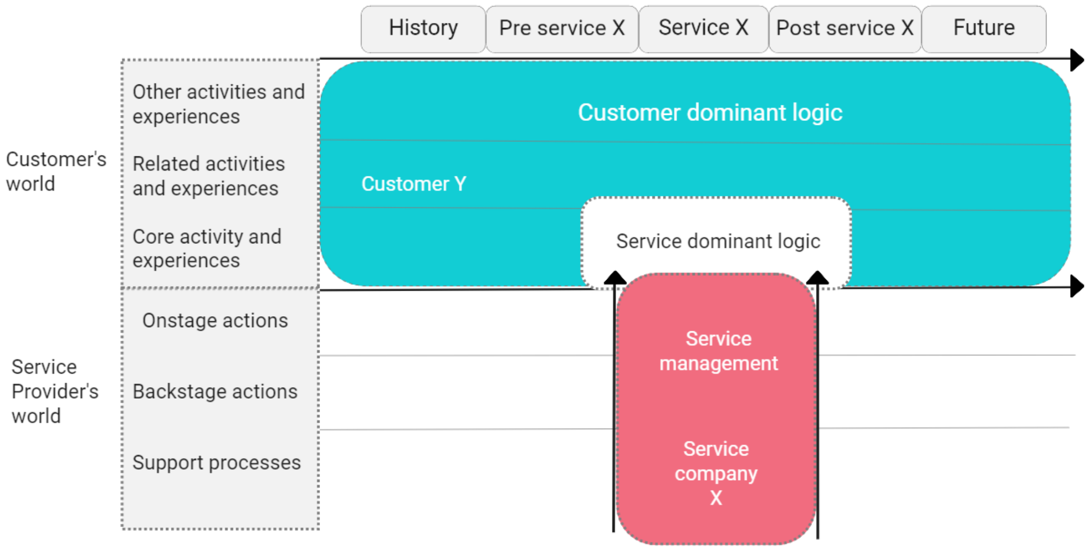


Figure 4: CD Logic of service contrasted with service management and SD logic adapted from Heinonen et al. 2010, 535

To highlight the role of the customer's world, in CDL it is claimed that experiences come to life in customers own activities and customers manage these experiences themselves. Therefore, service providers have only limited control over customer experience. The challenge is to understand, how customers incorporate the service into their own activity systems (Heinonen et al. 2010, 357-542). The question is to find out, how service providers' offering can be matched with customer's world and willingness to buy (Strandvik and Heinonen 2015, 115-117).

Summarizing key points relevant to service in this thesis

In SDL (Vargo and Lusch 2004a; Vargo and Lusch 2004b), SL (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014) and in CDL (Heinonen et al. 2010), the notion of service is central: services are a medium through which a service is rendered to the customer. This thesis aims at finding out, what are customer expectations concerning management consulting services in CDL's (Heinonen et al. 2010) holistic timeframe: in addition to client-consultant interaction, the objective is to understand customer expectations also during pre-, and post-service.

However, the scope of this thesis is not entirely based on CDL, since value-creation is not assumed to take place solely in customer's world where the service provider is invited (Heinonen et al. 2010; Heinonen and Stranvik 2018). In fact, the thesis author agrees with Gummesson (2008): a pure customer-orientation is rarely realistic since multiple stakeholders' interests' matter. The value spheres presented in SL: the provider's sphere closed from customers, the joint co-creation sphere between the service provider and the customer and the customer's sphere closed from the provider (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014, 208-209) are more pertinent for this study. Also SL acknowledges, that customer's value may evolve over time (Grönroos 2015, 14). This development work seeks to understand how the the value co-creation sphere (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014, 208-209) could be conceptualized to promote mutual understanding regarding service offering of the case company. Therefore, it cannot be argued that the bedrock of this thesis stems purely from Customer Dominant logic's customer's world into which the service provider is only invited (Heinonen et al. 2010, 357-542). Hence, the author sees that the theoretical foundation of this thesis lies in the intersection of Service and Customer-Dominant logics.

2.2 Customer expectations in services

Which factors influence customers' expectations?

According to Ojasalo (2001, 200) managing customer expectations is crucial for securing customer satisfaction and gaining lasting customer relationships. Also, expectations towards professional services such as consulting, differ from any other types of services. For instance, Wilson et al. (2021, 69) point out that in B2B context expectations can be derived from the organization's customers, sometimes also from their supervisors. Before exploring how to manage customer expectations, the author of this thesis finds it relevant to present different expectation levels and factors influencing them.

The *desired service* is the highest expectation level. It consists of *lasting service intensifiers* and *personal needs*. The above-mentioned 'derived expectations' belong to *lasting service intensifiers* because in addition to personal expectations, they are intensified by expectations of other stakeholders. Another service intensifier enhancing service expectations is a personal service philosophy – the underlying conception what is "the right kind of service". *Adequate service* level is the minimum acceptable service level for the customer. This level is influenced by *temporary service intensifiers*, such as urgency of the need. In addition, *perceived service alternatives* affect the adequate service level: the greater the variety of choice, the more demanding the client typically is. It is noteworthy, that services from other industries or one performing the service for oneself may be viewed as valid options (Zeithaml Berry and Parasuraman 1993; Wilson et al. 2021, 70).

Furthermore, adequate service level is shaped by clients *self-perceived service role* dictating to which degree customers perceive they can influence the service level. Consequently, customers who think they haven't done their part in the service delivery are likely to be more tolerant. Naturally, also *situational factors* influence what is perceived as an adequate service: e.g., in force majeure-situations characterized by insurmountable obstacles customers tend to lower their expectations. Finally, adequate service level is formed also by the *predicted service*: what is the level service customers think they are likely to get (Zeithaml et al. 1993; Wilson et al. 2021, 70-71).

When trying to find out the right kind of service provider, customers search for information to diminish risks related to purchase. Also, they want to feel more confident about their choices. The effort invested in information search increases according to the importance of the decision. Naturally, when searching for information, the service provider's personal and non-personal explicit promises shape customers' desired and predicted service expectations. Typical forms of non-personal *explicit service promises* derive from written communication such as advertisements. Personal service promises may be given e.g., by salespersons. *Implicit service promises* aren't directly outspoken or written, but they can be deducted: for instance, high price of the service may imply good quality. Naturally, *past experiences* shape the *predicted* and *desired service level* (Zeithaml et al. 1993; Wilson et al. 2021, 44, 72-73).

Finally, *word of mouth* (WOM) *communication* has a great impact on client's expectation level, both on and off-line. The importance of is related to the so-called *credence qualities* of services: the qualities of a service are difficult to evaluate beforehand and sometimes the customer is not knowledgeable enough to assess the service even after its consumption (Wilson et al. 2021, 42).

Furthermore, services usually are more intangible, less standardized and fleeting compared with products. For these reasons, the perceived risk in a purchase of a service is much greater. These factors explain the enhanced role of word of mouth communication, and WOM is also regarded impartial by nature. Similarly, choosing a renowned service provider may be considered less risky and in B2B context, persons responsible for purchase decisions typically count on the experiences of other organizations in their decision-making (Wilson et al. 2021, 45, 72-73). Correspondingly, Nikolova et al. (2015) highlight referrals, credentials, past experiences, and reputation as a foundation of trust in the field of consulting. Figure 5 summarizes the elements that affect desired, predicted, and adequate service level (Wilson et al. 2021) presented in this sub-chapter.

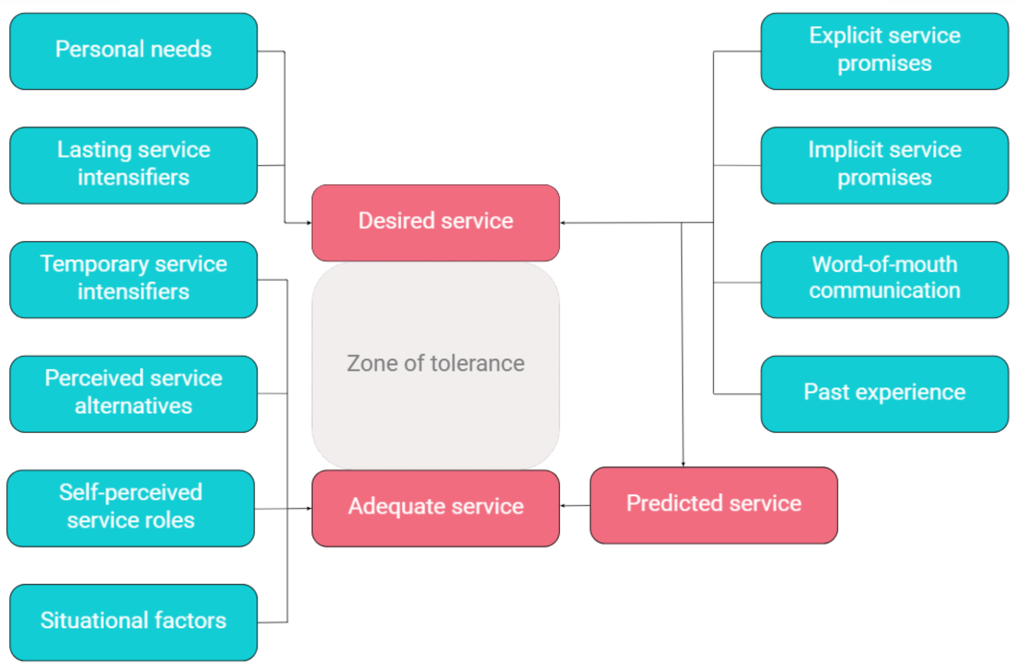


Figure 5: Factors that influence desired and predicted service adapted from Wilson et. al. 2021, 71

Intangibility – why communicating about services is challenging?

To understand communication challenges related to intangibility of services, the author finds it important to explore this phenomenon more closely. Wilson et al. (2021, 350) have deciphered intangibility into *incorporeal existence*, *abstractness*, *generality*, *non-searchability* and *mental impalpability*. Firstly, a service is abstract: even though the service delivery can take place in a specific place, the service itself does not occupy a physical space. Secondly, the abstractness makes it also hard to visualize, describe and verbalize service expectations. The generality makes it difficult to distinguish and compare services: most service providers describe their services in the form of general categories such as "unique experience" instead of distinct concrete features. Non-searchability refers to the fact a service typically cannot be experienced before purchase to evaluate its appropriateness. Mental impalpability describes the complex nature of services: without prior experience, it might be difficult to grasp what the service all about.

Due to the intangibility of services, customers seek evidence during every encounter with the service. The service evidence can be divided into three different categories: people, process, and physical evidence. The evaluation of a process consists of e.g., flow of activities, steps in the process, personalization of the service compared with the level of its standardization. Conclusions are drawn also based on people: what are the contact persons like? Also, what is the role of the customer and what are other customers like. Finally, physical evidence is based on e.g., tangible communication, guarantees, technology and website (Bitner 1994 cited in Wilson et al. 2021, 100). Strategies to increase service tangibility are discussed in the next subchapter among other things.

Managing expectations through external service marketing

Overall, in service expectation management, the provider should understand the factors influencing the expectations of their specific customer segment, and the significance of those factors (for instance weight of word of mouth compared with explicit service promises) and as well as their permanence (e.g., personal needs compared with situational factors). These sources of expectations differ in their potential to be affected by the service provider (Wilson et al. 2021, 73-74).

Wilson et al. (2021, 353) suggest several concrete ways to address the intangibility of services: for instance, since many services are about creating experiences, the use of positive narratives can be an efficient way to illustrate the essence of the service. Furthermore, references, case studies and testimonials on the webpage are impactful in convincing B2B customers to buy since persons responsible for purchase decisions typically depend on the experiences of other organizations. This type of evidence may be helpful in diminishing uncertainty associated with complex decisions (Wilson et al. 2021, 58).

Moreover, it is advised to use the tangibles in advertising: e.g., the service environment can be illustrated in communication, or a brand visibility can be boosted through brand icon or character. The more complex the services, the higher their importance. Video sharing channels such as YouTube and engaging influencers to promote services can also be very efficient in rendering the service experience more tangible (Wilson et al. 2021, 354-355). Correspondingly, McDougall and Snetsinger (1990, 28) advise stressing tangible cues and presenting more vivid communication. In addition, they highlight the need to reduce service complexity and focus on service quality.

Finally, to reduce the perceived risk related to the purchase, different types of measures can be considered. For instance, the service provider can offer a free trial period. Also, the service provider can provide the customer with an opportunity to monitor and evaluate part of the service production like in the case of postal services offering a tracking number to follow the delivery (Laroche, McDougall, Bergeron, and Yang 2004; Wilson et al. 2021, 45-46). Furthermore, the service provider can offer a service warranty, and highlight employee trainings, processes, and procedures through which the service has been standardized (Wilson et al. 2021, 45-45).

In contrast, Grönroos (2015, 55-56) points out that services should be *systematized,* not standardized because flexibility (service is designed in a way that allows deviation) and adaptability (service process can be adapted to surprising situations) form the two main competitive advantages of service business. Wilson et al. (2021, 360-361) highlight also the the need to make only realistic promises to customers. In addition, sometimes it is wise to provide the customer with different alternatives regarding the service level or potential trade-offs. For instance, the client could choose to pay less and settle with a lower service quality.

The thesis author views all above-described elements as external marketing efforts (Grönroos 2015, 58) and concludes that it is up to service providers to discover innovative measures to make their services more tangible and less risky for the customer: the most appropriate ways may also depend on customer segments' behavior, business model chosen and the industry of the organization.

Managing service expectations in client-consultant interaction

According to Ojasalo (2001, 200-203, cf. also Grönroos 2015, 116-119) customer expectations can be divided into three different categories: fuzzy, implicit, and unrealistic expectations and suggests translating them into precise, explicit, and realistic ones. This process is illustrated in the figure 6. As to fuzzy expectations, customers are opting for a change in their situation, but are unable to pinpoint, what exactly they are looking for. After the service, they might feel a vague discontent without being able to express the reason for their dissatisfaction. The thesis author presumes that fuzzy expectations may be due to intangible nature of services as previously described and the fact that the customer may not be knowledgeable enough to assess the service. Thus, in some cases customers need to be educated regarding service properties (Wilson et al. 2021, 16, 352).

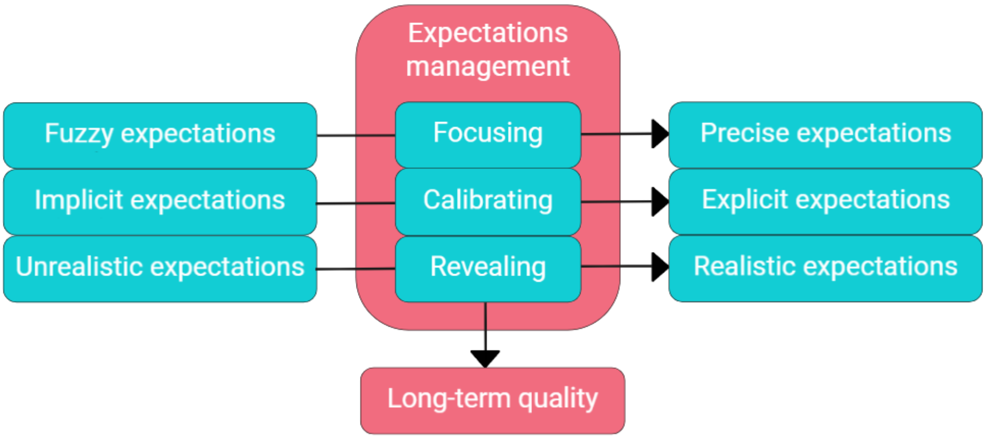


Figure 6: A framework for managing customer expectations adapted from Ojasalo 2001, 206

To overcome fuzzy expectations, the service provider, together with the client should clarify what is behind the unclear needs and expectations. In some case it might be that after joint definition of customer expectations, the service provider finds out not being able to meet these expectations. In this case, the service provider should decline the offer to avoid receiving unfavorable word of mouth. In short term, the client can feel dissatisfied by spending time on merely clarifying the need. However, in the long run it will increase customer satisfaction (Ojasalo 2001, 202). Along these lines, Nikolova et al. (2009) state how coordinating expectations offers opportunities for building trust for instance by rejecting lucrative but potentially unfruitful consulting assignments.

As to implicit expectations, they are so self-evident that client does not necessarily even consider the possibility that the service wouldn't meet them. Implicit expectations may be typical especially if the service provider and the client have a long history together. However, the service provider may uncover them intentionally or less preferable option is that they are revealed only when they deviate from expectations. In contrast, even though explicit expectations may or may not be expressed openly, but the customer consciously pays attention to them and evaluates if they were fulfilled (Ojasalo 2001, 203).

Finally, expectations can be unrealistic and thus impossible to accomplish. Yet again, clients may be frustrated in short term when understanding that their expectations aren't realistic. Naturally, the same client may have all types of expectations (fuzzy, explicit, implicit) at the same time and these expectations may concern any stage of the consulting: problem definition, solution design or outcomes. As previously discussed, calibrating expectations right in the beginning promotes long-term satisfaction (Ojasalo, 2001, 200-205). Moreover, aligning expectations regarding consulting process and outcomes is a key element in trust-building between consultants and clients (Nikolova et al. 2015).

In fact, Nikolova et al. (2009) demonstrated in their study that poor coordination of expectations in the beginning of the project resulted in less positive outcome: and the more complex the consulting case, the greater risk for discontent. In complex projects, expectations may change, and they need to be constantly negotiated. In fact, Veres and Varga-Toldi (2021, 1095) argue based on their study that expectations are constructed during consulting process and cannot be pre-defined. This viewpoint is echoed by Hodges (2017, 103), who also argues that needs and expectations may evolve during consulting process. Furthermore, the consultant should also ask, what type of help does the customer expect from consulting and, what type of a consulting relationship do the consultant and the client want: expectations towards the consulting process and the consultant may differ from each other (Hodges 2017, 103). Along these lines, von Becker et al. (2015b) recommend regulars reflections throughout the consulting process.

Negotiating service expectations seems vital also in the light of Ojasalo's (2019) qualitative research. This study deals with long-term and short-term customer satisfaction during and after the service and it demonstrates that customer satisfaction may change over time. In fact, the Ojasalo (2019) argues that sometimes the nature of the service makes it impossible to keep customers satisfied all the time and that similarly to expectations, customer's perceived quality may vary across time. Communicating the fact that less satisfying moments are a natural part of a successful result may be a part of the successful expectation management. Also, Ojasalo (2019) states that if one needs to choose between short-term and long-term quality, it is better to aim at benefit over a longer period. At best, customer may realize the need to prioritize long-term gains themselves, if right questions are skillfully asked.

Furthermore, Nikolova et al. (2009) found out in their case study that there is an interpretative margin when it comes to evaluating service quality post consulting, even with routine cases. The more innovative the problem, the higher the interpretative ambiguity. Shaping impressions concerning the consulting outcomes was pivotal especially if the client was not knowledgeable in the field of consulting. In addition, McDougall and Snetsinger (1990, 37) point out that in highly intangible services clients may not be aware of all the efforts made on their behalf and thus every encounter with the customer is a possibility to communicate information about the extent and quality of the service provided. Finally, when it comes to the presenting the consulting results, it is to be noted that even though there were tangible evidence such as meeting deadlines, financial goals, etc. a considerable amount of the project outcomes could be interpreted (Nikolova et al. 2009). To recapitulate this chapter, the thesis author sees the above-described elements as interactive marketing efforts (Grönroos 2015, 58) in client-consultant interaction.

Summarizing key points

In this chapter, it has been demonstrated that customer expectations are shaped by many factors and the service providers can control only part of them. However, there are various ways to manage customer expectations through service marketing by tackling the intangibility of services such as testimonials (Wilson et al. 2021, 354). In addition, the service provider can diminish the risk related to service purchase by lowering the perceived risk e.g., by guarantees. The context of management consulting is particular: B2B customers' expectations may be derived from other stakeholders (Wilson et al. 2021, 69). In addition to service marketing, consultants can, and they should manage, negotiate, and coordinate expectations throughout consulting as well as post-consulting (Hodges 2017; Nikolova et al. 2009). Furthermore, aligning process and outcome expectations is pivotal for building trust (Nikolova et al. 2015). Ojasalo (2001, 2007) points out that uncovering latent expectations is a small effort compared to the potential loss unrevealing them might cause.

2.3 Change management consulting - process and client-consultant roles

Reasons for choosing or not choosing external change management consulting

As previously stated, clients performing the service for themselves can be one of the perceived service alternatives and it typically increases service expectations towards external service providers (Wilson et al. 2021, 70). When it comes to an internal or external change consultant, Hodges (2017, 74) presents the main upsides between internal and external consulting: internal consultants have an in-depth contextual understanding and therefore, they may be better equipped to develop a more appropriate approach for organizational transformation. Also, since they know the internal stakeholders, they can build trust more efficiently over a long period of time and their commitment to the company can be perceived higher and their usage more cost efficient.

Contrasting these benefits, external consultants have the accumulated knowledge on several organizational transformations, newest technologies, and innovative ideas regarding organizational transformations. Furthermore, as outsiders they have more objective perspective and potentially more credibility thanks to their experience and brand status. External consultants are also detached from organizational tensions and for the employees, and it may be easier to confide in a more neutral party (Hodges 2017, 74).

