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Pop-up Consulting: A Case-Study of a public sector project-based consulting firm

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Abstract

Literature on the relation between consultants and public institutions is largely political-oriented, concerned mostly with the political consequences of the involvement of a private firm in public matters, the capacity for change of a manager in a local government or whether the use of consultants throughout time, by public institutions, has been beneficial or detrimental to the public sector.

This paper aims to shed light on the topic of business strategies of consultant firms operating in the public-sector. More specifically, it focuses on the definition and analysis of the expansion strategy of Pop-Up consulting.

The study consists of a combination of literature review complemented by qualitative research through nine in depth interviews with employees of a case study organization. The proximity of the employees involved in the implementation of a Pop-Up strategy provides a detailed understanding of both the strategy's *raison d'être* and its implications for the consulting firm.

The research begins to fill a gap in the literature by providing insights on a possible client-consultant relationship between a project-based consulting firm and a local government institution. It also provides project-based consulting firms with general guidelines on the intricacies that should be considered when deciding on the Pop-Up strategy.

Resumo

A Literatura sobre a relação entre consultores e instituições públicas é, maioritariamente, de natureza política. Concentra-se principalmente nas consequências políticas da participação de empresas privadas em decisões governamentais, a capacidade para a mudança por parte da gestão de administrações locais ou se a utilização de consultores por parte de instituições públicas tem sido benéfica ou prejudicial para o progresso do setor público.

O objetivo deste artigo é dar conhecimento sobre estratégias de empresas de consultoria que operam no setor público. Especificamente, foca-se na definição e exploração da estratégia de consultoria Pop-Up.

A Investigação consiste numa combinação de uma revisão de literatura complementada por uma investigação qualitativa realizada por meio de nove entrevistas detalhadas com funcionários de uma organização que serviu de caso de estudo. A experiência dos funcionários da empresa de consultoria na implementação da estratégia Pop-Up, possibilita a compreensão profunda do propósito da mesma e das suas consequências para a consultora. Através deste estudo, procura-se enriquecer a literatura preenchendo o vazio literário sobre a possível relação cliente-consultor entre uma consultora de projetos e a administração pública local. Adicionalmente, oferece a empresas de consultoria de projetos princípios e cuidados relevantes a considerar no momento de decisão estratégica.

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1. Introduction

In order to better comprehend the structure of this study, it is necessary to clarify the components which served as its grounds, thus the division of this section into five sub-sections: Literature Overview; Pop-Up Strategy; Case-Study Organization; Case-Study Research Activities; Purpose of the Investigation & Research Questions.

1.1 Literature Overview

Literature involving consulting firms has been widely researched to explore the importance and effects of their knowledge base (Morris et al, 1998) and knowledge management constraints crucial to the long-term survival of the firm (Prencipe & Tell, 2001). The other main literature path focuses on the client-consultant relationship as the determinant of consultant success, following the logic that the results of a knowledge intensive firm are highly correlated to the manner in which the knowledge is transferred leading to two perspectives, functionalist and critical, very cleverly researched by Werr et al. (2014).

On the one hand, researchers seem to be interested on the peculiar evolution of consulting firms' business model (Tavoletti et al, 2021). On the other hand, when it comes to the relationship between consulting firms and the public sector, research tends to focus on the constraints and challenges caused by the *modus operandi* of a large public organizations involving political pressures and extensive bureaucracy or the manner in which public sector change has been affected by private consultants (Rosenblum and McGillis, 1979; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Christensen, 2005).

Another important trend in academic investigation contributing to this paper's relevancy refers to the studies on project-based firms. This topic has been largely connected to the definition and business model of project-based organizations (Wikström et al., 2010; Kujala et al., 2010) and the study of the reasoning behind the evolution of otherwise companies with functional hierarchies to project-based organizations (Taylor et al, 2004).

This paper, therefore, delves into the investigation on the dynamics of strategy decisions on the consulting firms, seen as the subject rather than as the tool.

1.2 Pop-up Strategy

The strategy being investigated is not clearly defined in literature, as exploratory work can be seen as the first stage of research (Stebbins, 2001), this paper proposes a definition in the hope of placing the first brick on the wall. Nevertheless, as cause of exploratory research being also related with high risk (Elman et al., 2020), a greater sense of awareness and attentiveness is warranted. In the end, this paper intends to be similar to the cave explorer daring to delve into the unknown, knowing, from the start, the greater possibility of undesired outcomes, as finding a larger explored cave or simply a vulgar path anything but noteworthy or even being led to an empty ending, but, alas, that curiosity is precisely why the exploration is pursued (Stebbins, 2001).

Pop-Up Strategy is a strategy put in place in the public sector by the case-study firm. Simply put, it consists of creating a partnership with a city administration for the assistance in the development of applications to European Funding Programmes. However, for the purpose of this study, it's necessary to consider a more detailed explanation.

According to the Project Management Institute[1], projects are "temporary efforts to create value through unique products, services, and processes". To specify to the firm´s context, it is the execution of projects that, mainly originate from the European funding calls, as such, each project independent and has a specific set of circumstances that make it unique, even if it is similar to a past project, or through the words of the European commission[2] "each call for proposals or tenders has its own criteria, requirements and steps". In spite of that, the pop-up strategy involves only the beginning of several projects, the applications, instead of the project's execution. Furthermore, the denomination used "Pop-Up" is reflected in the ability of the client to request the assistance of the consulting firm, at any time, for EU Fund Applications, hence, comparing this availability of the consultant with the concept of Pop-Up retail store referring to a temporary store with the purpose of fulfilling a "Faddish trend or seasonal demand"[3]. This set of characteristics of the strategy lead to the development of the following proposed definition of Pop-Up Strategy which will be the considered definition throughout this paper.

[1] To see the definition, visit: https://www.pmi.org/about/learn-about-pmi/what-is-project-management
[2] To see the origin of the quote, visit: https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/how-apply/application-process_en

Pop-Up Strategy:

The establishment of a continuous relationship whereby the client requests, at will, a temporary service from the firm to fulfil an excess of demand or lack of expertise.

