José Gonçalo da Silva Araújo

Master’s in Management

Student number 731

A Work Project presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a

Master's Degree in Management from NOVA – School of Business and Economics

MANAGEMENT CONSULTING LAB – GALP SOCIAL MEDIA

JOSÉ GONÇALO DA SILVA ARAÚJO

Master's Student Number 731

A Project carried out on the Management Consulting Field Lab,

Under supervision of Gustavo Brito

6th January 2012

Abstract

This study consists of the reflection on a consultancy project developed by four students and one project manager from NOVA SBE. In attempting to assist Galp Energia structure the operationalization of an entry into Social Media, we were confronted with first-time challenges in real-life highly demanding workplace situations.

The following considerations attempt to defuse the problem-solving mindset of the practical experience from the methodological development and learning experience extracted from the consulting line of work.

Keywords: Consulting; Problem-solving, Methodology, Pedagogical

Table of Contents

Part I – Contextual Analysis

Client and Industry

Galp Energia is a Portuguese based energy company and there the only integrated group offering services along the oil and natural gas value chains, segmenting its business in Exploration and Production, Refining and Marketing, and Gas and Power. Galp Energia is actively present in 13 countries, across 4 continents, and holds the only two refineries in Portugal. It is currently in the late stages of its privatization process, which began in 1999 with the company's restructuring and rebranding. In 2010, turnover exceeded 14€ billion and profit was over 300€ million. It remains one of Portugal's best known and most influential brands.

The **oil industry** has a long and complex value chain, consisting of the exploration, extraction, refining, transportation and marketing of petroleum based products. Oil provides raw material for use in many energy and chemical industries and is one of the founding pillars of the modern industrial civilization. As a commodity, oil and many oil-based products require cost reduction and productivity efficiency in order to generate profits for their companies, which act in competitive and tightly regulated markets. There is not much threat of new entrants in the upstream oil business, due to demanding capital investment, technological and logistical expertise requirements. However, in the last few years, Portugal's downstream fuel distribution market has seen the strong entrance of supermarkets, offering a low cost product, which the population has been very receptive to, given the tightening of family budgets. Supply-demand dynamics tend to favor suppliers, partly due to the current low (yet increasing) threat of energy substitutes, and fairly stable demand. Prices are stipulated in highly competitive and regulated markets, generating strong rivalry. The attractiveness of this industry can be explained by high sales volume.

The Challenge

In the age of the popularization of Social Media, across an ever growing number of platforms and formats, an integrated presence in mobile and web-based networks is becoming a "must" for companies who wish to interactively engage consumers.

The assignment at hand was to support Galp in planning a Social Media entry strategy.

Part II – On the Content Generated for the Client

Problem definition

The client defined its short and medium term goals for the project.

The client's first and foremost challenge was to develop a coherent and consolidated official presence in Social Media networks. The primary purpose here would be to create a platform for supporting customers in any specific issues that may arise from the interaction with the company. At the same time, this presence should be characterized by the continued value creation between both parties, built upon the interactive nature of the medium, which should captivate and maintain the attention of Galp's audience. The client hoped to collaterally address issues of a generic and institutional nature.

What we were asked to do was plan and facilitate the transition into the operationalization of the client's objectives, to an articulated level of detail. To this effect, we were given a starting point which consisted of a few scattered and non-integrated visions of what this presence should be.

The second challenge we were presented with was that of exploring the potential of a full-fledged Social Media presence, more oriented towards strategic and global business objectives, and would be contingent on the fulfillment of the first part of the project.

While some of the main objectives were not identified to be of an urgent nature, others resulted from current needs of the company, making the project timely and relevant.

One of the main concerns from the start was the viral character of Social Media, which brings upon any prospective entrant the need to strictly assess both opportunities and risks, and develop a strategy accordingly. This is particularly important for large companies.

In order to better clarify and plan our problem-solving processes, we felt the need to redefine the main objective of the project, which was not in tone with the client’s original approach. It was our hypothesis that the main driver for the challenge at hand until then considered a secondary, latent issue. This strategic shift in the purpose of the project resulted in some conflict with the client, even though they actually agreed with the suggestion. A consistently conservative take on this issue was due to internal disagreement on the value of the project. The point we considered to be focal saw strong opposition from another department within the company, with which it overlapped. As this debate prolonged, we became more aware of tense dynamics and power struggles it sprung. For the Task-force in charge on this project, maintaining the "elephant under the table" seemed to be a tacit strategic objective in their internal dialogue, however we felt our duty as consultants should be, as an exterior force to create dialogue and consensus. This was an important step, given that the project was still pending approval by the executive committee, and we perceived this as a priority within the scope of the project.