When it comes to choosing external consultants, Mattila et al. (2019, 257-258) have identified two types of motives for using management consulting, labelled as *impact* and *significance*: the first one emphasizes the correlation between management consulting and organization's performance in a measurable way. The latter highlights the symbolic and image value of management consulting regarding e.g., organizational politics. Some concrete examples grouped under "impact" were the following: better quality of decision-making, use of the most recent and comprehensive knowledge in organizational development, identification of unseen development needs and improved ability to respond to changes in the external environment. As to "significance" reasons for using management consultant services, Mattila et al. (2019, 258, 260-260) identified motives like communication of hard decisions, help with organizational power struggles and boosting organization's image.

Regardless of this classification into significance and impact reasons, it should be notes that both reason clusters can co-exist, and they should be treated with equal importance. Acknowledging the existence of significance reasons is important because it influences the evaluation of consulting services. For instance, a consulting purchased based on significance reasons and evaluated based on impact reasons may be doomed as failed (Mattila et al. 2019, 258, 260-260). Reasons for choosing (external) management consulting can be observed through another type of clustering: for instance, Matthias (2013, 131) has identified the following reasons in her research: expertise (knowing what or knowing how), externality (external perspective either geographically or industry wise) extension (extra resource) and finally, endorsement (legitimization or de-personalization of a decision).

Change consulting process

Hodges (2017, 86) presents consulting for change as a cycle instead of a linear approach. The first phase is the initial contact where the client typically explains their consulting needs. During this meeting, the client evaluates the consultant's competence and the potential to achieve the desired transformation by observing also non-verbal cues such as energy, confidence, and appearance of the consultant. Correspondingly, Nikolova et al. (2009) have stated in their case study that shaping impressions is crucial especially in pre-consulting phase: consultants aim at demonstrating their capacities for instance by introducing tangible solutions and/or written or verbal persuasion.

Moreover, Hodges (2017, 96-98) points out how vital it is to prepare thoroughly to this meeting with all the relevant background information concerning the organization: in this discussion, it is decided whether the relationship between the consultant and the case company is a good fit. Similarly, Nikolova et al. (2015) point out that clients evaluate consultants' willingness to invest time in an in-depth-understanding of the organization's context and stakeholders' expectations. In addition to the consultant's expertise, clients also tend to select a consultant they find likeable which highlights the importance of establishing an emotional connection.

Contracting and the consultant's practical proposal (or refusal of either party) can take place once mutual understanding is established considering the following factors: what needs to change, how, when and who are the stakeholders and their roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities. Typically, also the client's involvement in the project, feedback, and communication practices as well as confidentiality issues are discussed before contracting (Hodges 2017, 98-105).

After contracting, the issue is diagnosed: data is gathered and analyzed to map the root causes of the issue. Hodges (2017, 120-150) stresses the collaborative nature of this process as well as choosing appropriates data collections methods for the issue at hand. Similarly, data collection and contextual understanding are emphasized in a discussion paper introducing principles of impactful organizational interventions by von Thiele Schwarz, Nielsen, Edwards, Hasson, Ipsen, Savage, Simonsen Abildgaard, Richter, Lornudd, Mazzocato and Reed 2021. Moreover, it is important to understand the past, the present and the future relevant to the task at hand: recognizing things like ways of working, systems, outspoken and implicit objectives may assist in identifying what is holding back from change and what could promote it (von Thiele Schwartz et al. 2021).

Followed by the right diagnosis, an appropriate intervention should be decided. In practice, this stage consists of identifying the best intervention and tailoring the solution and implementing related activities. In practice, the scope of the intervention should be appropriate to the organization and its' employees, correlate with the size of the challenge and boost organization's capacity for change (Hodges 2017, 155). The relevance of the intervention chosen is echoed by von Thiele Schwarz et al. (2021) who point out that whenever possible, aligning intervention with existing organizational objectives promotes engagement in the process and ensures its impact even after the change agents are no longer present. Furthermore, the authors suggest that the intervention should be chosen according to its effort-gain balance and prioritize low effort and high gain interventions (von Thiele Schwarz et al. 2021).

Finally, in the transition phase the consultant disengages from the process after having verified that the client is able to sustain the change implemented (Hodges 2017, 155-156, 226). In this regard, von Thiele Schwarz et al. (2021) suggest context-dependent evaluation of the intervention considering to whom the solution works, why and under which circumstances.

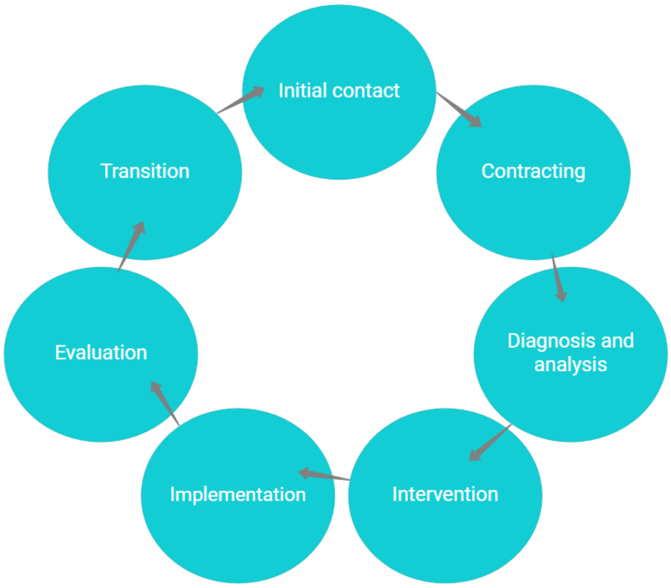


Figure 7: The consultancy for change cycle adapted from Hodges 2017, 86

In practice, implementing the change cycle described above (figure 7) is not straightforward: the whole process is iterative, the cycle might not be implemented entirely by the same consultant. To the contrary, in large organizational transformations there are many different types of consultants involved. Also, sometimes only parts of the cycle are implemented: for instance, the client might have already diagnosed the problem. In case the consultant diagnoses the problem, the solution rarely is uniquely tailored to the customer. In most cases, the consultant possesses a toolbox of solutions instead of customizing a completely new one (Hodges 2017, 86-90, 95). Similarly, also von Thiele Schwarz et al. (2021) emphasize the iterative and adaptive nature of the process together with active stakeholder involvement.

Client and consultant roles and level of involvement

As described in the previous chapter, it is important to clarify right from the beginning, what kind of consulting does the client expect bearing in mind that these needs may evolve during the consulting process Hodges (2017, 46). Furthermore, Nikolova et al. (2015) found out that customers do have different preferences regarding their own level of involvement in the consulting process: some seek sporadic interaction and possibility to concentrate on other tasks, some wish to be integrated in the consulting process. Next, different types of client-consult relationships are explored.

A classic consulting type is called the *doctor-patient approach,* which is characterized by the existence of a problem, which is defined, and solved by the consultant rather independently. In this scenario, the client trusts the consultant's judgement and expertise and does not seek to be part of the process. Consequently, the client doesn't learn how to solve these types of problems and needs to resort to consultants should similar cases re-appear (Hodges 2017, 48-49). This consulting type matches with client-consultant interaction labelled as *the expert model* by Nikolova et al. (2009): also, in this model the consultant is the expert providing both diagnosis and solution of the problem.

Next, Hodges introduces (2017, 48) an *expert approach,* but regardless of the term "expert", the meaning differs from the one introduced by Nikolova et al (2009): in this approach, the consultant provides a solution to a problem which is defined by the client. In other words, consultants offer their expertise to solve a specific pre-defined problem. From the consultant's point of view, this approach offers the opportunity to demonstrate innovative solutions out of the client's usual scope in the design and implementation of the solution. However, the downside of this consulting type is that the client may lack ownership in the process and become dependent on the consultant's expert opinion. In contrast, in *the service provider approach*, the client has defined both the problem and the solution. Typically, client seeks to have an extra pair of hands. Since the consultant's role is only to implement the pre-defined solution, it is of utmost importance that the client has carried out the right diagnosis (Hodges 2017, 49).

In *the process facilitative* approach, the consultant brings expertise to the process instead of some specific focus areas. The role of the consultant is to facilitate the client to tackle the challenges by themselves. In this way, the process is adapted to client's world compared with the expert approach which typically relies on general best practices and thus does not ensure the best possible fit for organization's needs. In practice, process facilitative approach is based on close co-operation between the consultant and the client: each of them recognizes the competences of the other. Thanks to this kind of partnership, the client is more capable of dealing with similar kinds of challenges in the future (Hodges 2017, 50-51).

Likewise, Nikolova et al. (2009) have studied client-consultant relationship in which both parties engage in the joint learning process from the point of view of a social learning model: in their view, it is important that both parties take part in the diagnosis of the problem and the design of its solution. The nature of the consulting assignment – either conventional or innovative - can influence the consulting process and the interaction between the client and the consultant. In the exploitative consulting (routine) the consulting firm is appointed to tackle a specific issue: the client's involvement is limited to providing a relevant data leaving the problem-solving process to consultants. In comparison with the exploitative consulting, innovative projects have a different process characterized by high involvement and intensive learning: it needs to be tailored to the client's context. Instead of the technical skills of the consultants, their capability to build relationships is more pivotal due to the increased ambiguity.

Hodges presents (2017, 51-52) *consulting for change* which consists of mostly expert and facilitative roles, it can't be dominated by one single consulting approach. Furthermore, Hodges states that a successful change consulting requires trustworthy relationships and building them takes time and effort. Also, in a fast-paced world, it is only natural that some of the trials fail – consultant should offer room for reflection to enable continuous learning. Moreover, in change consulting client-consultant co-operation is vital: client needs to give information regarding their situation and the challenges at hand whereas the consultant can shed light on the potential solution and its implementation.

Nikolova et al. (2009) present one more client-consultant interaction model which isn't covered by Hodges (2017): *the critical model*. In this approach, the consultant dominates the client-consultant interaction through storytelling and managing impressions. The author of this thesis presumes that this critical interaction model can correlate with previously presented Mattila et al. (2019) "Significance" reasons of acquiring external management consulting which is more focused on the symbolic and image value of consulting. Correspondingly, Nikolova et al. (2015; see also Veres and Varga-Toldi 2021, 1097) point out that consultants' making the client "look good" may be one of the motives. Table 2 delineates different consulting approaches introduced in this sub-chapter.

Approach	Doctor-patient	Service provider	Expert	Process facilitative	Critical model
Consultant's role	Collect and analyse data, select an intervention	Implement a pre-defined solution as an "extra pair of hands"	Define the right intervention and implement it	Facilitate understanding	Tell stories and manage impressions, make the client "look good"
Client's role in the process	Passive	Diagnoses both the problem and the intervention	Diagnoses the problem	Commits to a partnership with a high involvement	Passive
Source	Hodges 2017, 48	Hodges 2017, 48-49	Hodges 2017, 49-50	Hodges 2017, 50-51	Nikolova et al. 2009

Table 2: Selected consulting approaches adapted from Hodges 2017 and Nikolova et al. 2009 by the thesis author 2022

Summarizing key points

To conclude this chapter, it seems that purchasing external management consulting is a choice motivated by multiple reasons. Besides improved outcomes, symbolic value may also matter (Mattila et al. 2019). Sometimes internal consultants are deemed to be a valid option. When external consulting is chosen, the preferred client-consultant relationship may depend on the phases of change cycle into which the consultant is invited e.g., implementing a pre-defined solution versus designing the whole change consulting cycle (Hodges 2017). Also, the nature of the consulting assignment can play a role: routine cases differ from innovative ones (Nikolova et al. 2009). The author of this thesis summarizes that client-consultant roles require different levels of involvement, engagement, and expertise from both parties depending on the process and outcome expectations, and the context of the consulting.

2.4 Concluding knowledge base

In this chapter, the thesis author creates a synthesis of the main theories presented in previous chapters 2.1, 2.2. and 2.3. in which customer expectations have been discussed from different viewpoints. The big picture of this thesis is placed in the intersection of Customer-Dominant logic and Service logic: it is assumed that value is created both in CDL's customer world's holistic timeframe encompassing pre- during and post- service (Heinonen et al. 2010) and in the co-creation sphere with the service provider (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014, 208-209). The first question guiding the research "How do customer organizations choose and evaluate the relevance of management consulting services for them?" focuses more on the holistic timeframe of CDL whereas the second question “What are customer expectations in client-consultant relationships?” aims at understanding clients’ perspective during the co-creation sphere of SL.

Customer expectations concerning services are formed based on different sources and they can be only partly managed by the service provider (Wilson et al. 2021). For instance, also customers’ past experiences shape their service expectations (Zeithaml et al. 1993; Wilson et al. 2021, 73) and how they evaluate services (Heinonen et al. 2010, 357-542). Due to the intangibility of services, customers seek to diminish the risk related to the service purchase and they look for evidence during every encounter with the service (Bitner 1994 cited in Wilson et al. 2021, 99). In the case of management consulting services, customers estimate also, if they even need external management consulting or could they perform the service themselves (Hodges 2017, 74; Zeithaml et al. 1993; Wilson et al. 2021, 70). And when deciding to choose external management consulting, these reasons vary a great deal ranging from image value of management consulting to measurable outcomes (Mattila et al. 2019, 257-258; Matthias 2013, 131).

Before initiating the change consulting cycle (Hodges 2017), consultants should try to uncover customers’ expectations (Ojasalo 2001, 200-203; Grönroos 2015) and map, which are the most appropriate consulting approaches including the customer’s level of involvement in the consulting (Hodges 2017, 46-52). In the consulting process, expectations should be constantly negotiated (Nikolova 2009; Hodges 2017, 103). Post consulting, there is an interpretative margin regarding the consulting outcomes (Nikolova et al. 2009). Perceived quality of service may also change over time (Ojasalo’s 2019) and it may be created in retroactive (von Becker et al. 2015a) which may have an impact on word of mouth recommendations. Figure 8 summarizes this concluding chapter by visualizing the synthesis of the knowledge base and its affiliation to the questions guiding the research.

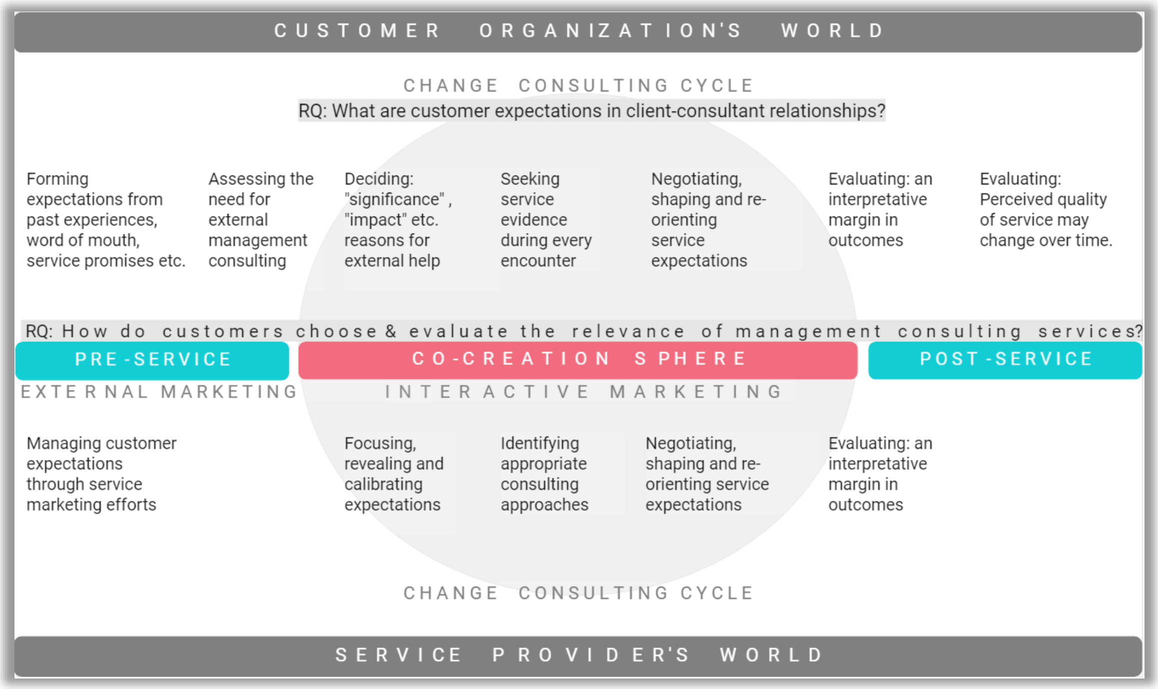


Figure 8: A synthesis of the knowledge base and the questions guiding the research by the thesis author 2022

3 Research and development setting

This chapter delineates the methodological approach. In addition, it aims at describing and justifying the use of methods chosen as well as demonstrating their impact for the design process. Furthermore, preliminary findings of the first research stage are introduced.

3.1 Methodological approaches

As opposed to theory-oriented scientific research, this thesis is based on research-oriented development because of its practical context for workplace development (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 18). More precisely, the thesis author sees this research-oriented development work as a service design case study including some elements of action research and constructive research. In fact, a development project is often a combination of several research approaches: It is advised to consider what would be an ideal approach for the development task at hand and if relevant, create a combination of different approaches accordingly (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 51).

This service design case study aims at developing service marketing of the case company through identifying customer expectations. As in this project, a case study generally explores a definite topic by asking questions like “how” and “why” without the objective to generalize (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 53). According to Kananen (2013a, 57) the use of several methods and complexity of the research problem are the most typical features for a case study which holds true for this study as well.

However, service design approach was estimated to be the most pertinent due to its collaborative and pragmatic process through which it places customer needs in the center (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 72-74). To better understand the essence of service design, it can be described as a multidisciplinary approach which consists of a collaborative process encompassing different stages from research to concept development and implementation (Foglieni et al. 2018, 29). Service design practice means that all physical and intangible components relevant to the service system need to be taken into consideration in service development. Service design can result for instance in new service development or in re-designing more coherent and more tailored service experiences, closer to customer needs (Foglieni et al. 2018, 18-19, 29).

To illustrate the nature of service design further, Stickdorn et al. (2018, 27) present principles guiding the design process. To begin with, the experience of all the relevant stakeholders of services needs to be considered (human centered) throughout the overall service (holistic). In practice, this is ensured through collaborating with these stakeholders (collaborative), by visualizing the service as sequences (sequential) and by exploring different methods and solutions as long as the desired outcome is obtained (iterative). Finally, service design approach aims at researching and prototyping in real life and translating intangible to tangible (real).

In short, the case study approach delimits the scope of this study in the context of the case company whereas service design aims at optimizing the design outcome for both customers organizations and employees of the case company. Nevertheless, this case study does include some elements of action research because of its objective to co-create solutions to practical problems and bring about real change (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 58-59) in the case company. Lastly, it can be argued that this development work is partly constructive since it aims at a practical outcome (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 65).

3.2 Design framework and data collection methods

Today, several service design frameworks exist. As Stickdorn et al. (2018, 88) point out, these frameworks do not differ from each other in their core. In every design project, one must understand user needs, embrace iterative way of working and alternate between convergent and divergent stages.

After comparing different design processes in the beginning of this case study, the design approach chosen was the service innovation process based on foresight and design (Ojasalo, Koskelo and Nousiainen 2015). The thesis author estimated this approach to be the most appropriate approach, because it combines foresight and design thinking and considering the case company's mission to "Build Future Organizations" a future-oriented approach seemed the most pertinent. However, due to time constraints, the original plan involving the case company's employees in the implementation of forecasting methods did not take place. Therefore, the author of this thesis decided to change the framework into the Double Diamond (Design Council 2019) after realizing that in December 2021 that in this development task, defining the right design challenge was more central than forecasting. Table 3 includes a comparison of the Service Innovation Process Grounded on Foresight and Service Design by Ojasalo et al. 2015 and the Double Diamond process (Design Council 2019).

Design process	Research & Understand	Define the challenge	Ideate	Develop & Prototype	Conceptualize & Deliver
The Service Innovation Process Grounded on Foresight and Service Design (Ojasalo et al. 2015)	Map & Understand		Forecast & Ideate	Model & Evaluate	Conceptualize & Influence
Double Diamond (Design Council 2019)	Discover	Define		Develop	Deliver

Table 3: Comparison of the first design process choice and the Double Diamond process by the thesis author 2022

Furthermore, according to Foglieni et al. (2018, 31), the Double Diamond model is the most acknowledged model (figure 9). And the with diamond shape, the Double Diamond process visually illustrates the alternance of divergent and convergent thinking. The divergent phases are about widening horizon by delving into the topic at hand widely or deeply (discover and develop -phases), the convergent phases are about focusing design actions (define and deliver -phases) (Design Council 2019).