1.3 Case Study Organization

The organization serving as the subject of this study is a small family-owned consultancy firm operating in Portugal for 55 years, since before the Portuguese revolution (the 25th of April). At the time of the study, it's managed by two administrators, father and daughter, the latter acting as the lead administrator, and there is one manager between the board and the general consultants. The consultants have no hierarchical difference thereby respect a horizontal hierarchy and are divided into teams according to the type of service they provide. Such consulting services can be in the area of audit, human resources and quality assurance or project management. Lastly, the firm's main area of expertise is European funding.

To delve into the intricacies of strategy decisions its small size allowed for a high level of intimacy with its consultants providing the study with a detailed view on team dynamics, pressures felt and concerns. Due to the fact the chosen method of approach to the main theme is the use of a case study, the study is largely influenced by the subject firm's previously mentioned specifications, whereby the study's conclusions may deviate from the intended outcome to create guidelines for the benefit of consultancy firms in general.

Therefore, to avoid rendering this research ineffective and, instead, complement it to enrich its findings, hence capitalizing on the personalized experience of the researcher, the firm's characteristics are taken into account and cautioned when analysing the results. The characteristics identified are the following: Family owned; Small size; Horizontal hierarchy; Experience.

According to Spence (1999), the limitation regarding size can translate to behaviours of "multi-tasking" and "fire fighting" or even "controlled by informal mechanisms" or "mistrustful of bureaucracy". Hatum and Pettigrew (2004) point to the "centralization and formalization of the decision-making process" and the "degree of professionalization of the top team" as relevant determinants of organizational flexibility in family-owned firms. Additionally, Ostroff (1999) claims the horizontal hierarchy to be the most effective structure, and which can "yield an organization capable of responding to today's diverse challenges". Finally, Laforet (2013) discovered a higher propension by old companies to "introduce innovations beyond their core competency" rather than new companies.

1.4 Case-Study Research Activities

The presented case-study had a duration of seven months divided into two distinct phases: A first phase with a longer duration due to its importance to the deep and holistic comprehension of the firm's environment and circumstances; A second and final phase to step outside of the researcher experience and question it, complement it with the adequate and thorough study and perform a meticulous analysis in order to test hypothesis and contribute to a valuable discussion.

To fulfil the purpose of a meaningful investigation, the researcher integrated the subject firm as part of their workforce with the purpose of witnessing first hand, not only the internal dynamics of the firm, but also the communication and interaction between the firm and the client with which the firm was executing the Pop-Up strategy. Moreover, in light of the study by Qu & Dumay (2011), to gather valuable information from interviews, researchers are required to be properly and deeply informed on the themes of the investigation. This is accentuated by the interpretation problem between what the manager says and what the researcher is able to understand, thus entailing a necessary level of researcher involvement in the specific business world (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Schwartzman, 1993). The integration in the firm's circumstances was halved into Direct Research Activities and Indirect Research Activities.

1.4.1 Direct Research Activities

Activities directly related to the research were those incorporated into the Pop-Up Strategy, placing the researcher in contact with the City Hall, the local government client, and the internal project team, which was made up of five plus two members and divided into five roles according to experience and availability. Two experienced consultants had the role of First Respondents, they were the ones to answer to the client whenever needed and provided the majority of the assistance. The researcher and another less experienced member took the role of Support, researching the projects being worked on and identifying upcoming projects in order to advise the client on possible engagements. The last of the primary five members of the team took the role of Backup Consultant or Second Responder and was the failsafe to possible mismatches in the First Responder' schedule. Finally, the two outstanding members were the project manager, responsible for the organization of the team and the distribution of the firm's project portfolio, and the firm's administrator, whose duty was to maintain and nurture the relationship with the City Hall, specifically with its Vice-President and several top managers.

Engaging directly in activities proved to be of considerable significance for comprehending the research's overarching strategy. The role of Support encompassed a triad of strategic facets, namely, research, analysis & the subsequent report of ongoing and prospective projects, communication and knowledge transfer with the First Respondents and the conveying of the analysis and counsel to the client's upper management. This approach facilitated the researcher in attaining a comprehensive grasp of the realm pertaining to European Funds, thereby equipping them with the ability to decipher project requisites alongside their complete lifecycle. Consequently, this led to a heightened comprehension of the strategic imperatives at hand.

1.4.2 Indirect Research Activities

In what pertains the remaining activities, their objective involved the attainment of a comprehensive outlook on the organizational behaviours of the firm. This pursuit aimed to cultivate the proficiency necessary for discerning disparities associated with the Pop-Up strategy. The set of activities chosen were the integration of the consultant team in the development of applications, active involvement in the execution of audit projects and a voluntary renewal of the office archives.

Among these activities, the foremost priority was accorded to the integration of the consultant team for application development, primarily due to its time sensitivity and inherent significance for the organization. This imperative entailed providing consultancy services to educational institutions, predominantly public schools, in the formulation and implementation of an application aligned with the second Call of *Centros Tecnológicos*

Especializados[4] (Specialized Technological Centres) inserted in the component *Qualifications and Skills* of Portugal's Recovery and Resilience Plan[5].

The researcher assumed responsibility for managing four distinct clients, overseeing a cumulative total of seven applications[6]. Performing the task included multifaceted approach involving regular consultations with clients, weekly collaborative sessions with the internal team, an exhaustive examination of the stipulated norms, objectives, and procedural aspects of the call, the creation of guidelines for each criterion of analysis along with other members of the internal team and the review and analysis of the client's progress and subsequent counselling. Tailored support was provided to each client, contingent upon their individual capacity, competencies, existing rapport with the organization, and the remaining timeline for the call's submission. For example, newly onboarded clients were afforded a higher frequency of face-to-face meetings to foster intimacy and rapport. Conversely, as the deadline for submission approached, an online format was favoured to optimize productive work time. Clients with prior experience in the preceding call received a more streamlined level of assistance, while maintaining periodic interactions, ensuring that no interval exceeded one week. This approach amalgamated strategic flexibility with targeted support, optimizing the collaborative dynamics for each unique client scenario.