In addition, we were faced with a client who gave us a working hypothesis for some of the more specific aspects of the project, based on intuitive claims. This approach was built from the top down, which made our job of building the foundations for a strategic approach much harder: our challenge was to accommodate the client's prior convictions, taking the few shared standpoints on the topic, to set the scene, in order to then persuade the client to reconsider some of their visions.

To support our suggestions, we directed our attention to what should be the ideal shape and content for Galp to have a custom presence Social Media networks. The complexity of the question created the need to further elaborate and structure the issues and sub-issues. Firstly, we had to determine how content should be created and managed, through what tools and processes. Only then should we make specific recommendations on which platforms to be present in, as well as the corresponding organizational implications and behavioral adjustments. Afterwards, final deliverables were defined, and the key success indicators for the project were established.

To assist us in communicating a roadmap for the project, we built a house shaped framework, which not only served to illustrate the above mentioned situation, but also fully translated the organization of out workflows.

Looking back, the main originator of dissonance was redefinition of the strategic goals of the project. At a certain stage, we were faced with a dilemma, between making our most earnest and honest recommendation and making the one we thought would be more efficient by having a greater likelihood of being internally accepted. This situation might have been avoided had we further pressed for meetings with the mains stakeholders, specifically those opposed to the project, prior to the first Progress Review.

Problem-Solving Process

Hypothesis-based research demands and inspires efficient resource allocation to quickly attain the desired results. For this reason, a great deal of the work done was of an intuitive and inductive nature. We experienced both proving and refuting working hypotheses through our many tasks and processes.

After aligning expectations on objectives and deliverables, we proceeded to allocate resources to various work fronts, according to intended outputs.

Three of the main work fronts dealt with the shape and content of the intended Galp presence in Social Media (**WF1**; **WF2**; **WF3**). One other had more to do with the way the organization would have to adapt to this presence (**WF4**). The remaining fronts were of a supportive nature, based on desk research and market research (**WF5**, **WF6**). These different work fronts would come to imply very different work methods, and their "ownership" was attributed to different team members.

WF1 would prove to be the focal point of our project. It required understanding a phenomenon with a great number of occurrences, which at first seemed completely random and disperse. The reports we were given were not as informative as we required. As such, we turned to their original databases and proceeded to interpret a sample from the data in a way that would come to show us causal relationships and the source of most of these occurrences. This allowed us to create a conceptual tree that organized the information and gave us a map of sub-issues that we could address with much greater direction.

From that point onwards, the task changed dramatically, and began to require in-depth investigation on the complex sub-issues previously identified. This required frequent 1-on-1 interviews and a great deal of desk research, which lead to a process of back-and-forth between the client and the project manager, in order to perfect the output. As these items began to be finalized, we started planning the transition of these contents into another format, which would require outsourced assistance. The specialized type of output required close guidance, given the complex nature of the content and its required simplification. WF1 lasted the full length of the project.

WF2 also required the interpretation of a phenomenon with a great deal of occurrences, albeit of a different nature from WF1. Once more the systematic clustering of data provided valuable new insights on the topic at hand. There followed an in-depth study of internal processes, in order to identify critical areas of action, and a benchmark study of external best practices. This lead to suggestions that not only fulfilled the adaptive intention of this part of the plan, but also aimed to correct inefficient and incomplete processes which were parallel to the Social Media project.

WF3 required a more creative and out-of-the-box methodologies. As such, brainstorming and inspiration from case studies were very useful tools.

For WF1, WF2 and WF3 we proceeded to create illustrations of the look and feel of a Galp presence in Social Media. At this stage, necessity brought us to make certain choices, such as those of platform structure and integration.

WF4 was mostly constructed on case-studies and analogy.

WF5 was transversal to all other WFs, and was based on academic and official company document research and analysis, over books and the internet. Some of the most useful techniques we found to convey information in persuasive manners were references to what others had done in similar situation, through best practices, benchmarks, case studies, golden rules and do’s & don’ts.