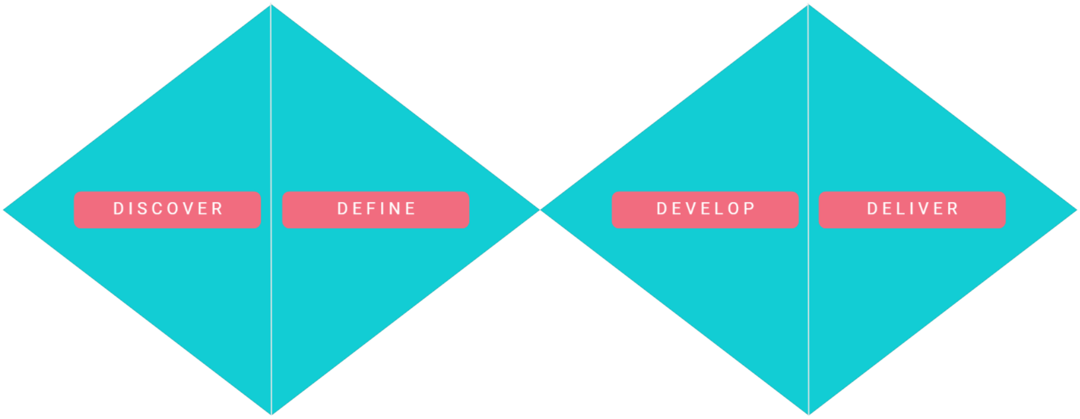


Figure 9: the Double Diamond model adapted from Design Council 2019

Next, the phases of the Double Diamond process (2019) are observed more closely. The first phase called “Discover” consists of understanding, what the design challenge truly is by discussing with stakeholders relevant to the topic (Design Council, no date, a). Typical methods used to gather a broad user understanding can include studying information concerning competition or other relevant trends (secondary research) or observation (Design Council, no date, a). The next stage “Define” emphasizes convergent thinking by crystallizing the insights formed at the previous stage and defining the main design challenge. Methods used at this stage can consist of the selection of most promising ideas through assessment criteria or by visually drafting user’s journey through service (Design Council, no date, b). “Develop” stage is about ideating different concepts and finding out what works and what doesn’t. For instance, building physical protypes can be used as a method at this stage (Design Council no date, c). The final stage, called “Deliver” is about fine-tuning and launching the project to gather feedback. Testing and evaluating are typically done at this stage (Design Council no date, d).

In this thesis, the choice of methods and their implementation was adapted to the design task at hand and due to restricted time, only the first three stages of the Double Diamond were implemented. In the “Discover” phase, desk research and interviews were carried out to gain contextual understanding and discover the development needs for this thesis project. Additionally, the target customer and stakeholders were discerned in a workshop. Next, in the “Define” stage, the content analysis of interviews was carried out after which customer personas and customer journeys were elaborated to categorize, visualize, and analyze further the insights from customer interviews. Also, a co-creative workshop was held together with the case company to identify development needs in the light of the research findings and to compare these finding with the outcomes of the internal development project.

In the final “Develop” phase, four prototypes were created (two service advertisements and two preliminary services concepts) to gather and synthetize insights from previous research stages. Several iteration rounds took place together with the case company in and in-between of three workshops to discuss, co-create and refine the final service concept.

The description of each of these methods and their connection to theory is presented while introducing their implementation in chapters 3.2.1.; 3.2.2. and 3.2.3. Due to the iterative nature of the process, the chronological implementation order of methods didn’t always follow the order presented in the table 4.

Process phase	**Method**	**Objective**	**Outcome**
Discover	Desk research: Document review and observation of the internal development project on Teams channels	Contextual understanding	Qualitative insights on the case company’s strengths and their previous and on-going service development work.
	Desk research: Benchmark	Contextual understanding and comparing competitor’s service offering and promotional material with the case company	Deepening industry-specific understanding, Identifying development opportunities for the case company
	Preparatory research: 6 internal interviews	Contextual understanding. Discovering development needs: scoping potential questions guiding this research	Forming preliminary research questions, discovering the need to define the target customer
	Workshop 13.10.2021: Stakeholder map	Identifying the target customer, discussing the joint project plan	Stakeholder map, joint project plan
	7 customer interviews	Identifying customer expectations in management consulting services	Qualitative insights on customer expectations
	1 expert interview		Mirroring and confirming qualitative insights from customer interviews

Process phase	Method	Objective	Outcome
Define	Contents analysis of internal interviews	Analyzing and categorizing the interview data	Thematic categorization of the interview data, deep interview insights
	Contents analysis of customer and expert interviews	Analyzing and categorizing the interview data	Thematic categorization of interview data, deep interview insights; What would the client ask? questions
	Customer persona	Abstract categorization of customer expectations in client-consultant relationships	Three customer persona types based on the expectations
	Customer journey	Illustrating and empathizing potential customer experience throughout the consulting process including pre- and post-consulting phases	Three customer journeys
	Workshop 8.12.2021: Brainwriting, ERRC (Eliminate, Reduce, Raise and Create) grid What would the client ask? questions Service concept template	Identifying development opportunities for personas, comparing results with the case company's internal development project, ideating, and drafting preliminary service concept	Development opportunities concerning service concepts, service offerings and service descriptions. Ideas for preliminary service concepts.
Develop	Protype: service advertisements	Streamline and crystallize qualitative insights from previous research stages in a visual form.	Two service advertisements for the most important customer personas
	Prototype: service concepts	Iterate service advertisements further into verbally more explicit service concepts	Two preliminary service concepts
	Workshop 12.1.2022: Ideation, free discussion with the case company	Test the service advertisements and the service concepts with the case company	A decision to zoom in and develop further the second preliminary service concept
	Workshops: 27.1.2022 and 21.2.2022: Ideation, free discussion with the case company, (several iteration rounds outside workshops)	Develop a final service concept	Drafting a service concept to serve as a model for other services.

Table 4: The adaptation of the Double Diamond process (Design Council 2019) in this thesis

3.2.1 Discover

Overall, desk research can help in mapping, what is the real research problem (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 118). Furthermore, it can provide important contextual understanding concerning the organization and the competition. In other words, instead of discovering the correct answers, desk and preparatory research like internal interviews are more about uncovering relevant questions to ask. In this chapter, the authentic implementation order of methods is described including the content analysis of interviews with the purpose to define interview insights.

Desk research: Document review and observation of the internal development project

To begin with, the project started by exploring internal and external documents of the case company. For the time being, the company had not yet elaborated strategy, mission, and vision, but documents concerning company's philosophy, operating model, service descriptions, customer offers, summary of previous customer interviews, company presentations, case studies and the company blog were reviewed.

Among other things, the author of the thesis got an overview of the company's service development based on these documents: for instance, service descriptions had been iterated several times. Furthermore, a glimpse of the company's strengths was gained while screening the documents, summarized in figure 10.

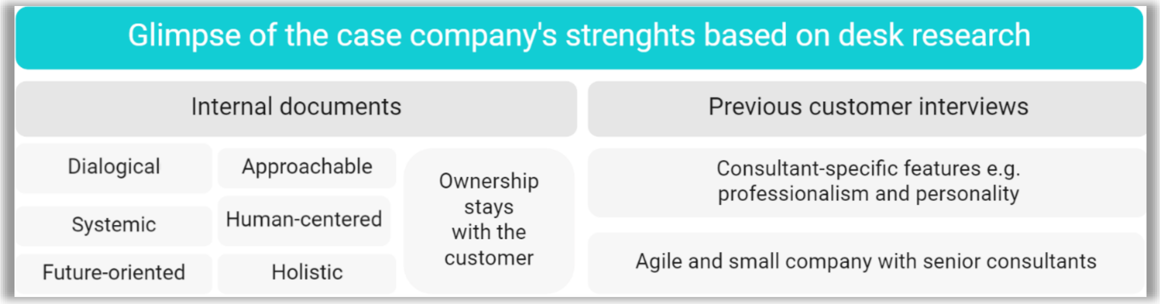


Figure 10: Case company's strengths based on desk research

The iterative nature of service design Stickdorn et al. (2018, 88) holds trues also in this development work: in a way, desk research was an on-going research method throughout the project. Due to the on-going internal development project, the thesis author regularly screened the Teams discussion channels of the case company. The aim of this observation was to gain further contextual understanding and stay updated on the internal service development project. This research stage contributed especially to the elaboration of the internal interviews.

Desk research: Benchmark

Stickdorn et al. (2018, 118) and Tuulaniemi (2011) present benchmarking as a design research method. Furthermore, Tuulaniemi (2011, 238-141) states that benchmarking is particularly beneficial when it comes to learning from others and developing one's own actions. It is important to know the market to create a successful service. In practice, benchmarking can have different forms such as research, observation, and comparison. Benchmarking can help to avoid mistakes that competitors have done, learn from their best practices, develop a competitive advantage, or even find a completely new market (Tuulaniemi 2011, 238-141).

In this development work benchmarking was conducted for the purposes of learning more from industry through competitors and to compare their services with the case company to identify improvement suggestions. In practice, the CEO of the case company indicated some names of potential competitors after which their websites were browsed. In the next phase, the closer benchmarking was focused on five smaller consulting companies: observations were made concerning their service offerings and additional promotional material on the webpage (appendix 2). The main conclusions were:

- Competitors tend to indicate a more concrete description of their services compared with the case company
- Tools and methods for consulting are often presented in service descriptions
- References, example cases, blogs and podcasts are typical
- Partnership-based service model is an option besides selling separate services

Besides enhanced industry-specific understanding, the insights gained from the benchmarking were especially valuable while drafting the preliminary service concepts in the develop-stage.

Preparatory research: Internal interviews

Internal interviews of the case company's employees were carried out in September and October 2021. The aim was to discover development needs for this thesis project and to deepen the contextual understanding gained through desk research and benchmarking. Internal interviews were considered important for the purpose of clarifying the scope of this project and to avoid overlapping with the on-going internal development project. This approach is typical for case studies: often one needs to familiarize oneself with the research topic to find out what is the real development task at hand (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 54). Similarly, Stickdorn et al. (2018, 218) point out the relevance of internal interviews for discovering the right questions to ask. All employees working full-time for the case company were interviewed (table 5).

Number	Role in the case company	Date	Duration
1	CEO	20.9.2021	55 mins
2	Consultant	21.09.2021	42 mins
3	Consultant	22.09.2021	82 mins
4	Head of Communication and Marketing	28.09.2021	34 mins
5	Consultant	30.9.2021	93 mins
6	Consultant	08.10.2021	56 mins

Table 5: The case company’s internal interviews

Vilkka (2021, 124) considers thematic and semi structures interviews as synonyms, and this is the definition used in this development work. In thematic interviews the focus is more on themes relevant to the research topic instead of a pre-defined structure. This method was chosen because of its flexibility (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010, 102-105).

Ethical recommendations were taken into consideration while planning the interviews and their data management (Arene recommendations 2020). The publicity of this thesis was highlighted from the very beginning with the case company. Prior to the interviews, a set of themes and example questions (appendix 1) iterated in co-operation with the case company’s CEO was sent to all interviewees to inform the interviewees about the purpose of their interview (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 48-49). Furthermore, the aim was to give the interviewees time to reflect and thus orient to the up-coming interview. A permission for recording the interviews was asked from all interviewees.

In practice, not all the example questions were discussed in the interview: with some interviewees it was more relevant to focus on certain themes and ask additional questions regarding them and for example with the CEO, the context of the development work was discussed in detail. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2010, 47-48; 109) suggest, themes were the same in all interviews, but order and set of questions varied according to the knowledge and viewpoints of the interviewee. While interviewing, the interviewer summarized interviewees' answers as a technique to verify correct mutual understanding (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010, 108). The interviews were listened and transcribed immediately after the interview. Since there are no unambiguous guidelines how to transcribe an interview and considering that the researcher was transcribing the interviews herself, solely the most relevant parts for interview themes were transcribed literally (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2010, 139, 142).

The recorded interviews were stored only during pre-defined period (October 2020 - March 2022) into the thesis author's private account after which they were deleted (Arene recommendations 2020, 20). Due to the on-going pandemic situation in September 2021, most of the interviews were carried out on-line in Microsoft Teams; only one interview was held face-to-face. A transcribed interview summary was sent via e-mail to interviewees to be validated. In this way, interviewees were provided with the possibility to fill in missing information and correct possible misunderstandings.

Content analysis of the internal interviews

In qualitative analysis it is crucial to decide in the very beginning, what the researcher is looking for in the data and exclude everything else. Naturally, this scope should be in line with the development task (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 104-105). Therefore, the author of this thesis decided to focus on identifying potential service development needs with the objective to formulate questions guiding the research in such a way that it would bring added value for the case company. However, the researcher did not want to narrow down the scope too much right in the beginning of the project.

As to analyzing interviews, content analysis was used as a method to identify relevant categories based on research data. The aim was to compose a concise written description of the phenomenon yet maintaining all relevant information (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 108, 122; Vilska 2021,163-164). Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 122) divide the content analysis process in three different categories: 1) reduction of the material 2) clustering the material 3) creating theoretical concepts. First, the unit of analysis chosen was a verbal unit expressing one idea/thought (reduction). The extractions were color-coded in Microsoft Excel according to interviewees to keep tract of the original source of the data and to anonymize interviewees (Arene recommendations 2020, 20). Next, the data was further reduced and transferred into virtual post-it's on Miro (Miro is an on-line collaboration tool) after which the verbal expressions were further reduced. At this phase the data was grouped (clustering) according to similarities and the reduced expressions were grouped into subcategories, illustrated in figure 11. Considering the preliminary research stage, the thesis author didn't find creating theoretical concepts (the third stage of content analysis) relevant at this point.

Clustering showed the heterogeneity in interviewees' answers and the researcher was unable to group some expressions. The researcher concluded that it was important to demonstrate the deviation in the research data to illustrate the different viewpoints employees have. Therefore, researcher drafted an interview summary to the case company including direct quotes to facilitate their internal discussion.

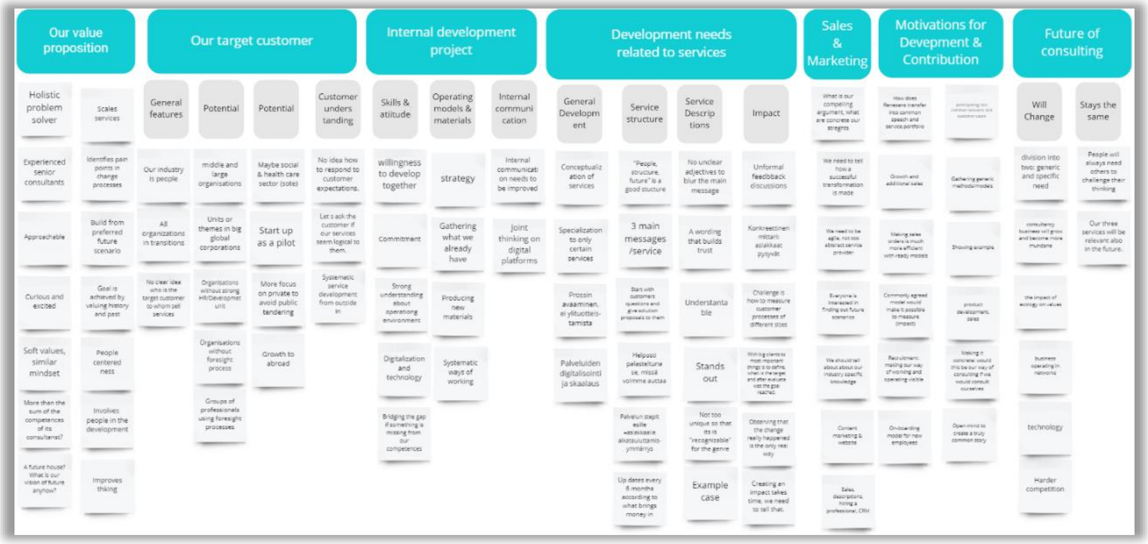


Figure 11: Clustered post-its from internal interviews

Based on the employee interviews, the researcher was able to redefine the research questions with a clearer focus on customer understanding: what customers expect from services and how they evaluate the relevance of the service while choosing a service provider. In addition, it became evident that 1) there was a need to define the customers of this project and enhance customer understanding 2) develop services further. The following quote exemplifies these aspects:

> *"Who are we selling, who is our customer? Whom should I tell? I do not have a ready answer. This aspect should be considered […] The services are relevant, but the cutting edge is missing, what is our strength, from abstract notions into something concrete" (internal interviewee)?*

Regardless the heterogeneity of opinions concerning service development process, also some similarities were identified. For instance, the interviews confirmed conclusions drawn during desk research: the consultants perceive their company as a holistic problem solver able to tackle complex challenges with a human-centered approach. The thesis author concluded that consultants share similar values, but co-operation practices, service concept(s) and service descriptions require more work.

Workshop 13.10.2021

The workshop was held face to face including all but one employee. The thesis author was the designer and the facilitator of the workshop with the objective to clarify the target customer and stakeholders of this development project and co-create an internal process for environment scanning (workshop outline in appendix 3).

In practice, reasons to set up an environmental scanning process were discussed and practicalities on how to implement this process were ideated. The purpose of environmental scanning was to identify significant evolutions and changes in the environments (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 204) that might be relevant both for the case company and its customers. It was agreed that all employees will start environmental scanning proposed by the researcher. The objective was to draft trend cards for the service development ideation. However, this plan was later decided to leave out of scope the development work.

The target customer and the stakeholders of this project were discussed already during internal interviews, but in the workshop, it was decided that customer cannot be characterized by those industry-specific features recognized in the internal interviews. Instead, it was decided that the target organization is any organization at strategic transformation. The concrete outcome of the workshop, the stakeholder map (figure 12) helped to visualize and understand the whole spectrum of stakeholders that might be concerned by the service concept. Moreover, the target customer of the project was identified, which was necessary for the recruitment of customer interviewees.

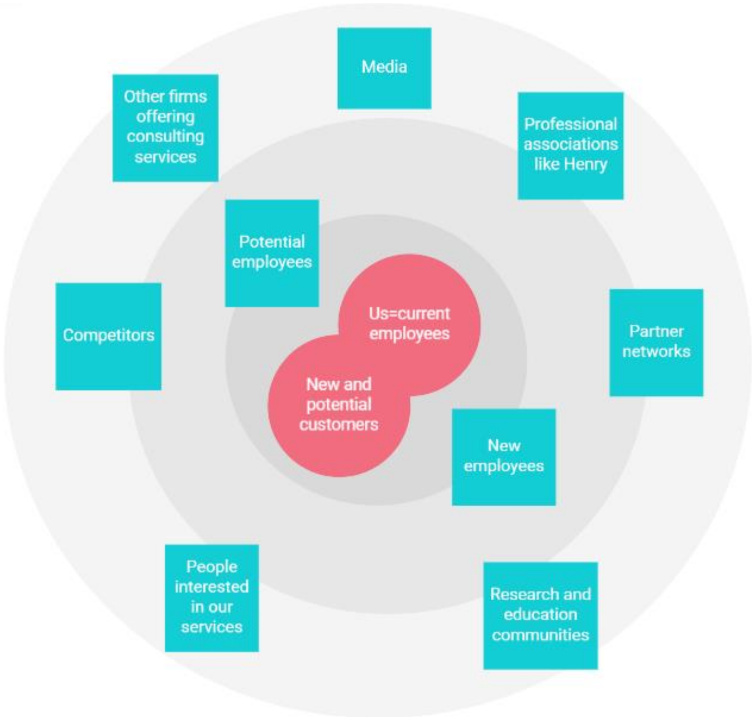


Figure 12: Stakeholder map

Customer interviews and their content analysis

Correspondingly to internal interviews, ethical recommendations were taken into consideration while planning the customer interviews and their data management (Arene recommendations 2020). As to choosing informants (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 163), the case company recruited the customer organizations for this research according to the target customer profile defined in the workshop (examples of e-mail correspondence in appendix 4). The preliminary questions for the interview template (appendix 5) were drafted by the author based on the case company’s needs discovered during internal interviews after which the interview template was finalized in co-operation with the case company. Altogether, seven customer organizations participated in the project out of ten invited. Each of these organizations can be classified as large (the number of their employees ranged from 400 to over 15 000), but besides the relevance of organizational transformation/change and the large size of the organizations, there was no common denominator: they consisted of current and potential clients, both in private and public sector covering different types of industries. Furthermore, the interviewees of the customer organizations worked in different roles from top management to customer insight and HR roles (table 6). To conclude, the selection of the interviewees was well in line with the preferred customer of the case company. The aim was to discover the most important consulting expectations shared by the diverse sample of customers. This kind of selection criteria is called maximum-variation sampling (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 103).

One of the interviewees was recruited for a different purpose: this person works in a pension insurance company and has an accumulated overview concerning customer behavior in challenging change situations. Furthermore, this respondent had worked as a consultant previously. Thus, the role of this interviewee was to provide maximum input thanks to the comprehensive experience (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 203). The data gained in this interview was used to complement and support other findings. The list of interviewees can be found in table 6. All interviews were carried out in Teams and with the written permission of the participants, they were recorded and fully transcribed. The recordings were deleted in March 2022 as agreed with interviewees. The validation process was identical with internal interviews: the transcribed interview was sent to interviewees by e-mail thus offering them a possibility to approve and correct their own interview data.