The activity proved invaluable to the understanding of internal organizational dynamics, as well as client dynamics. As we will see further in this study, the activity's clients behaved very differently from CMM and the communication patterns observed among the firms' constituents presented an additional layer of differentiation. Despite the acknowledged uniqueness of the application itself, it is worth noting that the application process provided a noteworthy glimpse into the broader operational contours akin to those encountered in the Pop-Up Strategy.

The audit project in which the researcher participated exhibited a briefer duration, as it encompassed a smaller subset of characteristics germane to the focal strategy under investigation. In undertaking this role, the researcher was necessitated to acquire proficiency in the technical tools employed by the firm, coupled with a nuanced understanding of the associated innovations, to effectively execute the requisite accounting tasks. Unlike the

[4] For the Portuguese file announcing the call see: https://centrostecnologicos.gov.pt/

[5] For information regarding the Portuguese EU plan see: https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/portugals-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en

[6] Each school can apply to more than one type of technological centre, but not more than one of each type.

previous activity, direct interaction with clients was absent; however, collaborative efforts within the team played a pivotal role in this endeavour.

For the interests of the paper, the collaborative engagement within the team led to a more complete understanding of the process of knowledge transfer among consultants. The project also aided the researcher in the construction of a clear strategical picture of the project and tool portfolios of the firm, as well as in comprehending the firm's innovation from within.

Finally, the researcher voluntarily took action to renew the office archives in an attempt to improve the firm's work environment and help to decrease its carbon footprint. This goal was reached after a thorough analysis of the archives, assisted by the consultants who originally made said documents, after which the researcher contacted the firm's quality assurance team and liaised with an office waste company culminating in a successful outcome, wherein 545 kilograms of paper underwent secure destruction, ensuring its appropriate recycling.

Regardless of the voluntary and physical nature of the effort, the analysis of archives was key to the cognizance of the firm's knowledge transfer both with the client and internally. Furthermore, it allowed for the inspection of the evolutionary trajectory of knowledge transfer over the past two decades, including its concurrent process of digitalization.

1.5 Purpose of the Investigation & Research Questions

Literature of industry's innovation is well researched, namely by one of the fathers of economics, Joseph A. Schumpeter. It tells us, through famous examples such as the US tyre industry and the Akron cluster, about how the effects of a shift in the 'business as usual' of a mature industry presents a difficult challenge for the experienced incumbent firms (Schmitz, 1992). It is also studied that an institutional change causes a shift in the industry forcing incumbents to look for other strategies (Walker et al., 2002). In this case, a link in the vertical chain was removed when a competence transfer from public schools to the respective city halls occurred causing a complete shift in the client pool of a firm, while also presenting an opportunity for strategy innovation.

The purpose of this Investigation is, thus, to comprehensively examine and analyse the Pop-Up strategy, which resulted from the radical change in the firm's environment. Guided by a comprehensive literature review, the researcher aims to answer a primary research question and following the response with a subsequent second question:

RQ1: How can the Pop-Up strategy be effectively implemented within the context of a public sector project-based consulting firm?
RQ2: What organizational changes and adaptations are necessary when implementing the Pop-Up strategy in a public sector project-based consulting firm?

2. Literature Review

The research stage is explicitly delineated within the research questions to uphold the credibility and robustness of the outcomes, in that sense and as highlighted by Ginter & Duncan (1990) in stating the importance of the macroenvironmental analysis in the strategic framework, the starting point of this research is the in-depth exploration of the public sector project-based management consulting realm to enhance the subsequent, more intricate, investigation phase.

It is relevant to acknowledge that while the subject matter may be intrinsically connected to the argument against the creation and development of close relationships between private agents and public institutions, the author consciously abstained from delving extensively into the political dimension. The decision is driven by the alignment of the present approach with the consultant perspective as well as the strategic intent to maintain a narrow focus of investigation. Such circumscribed investigative scope would be otherwise unfeasible if the aforementioned dimension were to be explored. As such, while the paper will cursorily allude to political implications, it will be mentioned in a more generalized form.

Lastly, prior to the investigation, following the paramount consideration of maintaining focus on the main theme of the research, the definition of the main strategy under examination is reiterated once more.

Pop-Up Strategy: The establishment of a continuous relationship whereby the client requests, at will, a temporary service from the firm to fulfil an excess of demand or lack of expertise.

2.1 Environment analysis

2.1.1 Management Consulting

Management Consulting is not without its controversy, scholarly discourse is extensive in the attempt to define the practice (Kipping & Clark, 2012; Engwall & Kipping, 2013; Cerruti et al., 2019) due to the inherent ambiguity of its object. Within this academic discourse, some authors prefer a philosophical approach to its definition (Butler, 2008) forging a connection with the human behavioural inclination towards giving advice, while others tend to opt for a more pragmatic perspective to allow for an evaluation over its inherent value (Wright & Kitay, 2002).

In the midst of the discussion, Greiner and Metzger (1983) provide a definition that has gained considerable acceptance within the field (Srinivasan, 2014; Pereira et al., 2017). They assert that management consulting is a service of the advisory nature contracted for and provided to organizations by trained and specialized individuals. Notably, they further elucidate that the service can be extended to the implementation of the solution.

This service, along with the associated client-consultant relationship can be characterized as knowledge-based, necessitating to be well delineated in what concerns time and task specificity (Werr & Styhre, 2002). The need to specify the task stems from the value ambiguity of a knowledge-based service which can be understood through fundamental communication models, exemplified by the Shannon-Weaver model of communication[7]. In this context, the defining rule is that if any of the six components involved in the transmission of a message failed to perform (seven after 'feedback' was considered as a component by Norbert Weiner), the accurate and holistic transmission of the message itself would be compromised.