WF6 consisted of the proposal, planning and preparation of focus groups. This required the determination of the scope and format of the study, as well as preparatory sessions with the conductor of the focus groups and providing customized *stimulae* for the sessions. These *stimulae* were related to the output of WF1. A selection from the output of the session was made and integrated in the final deliverables for the other WF.

The different WFs were mostly unrelated, dealing with different aspects of the company's reality. Nonetheless, the team often felt the need to relocate its resources from one WF to another, to deal with more work intense periods. While some team members were systematically focused on and only on their respective tasks, others tended to contribute to the various WFs of the project. In addition, some of the WFs were interdependent on the output of each other. Moreover, as part of an integrated and systematic approach to a new platform, WFs 1-3 had to be conceived together, in a simple, structured and appealing "package".

Along the three-month project, we had scheduled three Progress Review sessions in which we would present the team generated developments. About one third of our time had been dedicated to preparing these sessions, the effectiveness of which could determine the continuity and success of the project. The respective documents were both meant for oral presentation support and as deliverables, which made their creation more challenging.

Throughout these processes, we often found it difficult to access individuals and information within the organization. Upon reflection, we found that our facilitator within the company probably felt somewhat threatened by our presence, as it overlapped her job description. This attitude lead to a constant monitorization over all of our interactions with key employees and frequent discouragement of the pursuit of specific topics. We often had to be explicitly prescriptive in certain tasks and processes, which were otherwise adapted to suit internal self-interests. However, we sometimes felt somewhat <u>unable to be persuasive</u> in our discussions. A useful framework given to us by our project manager helped better understand the issue: <u>the trust equation</u>. According to it, the trust deposited in another party shall be the product of perceived reliability, credibility and empathy, divided by the perception of self-interest. We often felt we were regarded and introduced as “youths” or “students”, and not taken in the full seriousness of management consultants. We clearly <u>lacked credibility</u> and frequently had to resort to that of or experienced project manager.

Then came our first Progress Review session, and with it the chance to show the quality of the work we had produced and increase our credibility. We seized the opportunity, obtaining positive reactions, feeling validated for the value of an external non-conformed point of view. Afterwards, although we felt a greater openness to interactions with the team the relationship with the facilitator remained tense and conflicting for the most part.

Other changes occurred over time. After the first progress review, some WF ownership was relocated to better adapt to individual preferences and skillsets. As they approached their later stages, WFs began coming together which required more dialogue between group members. In accordance, as the project matured, a decreasing amount of resources were employed in quantitative and deductive tasks, but rather in qualitative inductive ones.

More time started being invested in document creation, resulting in each WF having its own deliverables and presentations.

<u>Some outputs proved key for the success of the project</u>. Those were typically easily identifiable by the “wow” moments. The insights extracted from the <u>data analysis re-clustering proved very effective</u>. Some of the information even left members of the Task-

force surprised. Determining for this success was the creation of visual presentations such as the “issue tree”, which allowed for the demonstration of causal relationships and relative proportions between seemingly random occurrences. This had strong response from the audience. The subsequent product (where an argumentation was developed emulating typical interactions which its target audience) was also invaluable, as it overcame the current conservative approach to this problem.

Two more aspects were crucial for the positive realization of our endeavor. One of them was the materialization of the look and feel of both shape and content recommended for a presence in Social networks. Had these not gone beyond conceptual description, their impact would have been far reduced. The other one was seizing key moments from the focus groups, either by transcription or footage, when the consumer had a say and confirmed our hypothesis. Conjecturing and perceiving the consumer are very different experiences with different scales of impact.

These and other intensely value adding products served to increase our credibility and consequently the trust deposited in us. Such was our success that we were asked to suggest a document for Executive Committee appreciation, which further validated the quality of our work.

The initial division of WFs was done on a first-grabber criterion, and was not carefully thought out. If relocation of ownership had happened to suit individual skill-sets, some demanding tasks could have been more efficiently performed. Similarly, on occasion, team members were unaware of each other’s tasks and breakthroughs, which symptomized excessively individualized division of resources. Building on this, some aspects of the project should have been more broadly discussed within the team, such as the recommendation and integration of social media platforms and functions, which was not yet determined by the time we had to create illustrative prototypes.