Number	Role in the Organization	Public or Private	Current or potential client	Date	Duration
7	Transformation Director	Public	Potential	21.10.2021	48 mins
8	Senior Vice President, HR	Private	Current	08.11.2021	56 mins
9	Director, Business Development	Private	Potential	01.11.2021	40 mins
10	Customer Insight Manager	Private	Potential	02.11.2021	47 mins
11	HRD Manager	Public	Current	05.11.2021	51 mins
12	HSEQ Manager (HR as a main responsibility)	Private	Current	09.11.2021	39 mins
13	HRD Manager	Public	Current	08.11.2021	44 mins
14	Customer Insight Director, Pension insurance company	-	-	01.11.2021	43 mins

Table 6: Customer interviews and the expert interview

The analysis of customer interviews also followed the content analysis process. Consequently, the data was gradually reduced yet trying to retain all the relevant information (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 108, 122; Vilska 2021,163-164). This time, the first two phases of 1) reduction 2) clustering of the content analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994, cited in Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 122) were carried out in Miro. In the first reduction stage, the direct quotes relevant to research questions, were selected from the transcribed interviews. In the first stage, while analyzing and labelling the data according to themes the post-it notes were color-coded according to interviewees to keep tract of the original data source and to anonymize the interviewees (Arene recommendations 2020, 20). An example of this process stage is illustrated in figure 13.

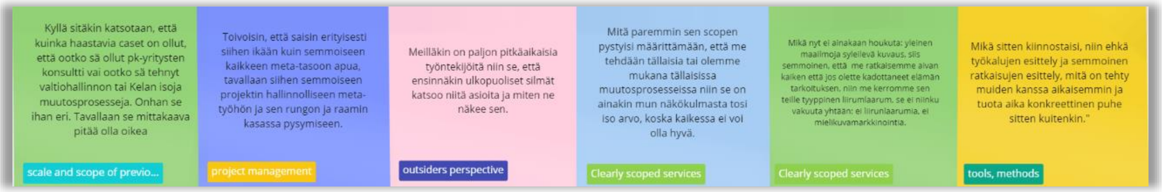


Figure 13: An example of the preliminary interview clustering

As the analysis progressed, the themes were clustered into more general categories illustrated in figure 14.

Figure 14: Clustered customer interview data

Creating abstract concepts through interpretation and deduction is the final stage of content analysis (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 127). In this development work this stage was completed by drafting personas and customer journeys described in the following chapter. The iteration of the content analysis resulted also “What would the client ask?” -questions presented in chapter 4.1. Furthermore, the case company was provided with a comprehensive set of insights including quotes and preliminary recommendations to facilitate the discussion in their internal development project. All in all, these interviews proved to be the most crucial step of the development project because these findings shaped all the following design stages and provided answers to the questions guiding the research.

3.2.2 Define

Customer personas

Customer personas are a typical way to present data in service design. According to Goodwin, (2009, 229) personas are a capturing, memorable and understandable way of visualizing data: research methods are helpful in data collection, but personas are useful in understanding, what does the data mean and in communicating it to stakeholders. Classifying data into personas is efficient, because categorization is a basic function of human mind (Goodwin 2009, 234). The thesis author also sees the abstract categorization and interpretation of the customer interview data into personas as the final part of content analysis (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 127).

Stickdorn et al. (2018, 41) emphasize that in service design, personas are formed through research. The purpose of a persona is to demonstrate service needs, goals and behavioral patterns characterizing a particular group of people. A persona – an archetype illustrating the typical features of his/her group – is a way to make research insights more tangible and create empathy towards users. Personas are fictional, but research behind them should be real (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 41;) which was the case with personas elaborated in this development work.

As to constructing personas, different choices would have been possible in this study: to create personas based on the distinction between potential and old clients - or profile customers according to the industry type – private or public. However, the thesis author opted for goal and task-based persona with lesser focus on characteristics such as demographics (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 40,142-144) due to the observation that the same customer can have different types of expectations and needs depending on the situation. Therefore, it was more relevant to focus on the different types of expectations instead of mechanical classification based on demographic characteristics.

When it comes to the usefulness of personas, personas can be an excellent tool for ideating and creating different types of service concepts: personas provide different lenses through which a service can be observed: customer understanding can be crystallized into personas which guide service development (Goodwin 2009, 232-233; Tuulaniemi 2011, 156): why and to whom the service is designed. In this development work, the persona cards contain a short description of what is a typical situation, where the need for this type of consulting emerges, a quote illustrating the thinking of the customer, their pain-points, and expectations. The quotes of the persona cards are a synthesis from real customer interview quotes. Jobs to be done were included into the persona card, because they illustrate what the customer is trying to achieve through the service (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 131).

Personas were used for ideation in a workshop, where the case company also validated these personas based on their experiences with customers. Consultants also found similarities between these customer personas and consulting theories, which weren't yet familiar to the thesis author at that point. In addition to the workshop, customer personas were used for drafting service advertisements and for service concept development. Furthermore, they provided an answer to the second question guiding this research by illustrating customer expectations in client-consultant relationships.

Customer journeys

Customer journeys were elaborated based on the insights from customer interviews and they were completed with theoretical knowledge from the knowledge base. A concrete example of the theory used is the difficulty to evaluate service even post-service (Wilson et al. 2021, 29-32, 358-361) and the interpretative margin in expert consulting assignments (Nikolova et al. 2009) illustrated in the third customer journey. All in all, a journey map exemplifies how a person experiences a service over a certain period. Customer journeys can be drafted on different levels and for different duration: for instance, a comprehensive journey map about the overall journey including all steps or a micro-level journey map focusing only on certain interactions. The purpose of a journey map is to identify potential gaps between the service provided and the customer experience by making the intangible service more visible (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 44-46). For this reason, it is important to choose the right "zoom" level fit for the research purpose. In this study, the focus was to understand customer expectations pre- during and post-service in the holistic time frame of Customer-Dominant Logic (Heinonen et al. 2010). Therefore, the scope of this customer journey remains on high level.

According to Tuulaniemi (2011, 74-75) customer experience encompasses all touchpoints related to the company starting from advertisements all the way to post-service. Customer experience can be divided in three different levels: actions, feelings and meaning. By action level the service needs to be able to respond to customers functional needs: this level is the minimum requirement to survive on the market since the service concept should facilitate the client to meet a certain need. The second level is about emotions: how well does the service concept fulfill client's needs and expectations related to mental images and sensations the client wants to feel. The highest level is the level of meaningfulness: how well does the concept fit into client's aspirations, identity, and way of life. Thesis author considered the level of meaning less important because customers in this study represented organizations.

All in all, customer journeys helped to empathize with users and reflect, how customer expectations may differ before, during and after service. Customer journeys were used for ideation in the workshop and in the service concept development.

3.2.3 Develop

Workshop 8.12.2021

After customer interviews, customer personas and customer journeys, it was time to reflect and ideate, what kinds of implications do these findings have for internal service development: The goal of the workshop was to mirror current state of internal service development with customer understanding gained from the interviews and to generate improvement ideas. The workshop was held virtually on 08.12.2021 on Miro Board (appendix 6). There were six participants altogether - and the author of this thesis was the designer and the facilitator of the workshop, but she got valuable improvement suggestions from one consultant highly experienced in on-line facilitation. To prepare for the workshop, the participants had the possibility to read all the customer interview insights beforehand.

The first task in the workshop was to ideate solutions based on different personas and their customer journeys. A free ideation was encouraged regardless of the feasibility of those ideas in real world. The method used was brainwriting (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 180): in this case, it consisted of individual ideation on Miro wall with post-its. Next, the participants were asked to mirror the current state of their internal service development project with customer personas and journeys and in the light of “What would client ask?”- questions which were elaborated from the customer interviews.

In the following phase, the internal service development was evaluated based on customer expectations with the help of ERRC grid to map what to Eliminate, Reduce, Raise and Create (Kim and Mauborgne 2017). This phase was followed by ideation, what could the service concept for customers include based on a template by Johnston et al. (2021, 100). The template includes the elements of organization/persons responsible for the service, the essence of the service used by the customer, overview of what is being delivered, service provided and received including customer experience and service outcomes. Due to limited time, the draft wasn’t completed. Still, several useful development ideas were found (figure 15).

Direct quotes (translated from Finnish) from the workshop post-its highlight the need for further service development, clarity and customer focus:

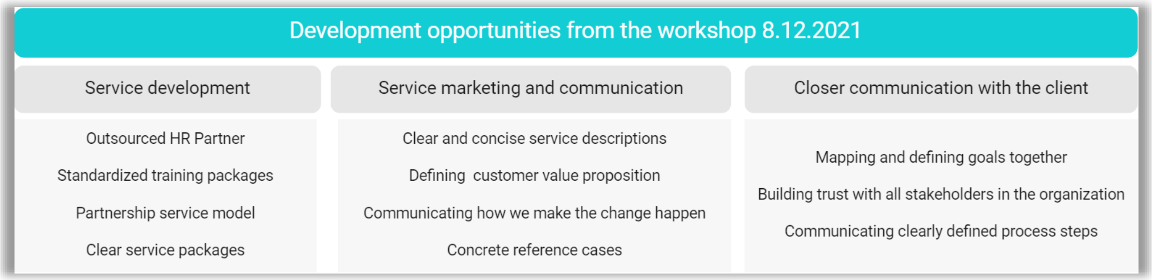
> *“There is too much of everything [in the current offering]: how to crystallize skillfully”*

> *“There should be a possibility to buy different size of services to meet the needs of different personas”*

> *“It would be good to answer to customer expectations [only] with a couple of slides”*

> *“There is too much consulting jargon [in the current offering]”*

Figure 15: Development ideas from the workshop



Prototyping

Prototyping can be described as a rapid service modeling to support the design and development of the service and it can be used to describe and test elements related to the service (Tuulaniemi 2011, 194). Service advertisements and preliminary service concepts were used as prototypes in this development work.

Prototyping: Service advertisements

Service advertisement (fake ad, fake advertisement) is a good way crystallize value proposition (The Lean Service Creation Toolkit 2019; Stickdorn et al. 2018, 237). In general, it is used to test the desirability of the service with customers. The core idea of this fictional advertisement is to sell the service with visuals, engaging text, and clearly stated value proposition. In this development work, service advertisements were used to synthesize and streamline insights from previous research stages: company's strengths discovered through desk research and internal interviews, insights from the workshop discussion and the needs and expectations of different customer personas recognized through customer interviews. Moreover, this method was chosen in the attempt to tackle the intangibility of management consulting services with a physical, although fictional, service evidence (Bitner 1994 cited in Wilson et al. 2021, 100).

At this point, the third persona type was left out, because this type was in minority within customers. As an outcome of this method, the thesis author created two different posters, presented in chapter 4.3.

Prototyping: Preliminary service concepts

The thesis author decided to iterate service advertisements further and translate them into verbally more informative services concepts. This method choice was also an attempt to conceptualize the co-creation sphere between the service provider and the customer, as presented in Service logic (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014, 208-209).

According to Johnston et al. (2021, 97-98) a service concept delineates how a service is organized and what are the important features of the service. It is an effort to close the gap between the service provider and the customer by describing what is to be done for the customer and how these objectives are obtained. From customers' perspective, service concept is a bundle of smaller services (Johnston et al. 2021, 102). The essence of a service concept can be grasped by the following quote: "The service concept is more emotional than a business model, deeper than a brand, more complex than a good idea and more solid than a vision" (Johnston et al. 2021, 98). According to Tuulaniemi (2011, 189) service concept captures the big picture of the service and can serve as a map for further development.

In addition to customer personas recognized in this study, the preliminary service concepts draw on insights gained in the internal interviews, unpublished internal documents (2021), and benchmarking. The concepts created were the very first drafts and for that reason, they remain on general level without describing customer journey as suggested by Tuulaniemi (2011, 189). The second preliminary service concept served as an inspiration to the final service concept.

Iteration towards the final service concept through three small-scale workshops

The service advertisements and the preliminary service concepts were tested with the case company in a virtual workshop 12.01.2022. The goal of this workshop was also to agree the next steps of the development process. The CEO of and the Head of Communications and Marketing of the case company participated in this workshop together with the thesis author. In practice, the thesis author showed the service advertisements and the preliminary service concepts and justified the design choices made which was followed by free ideation and discussion. In the end, it was decided to focus on developing only the service concept targeted for the second customer persona (=the Outsourcer, presented in chapter 4.2.). Moreover, to narrow down the scope even further, it was agreed to concentrate only on one element in this second concept, "the community-oriented culture" to development a more tangible concept.

This decision was followed by a small-scale virtual workshop on 27.1.2022. The consultant responsible for this service and the Head of Communications and Marketing were invited to ideate together, how this service could be conceptualized. In addition to the preliminary service concept, the basis for this discussion was a service description of "Community-oriented culture"; drafted by the Head of Communication and Marketing. As an outcome of this workshop, it was agreed to clarify further, who is the target customer, what is the competitive advantage and what is the service process in practice. This workshop was followed by iteration through e-mails and on Teams chat and asynchronous working on Miro board. On 21.2.2022 a live workshop with the same participants was held to draft the final service concept. Appendix 7 demonstrates a part of the ideation and elaboration of concepts carried out in and in-between of the workshops. The final concept is conceived based on the adapted template of Johston et al. (2021,100) which was also used for concept ideation during workshop 8.12.2021. Special attention was given to the description of the service steps considering that service process consists of *series of activities* and involves the customer at least to some extent in the service production (Grönroos 2015, 50).

4 Results

In this chapter, answers to the questions guiding this research are delineated (research aim) after which the final deliverable of the service design process is presented (research purpose). Chapter 4.1. provides an answer to the first question guiding this research by introducing the criteria through which customers choose management consulting services and evaluate their relevance pre- during- and post-service. The next chapter 4.2. lays out an answer to the second question guiding this research by illustrating customer expectations in client-consultant relationships through customer personas, developed at the define-stage of the Double Diamond process (Design Council 2019). Chapter 4.3. introduces further the main outcomes of the define- and develop- stages: customer journeys, service advertisements, preliminary service concepts and the final service concept.

4.1 Criteria for choosing and evaluating management consulting services

The content analysis of the interviews revealed that according to this study, customers evaluate the relevance of management consulting on six levels. These levels were transferred into “What would the client ask?” -questions by the thesis author. Next, these levels are introduced after which they are discussed more in detail. In the end of this chapter, the discussion concerning the criteria is summarized in figure 16.

Levels:

1) Added value of external help vs. internal resources: Do we need external help?

2) Compatibility of consulting firm vs. needs: Are you the right consulting agency?

3) Credibility of service offering: Can I trust the quality of your services?

4) Consultants: Can I trust you?

5) The implementation plan and methods: How would you implement the change?

6) Results of the consulting: How do I know if the change was successful?

To begin with, customers interviews divulged that resorting to external help isn't self-evident. In some cases, customers seem to evaluate first, if the tasks should be carried out by internal resources, and as discussed in the knowledge base, internal consulting can offer many advantages compared with external management consulting (Hodges 2017, 74). Similarly, the CEO of the company estimates that its strongest competitor is "Do it yourself" -mentality in organizations (internal interview): organizations seem to weight the added value of external consulting. Customers may also see internal consulting as an opportunity to enhance in-house competences through job rotation. The following quotes demonstrate these aspects:

> *"It is not always evident, at what stage [external] consulting services are needed – or are they needed at all. Consulting services are just one tool in the toolbox of of change management processes "(customer interview).*

> *"It is estimated, if [an external) consultant is needed and if so, what is the added value" (customer interview).*

> *"It [organizational change] does not always mean, that one always hires an external consultant. It can be a great opportunity for job rotation for someone" (customer interview).*

Secondly, in this study it seems evident, that customers tend to evaluate also, whether a consulting agency is the right kind of service provider for them. For a global customer organization practical matters count: for instance, it is pertinent to ask if the consulting company is big enough and if it has presence in those countries in need of consulting and if their consultants have the necessary cultural understanding. Also, implementing an organizational change in a large company is considered to require special understanding. When estimating the generalizability of this criteria, it is to be noted that customers in this study were large organizations. Thus, it may be that they highlight these aspects more than smaller organizations would. Furthermore, pricing, competitive advantage and scale of previous projects were also brought up. The following quotes illustrate these aspects:

Size, resources, and cultural understanding of the consulting agency:

> *"I have often encountered the fact that we are such a big organization, I mean huge, a real mammoth in size. If [they] have been working with a big or a similar size organization it is easier to understand and recognize, what is to be expected in this kind of development challenge" (customer interview).*

> *"Well, we operate across globe and at first, we will [consider] where the [consulting need] exists. It is obvious that you wouldn't hire an English consultant to China and vice versa" (customer interview).*

> *"A big (consulting) company may have presence in those locations where most of your people work, that really helps a lot" (customer interview).*

Competitive advantage:

> *"In practice, it means that [the firm] can demonstrate what exactly is so much better in the strategy consulting process […] compared with all the others" (customer interview).*

Scale of previous projects:

> *"One does evaluate, how challenging the [consulting] cases have been: have you been a consultant for SME or have you executed large change processes. It really makes a difference. I mean the scale needs to be right" (customer interview).*

Price:

> *"Price is 30-40% [compared with other decision factors]" (customer interview).*

The third evaluation criterion was labelled as the credibility of the service offering: According to thesis author's interpretation, the customers evaluate gap between the "predicted service" and the "desired service" discussed in the knowledge base: in other words, what is the service customers think they are likely to get and what kind of service they want to get (Zeithaml et al. 1993; Wilson et al. 2021). This assessment is made most of all through word of mouth communication, references and focus and clarity of service offerings; in contrast, vagueness and generality of services were perceived as uncredible. Also, industry-specific knowledge was mentioned as an important part of the reference. Many respondents emphasized, that a consulting agency can't be good at everything which is why the service offerings needs to be focused. Also, the inability the crystallize core competences was perceived as unprofessional. The following quotes embody the importance of these aspects:

Word of mouth, references:

> *"It [recommendations] is very much about networks: someone knows someone[..] Word of mouth is huge, internal, and external networks" (customer interview).*

> *"It is surprisingly common how often they ask from acquaintances: from their colleagues from other companies based on recommendations and references from other companies or if one has worked together with a consultant in a previous company, it is easier to bring this co-operation into a new environment […] it is that that people's judgement and recommendations are trusted upon" (expert interview).*

> *"I have quite many friends in different firms, and I think I would have called them, because they have used [those management consulting services]. It would have been the main channel to have something*

concrete […] and when it comes to references, there needs to be continuity in them, but if you have consulted a big company only once, it doesn't really impress" (customer interview).

"Industry-specific knowledge is an important part of the reference because I have noticed that the expertise from one industry does not necessarily transfer to another industry and then the [consulting] projects may remain shallow" (customer interview).

On the other hand, the ability to bring insights from other industries was also mentioned.

Focus and clarity of service offering and descriptions:

"Well, what does not appeal: a general world-embracing description, like we will solve everything, if you have lost the meaning of life, we will solve it for you type of gobbledygook. That does not impress at all. [A consulting company] should tell honestly, where they are good at. And tell also, if your problem is this or that, we are not your type. So that you aren't like general store [like Prisma in Finland] where you can get a little bit of everything. You need to know, what you are offering. Tangibility and a clear core message that does not embrace the whole world (customer interview).

"When a [consulting] company contacts and says that we do this and this and this: we are so good at all of these, [their proposal] goes directly to rubbish bin; because nobody can be good at everything: you must have something that you are good at that makes you stand out. And if you are unable to crystallize it by yourself, I have very little faith in you" (customer interview).

"The better you can define your scope that we do this, and we are involved in these kinds of change processes, it is extremely valuable at least for me, because you cannot be good at everything […] Quite often the stories of especially small consulting firms, they are fuzzy and expand to all directions: one does not really know, what they actually do" (customer interview).

As to the fourth evaluation criterion, trust is a crucial element also in the interaction with consultants. In this category, trust in this context refers to the belief the consultant is the right person for implementing the desired organizational change including several factors such as consultant's competence, personality, and the right "fit". Also, customer understanding along with dedication to the customer's cause were accentuated. A single most important feature mentioned was the ability to challenge, ask right questions, and bring new perspectives; this feature was clustered under coaching skills.

Personality, being on the same wavelength, the right fit and the commitment:

"Do I get a feeling that we speak the same language […] how trustworthy their way of working seems: if we have meetings, how they have prepared for it among other things, what kinds of preparations they have done, it [good preparation] awakens a certain feeling that I can trust (customer interview).

"The personality [of the consultant] is super important […] It is your way of doing things: the feeling you leave to people. People don't remember what you said or did, they remember how you made them feel. It is very important also for the consultant" (customer interview).

"[Consulting] is a trust business. Track record and compatibility between teams and people" (customer interview).

Coaching skills, consultant's capacity to challenge and re-orient:

"An ability to challenge me: to really challenge my point of view so that I get a get a feeling that this really is beneficial for me, so that the consultant is not just some supporter, yes man or yes women to my actions" (customer interview).