Werr and Styhre (2002) are meticulous in their study of the client-consultant relationship. They identify two branches of literature related to external viewpoint of the dynamic: the functionalist literature and the critical literature. The former consists of a view more resonant to our accepted definition put forth by Greiner and Metzger (1983) where the relationship could be viewed as the consultant providing assistance. In contrast, the latter switches the power dynamics transforming the consultant into the dominant agent having control of the client through his strategies. The different dynamics of the relationship affect the overall behaviours of the consultant. Consequently, the prerequisite of both time and task specificity and the intricacies of the client-consultant relationship emerge as first points of interest within our investigation into the implementation dynamics of the Pop-Up strategy. Furthermore, as underscored by Gustafsson & Lundblad (2019), in knowledge intensive firms, it is imperative to ensure the elevated quality of knowledge due to its centrality as the core product of the consulting firm. Therefore, knowledge management should be further investigated as yet another critical aspect of our paper.

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[7] To see a more detailed explanation of the Shannon-Weaver model of communication see: https://helpfulprofessor.com/shannon-weaver-model/

In order to achieve a practical orientation, it is important to identify the consulting services in a precise manner. For that reason, the following hierarchy of the consultant's eight main objectives as proposed by Turner (1982) is taken into consideration:

1. Providing information to a client
2. Solving a client's problems
3. Making a diagnosis, which may necessitate redefinition of the problem
4. Making recommendations based on the diagnosis
5. Assisting with implementation of recommended solutions
6. Building a consensus and commitment around corrective action
7. Facilitating client learning—that is, teaching clients how to resolve similar problems in the future
8. Permanently improving organizational effectiveness

This structured definition serves as a framework for enhanced precision in understanding the implications inherent to a management consulting strategy.

2.1.2 Project-Based Organizations

During the second half of the twentieth century organizations faced an increasingly changing environment forcing the revaluation of their managerial approach into a more versatile project-based approach (J. R. Turner & Keegan, 1999). Through the creation of temporary teams or task-forces firms were empowered to address innovative ideas and assist organizational change while maintaining everything *ceteris paribus* (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995).

Gareis & Huemann (2007) define this entity as being project oriented with an organizational strategy based on its projects. This organization entails the continuous management of a portfolio of the various types of projects while recurring to a permanent location to perform integrative functions. Through the adept orchestration of portfolio management, interlinking the temporary organizations (projects), and fortified by the execution of integrative functions, the final characteristic underlined by their research is the flexibility providing the ability to navigate through uncertainty and change. This is further supported in the context of volatile markets of freelance contracting in which the Project-Based Organization (PBO) becomes the most effective framework (Cattani et al., 2011).

Moreover, the project at the core of the firm has the specific requirements of time and task (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). This aligns with the previous findings in management consulting, which is not surprising given the temporary nature of consulting arrangements. Lundin & Söderholm (1995) extend the concerns of a project to include the project team as it is catered to the unique attributes of the project, thus, indicating the aspect of internal organization as research theme to explore further.

Of interest to our paper is the capability of this inherently flexible organization to reconfigure itself contrasting with the anti-innovation bias of large integrated, hierarchical organizations (Hobday, 2000). A practical comparison can be drawn between the creation of an entirely new department against the much more streamlined creation of a project. In addition, the project bears considerably less financial risk due to the low initial investment, resulting in a higher willingness to its creation even more so in a scenario of outcome uncertainty — a hallmark of innovation.

To make sense of the fundamental rationale behind the long-term strength of a PBO, it is necessary to recognize that while a project is transitory and unique, the type of project can remain stably unaltered in its overall processes. This idiosyncrasy facilitates the development of methodologies and practices ensuring that, even though a project is novel, its execution can be effectively guided through tried and tested methods (Keegan & Turner, 2002). Complementing this finding and supporting the long-term resilience of the project-based organization, the capacity to develop methods implies the evaluation and analysis of past experiences leading to the opportunity to correct mistakes, thus enabling higher quality of work for future projects. This is corroborated in the argument by Davies & Brady (2000) that with an increasing number of projects executed, this learning process creates 'economies of repetition'.

Following the trajectory of this transition from continuous to a finite scope of the PBO, Miterev et al. (2016), supported by Keegan et al. (2012), highlight the relevance of another aspect of internal organization: the adaptation of rewards systems to the organization's structure. To reach this alignment, their research accepts main priority to long term rewards through the functional hierarchy which aids in the environment of a team and prevents mercenary behaviours among consultants being short-sighted. After which their paper asserts that more focused rewards should be dependent on project performance.

It could also be argued that, as rewards, incentives should be adapted to the structure of the PBO. This is due to their essential role in the achievement of 'economies of repetition' which are dependent on the consultant's ability and motivation to analyse past work and communicate project's knowledge.

Therefore, despite the absence of explicit mention of the client-consultant relationship in our research of the domain of a project-based organization, the findings not only reinforce our previous critical aspects, namely strategic specificity of both time and task and Knowledge Management but broadens the scope of our investigation to include the Internal Organization of the firm.

2.1.3 Public Sector

Through our research we have established a clear view of the inner workings that underlie the project-based consulting firm, identifying the primary concerns that should be considered when planning any type of strategy. Before we delve into the specifics of each concern, our investigation turns to the final component of our sighted environment, the client side: the public sector.

The public sector can be said to cover the organizations whose funds are in its majority public, are in public ownership and officially recognized charities and foundations whose funds originate mainly from the general public and have research as the main mission (Senker, 2000). These organizations are known to have difficulties to implement change (Isett et al., 2013) and, when compared with the private counterparts, are generally considered as exhibiting lower levels of efficiency and innovation (Roumboutsos & Saussier, 2014).

In this sector, local government institutions are an essential political piece of Europe's liberal democracies providing a diversified array of services such as education, transport, and many others (Stoker, 1991). Last century, this organizations relied on financial support from central government sources. However, this type of funding has been reduced forcing behaviour changes in a dynamic and rapidly evolving environment (Zerbinati & Souitaris, 2005). The reduction in Central Government funding along with the increased demand for change lead to the opportunity for the pursuit of European Funding by the local governments (Zerbinati & Souitaris, 2005). Nonetheless, public sector organizations still have less flexibility, less willingness to risk and more bureaucratic procedures than private sector organizations who are capable of dealing with such changing environmental conditions (Boyne, 2002).