It was personally often frustrating having to rely so heavily on <u>best practices and case studies.</u> Although understanding the limitation of our resources and the steepness of the learning curve at our level of preparedness for facing the challenges of this project, the output might have benefited from a more <u>creative approach</u> to some topics. Case studies work to the extent that they do not: cultural adaptation. This unpredictability is the technique's flaw, which, however resource efficient and persuasive, is a <u>follower's strategy in an age of innovation</u>. Creative approaches, albeit less credible, could have been more in tone with what the client was looking for by hiring us: a new take on things. Some of the case studies suggested were actually refuted in Progress Review sessions by the client.

<u>Final Recommendations</u>

At the end of the day, we hope to have left the client with a few key messages to digest. The first and most important of which is that <u>transiting from decision-making to action-taking stages should be a question of timing rather than contingency,</u> a claim we supported with a key statistics. Furthermore, the issue we've identified as the focal point of the discussion (WF1) urges action-taking, because ignoring it may only further compromise Galp's position and part ways with the brand's value proposition.

Another key message is that <u>Galp would not be the first one to walk this path</u>, as other, some similar, companies have already done so, successfully. However, to do so, a certain kind of attitude is required in these new channels, one that is paradigmatic considering Galp's traditionally conservative take on the issue. We've taken the issue to the consumer and they were positively receptive, which met our highest expectations. We hope that content will continue to be developed and be in the future employed.

WF2 may prove to decrease costs and increase organizational efficiency, requiring some simplification and optimization of internal processes in order to make way for a seamless transition into a new integrated structure. The media in which the client is considering entrance requires organizational nimbleness and precision, as well as very agile multidepartmental integration.

Some cultural changes (WF4) might be required along the organization to accommodate this entry, which should happen through the preparation and monitorization of a very clear set of rules.

We were left with a few concerns regarding implementation. First of all, by the time our work was done, the project still pended approval by senior staff.

Building on the aforementioned internal dissonance of opinion regarding it, we can see how a negative take on the issue on the part of influential internal players may prove to difficult this approval. One of our shortcomings was to have never actually been able to discuss these issues with these conflicting forces, much less have the opportunity to persuade them. We feel we took the right step by revealing the "elephant from under the table", despite friction this caused with the client, who might still be weary of losing face, internally. One of the final concerns our client shared was that one of our suggestions had previously been made by the now opposing faction and rejected by the now favorable faction. We foresee it to be difficult for our client to bring the issue up, whilst saving face.

On another note, WF2's suggestions require some changes to be implemented on a heavy bureaucratic structure within the company. This, we believe, will require time to happen.

Although receiving positive feedback from the work we developed, when it came to passing on the torch to the previously formed Task-force we felt some organizational inertia. From applause to ownership goes a great leap of responsibility and commitment, which we did not find reflected in any proactive attitudes. This was clearly noticeable by the absence on most Task-force members on our third and final Progress Review.

One final concern has to do with the member of the organization who we expect to take over command of the project. We do not deem it ideal that our facilitator lead the project in the future, the person we so often strongly disagreed with and who had proved to both lack a global view on the issue and the organizational competencies to lead groups.

Part II – On the Pedagogical Experience

Application of Previous Knowledge

The nature of our project did not favor the direct application of previously systematized Master's content due to its extremely practical character and industry specificities. However, we found many indirect applications of both content and methodologies.

On the more quantitative side of the project, much of the accumulated knowledge over the years on **Statistics** proved useful. Likewise some software-specific practices (Microsoft Excel) were employed in data analysis, for which the contents of **Modeling Business Decisions** was of valuable use.

New Product Development course contents were also indirectly present in our project, specifically in its later stages, when we focused on product design and development through the identification of customer needs, and subsequent concept generation, visual expression and prototyping.

Human Resource Management sensibility and issue awareness, developed along the course, was likewise present, especially in WF4.

Corporate Social Responsibility offered some insights for WF3, namely on having trained us to measure and market practices, adapting them to organizational behavior, and developing plans taking into consideration all stakeholders.

Both **Negotiation** and **Persuasion** courses proved continually useful in terms of client management and team dynamics. Although hard to achieve seamlessly, some contents like inducing cooperative behavior, conflict management and communication strategies were always present, and proved extremely value-creating in certain situations.

The **Leading Teams** module was also of relevance, since all team member rotated as leaders, whose responsibility was to conduct dialogue within the group, as well as with the project manager and client.

I personally found some resources from courses I had not taken also useful. **E-marketing** and **Market Research** contents were present throughout the project, and having materials available helped both in the content generation process and in focus group planning.