"When I purchase [a consulting] service, I do estimate if they have balls so to say. And big companies usually do: one customer is not that important. For a small one it may be that they can't lose one single process. One should have courage: it serves the customer the best […] A courage to say, that we went into the wrong direction that now we need to look over there. […] We change direction, expand, or even abandon the project if it feels like it doesn't work (customer interview).

"Because [in consulting] the biggest investment is not the payment to the consultant, it is the time used and in a certain way, if you happened to guess wrong, how long does it take before it is realized (customer interview).

"That [a consultant] can bring a new perspective, insightful questions or dares to challenge the listener away from his/her comfort zone" (expert interview).

Customer understanding:

"They […] understand our business and they know that we are operating in this way. It is low threshold for me to use their services" (customer interview).

This fifth criterion according to which clients evaluate the relevance of management consulting services is the way the organizational change would be implemented. In practice, clients seem to evaluate, what kinds of frameworks, tools and methods consultants would use for instance to involve staff, collect data, and implement the change. The quality of the sales offer matters: how well the consultants have discerned clients' expectations and how do they plan to meet these needs in practice. Also, describing what does the consulting process require from customer organization would be valuable.

Frameworks, methods:

"Bringing fresh insights about methods, tools, thinking into different stages of the process" (customer interview).

> *“What involves them (employees) working together enthusiastically. [Consultant] is there to help that we get all the information out from the staff (customer interview).*

Quality of the offer:

> *“In general, one can tell by looking at the offer what is the consultant’s analysis and suggested way to proceed and by looking at those I can evaluate has the consultant understood anything, what is really the question. Or is it an offer made by using copy-paste-search-replace functions that the consultant sends three times per week” (customer interview).*

> *“One notices quite clearly how well [the consultants] have thought about steps to resolve our situation. The plan, how would they involve people, what is to be done and to what extend” (customer interview).*

Customer’s required level of involvement in the process:

> *“[Consulting] process should be described transparently also regarding the resources it requires from us. It brings credibility. […] In other words, the process should be described also from the point of view of our [desired level] of commitment” (customer interview).*

On the sixth level, the relevance of the external consulting is evaluated when the process is over. The clients can anticipate beforehand, what would be the impact of the external consulting. In this study, customers were asked how they currently evaluate management consulting services post-consulting. The most common way of evaluation were discussions (formal and informal) and gut feelings. Also, feedback from the staff was cited. Moreover, one interviewee pointed out that consultants should make themselves unnecessary to the organization. The following points exemplify the assessment criteria used post-consulting.

Discussions, gut feelings, staff feedback:

> *“[In the evaluation] we will go through discussions, always these internal lessons learned, how [consulting] worked and then we might go through names: are there any “no, no” or “absolute yes” consultants, but it is not documented (customer interview).*

> *“It has been pretty much based on gut feeling that we have continued with them. We have been listening to participants’ comments” (customer interview).*

> *“I guess it is a feeling in my backbone: how we have succeeded in change and what is the feeling that we have regarding a consulting company or a consultant” (customer interview).*

> *“Also, the way the consultant trains and how our staff evaluates the training, of course it also tells for me is the consultant the kind we could use also later” (customer interview).*

Consultants are no longer necessary:

> *"Well, it should mean that the consultant makes him or herself unnecessary. It can't be so that competences leave at the same time with the money: if nothing happens once all the payments are done, it means that we have learned to be helpless" (customer interview).*

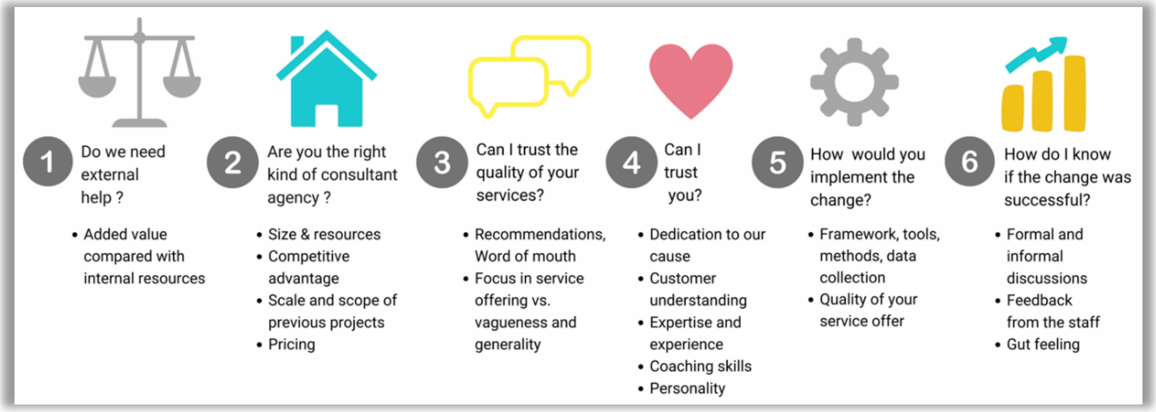


Figure 16: The main criteria for evaluation of management consulting services

In addition to the above-mentioned criteria, some interviewees pointed out a development suggestion: consulting firms should pay more attention to the post-consulting stage by collecting more feedback. Also, a long-term follow-up was mentioned. The following quotes delineate this finding:

> *"I wish that firms would collect feedback for themselves so that they would know where to improve and what went well. Maybe max half [of the management consulting firms] do" (customer interview).*

> *"It might be a clever move from the consultant that here is a feedback [form] A, it is the feedback for us and [the feedback form] B is for your own evaluation, it would be for internal use [...] Consultant would help in improving in customer's [own] understanding and the form could be the same for all customers. The customer could fill in the form or not to use it. But it could give an impression to the customer that the consultant thinks of you as a customer, not [only] as a source of an income" (customer interview).*

> *"I do get a lot of cold calls. But those [consulting firms] with which we have carried out projects they don't call me [...] I mean a follow-up [call], like "hey, now after a year, can you tell was [our consulting] useful for you? How could we improve?" (customer interview).*

4.2 Expectations in client-consultant relationships illustrated by customer personas

Customer personas provided an answer to customer expectations in client-consultant relationships in the context of this case study. It is important to note that these personas do not represent real clients, they are archetypes formed based on service needs (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 41). All in all, three personas were formed, and they were labelled as "the Partner" (figure 17); “the Outsourcer” (figure 18); and “the Expert seeker” (figure 19). Customer persona as a method was described in chapter 3.2.2. Persona cards are presented in full-size in appendices 8-10.

To briefly summarize, one of the biggest differences between these customer personas is their desired level of involvement in the consulting process: the Partner is looking for an egalitarian partnership with high involvement, where both parties learn and grow together in complex organizational transformations. In contrast to the two other personas (The Outsourcer and the Expert seeker), for the Partner the nature of the assignment is rarely clearly defined before contacting the consultant. The description of the Partner persona is very similar to the *process facilitative* approach which is based on co-operation where consultant brings expertise to the process instead of some specific focus areas: the consultant facilitates the client’s learning and discovery of the right answers (Hodges 2017, 50-51).

Figure 17: Customer persona: The Partner

Quotes illustrating the Partner:

> *“It is a joint learning process. I met those people, we talked where we are at: it had been a great learning process for them. They didn’t come to tell us the truth and we didn’t expect that consultant implements [the change] by himself” (customer interview).*

> *"I have someone as a mirror with whom I can ponder, what would be the wisest thing to do right now, and the consultant would bring me perspectives from his/her own experience and expertise background: in this situation I would do like this, and have you thought about doing that?" (customer interview).*

> *"In those kinds of things where [consultants] are more part of the part of the process the added value is also good when you constantly reflect with the same people the same things. In a way, the process is refined better forward" (customer interview).*

> *"In fact, [a consultant] could get bonus credits if a consultant understands that a customer's need is not over once a strategy process is executed or documented, it is not an endpoint, to the contrary, it is the beginning of the work. Can the consultant offer partnership on many different levels?" (customer interview).*

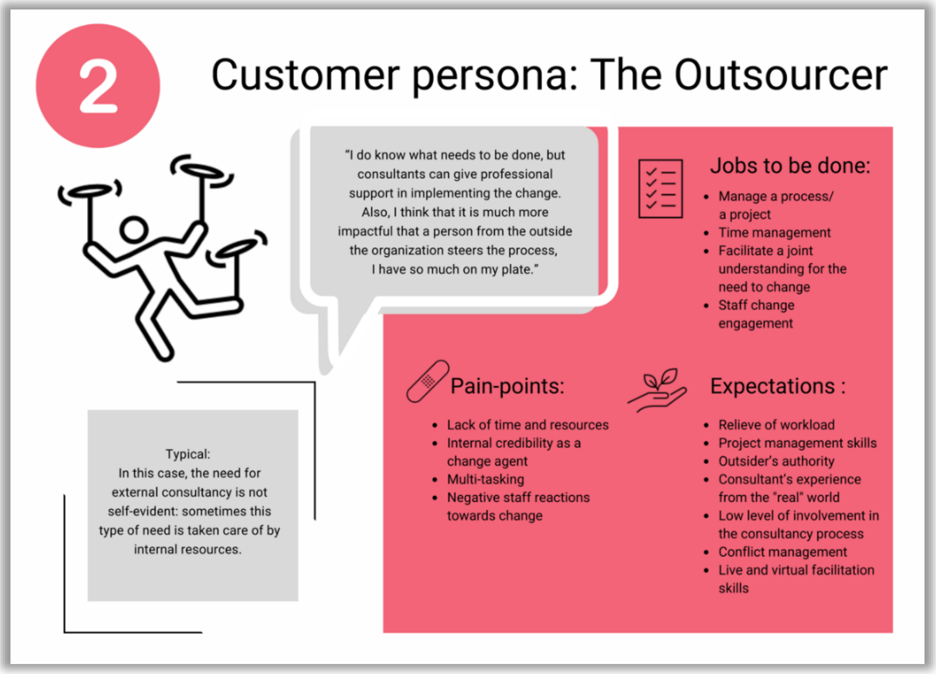


Figure 18: Customer persona: The Outsourcer

The Outsourcer had the strongest evidence in the research data of this case study. This persona has a clearly defined consulting assignment and typically seeks to relieve workload and appreciates an outsider's perspective in engaging staff into change process. The Outsourcer values project management and facilitations skills, and consultants' experience outside consulting from "the real" word. The Outsourcer wants to be involved in the consulting process as little as possible. The description of this persona comes very close to "service provider approach" (Hodges 2017, 48-49), in which the consultant's roles is to serve as an extra pair of hands and implement the solution which is pre-defined by the customer.

Quotes illustrating the Outsourcer:

> *“The service model needs to be such…in a way, if we pay for the service, it should burden the organization as little as possible. It is like building a turnkey home. Well, it does depend a little about the matter, but most of all it needs to be with carried out with turnkey principle” (customer interview).*
>
> *“It is more that we do know to which direction we do want to go and then we need support in how to get there [..] in a way I have all the threads in my hand of what is the thing we need to carry out.[…] I wish I could get help to the so-called meta level: I mean the administrative work related to the project and sticking within the [project] frames (customer interview).*
>
> *“What we look at is the experience from “real work” [from outside consulting industry], when you may understand more about the dynamics of “normal work” compared with “consulting work” [..] how things happen in real life instead of on paper” (customer interview).*
>
> *“It is easier to get by, when there is someone else who brings out good and bad aspects neutrally and maybe also can give a context/perspective: our supervisors and staff quite often see only the life inside the walls of our organization. But then a consult can say that this is a nation-wide phenomenon and happens also elsewhere in Finland and you are not the only organization that has these kinds of struggles, and this has been tackled and promoted elsewhere” (customer interview).*

The final customer persona identified in this research is the Expert seeker. This external expertise can be needed for two different purposes: to solve a problem requiring expertise or to build expert competences in-house. There is no obvious equivalent to this persona type in the knowledge base of this thesis. Hodges (2017, 49-50) has introduced “an expert approach”, otherwise similar, but Hodges’s approach doesn’t include the aspect of building in-house competences with the help of the consultant’s expertise. Even though the Expertise seeker had less evidence, it stood out: “If I realize we don’t have competence in-house, then it is quite clear that we will use external consultants” (customer interview).

In fact, the Expert seeker is the most likely to recognize the need for consulting right from the beginning, because using internal resources is not an option: the desired expertise is considered so specialized that acquiring external consulting is recognized to be the best or the only way to achieve the jobs to be done in business-critical matters. Naturally, also the Outsourcer and the Partner appreciate the expertise of a consultant. However, the Outsourcer has the needed expertise also in-house as an option for external consulting and the Partner is most of all motivated by the joint learning process instead of some specific expertise. Table 7 compares the differences and similarities between customer personas archetypes identified in this study.

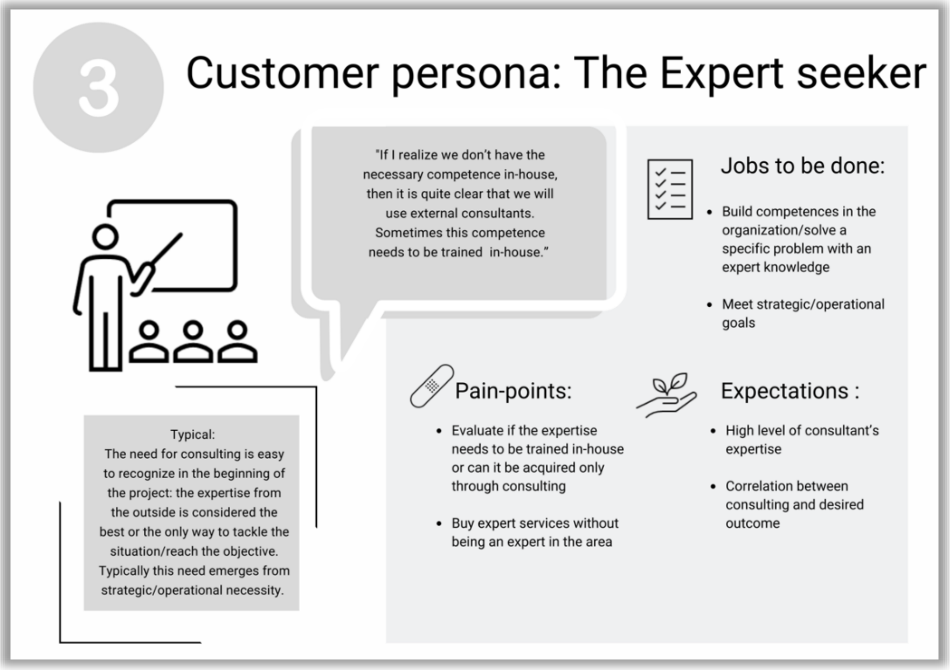


Figure 19: Customer persona: The Expert seeker

Quotes illustrating the Expert seeker:

> *"But the newer the thing is, the more likely it is that we start using consulting services because we realize that my competences are not adequate, that I don't have enough knowledge. This is something I can't understand" (customer interview).*

> *"If our task would be let's say to raise the sales in our digital channels, it does sound like something that someone else understands this better than us and will tell, how this should be done" (customer interview).*

> *"Questions related to branding, communication and leading customer experience. Then the consultant clearly has an expert role: what does brand and branding mean in this kind of situation and what could it mean leading customer experience" (customer interview).*

> *"Quite quickly it is recognized if there is competence related to mergers and acquisitions it is such a big trade and subject for DD [Due Diligence] that mostly expertise is acquired from outside (expert interview).*

Customer persona type	THE PARTNER "Let's grow and learn together"	THE OUTSOURCER "Let's save time and energy"	THE EXPERT SEEKER "Situation requires expertise"
Timing in the consulting cycle	Beginning	Middle	Beginning
Consulting assignment	Undefined	Pre-defined	Pre-defined
Internal resources as an option	No	Yes	No
Expectations	Define, navigate, coach	Manage projects, facilitate, deliver controversial messages	Solve a problem with expert knowledge/ Train expert competences
Level of involvement	High	Low	Low/Intermediate
Comparison with the knowledge base	Process facilitative approach by Hodges 2017, 50-51	Partly similar to service provider approach by Hodges 2017, 48-49	Partly similar to expert approach by Hodges 2017, 49-50

Table 7: Comparison of differences and similarities between customer personas identified in this study

4.3 Design outcomes: customer journeys, service advertisements and concepts

The purpose of the development work was to draft a service concept tangible enough for customers to understand the content of the service and thus facilitate the case company's service marketing efforts and increase sales. The iteration towards the final service concept was long: several other methods and intensive collaboration was needed before arriving at the final concept: this chapter introduces further the key outcomes of the methods used in define- and develop- stages of the Double Diamond process (Design Council 2019).

Customer journeys

The three customer personas presented in the previous chapter were complemented with customer journeys. Their aim was to illustrate the potential differences between the customer experience across touchpoints and to empathize with customers. The customer journey number one (figure 20) drafted for the Partner is characterized by the need to navigate in a complex and ambiguous transformation. The persona type is willing to invest time and effort in this journey to find a good match with consulting firm that has experience from change processes of similar scale and scope and the ability to challenge, coach and re-orient. The consulting process is a successful learning process, but post-consulting, the

Partner feels left alone when the consultant no longer contacts after the intensive business partnership.

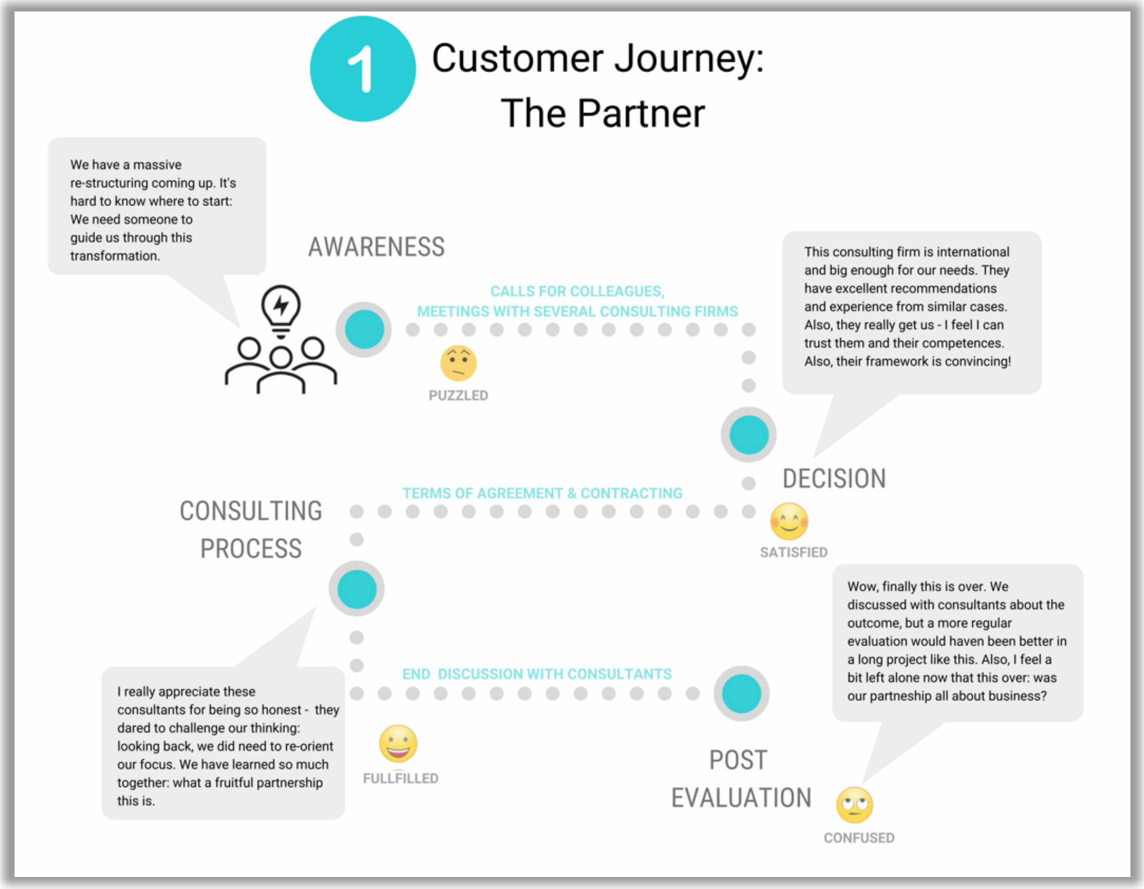


Figure 20: Customer journey: The Partner

The customer journey of the Outsourcer (figure 21) is defined by the need to find someone to help with the project management and tackle staffs' potentially negative reactions towards change. When searching for the right kind of consultant, the Outsourcer highlights convenience and familiarity in this journey. During the consulting process the Outsourcer is content because instead of the project management, now he/she can concentrate on other daily business. In the end, the Outsourcer if satisfied thanks to the positive feedback and efficient time management.