The exploration of public sector consulting dates back to as early as 1976 with Guttman and Willner (1976), where the consultant relationship was depicted so intimately the authors mention consultants as the 'Shadow Government' of the United States. In their studies, researchers have found an important role of consultants as suppliers of competencies that are often lacking within the public sector (Fattore et al., 2017; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004).

Even though consultants are considered as possible agents of strength of public organizations, their practical knowledge of the private practices is debated for its applicability. Some authors have attempted to discover the differences between private and public organizations and found that while they are not grand, they do indeed exist (Rainey et al., 1976; Boyne, 2002). Though public institutions have changed, they still are a complex political network embedded in bureaucracy, thus Meredith & Martin (1970) remain pertinent by their stating that the main distinction was that to consult the government there is the prerequisite for more profound knowledge of the institution and its realm. This holistic perspective required informs us that any relationship with a public organization should contend a large time period to allow for the complete understanding of the specifics of the institution.

Lapsley & Oldfield (2001) confirm this in their investigation discovering that the consultants outlived managers to the point of being considered the repository of organizational memory. Moreover, Fattore et al. (2017) find through their analysis in the Italian public sector that in order to foster change, the survey respondents evaluated as second and third priorities the incorporation of the consulting projects methods and private management tools.

Collectively, the evidence suggests there are important considerations to be made on the careful establishment of the client-consultant relationship between local government and a management consulting firm.

2.1.3.1 Portugal Overview

Seeing that previous knowledge of the public institution is crucial for the effective counselling by the management consultant. Our paper turns to the identification of singularities in the Portugal paradigm to ensure our conclusions are not limited to one country.

Portugal's public administration is considered to be of the Napoleonic model of administration owing to the French invasions of the 19th century (Guogis et al., 2012). More recently, noteworthy milestones have attempted to transform this administration. This is the case of the revolution of the 25th of April of 1974 which ended Salazar's dictatorship and subsequently instituted a parliamentary democratic republic. The entrance in the European Union in 1986 catalysed a modernization wave within Portugal's administration with new public reforms. This wave along with its population's pressure, led to public reforms which brought Portugal's administration closer to the New Public Management (NPM) model.

In this model, the spinal cord is its fusion with private sector management practices in order to increase efficiency (Ferlie et al., 1996), also decentralization comes as a consequence of NPM reforms due to its dependence on local capacities and managerialism (Ferlie et al., 2005).

Finally, a pessimistic outlook prevails among public managers in Portugal regarding performance management changes claiming that performance information is primarily used to satisfy top managers and evaluate subordinates, rather than to provide solutions (Melo & Mota, 2020).

To conclude, even though Portugal has been making public administration reforms to modernize its structure, there is evidence that it has not been successful (Rhodes et al., 2012).

2.2 Review of Points of Interest

The realm at hand in this investigation has now been comprehensively grasped to a satisfactory degree. Through the review done in this paper, the critical points of interest of our future research steps were pinpointed, thus our investigation can proceed confidently to the identification the conditions imposed on both the strategy and the consultancy firm.

As a reminder of our selected themes to further scrutinize, the themes are highlighted in the following list:

- Client-Consultant Relationship
- Knowledge Management
- Internal Organization

The rationale behind the theme order stems from our paper's continued progression to explore from the broad picture into detail, hence narrowing our scope with each step. In this stage, commences with the relationship between the individuals inside the organizations to understand the intricacies of what connects them, this is followed by research on the specification of the consultant firm and its greatest resource, Knowledge, and, finally, ending with the organization sustaining this resource, thus narrowing the investigation from the scope of both organizations to the details of the intended perspective. By means of this rationale, this research can achieve a significant level of pragmatic knowledge while always capable of adapting it to the environment around it.

2.2.1 Client-Consultant Relationship

As a result of the previous review, it has been established that the client consultant relationship requires a clear time period and tasks owing to the fact that it depends on such a broad and yet nebulous resource that is knowledge. It has also been established in the Public Sector review that a fruitful consultant-local government relationship requires extensive experience and a long duration.

Taking these findings into due consideration, our research will follow the avenue identified in the review of management consulting. The exploration of the two currents of the client-consultant literature, functionalist and critical perspectives, as these views influence the expected behaviours of our relationship's parties.

As mentioned before, Werr and Styhre (2002), perform an exceptional job analysing the client-consultant literature, thus achieving an academic paper of great value to our research. For that reason, their paper will be the source for our understanding of both strands of literature.

On the one hand, according to the authors, the functionalist literature can be characterized by a client led relationship, the action originates and finishes with the client that seeks the consultant for a specific knowledge. This agrees with the definition that the consultant job is rooted on specialized individuals. This relationship can be considered more transactional and direct as the study informs us that the client seeks an external individual who can evaluate the scenarios through an objective lens.

Furthermore, this perspective corroborates the identified task and time specificity as the authors state that the contents of the relationship are pre-established to avoid any fees from the supplier side, hence removing any bargaining power from the consultant. Lastly, the paper adeptly concludes that because of the inferior stance of the consultant, trust is of the utmost importance to achieve success forcing a profound adaptation to the client.

On the other hand, Werr and Styhre (2002), notice critical literature does not view the relationship as much transactional. The consultant is called to convince the client of its value rather than simply providing a predefined service. The lack of definition offers the consultant an opportunity to seize control through its persuasiveness to demonstrate itself as a problem solver and a valuable ally to the client, which is supported by Lapsley & Oldfield's (2001) finding that the consultant is viewed by the public organization as part of the institution. In this case, the client is depicted as a manager with internal pressures to perform well in a business environment where the correlation between decisions and success is blurry, thus the consultant's suggestions stemming from specialized knowledge and a comprehensive view on the client's concerns allow for the control of the client. This is corroborated by the increased demand for consultant services by public organizations in times of austerity (Steiner et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, Werr & Styhre's papers enlighten us to the limitation of the consultant power through internal pressures to retain the client for future business.