Truly invaluable, however, was the application of business sense acquired at NOVA. Having a background unrelated to Economic sciences previous to the Master's, I believe its curricular experience helped me develop both more structured and analytical thought processes and specific technical knowledge on various topics. Also personally advantageous for this Social Media project were my previous studies, which encompassed Media Theory and Evolution, as well as audiovisual editing skills.

I had, however, hoped to apply and test many of the more quantitative and analytical skillsets I've recently developed, but both the nature of the project and the Work Front distribution favored a softer approach to most of my tasks.

Methodological Takeaways

Regarding the **client's Industry Specific Knowledge** it was required of us to understand the long and complex value chain of oil energy markets, which in itself was a laborious and fulfilling task. Furthermore, we developed a deep understanding of Galp's current business, sectors and markets.

Consulting Industry Specific Knowledge

Strategic management consultancy is a project-based field of work in which business experts provide advice to senior management on strategic and organizational improvements. The complex and intense workflow in this industry grew to require innovation in project management, framework building and even in the jargon it employs. Creating industry-specific terms and phrases, as well as creating operational "warnames" for content, serves to tangibilize processes which often in normal settings are not completely fulfilled due to their tacit nature. These terms are witty or analogous, in service of creating positive reception of sometimes negative messages. Throughout this document and specifically in the following paragraphs, we will attempt to systematize some of them.

In order to resolve conflicts of opinion, denote meanings and align expectations, a communicator may frequently ask to be on the same page as someone else. This means parties should be in agreement and symmetrically informed.

80/20 determines a ratio of efficient communication of certain ideas. Often the larger represents the relevant object of analysis or the smaller accounts for the causes of the remaining. Similarly, boiling the ocean coins the idea of not wanting to overdo or be too ambitious, but rather take the time you have to do the best you can. On the other hand, one is often asked to deep dive, meaning to explore a particular topic in-depth. The scale of this is granular, measuring the level of detail in the abstraction or analysis.

MECE is a McKinseyan expression for mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive. In practice, it provides a guideline for information analysis, by which one should divide an issue into as many subgroups as possible (through issues trees, for instance), so that the topic be entirely considered, and that no repetition be present. Benefits of a MECE analysis are clarity, simplicity and completeness, however these require a good ability to have a zoomed out point of view, demanding also a great agility in structuring and storytelling.

Deliverables are anything owed between parties, usually having due dates which are set in next steps of prior meetings. The set of agreed-upon deliverable and boundaries of an engagement is called the scope. Progress Reviews are periodic meetings to formally exhibit and discuss deliverables and propose next steps.

On the topic of **Client Management**, we recap the aforementioned Trust Equation, where *trust = (credibility * reliability * empathy) / self-interest* (which is also usable for any other relationship analysis). Ideally, all factors should be aligned to maximize trust. However, when trust is lower than desirable, this simple framework can allow us to allocate our resources efficiently. One may, for instance, diagnose lack of empathy, and direct one's attention towards creating intimacy. We identified the difficulty we had in accessing data and individuals as a symptom of lack of trust and acted accordingly, as previously described. But organizations are complex, and sometimes one can find other ways around issues. Breaking the ice with the people inside an organization can increase efficiency and resolve many problems. Blurring the lines between "outsider" and "insider", as well as "formal" and "informal" relationships can be invaluable, so long as the interest shown is genuine and certain lines are not crossed. After all, the most influential person in a corporation is often the "CEO's secretary".

True for Client Management but also for **Team Dynamics**, is the fact that <u>Active Management of Expectations</u> and keeping all parties up to date can avoid awkwardness and misunderstandings. Long projects can generate a great number of tasks and deliverables, and as time progresses it is important to maintain control of stakeholder expectations. One can be proactive in suggesting new work plans and due dates.

Defining from the start clear <u>team rules</u> was beneficial to a better understanding and more efficient task allocation, especially for a group of people who did not know each other very well. In this document we identified and characterized the main stakeholders for the project, as well as our own individual strengths, developmental opportunities, and preferences. We also had an opportunity to clarify our "impossibilities" and lifestyle inclinations. In addition, we set out clear team roles, which included: team leader, accountant, note taker, resource organizer, power point designer and timekeeper, many of which required rotation. This planned rotation provided for a more <u>dynamic sharing of tasks and duties</u>, in a project inside which we could not help but feel that each member was focused only on their own task, more often than not.