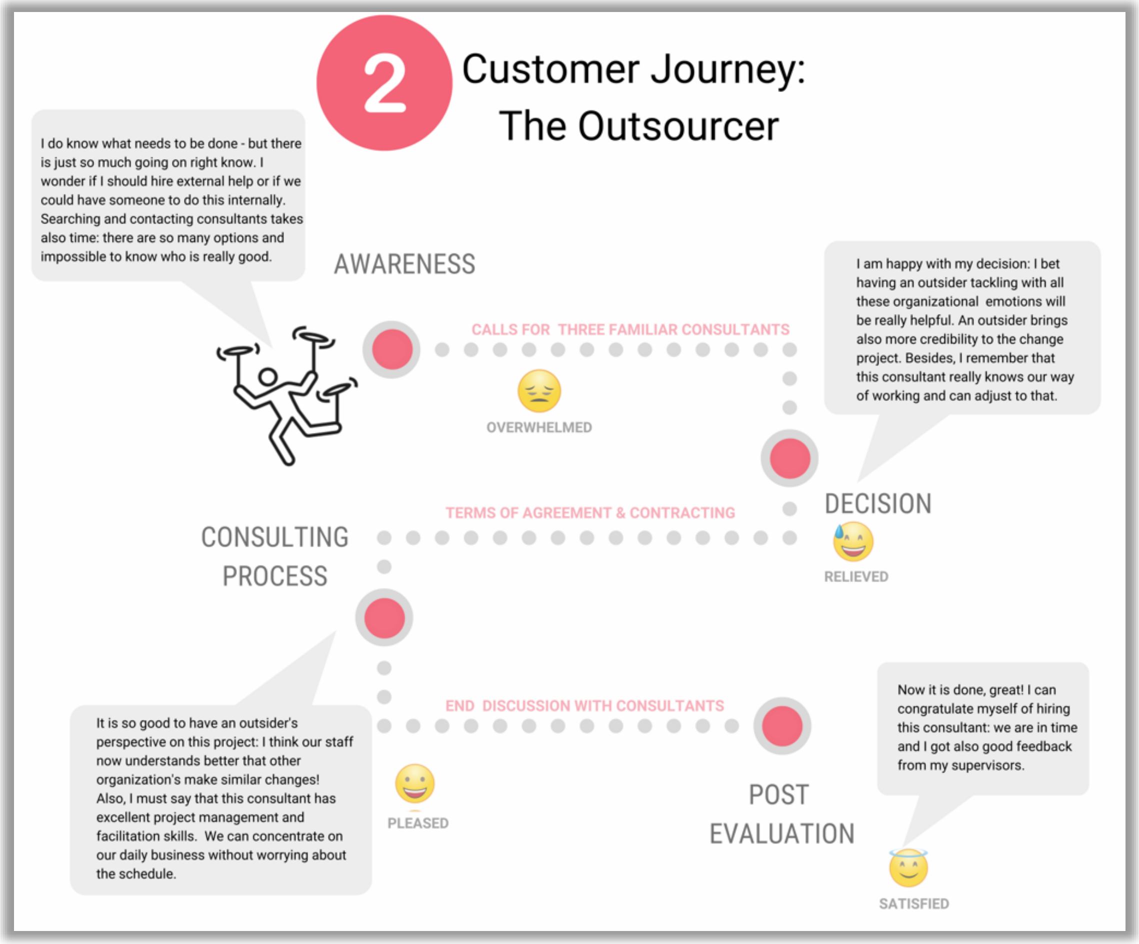


Figure 21: Customer journey: The Outsourcer

The third customer journey created for the Expertise seeker (figure 22) starts with the customer persona pondering if consulting is needed for building in-house expertise or would it be enough if consultant solves the challenge at hand with his/her expertise. In this journey, searching for the right kinds of consultants is somewhat challenging, because the Expertise seeker doesn’t have the competence to evaluate consultants’ expertise. When choosing a consultant, formal training is important in addition to achievements. Although persons involved in the consulting process seem satisfied, post-consulting it seems difficult to evaluate the true impact of the consulting process. Customer journeys are presented in full-size in appendices 11-13.

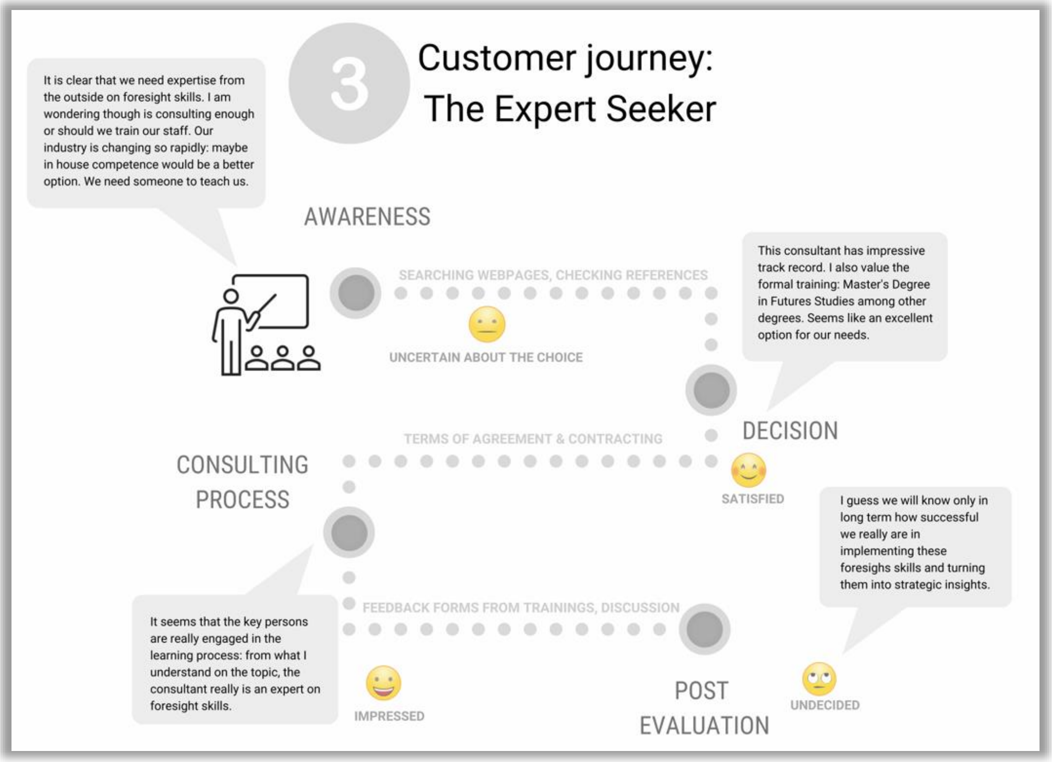


Figure 22: Customer journey: The Expert seeker

Service advertisements

As stated before, the thesis author designed service advertisements to streamline and visualize findings from previous research stages. The goal was to target the two main customer personas the Partner and the Outsourcer with different approaches. The objective in these service advertisements was also to use simple and clear expressions since this aspect was highlighted both in customer and employee interviews. In practice, the thesis author also reformulated and re-organized the services elaborated during the internal service development project by the case company (figure 23). Appendix 14 contains a full description of the case company’s services. Next, the posters are presented after which their further design choices are explained.

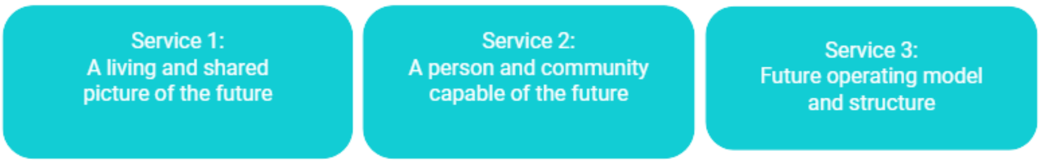


Figure 23: Case company’s services in December 2021, the case company’s translations

Figure 24: Service advertisement for the Partner

Figure 25: Service advertisement for the Outsourcer

Design choices in the service advertisement for the Partner customer persona

The title of the poster refers to “piloting” in transformation alluding to the ability to guide successfully through complex projects. Service packages are named in the form of a journey starting from mapping the challenge “Change compass”, “Change navigation” and “Change capabilities”. Even though this poster was mainly designed to attract the Partner persona, the grouping of the service packages was made bearing in mind other personas (change navigation in the light of the Outsourcer’s needs to implement and facilitate a change process and change capabilities for the Expert seeker looking for competences). Company’s strengths are demonstrated through the picture: fingerprint refers to human-centricity and individual tailoring of their services. Partnership is explicitly stated in the slogan. Overall, simple, and short language is aimed at (figure 24).

Design choices in the service advertisement for the Outsourcer customer persona

The visual outlook of this ad aims at even more succinct and to the point expressions compared with the first poster. This poster proposes “service packages tailored to every-day life” implying easiness and convenience of solution targeted for the Outsourcer. This persona type also typically knows beforehand, what the need is. Therefore, the “clarity of service packages” is highlighted. The case company’s asset, the ability to solve complex change situations is illustrated through the main picture and the title: “Let’s start by localizing the right objective” (figure 25).

Preliminary services concepts

The thesis author decided to iterate these service advertisements further into verbally more explicit service concepts bearing in mind the differences between customer personas. Ultimately, both preliminary service concepts provide the same underlying core service: future proofing of organizations. However, the way the service is provided, and the customer experience is tailored according to personas: in the first concept (figure 26), partnership and growing together in complex transformations is again highlighted (cf. the Partner persona) whereas in the second concept the easiness of change and the match with customer organizations’ daily practices is emphasized (cf. the Outsourcer persona). Furthermore, the first concept assumes that the customer organization does not know what exactly should be done (cf. the Partner persona) and thus the partnership encompasses all services relevant to the transformation at hand: the customer doesn’t need to decide beforehand the content of the service since it is evaluated during the joint “transformation journey”. Also, in this partnership client can explicitly decide the right moment for ending the co-operation to avoid the feeling of being “left alone”, illustrated in the Partner’s customer journey. In contrast, in the second concept it is presumed that the customer organization already knows what is needed (cf. the Outsourcer persona) and the customer can thus select only the elements considered relevant to their change needs. In this concept the customer also has the possibility to choose a more comprehensive implementation of the service to save time and resources (figure 27). Preliminary service concepts are presented in full-size in appendices 15-16.

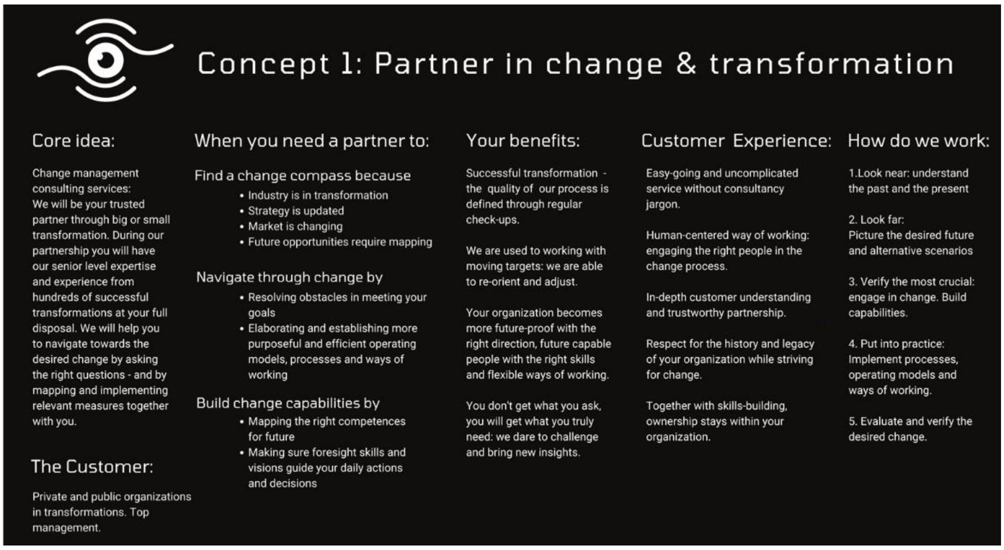


Figure 26: Preliminary service concept for the Partner

Figure 27: Preliminary service concept for the Outsourcer

Final service concept

Followed by the decision to focus more on the Outsourcer persona and develop the second concept further, only one element of this second preliminary service concept was chosen to be developed: namely “the Community-based culture and practises”. This element was transferred into a new, more focused service concept. The content of the service was explained by laying out the consulting process in detail: in addition to improved transparency, the customer has now the possibility to evaluate the time and other resources this service could require from their internal resources. Besides, offering on-line study materials as an option matches the Outsourcer’s hectic every day business by offering more flexibility. Furthermore, offering a free trial period of on-line services can reduce the perceived risk related to purchase (Wilson et al. 2021, 46). In addition, the easiness of service is emphasized by promising to focus on the strenghts the customer already has. Along these lines, von Thiele Schwarz et al. (2021) point out that aligning intervention with the existing organizational objectives promotes engagement in the change process.

Moreover, the concept develoved aims at tackling the following questions clients might ask while evaluating the relevance of management consulting services for them. First of all, they might ponder, what is the added value of external consulting for them. Therefore, the benefits of the service are explained on different levels. Scale of the service is mentioned by stating that the service is possible to implement team/department/organization-wide. Furthermore, the focus of the service is narrowed down: instead of offering the whole service “People and community capable of future” (see appendix 14), only one element of this service package is elaborated into a more tangible service concept. Finally, the servive concept answers to the question how would the change be implemented and introduces also tools and methods. Figure 28 demonstrates which aspects were considered in the elaboration of the final service concept, which is introduced in figure 29. The final service concept is presented also in full-size in appendix 17.

Figure 28: The criteria for evaluation of management consulting considered in the elaboration of the final concept

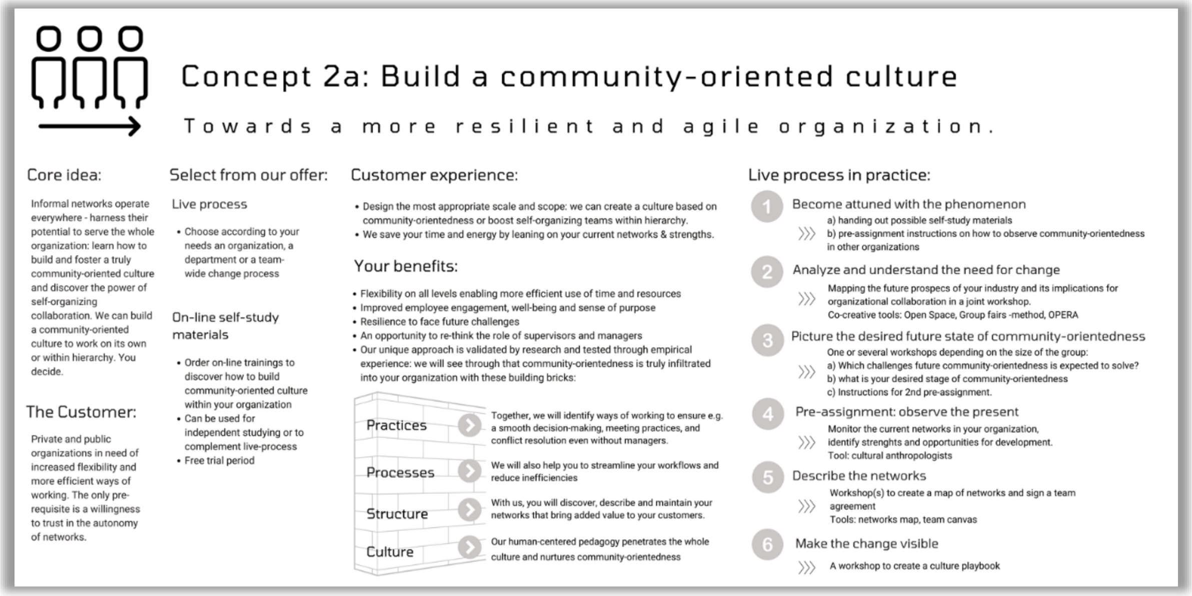


Figure 29: The final service concept

5 Reflection

In the chapter, conclusions are drawn based on the results and their scalability to other contexts is discussed. Also, assessment of the development setting, recommendations for further research as well as ethical and privacy protection issues are reflected before closing this thesis with final remarks.

5.1 Conclusions and scalability of the findings

The aim of this thesis was to study customer organizations' expectations towards management consulting. Expectations were studied in the holistic time frame of Customer-Dominant logic (Heinonen et al. 2010) before, during and after services by studying answers to a question: how do customers choose and evaluate the relevance of management consulting services. The objective was to conceptualize the co-creation sphere between the service provider and the client (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014, 208-209). This was done in the development part by recognizing customer expectations in client-consultant relationships and forming customer personas around those expectations. In practice, a service concept called “Build a community-oriented future” was elaborated in co-creation with the case company based on the research findings.

To highlight the main results, regardless of the differences in persona types and other variables, in this study there is strong evidence that clients choose their management consulting services via recommendations and word of mouth. This is understandable considering the intangibility and the so-called credence qualities of services: their quality may be difficult to evaluate even post-service (Wilson et al. 2021, 42, 252). Secondly, this study argues that most customer organizations prefer focused service offerings and clear service descriptions. The final service concept elaborated in this thesis should be tested with customers to discover if the concept meets their expectations in which case it can serve as a model for other service concepts. Based on the research findings, tangibility of the final service concept was addressed in several ways. For instance, the service offering is now more concrete and focused, the service process is laid out, and the scale of the service is clarified.

Making compelling service marketing promises (Grönroos 2015, 58) can help management consulting firms to stand out from fierce competition, but the author believes that striving to keep those promises made through interactive marketing (Grönroos 2015, 58) is much more crucial. Also, finding the right balance between the systematization of service process and its flexibility and adaptability is a key competitive advantage (Grönroos 2015, 55). Moreover, keeping promises made in the beginning of the process may not always be relevant throughout the organizational change: customer expectations and or surrounding context may transform. Therefore, managing and negotiating expectations during the change management consulting cycle (Hodges 2017, 86, introduced in chapter 2.3) is the only way to secure positive word of mouth, which is the most crucial element of service marketing in the light of this study. This finding is in line with theory: Wilson et al. (2021, 58) argue that B2B customers rely on the experiences of other organizations in their attempt to diminish uncertainty associated with complex decisions. This uncertainty can be decreased by increasing tangibility in the service marketing (chapter 2.2).

The thesis author also thinks that one of the most important things is to find out the client's desired level of involvement in the change process, which is illustrated through different customer personas in this case study (chapter 4.2.). Joint understanding of the customer's role in the consulting process is pivotal because customers evaluate the service also according to their self-perceived service role: customers who haven't done their part in the service delivery are likely to be more tolerant in their evaluation (Zeithaml et al. 1993; Wilson et al. 2021, 56-59).

Furthermore, more attention should be given to the post-consulting stage: there is the interpretative margin when evaluating consulting outcomes, even with routine cases (Nikolova et al. 2009). Consultants should also bear in mind that customer's perceived quality may vary across time (Ojasalo 2019). Based on what some of the customers said in the interviews, a simple follow-up call or a follow up plan post-consulting could convey a feeling that the consultant cares for the customer, and this could enhance the perceived quality of the service. In fact, the thesis author suggests adding a complementary stage of long-term follow-up to the change consulting cycle presented by Hodges (2017, 86).

Even though this study was a case study, the thesis author presumes that the following considerations may be helpful for all management consulting companies, especially for small ones. The following synthesis is based on customer interview insights and the theories from the knowledge base.

1. **Focus of service offering strategy**:

   Recognize your core competences and focus your service offerings accordingly. Especially for a small consulting firm, selling services with a too general focus can add to the vagueness of management consulting services, which are already highly intangible by nature. Moreover, a wide range of service offerings may be perceived uncredible, because nobody is good at everything (source: customer interviews).

2. Expectations management in external service marketing:

Tackle the intangibility of your services by service marketing efforts. Draft clear service descriptions. Promote positive word of mouth, use illustrations, and case examples (Wilson et al. 2021, 353-354). Be transparent about your frameworks, methods, ways of working, pricing and introduce your service process. Highlight the personality, background, and skills of your consultants (source: customer interviews). Customers seek for *service evidence* to know what your services are like (Bitner 1994 cited in Wilson et al. 2021, 100). Offer it.

3. Customer understanding in selling services:

Prior to contacting your client, do your homework thoroughly. What could the client need, what is their context. If you are convinced that the scale and the scope of your services match clients' needs, tailor your sales offer carefully according to the customer needs (source: customer interviews).

4. Expectations management in consulting process / interactive marketing

Discover the stage of change consulting process where your client is at: for instance, is the client in need of defining the right challenge and or is the consulting more about implementing the pre-defined change project (Hodges 2017). This may give some indication of what kind of consulting relationship the client wants (Hodges 2017, see also customer personas identified in this study in chapter 4.2.) but be sure to explicitly uncover these expectations (Ojasalo 2001). Expectations towards the consulting process and the consultant may vary also (Hodges 2017). Map and confirm the expectations and needs of other stakeholders: your contact person may have derived expectations from other stakeholders (Wilson et al. 2021, 69). Be transparent of what is expected from customer: the level of involvement and use of resources (Hodges 2017, customer interviews). Negotiate a common understanding. During change consulting process, remember to calibrate expectations regularly with the client and other stakeholders in the customer organization (Hodges 2017). Every encounter with the customer is a possibility to communicate information about the extent and quality of the service provided: in this way even the invisible efforts of the service delivery become more tangible to the customer (McDougall and Snetsinger 1990, 37).