In the researcher's analysis, the client consultant relationship is not limited to one or the other perspective, instead it shifts by influence of 'discourses', represented as the characteristics of the institutions and practices around it. In this alternative perspective, the rigidity or flexibility of the client's institution influences the path of the relationship.

On the whole, the client-consultant relationship can be defined as a dynamic interplay marked by shifts in proximity and power, largely driven by internal pressures, systems and inter-dependency. Consequently, the behaviours of the consultant can range from a disciplined soldier following orders and nurturing trust to a strong ally whose input is par with the client's.

2.2.2 Knowledge Management

So far, we have understood the importance of knowledge management in any consultancy endeavour. Without the rigorous and appropriate mechanisms, a consultancy firm's service is rendered completely ineffective. The ramifications extend beyond the nullification of gains from singular projects and include erosion of the quality of the firm's knowledge in the absence of economies of repetition. Additionally, the inexistence of an adequate record of the project impairs the firm's ability to survive on the long-term as its capacity becomes dependent of its individual consultants and their ability to share their findings with new collaborators.

These findings are even more present within the context of a relationship with local government, as we found the elevated significance of experience and continuous engagement.

Literature on this theme further supports the previous findings and underscore its relevant considerations. Sydow et al. (2004) state that the correct transfer and record of knowledge of past projects is imperative in order to be useful for future projects.

A potential source of failure is connected to the recent technological paradigm in which the world finds itself, wherein the adoption of digital technologies in highly competitive markets can potentially represent the competitive edge against competitors (Parviainen et al., 2022).

Another pertinent concern revolves around the consultants and their responsibility to be disciplined and communicative in the process of knowledge transfer. While they serve as the primary agents accruing valuable experience, the responsibility may be at the risk of being forgotten or put in second plan by employees due to pressures to complete other tasks (Larsson, 2018).

Larsson (2018) adds in his research of digital methodologies that good practices include the writing of extensive documents with summaries and the addition of description of events that led to successful scenarios. Verteramo & De Carolis (2001) corroborate these insights in their identification of problems with knowledge management referring to the risk of high engagement in individual activities in detriment of collective improvement. The authors mention the time pressure consideration as well where the lack of reflection time after a project, specially if the project teams are also temporary, inhibits knowledge gains.

Moreover, in contexts where communication is practiced amongst consultants, added gains are experienced due to the *learning by thinking*[8] process done by the main communicator of the knowledge (Prencipe & Tell, 2001).

To synthesize, a project goes beyond both the client consultant relationship and the activities related to the specified task. A great deal of effort must be allocated to the internal synchronization of the project information with the firm's database. This entails the active involvement of consultants in hard reporting as well as sharing with colleagues and upper management. It also shouldn't be disregarded the vitality of incorporating the right technological and digital tools to the competitive landscape.

[8] To understand the process of learning by thinking, see: Di Stefano, G., Gino, F., Pisano, G. P., & Staats, B. R. (2014). Learning by Thinking: How Reflection aids performance. Social Science Research Network. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2414478

2.2.3 Internal Organization

As the last piece of our literature review, we turn our attention to internal organization of the project team. Summarizing what has been found, our environment analysis covered the theme of the consultant's motivation and focus to pursue the firm's best interests, the investigation of the client consultant relationship highlighted the different nuanced behaviours of a consultant depending on its context and our dive into the knowledge management subject surfaced the imperative processes that require enforcement from the firm.

These findings create a logical connection with how the team must be, aligning the team's composition with the nature of activities and behaviours, hence this theme focuses on the mentality that should exist when forming a team and its characteristics.

When confronted with the decision of which consultant to assign a project or even which candidate to accept, the criteria that might come to mind is the competences needed. Even though, at first, since it is a specific knowledge industry, one may conjure that specific task knowledge gains prevalence in the selection, however broader knowledge is more valued (Paris et al., 2000).

Such preference for adaptability can be better comprehended when paired with the consideration that team adaptability is a vital capacity that improves performance and fulfilment of client expectations (Klarner et al., 2013). Klarner et al. (2013) continue this logic through the discovery that, much like the present literature review, from a broader point of view it becomes easier to adapt to a more specific task and specific knowledge can be gained with effective communication with the client. An example is the added value of a senior manager in a client consultant relationship due to his experience to handle clients (Foley, 1997).

An interesting practice studied by Reihlen and Nikolova (2010) is the grouping of functional business areas, such as IT consulting or the energy industry. Their research finds this practice to enable consultant specialization and improvements in communication with client and colleagues. Additionally, this grouping allows for consultants to easily identify other consultants with relevant knowledge and motivates them to create standardized work practices to ensure stable service quality overtime (Dutton & Jackson, 1987).

Lastly, the creation of a new project team englobes a new distribution of the consultant's effort through his several projects. Consequently, other projects and consultants not directly involved in the new assignment are affected summoning a re-organization of the firm's projects (Pellegrinelli, 1997).

On the whole, the formation of a project team requires a diverse team involving members of different ranks with situational knowledge and a capacity to conceptualize strategy to face different clients demands. Furthermore, the firm might benefit from grouping areas of business to ensure consultant specialization, nevertheless, this grouping can be detrimental to the team's adaptability, thus the choice necessitates context specific analysis.

2.3 Summary of the Literature Review

Before moving onto the case-study itself, we glance at the findings of our literature review so that the tools with which we will study the practical case are consolidated.

Through a macro analysis of the context of the case-study firm, we found four themes that deserved our attention:

- Task and Time Specificity: This theme emphasizes the importance of clear and specific responsibilities for each party involved in a contractual relationship before its execution.

- Client-Consultant Relationship: We recognized the dynamic nature of this relationship, which is heavily influenced by internal pressures, systems, and interdependencies within both parties. Our interviews aim to uncover the nuances of this relationship in the Pop-up strategy.

- Knowledge Management: This theme underscores the critical role of knowledge management in the long-term success of a consulting firm. It encompasses both hard information and social communication, along with the activities facilitating knowledge transmission. During our interviews, we will explore how the firm perceives its own knowledge management systems and their impact on the Pop-Up Strategy.