Another important tactic is frequently <u>keeping up to date with the current states-of-mind of team members</u>. To this effect our project manager would frequently ask us how we felt, making us first name 3 adjectives and then extrapolate, building on that and complementing with reasoning. Similarly, <u>upward feedback</u> helped tie in some loose ends along the project, and provided guidance for team members. From the start of the project the team decided to have frequent feedback sessions. At first, these proved useful in the sense that they helped correct certain attitudes and behaviors that were harming team dynamics and efficiency. However, in later stages of the project, too much feedback had begun to give too much emphasis on some negative aspects of team dynamics, which only resulted in further setting opinions and positions apart. In our case, we were afflicted by the recurring conflict between too group members who often saw processes and concepts in very diverging ways. Using the Myers-Briggs type indicators, one could assess them as having quite different psychological preferences. The source of conflict lied in two clear dichotomies: where one was an intuitive and thinking type, the other was a sensing and feeling type. This is very generic and not in itself a bad thing. Nevertheless, in this case, we were not successful in turning diversity into better results. In order to overcome these difficulties several, strategies were applied, such as alliance building and different argumentative approaches, however to no avail. Diversity demands strong leadership skills and our inexperience held us back from taking full advantage of our potential.

In order to keep things casual and fun, the team set up a blog and a wall in which to express ourselves. In the end, one of the team members created a video montage, collecting some memories, so that we could later look back on these intense and memorable times.

In terms of **Process and Project Management**, we once more point out the importance of ownership for the successful and timely fulfillment of tasks and processes. Along the process we learned to proactively propose timelines and priority organization to the project manager. Although the team was not in habit of using them, I personally found Gantt charts (a type used to illustrate a projects schedule along a timeline) useful.

As one of the most tangible outputs, **Document Creation** is required to be of the best possible quality. Throughout this project we were confronted with the need to learn and improve our ways of producing many kinds of documents – two examples follow. A simple email may be formulated in a variety of ways, and vary in tone according to the content and urgency. Likewise, a data request should follow some rules, such as asking for specific hard data first, then softer issues and contacts, always explicitly justifying their purpose.

Learning to unify oral presentation support such as the "slide" and final deliverables in one document and was a critical challenge. On top of that, hypothesis-based research required a broad view of what a final document should look like and contain from the very start. After each bulk of research or informative meeting, one should immediately transform the key messages into a simple, clean and intuitive format so that others may apprehend content efficiently. After compiling all relevant information, the team should suggest a dummy-deck – an extensive view of the structure of the document. From there a first draft would be created, which we called the master. This stage already required a clear idea of the story we would be telling. Then began a process of back-and-forth with the project manager, meant to shape the content and communication, which one should regard as integrated. Thereupon, some final fine-tunes should be guaranteed, before taking the document to the client. One of the most common of these was wordsmithing – editing phrases to become more succinct and maintain their full meaning.

Throughout the process, a series of rules should be constantly kept in mind in order to maximize the efficiency and persuasiveness of the communication. Font type and size should be maintained throughout the document, with very few exceptions, which is not as intuitive as seems, since one would have the impulse to increase the size of some key messages. The Master should be a precise self-explanatory autonomous document to overlay in presentations. Size and density should be adjusted to the contents and viewer, using repetition of standard forms to assist the reading experience. Upon necessity, diagrams can make content more stimulating, but should be used economically. A pyramid structure also assists the intelligibility of information, which should have one all-encompassing starting point and then multiply in information in stages and groups. The main message behind each slide should be present in an action title, which formulates a clear summarizing statement. Together, these action titles should tell the story behind the document. All additional information is contingent on serving the purpose of the message. Since documents in western culture are read top-to-bottom and left-to-right, the concluding statements (which we named so-what) should be accommodated at the end of the slide.

Meeting Preparation and Participation implies the same conduct rules as any other interaction, but the intensity and stakes are much higher. For the sake of discussion, we shall take the example of a Progress Review. The first step is to perform a stakeholder analysis and propose a clear agenda for the meeting, which can guide the conversation towards our points of most interest, aligning expectations and avoiding confusing directionless interactions. For the best outcomes, this event must be a sort of stage, where all participants already know what is going to happen, avoiding surprises. One can then use many techniques such as: active listening, paraphrasing what others say to confirm understanding an avoid connotation, building on what other say and valuing their contributions, pushing back (showing disagreement in a non-confrontational way). All of these serve to set the mood and create a shared view, with consultant and client on the same side. The team underwent a noticeable improvement in these situations, along the project.