5. Expectations management post-consulting

Remember post-consulting. The interpretative margin of projects outcomes (Nikolova et al. 2009) gives you the possibility to shape customer's understanding of how well you succeeded. Value may be created in retroactive through common re-interpretation (von Becker et al. 2015b). This may be especially relevant in the case of the Expert seeker persona type, who is not knowledgeable in the substance matter of your consulting. Demonstrate that you really care about the client's success even after money is no longer involved (source: customer interviews). In this caring, the tangibility of the service comes to life.

5.2 Assessment of the development setting

The development part of this thesis is based on qualitative research. According to Kananen (2013b) different conclusions can be drawn from the same material in qualitative research since the same material can be analyzed from different perspectives and even the same research can be interpreted differently due to individual differences. Along these lines, Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, 143) emphasize that the same research data may be deciphered differently according to the researcher. Therefore, the author of this thesis alleges that unconscious personal biases have influenced this research: the choices made, the data analyzed, the conclusions drawn. Furthermore, it is also possible that something has been "lost in translation". Not only literally, but also because the thesis author has aimed at internalizing partially new research topics and synthesizing them with her own words.

Moreover, service design tools used in this case study (e.g., customer personas, journeys, and service advertisements) are thesis author's interpretations, although they are derived from the research data. However, the role of these methods was to serve as a medium towards the final deliverable, the service concept, which was iterated and validated in co-operation with the case company. Since the limitations of researchers are reflected in the limitations of the project itself (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 48), the thesis author has aimed at a detailed description of the development process so that readers could evaluate the reliability of the research project (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 164).

Traditionally, research has been evaluated through reliability (research measures what it is it supposed to measure) and on its validity (accuracy of the measurement) but Tuomi and

Sarajärvi (2018, 160) point out these evaluation criteria stem from quantitative research. In fact, they argue that there is no one single unambiguous way to evaluate qualitative research. Nevertheless, Tuomi and Sarajärvi claim that reliability of a research can be concluded from the the following parts (2018, 163-164):

- the aim and purpose of the research (in this thesis chapter 1.1.)
- researcher's reasons for conducting the research (chapter 1)
- researcher's reflections during the process (chapter 5)
- duration of the research (chapter 1.1.)
- data collection methods, analysis and their reporting, choice of informants and their possibility to read and comment the results (chapter 3.2. and 4)
- ethical aspects (this chapter and chapter 5.4.)

Based on this list it can be concluded that the thesis author has covered all these aspects thus providing the readers with a complex context and possibility to evaluate the overall reliability of the thesis.

Moreover, the reliability of a research can be improved through triangulation which can be divided to following categories: triangulation of informants, researchers, theories, and methods (Denz 1978 cited in Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 168). Partly similarly, Stickdorn et al. (2018, 109) divide triangulation into three different categories: researcher triangulation, method triangulation and data triangulation. However, Stickdorn et al. (2018, 107-108) point out that in service design the purpose of triangulation is not so much to validate the data but to assure the richness of a dataset for solid design decisions: researcher is urged to collect different type of data (photos, texts, numbers, videos, audio). Stickdorn et al. (2018, 109) also distinguish between first-order concepts, namely raw data and second-order data referring to the interpretations of the researcher.

In this thesis, the main data sources were the interviews (fourteen) and the workshops (five), but also several other methods were used to present and analyze the data from different viewpoints. Data types of this thesis consisted mostly of audio recordings, transcribed texts and texts produced in and in-between workshops which were transferred into data visualizations through service design methods. To improve the transparency of the process, several first-order concepts, namely quotes (translated from Finnish into English by the author), were left in this thesis report. Also, an interdisciplinary approach was used in the knowledge base to offer wider theoretical perspective (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 168). The main weakness in this thesis is the shortage of researcher triangulation: the potential issues arising from this fact were discussed in the beginning of this chapter.

5.3 Recommendations and suggestions for further research

Due to practical matters, the most significant method of this development work; the semi-structured interviews, was a snapshot of clients' thoughts in a certain moment without a clear link to a specific change consulting assignment. Therefore, the author of the thesis suggests exploring customer expectations in a real-life context with a longitudinal study: the case company could study how customer expectations evolve, before, during and after the process, which is typical in consulting (Hodges, 2017, 213; Nikolova et al. 2009).

Contextual longitudinal research would be important in the light of Customer-Dominant logic: CDL focuses on understanding customer's own context and selecting and integrating the offering accordingly (Strandvik and Heinonen 2015, 116). Similarly, a case study typically favors data collection in their natural context (Ojasalo et al. 2014, 55), and many service design methods are grounded in real life context (Stickdorn et al. 2018, 27). In-depth ethnographic research could be included to truly understand the customer's world (Heinonen el al. 2010, 545).

During this design project, the thesis author formed a hypothesis: how typical consulting assignments vary according to persona types (the Outsourcer, the Partner, the Expert seeker) and how different selection criteria for management consulting services are highlighted depending on the level of consulting assignment (strategic/operational). It seems that in strategic assignments, criteria regarding the consulting firm, their previous projects and innovativeness of their framework are emphasized whereas in operational assignments the consultants' personal qualities prevail. In both cases, recommendations and word of mouth are important. A more detailed description of this hypothesis is presented in table 8.

Moreover, even though the heterogeneity of client roles in customer organizations was not studied in this thesis, a hypothesis was nevertheless formed. The roles of the interviewees in customer organizations of this case study varied from the middle to upper management. Mattila et al. (2019) have found that middle managers typically choose external management consultants to communicate difficult decisions (clustered under the umbrella labelled "significance" reasons). Consequently, it may be that the Partner is more typical persona type with upper management and the Outsourcer with middle management. It may be that the Partner type is more involved in planning transformations whereas the Outsourcer type is more often involved in their implementation. This would explain the need for the outsider's credibility and project management skills typical for the Outsourcer. However, further research would be required to confirm all these hypotheses.

Customer persona type	the PARTNER	the OUTSOURCER	the EXPERT seeker	Prevailing selection criteria for consulting:
Typical consulting assignments on strategic level	Strategy crystallization Complex and long-term strategic projects (Including coaching of top management)	Strategy process Strategic projects	Building strategic competence Solving strategic challenges with expert knowledge	Scale and scope of previous projects Customer vs. consulting firm compatibility Credibility and innovativeness of the consulting framework References and word of mouth
Typical consulting assignments on operational level	Individual coaching Team/department coaching	Operational projects Workshops Conflict resolution	Building operational competence Trainings Solving operational challenges with expert knowledge	Consultant's competence and personality, the right "fit" Customer understanding References and word of mouth

Table 8: Hypothesis formed during this research

5.4 Ethical and privacy protection issues

Ethical recommendations for thesis writing at universities of applied sciences (Arene recommendations 2020) and Responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations misconduct in Finland (RCR guidelines 2012) have been taken into consideration in this thesis process. To begin with, a thesis agreement was signed with the case company according to Arene recommendations (2020, 6). Striving for transparency and research ethics have been cornerstones throughout the thesis process all the way from research set up to the evaluation of the results (RCR guidelines 2012). As to the neutrality of the development work, the author of this thesis doesn't have a conflict of interest: the case company as well as the customers interviewed were previously unknown to the researcher (Arene recommendations 2020, 17-18, RCR guidelines 2012, 32).

Personal data refers to the handling of any data that can result in identifying the person either directly or indirectly and due to changes in legislation, data protection issues are more topical than ever also in thesis process (Arene recommendations 2020, 7, 20). In this development work, data protection was considered particularly important at the interviewing stage: the data management plan is described in the method chapter 3.2.1. In the end of the thesis process, the CEO of the employees of the case company had the possibility to read and comment this thesis to make sure that no confidential information regarding the company would be disclosed. Also, the name of the case company together with other identifiable information was intentionally left out for confidentiality.

5.5 Closing remarks by the author

In essence, the purpose of a thesis is to serve as a learning experience for the student by enhancing professional development and skills (Arene recommendations 2020, 18). Personally, I learned greatly during this process. The most crucial insight for me was the in-depth understanding about the intangibility of management consulting services. I believe that the reason why consulting firms are tempted to present their offerings on a very general level is that the requirement for customization of services according to client needs is well understood and for that reason, there is no willingness to close doors beforehand.

However, I think that in management consulting, when you offer “everything” in reality, you offer nothing: the clients do not have a tangible reference point against which to mirror their needs and expectations. Besides, laying out the service process offers transparency to customers: what does that service contain, how is the value is (co-)created and how much the client should be involved in the process. Furthermore, in my opinion the real need for customization is while drafting a sales offer based on customer understanding, and even more importantly, during the consulting process and post-consulting.

Johnston et al. (2021, 471) point out that service innovation is not typically radical by nature. To the contrary, it is generally cumulative. Therefore, I hope that the outcomes of this design process will be beneficial for the case company and contribute to their future success.

Lastly, I would like to thank the case company and the customer organizations for providing me with this intriguing opportunity to delve into the complex world of management consulting, my supervisor Kaisa Airo for her pertinent advice, all my friends who gave valuable insights and finally, and my dear husband for his love and support.

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Case company's internal material. 2021. (Intentionally anonymized for this research)

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Appendix 1: Internal interview brief and template

Goals: Contextual understanding and scoping relevant questions to guide the research

Themes:

- Customers
- Service offerings
- Internal service development
- Future
- Expectations towards this thesis

Example questions according to themes:

Customers:

- Examples of our current customer organizations?
- Your view of the potential customer organizations in the future? Why these?

Services:

- How would you develop your company's current service offerings so that they would meet better the needs of your
  - Current clients?
  - Potential clients?

- How would you develop your current service descriptions and concepts so that they would meet better the needs of your
  - Current clients?
  - Potential clients?

Internal service development:

- What is your company's customer promise now?
- How does this customer promise show to your customers in practice?
- What do you think the customer promise should be in the future?
- How would you implement this desired change?
- How would you develop internal ways of working to reach the desired change?
- What is your contribution in this change?

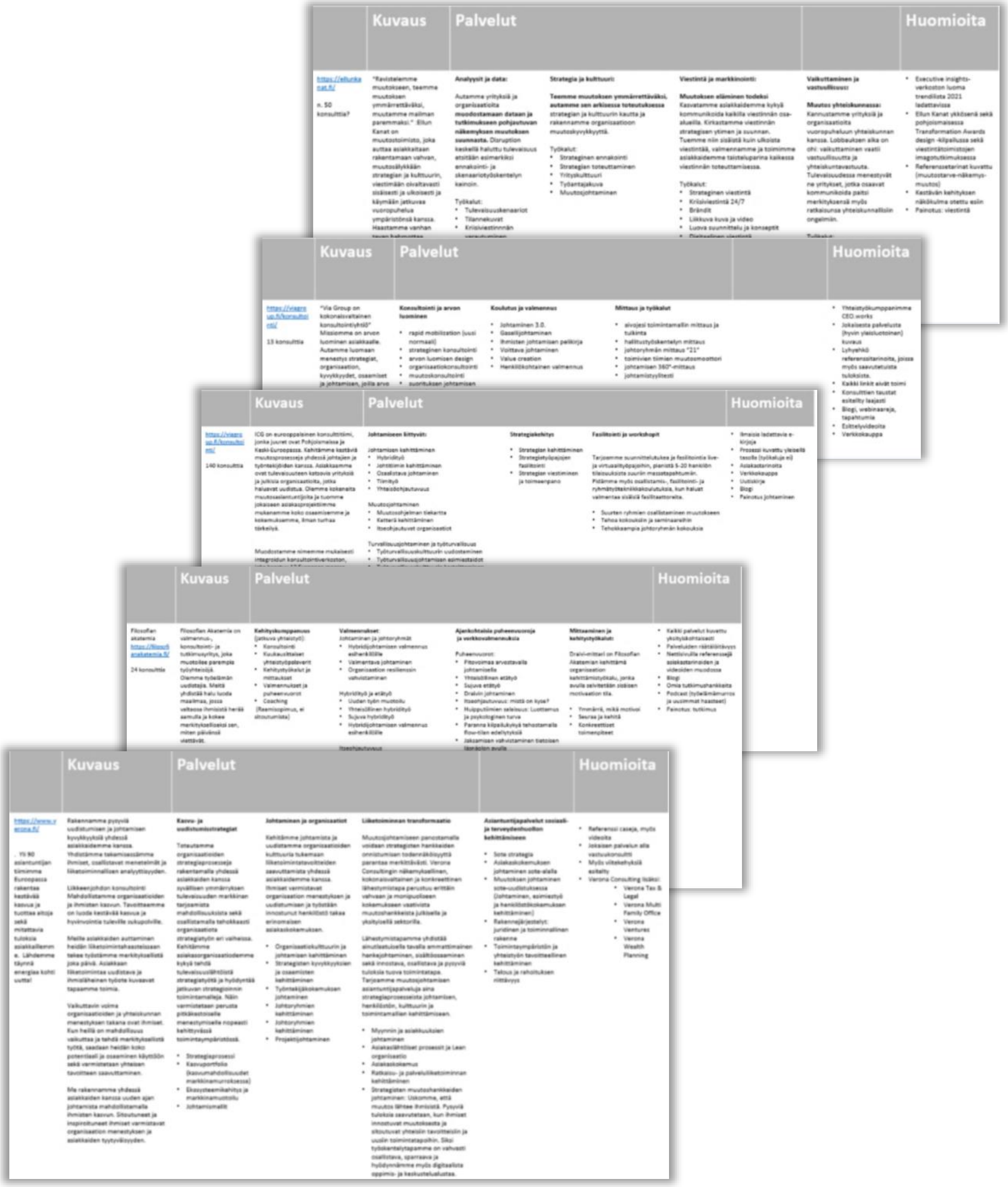
Future:

- Envision the future of the consulting industry
- Envision the future of your company
- What would you do to increase sales? What is needed to achieve this vision? What is your contribution?

What are your wishes and expectations towards this thesis project?

[Translated from Finnish by the author]

Appendix 2: Background material from benchmarks



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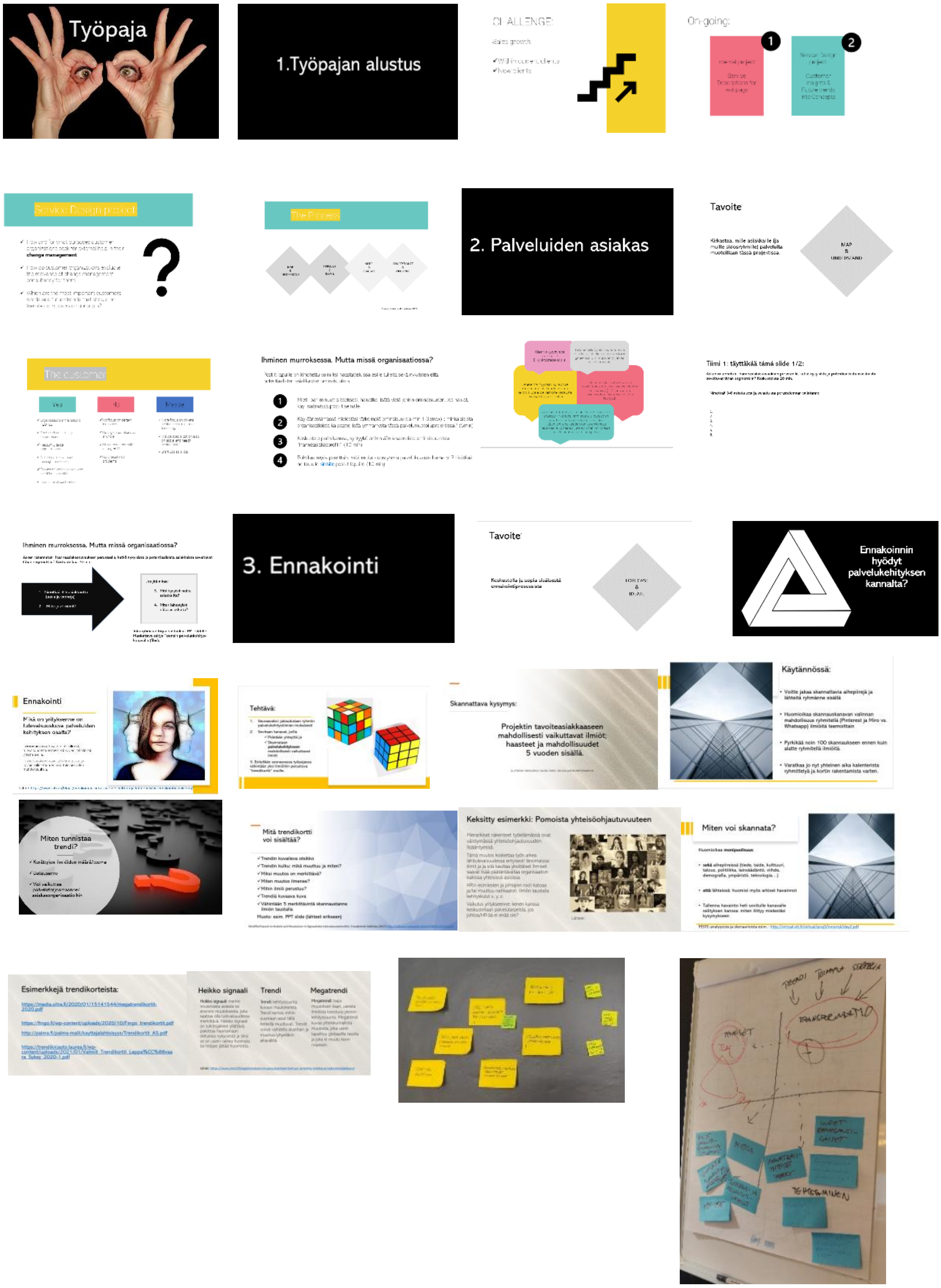
Appendix 3: Workshop template and workshop drafts 13.10.2021



Appendix 4: Correspondence examples related to customer interviews

Example 1: Invitation to the interview

Hei,

Loistavalla, keskinkertaisella ja surkealla konsultoinnilla on eroa organisaation murrostilanteessa. Siksi haluamme kehittää palveluitamme vastaamaan entistäkin paremmin asiakkaiden tarpeita. Kehitystyö tehdään yhteistyössä Laureassa palvelumuotoilua (MBA) opiskelevan Sanna Antolan kanssa.

Arvostamme kovasti, jos haluat käyttää hetken aikaasi (45 min) Teams-haastatteluun ja kertoa odotuksistasi sekä ajatuksista liittyen murrostilanteiden konsultointipalvelutarpeisiin. Ehdotathan itsellesi sopivia ajankohtia 19.10–10.11.välille. Myös ilta-ajat onnistuvat. Odotamme innolla kuulevamme näkemyksiäsi aiheen tiimoilta.

Aihepiireinä ovat mm.

- Tilanteet, joissa konsulttipalveluita harkitaan
- Toiveet ja odotukset konsultointipalveluille
- Mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat palveluiden valintapäätökseen

Kehitysprojekti on samalla myös osa Sannan opinnäytetyötä, joka julkaistaan theseus.fi-palvelussa. Haastattelun jälkeen saat haastatteluyhteenvedon hyväksyttäväksi. Halutessasi voit osallistua tutkimukseen myös anonyymisti.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

XX

Example 2: Example for asking permission for recording

Huomenta,

Kiitos minunkin puolestani haastatteluun lupautumisesta.

Laitan Teams-kalenterikutsun huomiselle klo 13.00.

Käykö sinulle, että nauhoitan haastattelun? Poistan nauhoitteen viimeistään opinnäytetyön valmistuttua (arviolta maaliskuussa 2022) ja tosiaan saat vielä haastatteluyhteenvedon hyväksyttäväksesi.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Sanna

Appendix 5: Customer interview template

In the beginning: The aim and the purpose of the research and framing the research topic

Background questions:

- Could you briefly introduce your professional background?
- Does your organization have a strategy and if it does, to which period?

Themes:

- Organizational change/transformation
- Recognizing the need for external consulting
- Choosing the right management consulting service provider
- Expectations towards management consulting
- Evaluation of management consulting services

Example questions according to themes:

Organizational change/transformation:

- How would you describe a strategic organizational change/transformation?
- Could you give examples of those strategic change situations in which you have used external consulting?
- What are the most typical reasons to use consulting in these types of situations?
- Looking back, in which change situations you would have used external management consulting services but at the time you didn't? Why would you choose now differently?
- Anticipating the future, in which change situations you think you will need external management consulting? Why do you think so?

Recognizing the need for external consulting & choosing the right management consulting service provider

- How do you recognize the need for external management consulting?
- At what stage of the change process do you typically contact management consulting firms? (planning, beginning, middle, end..or when problems arise?)
- Where and how do you search for the right kind of management consulting service provider?
- Can you describe, what kind of management consulting service concept or description would make you want to contact *a new* management consulting company?
- What are the most important selection criteria for management consulting services? Why these in particular?

Expectations for management consulting services:

- What kind of help do you wish to have from management consulting services? Examples in practice?
- What are the most important features of the management consulting service of your dreams? Why these in particular? Are there any differences between new and old service providers?