- Internal Organization: Our review of this theme shed light on the characteristics of a team engaged in multiple projects and guided us towards a contextual analysis of the Pop-up strategy's team to assess the value of different workflows.

With this comprehensive understanding derived from our literature review, we are well-prepared to effectively investigate the practical case of the Pop-Up Strategy. These guiding themes will inform our interviews and allow us to gain valuable insights into how the strategy has been implemented and its impact. As we proceed, the questions we aim to answer are:

RQ1: How can the Pop-Up strategy be effectively implemented within the context of a public sector project-based consulting firm?

RQ2: What organizational changes and adaptations are necessary when implementing the Pop-Up strategy in a public sector project-based consulting firm?

3. Methodology

In this stage, we explain the foundational methodology underpinning our investigative approach and briefly elucidate on its practical application.

3.1 Rationale for the Methodology

In this research, the approach chosen was an exploratory research with the purpose of combining theory and reality to extract the maximum potential of the research insights (Reiter, 2017). Additionally, the exploratory approach is adequate when several variables relating to the participants are unknown (Adams et al., 2007). A case study was selected due to its suitability in the study of phenomenon with no with no predefined outcomes (Fridlund, 1997) which is the case of a new strategy such as the Pop-up Strategy in public sector project-based consulting firms. Moreover, the strategy represents a contemporary event in which the researcher has no behavioural control, thus the case-study is the appropriate technique according to Yin (2017). The specific type of case-study is an interpretive case study, chosen to gain a deeper understanding the active agents' perspective of their own context (Runeson & Höst, 2008).

The data utilized in the analysis of the case study investigation was gathered through a qualitative interview approach. Interviews were chosen dues to the objective of qualitative methods to find patterns and create meanings in the "communicative characteristics of language" (Biggs et al., 2021). Furthermore, interviews serve as a valuable means for the researcher to gain deeper insights into the perspectives and experiences of others (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The interviews in this study were conducted using a semi-structured interview format. Even though the structured interview may facilitate the quantification and analysis of results (Agarwal & Tanniru, 1990), and the less structure the more expertise required from the interviewer (Rowley, 2012), the structured form is appropriate to a goal driven investigation where the researcher is looking for specific results (Agarwal & Tanniru, 1990).

In the context of this research, the semi-structured interview format was deemed appropriate as it strikes a balance between providing some guidance and flexibility for participants to express their views and experiences, aligning with the exploratory nature of the study.

3.2 Application of the Methodology

As emphasized in the beginning of this research, a preliminary research phase was conducted for a period of five months followed by a pure investigative period of two months culminating in seven months of research. During the first stage, the researcher studied was inducted in the work-life of the case study consulting firm. This experience and continuous comparison of reality and theory developed, within the researcher a holistic notion of the interplay between individual consultants, team behaviour as well as task specificities and strategy nuances.

By means of the gained knowledge, the interviewees could speak freely as they were in a context adapted to their professional environment. The importance of this first phase stems from the important procedure to correctly interpret and formulate a semi-structured guide is the investigation and gathering of relevant information prior to considering the questions to ask so to increase its quality (Dilley, 2000).

3.2.1 Interview Guide

The flexibility of a semi-structured interview comes with an added effort to carefully design an interview guide that will effectively lead the interview and the interviewee to elaborate on the studied themes (Kallio et al., 2016). For this purpose, Rowley (2012) found the questions must follow the following rules:

- Not have implicit assumptions;
- Not include two questions in one;
- Not have yes or no answers;
- Not be vague or general;
- Not be invasive.

Our question guide, which is demonstrated in Table 1, had these rules as its foundation. In its final form, the interview guide underwent a multi-step refinement process, based on the five steps proposed by Kallio et al. (2016): identifying cause for semi structured interview; gathering knowledge; formulating a first draft guide; performing a pilot test; presenting the complete guide.

The research themes were based on the literature review and are presented on the left column of the interview guides. The theme of 'Basis of opportunity for the firm" is used to ensure the coverage of alternative questioning avenues.

Executive Administrator	
Knowledge Management	What is your perception of the storage and information organization strategies used in the firm?
Internal Organization	This project represents a new responsibility for consultants. How is this added workload managed? How do you assess the suitability of the incentive and compensation systems for this growth-oriented vision?
	What challenges does this strategy pose for the firm in terms of internal organization and overall company strategy?
Client-Consultant Relationships	Can you describe your relationship with City hall? How does it compare to other clients?
Time and Task specificity	How do you project the time spent with the council? What evaluation methods are used? In your analysis, apart from yourself, how many consultants should be partially or fully involved with a council? What does the strategy consist of? Can you clarify what the key objectives and goals are that you aim to achieve with this strategy?
Basis of Opportunity for the firm	What were the main considerations in selecting the target client for this strategy? What issues did you identify within the City hall that created this opportunity? And within the firm? What were the reasons for deciding that a strategy of this nature was necessary?

Table 1 Interview Guide for the Executive Administrator

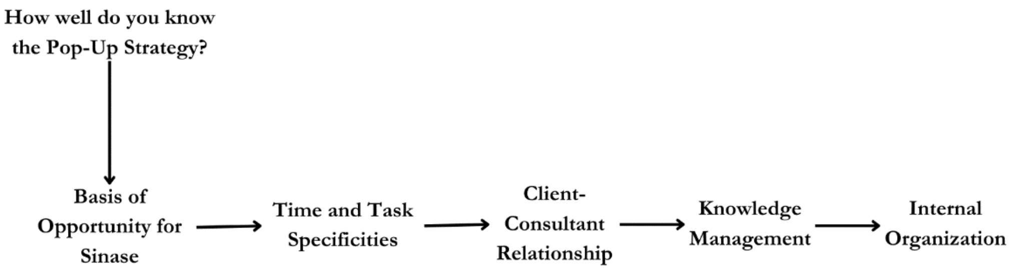
General Consultants	
Knowledge Management	What is your perception of the storage and information organization strategies? If you needed assistance for the CITY HALL team, do you feel there is access to the necessary tools and information? How is the choice of information storage made?
Internal Organization	How do you view the possibility of working on the CITY HALL project? Has your perception of the project and the effort involved changed after observing colleagues working on the same project? What is your assessment of the compensation for effort at Firm? Specifically, related to the CITY HALL project. Can you describe the nature of teamwork you experience at Firm? Are there any challenges or obstacles in aligning the team with this new strategy? Can you provide details? What resources or support do you think would be beneficial for the team to improve the execution of this strategy? How has the team been affected by the strategy?
Client-Consultant Relationships	Can you describe the nature of your relationship with a client?
Time and Task Specificity	What metrics does the firm use to evaluate the success of tasks?
Basis of Opportunity for Firm	What is your assessment of the strategy pursued by the firm with this collaboration?