Personal Takeaways

This experience provided numerous personal growth opportunities, from which I would like to point out just a few, referring to teamwork, techniques and methods.

On the first issue, I faced some difficulties in coordinating with my group. From the start I had made my preference of working offline clear, since I usually feel more productive working on my own and then comparing with others. This was aggravated by the work conditions at the company, where eight people usually had to share one table, working two different projects. To add to this, I was the team member who had the most time constraints. Upon having to divide Work Fronts, I ultimately ended up with the most supportive and transversal roles, which implied I would spend less time producing final deliverables. Both my personality and task description lead me to focus more on client relationship building, which was, for our project troublesome. The combination of these issues with personal misunderstanding with other group members generated a somewhat negative general opinion and bias on my individual and collective contributions and on myself. From this experience I will takeaway one main conclusion for future engagements: one must very actively manage the perceptions of one's contributions so as to avoid damaging misunderstandings. I should also better manage my time and set upon myself more and smaller deadlines and opportunities to present my progress to others.

As mentioned before I took actively to client relationship management. Sometimes I had work meetings with more than one people on the client's side. Although employing the aforementioned meeting preparation techniques, I sometimes felt overwhelmed by the lack of credibility ingrained in our presence. The challenge was to take into consideration the project manager's expectations and transfer them to the client, who in our case constantly objected to many of our opinions and work methodologies. Lacking the credibility, I was often haunted by a lack of persuasiveness with the client. For the future, I must work on my assertiveness, especially when opposed a group of aligned individuals, and diversify my persuasiveness techniques in order to attain greater authority. In line with this, my oral presentation, although generally engaging, should be worked on to become more poised and succinct. To do this I must focus on organizing my thoughts prior to addressing the stakeholders present. Although usually having ease in written communication, the typical format in consulting engagements is one I was not accustomed to: the "Powerpoint slide". At first, without prior training in the particular aspects on a "consultant's slide", I had ample difficulty in conveying my thoughts to a sheet in efficient and easily intelligible ways. Although I was able to undertake a strong evolution throughout the project, the key aspect was my approach to the document creation process. My typical thought processes had grown accustomed to conceptual and abstract intertwining of contents, so as to please the more curious and creative characteristics of my personality. However, for efficient consultant work, one must be more objective and hypothesis-driven. My preference for expansive research did not suit the nature of the project. As a result, I ended up generating interesting and creative content which was not in line with the conveying of the key messages. This implied that my time was not always efficiently managed. One of the main takeaways for me is that a consultant only conveys 5% of what he/she knows: sometimes less is more. By directing one's attention towards where one knows most value will be added, one can be more resource efficient.

On my key strengths, I found that my approaches tended to be more “outside of the box” than those of my peers. I tend to structure a process keeping the big picture in mind. I also believe I have good communicating and empathy creating skills, on which I will emphasize my future development as I grow more accustomed to real-work experiences.

Keeping a learning log was a decisive process, which helped systematize my learning.

Business consultancy has interested me for some time. However singing in the shower is different from rocking on stage. This was my first serious and prolonged workplace experience, and I was challenged in many different aspects of the engagement, truly revealing my strengths and development opportunities. I continue to value the challenge of project-based work, both for the learning experience and the intense value-creating outcomes. I will continue to pursue challenges in this field of work.

Concluding Thoughts

The project's pace and challenging nature represented a steep learning curve. Dealing with softer issues than I had expected, closer to the reality from my background studies, it served as in interesting stepping stone for me. The more challenging interpersonal relationship also fortified my toolset and methodological portfolio. The constraint of these pages cannot allow for fully conveying the benefits of such a practical and intense learning experience. The project's success – visible in the upwards internal influence of our deliverables within the organization – can be one measure for its value. However, the most relevant one is not so easy to ascertain or communicate, and such will not be attempted. Nonetheless, I can assure you: it will accompany me the remainder of my life.

References

Websites:

- http://www.galpenergia.com/EN/Paginas/Home.aspx
- http://managementconsulted.com/consulting-lingo/management-consulting-lingo-words-and-phrases-that-applicants-and-interviewees-should-read-and-know/
- http://www.investopedia.com/features/industryhandbook/oil_services.asp#axzz1iVxKvfSb
- http://www.consultingmethodology.com/Documents/Informal_client_contact_consultancy_international_VU_final_tcm30-197246.pdf