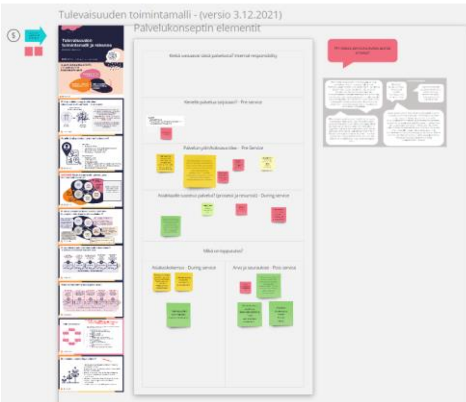
Evaluation of management consulting services:

- How do you evaluate the impact and the relevance of management consulting services internally post consulting? How does this evaluation influence the choices you make the next time when you need external consulting?

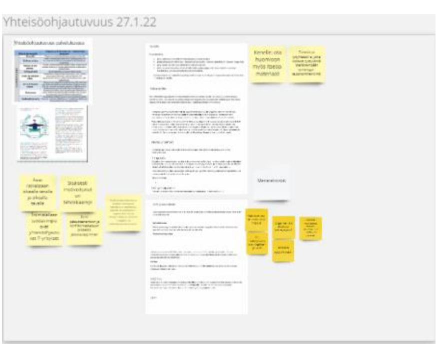
[Translated from Finnish by the author]

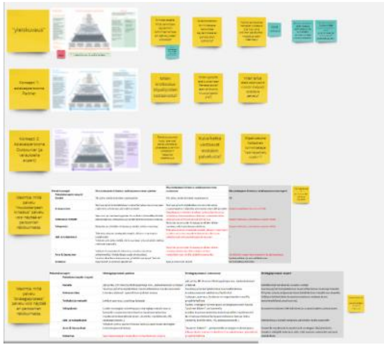
Appendix 6: Workshop template 8.12.2021

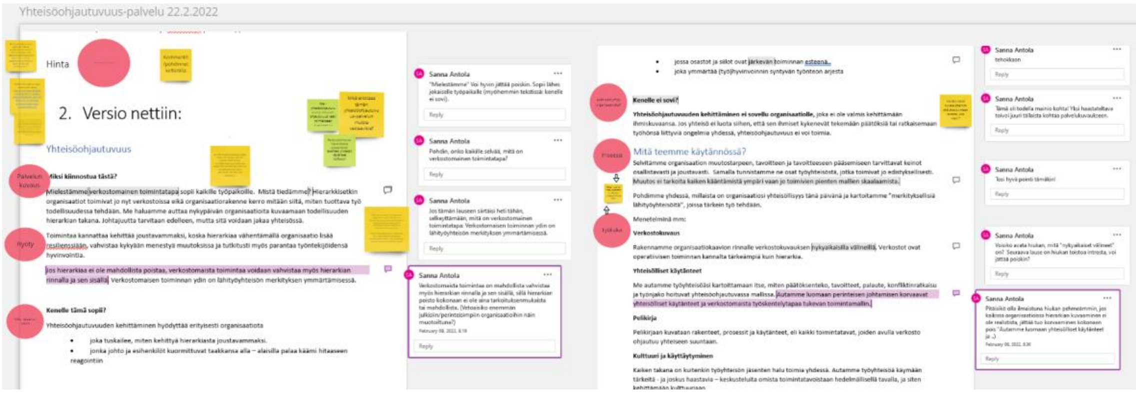
(Step 2 confidential)

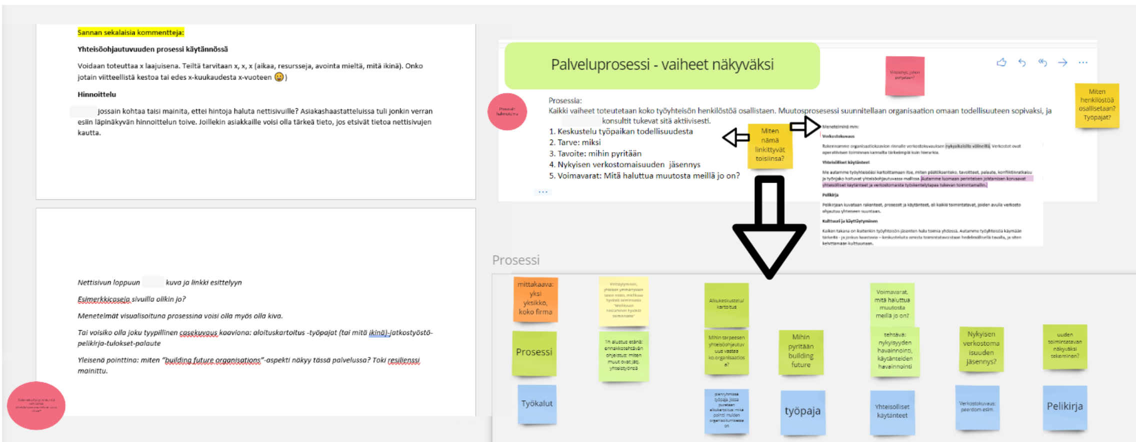


Appendix 7: Workshop iteration rounds towards the final service concept:









Appendix 8: Customer persona: the Partner

Appendix 9: Customer persona: the Outsourcer

2 Customer persona: The Outsourcer

"I do know what needs to be done, but consultants can give professional support in implementing the change. Also, I think that it is much more impactful that a person from the outside the organization steers the process, I have so much on my plate."

Typical:
In this case, the need for external consultancy is not self-evident: sometimes this type of need is taken care of by internal resources.

Jobs to be done:

- Manage a process/ a project
- Time management
- Facilitate a joint understanding for the need to change
- Staff change engagement

Pain-points:

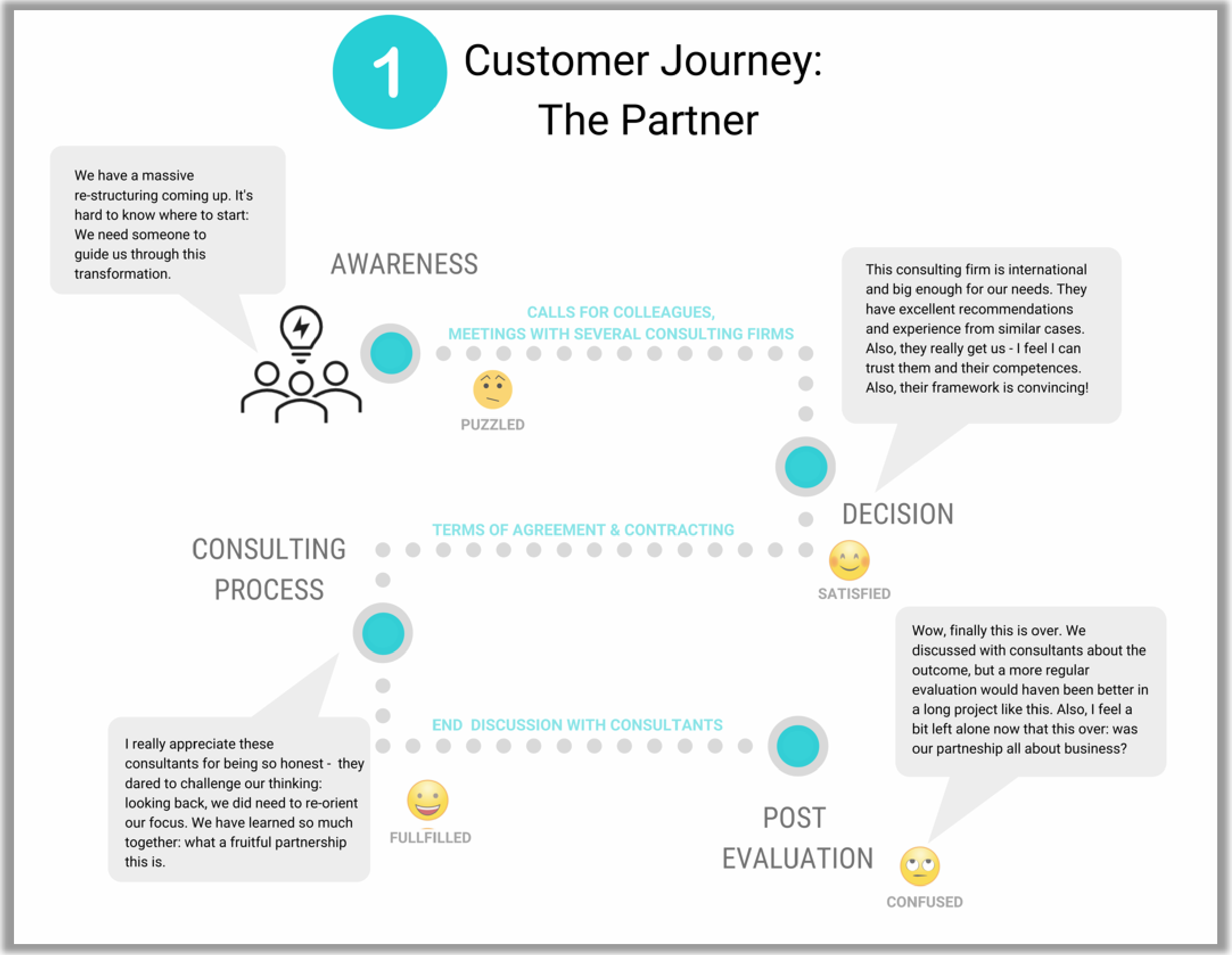
- Lack of time and resources
- Internal credibility as a change agent
- Multi-tasking
- Negative staff reactions towards change

Expectations :

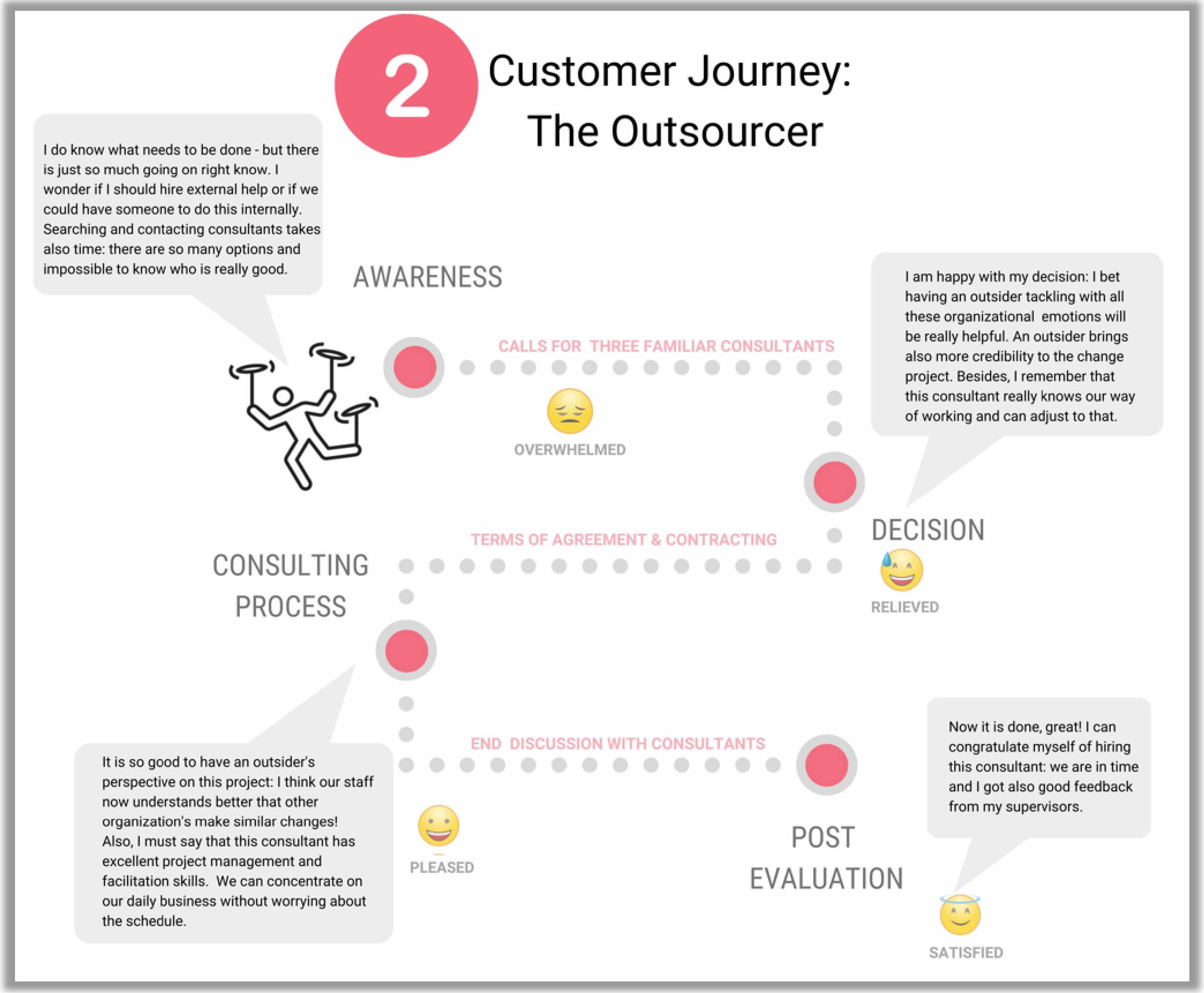
- Relieve of workload
- Project management skills
- Outsider's authority
- Consultant's experience from the "real" world
- Low level of involvement in the consultancy process
- Conflict management
- Live and virtual facilitation skills

Appendix 10: Customer persona: the Expert seeker

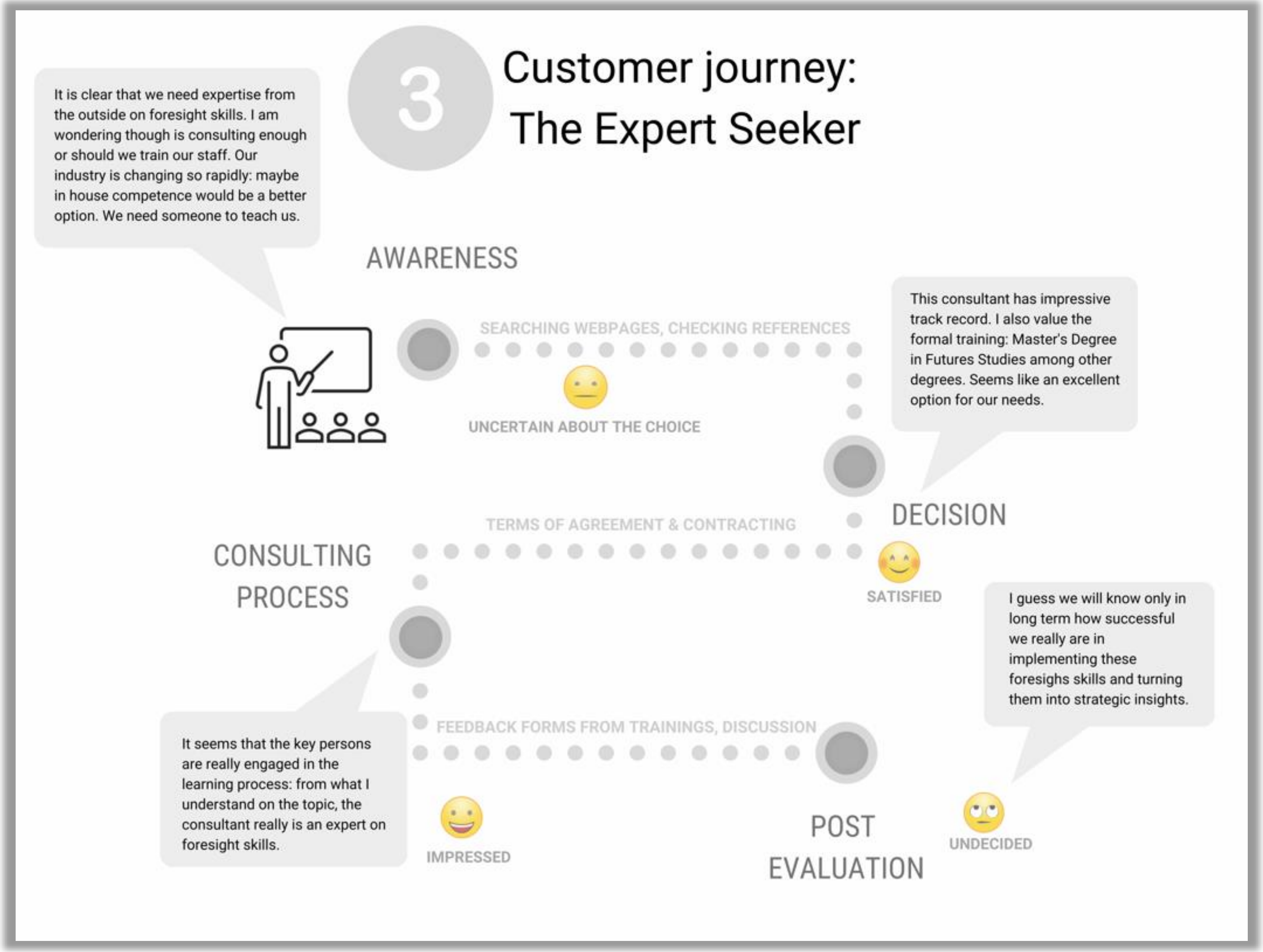
Appendix 11: Customer journey: the Partner



Appendix 12: Customer journey: the Outsourcer



Appendix 13: Customer journey: the Expert seeker



Appendix 14: Case company’s services in December 2021

Service 1: A living and shared picture of the future	Service 2: A person and community capable of the future	Service 3: Future operating model and structure
A common vision and scenario	A culture of future operations and management	Building operating models that implement the desired vision of the future
An agile strategy concept and participatory strategy process	Competence anticipation and proactive career planning	Appropriate organization and flexible structures
Foresight skills and visions in current decisions and operations	Elucidation of organizational dynamics inefficiencies	Designing a community-based operating culture and practices

Services are based on the case company’s internal service development project in December 2021. [Translations by the case company]

Appendix 15: Preliminary service concept for the Partner customer persona

Concept 1: Partner in change & transformation

Core idea:

Change management consulting services:
We will be your trusted partner through big or small transformation. During our partnership you will have our senior level expertise and experience from hundreds of successful transformations at your full disposal. We will help you to navigate towards the desired change by asking the right questions - and by mapping and implementing relevant measures together with you.

The Customer:

Private and public organizations in transformations. Top management.

When you need a partner to:

Find a change compass because

- Industry is in transformation
- Strategy is updated
- Market is changing
- Future opportunities require mapping

Navigate through change by

- Resolving obstacles in meeting your goals
- Elaborating and establishing more purposeful and efficient operating models, processes, and ways of working

Build change capabilities by

- Mapping the right competences for future
- Making sure foresight skills and visions guide your daily actions and decisions

Your benefits:

Successful transformation - the quality of our process is defined through regular check-ups.

We are used to working with moving targets: we are able to re-orient and adjust.

Your organization becomes more future-proof with the right direction, future capable people with the right skills and flexible ways of working.

You don't get what you ask, you will get what you truly need: we dare to challenge and bring new insights.

Customer Experience:

Easy-going and uncomplicated service without consultancy jargon.

Human-centered way of working: engaging the right people in the change process.

In-depth customer understanding and trustworthy partnership.

Respect for the history and legacy of your organization while striving for change.

Together with skills-building, ownership stays within your organization.

How do we work:

1.Look near: understand the past and the present

2. Look far: picture the desired future and alternative scenarios

3. Verify the most crucial: engage in change. Build capabilities.

4. Put into practice: implement processes, operating models and ways of working.

5. Evaluate and verify the desired change.

Appendix 16: Preliminary service concept for the Outsourcer customer persona

Concept 2: Tailor your seamless change

Core idea:

Change management consulting services: With our help, your organizational change will be a seamless experience. Our services are easy to buy according to your needs - you can also choose the level of implementation that matches best your organization's demands.

The Customer:

Private and public organizations in need of organizational change. Top management, HR, middle management.

Select from our offer:

Localizing the right direction

- Future scenarios and images
- Strategy concept
- Development of a roadmap for future organization

Organization & ways of working

- Strategy processes
- Leadership trainings and coaching
- Operating models enabling future vision
- Community-based culture and practices
- Resolution of organizational dynamics inefficiencies

People & Capabilities

- Competence anticipation and proactive career planning
- Foresight skills and visions in current decisions and operations

Your benefits:

With our project management help, your organization saves time and can concentrate on business-critical matters.

No matter the size of the service you need, our way of working is holistic: we ensure that the change matches the big picture of your organization.

Your organization becomes more future-proof with the right direction, future capable people with the right skills and flexible ways of working.

Customer experience:

Our senior level expertise and experience from hundreds of successful transformations is at your service.

Easy-going and uncomplicated service without consultancy jargon.

Our way of working is human-centered: we engage the right people in the change process.

We can see through the change all the way to fit your organization's every day practices.

In practice?

- Gap analysis between the current and desired state
- Project planning, management and/or implementation
- Live and on-line workshops and trainings
- Conflict resolution
- Individual and team coachings
- Culture playbooks

Appendix 17: Final service concept for the Outsourcer customer persona