Table 2 Interview Guide for Consultants not directly involved in the Pop-up strategy.

Pop-Up Consultants	
Knowledge Management	What is your perception of the storage and information organization strategies? If you needed assistance for the CITY HALL team, do you feel there is access to the necessary tools and information? How is the choice of information storage made?
Client-Consultant Relationships	The relationship with Maia involves collaboration with various individuals within the CITY HALL hierarchy. Can you describe, if any, the types of relationships between consultant and client? Within this team, do you have the ability to advise the council on applications and projects through leadership? What differences does this proximity bring to your work? How do you compare this client to others you have worked with?
Internal Organization	How do you rate the way the communication of this strategy was carried out among all consultants in the Firm? How confident are you that the Firm can implement this strategy and achieve the proposed objectives? In the normal functioning of the Firm, how is the continuity of projects ensured? For example, if a consultant were unavailable. How do you feel about being part of this team? How does the actual work with CITY HALL compare to your expectations? How do you view this responsibility, which is new, both for yourself and for the Firm? In what ways has the Firm supported you in this project?
Time and Task Specificities	How do you evaluate your position within the spectrum from subcontractor to advisor? Please explain. What is the reason for a client to consider the services of the Firm? What metrics does the Firm use to evaluate the success of tasks? Do you believe the agreement between the Firm and CITY HALL reflects the consultant's effort?
Basis of Opportunity for Firm	What problems do you identify in the management of the council? Do you believe the Firm's involvement helps eliminate these problems, merely shifts the responsibility of resolving them to the Firm, or is it indifferent? What is the reason for a client to consider the services of the Firm?

Table 3 Interview Guide for Consultants directly involved in the Pop-up strategy.

The following figure shows the chain of themes followed during the interviews.



4 Figure demonstrating the chain of themes followed in the interviews

3.2.2 Interview Participants

In terms of the selection of the participants, Rowley (2012) finds that the important aspects are the creation of a profile to assist in the search for participants in a position to maximize potential insights and level of access to the participant. Furthermore, Rowley (2012) offers a rule of thumb and advice for novice researchers, suggesting combination of number of interviews and duration of between 12 interviews lasting thirty minutes each and six interviews lasting one hour each.

Regarding the first aspect, the profile, there was a concern to create a diversified pool of interviewees in what related the characteristics of: Job role; Experience and Relation to the Pop-Up Strategy. The variety in this characteristic augments the probability of different perspectives of the Pop-up Strategy which in turn improves the interview's data quality. Furthermore, due to the impact of the strategy on its main consultant, the team that he is in contact with the most (participants #5, #6, #7 and #8) was all chosen to be interviewed.

The thought process of accessibility was dependent on two main variables, consultant availability and comfort level with the researcher. The comfort level was dependent on the contact of the potential interviewee with the researcher during the first stage of the investigation. For availability purposes, the interviews were conducted via online format in a videocall, thus maintaining a visual contact with the interviewees while also increasing their availability. This approach proved advantageous since some participants were in a different city. Another factor that posed a constraint preventing the execution of additional interviews was the potential participants' days off.

Ultimately, a total of nine interviews were conducted, recorded with explicit interviewee authorization, resulting in 164 transcription pages. Eight of which lasted approximately 45 minutes each and one more extended duration, lasting one hour and twenty minutes. All profile characteristics had different representation in the interviewee pool as it is demonstrated in Table 1.

Interviewees' Profile				
Participant	Job Role	Experience	Relation to the Pop-Up Strategy	Duration
#1	Consultant	7 years	Main consultant of the strategy	80 minutes
#2	Executive Administrator	20 years	Responsible for the creation and negotiation of the strategy	45 minutes
#3	Consultant	13 years	Assistant consultant to the strategy	45 minutes
#4	Consultant	21 years	Project Team Leader	45 minutes
#5	Consultant	13 years	Works on other projects with #1	45 minutes

#6	Consultant	13 years	Works on other projects with #1	45 minutes
#7	Consultant	4 years	Works on other projects with #1	45 minutes
#8	Consultant	1 year	Assistant analyst to the strategy #1	45 minutes
#9	Consultant	35 years	Works on other projects with #3	45 minutes

Table 5 List of interview participants

4. Analysis and Results

In the following section is composed two halves. Firstly, a report and discussion of the interviews is presented along with a comparison with theoretic takeaways from previous sections. Secondly, results are debated culminating in the response to the paper's two research questions.

4.1 Analysis

In order to establish facilitate the discussion of the interview results, each primary theme identified during the literature review is analysed individually in a table. The table then is sub divided into the main insights learned when exploring the primary theme in the interviews.

Time and Task Specificity	
Variety of the task	**#4:** "At least not in this record of everything, everything that comes up for funding. We will now, if they give us, look at everything that comes up for social matters here in the City Hall. Alright, ready. There aren't always applications on the social side."
	#3: "The know-how of the City Hall is difficult to acquire at this moment. Initially, it's something that is gained, as there are different projects, and it is an attempt to improve the know-how by specifying it in each department."
Amount of tasks	**#1:** "However, we have to choose our city councils. We don't have the capacity for a city council like this one, or rather, for several city councils like this one."
	#4: "I think our focus should not be on entering such large city councils because then it's difficult for us to have a responsive capacity, as the needs are extensive. Maybe we should focus on medium-sized city councils with around 200, 300, 400 employees, which naturally allow for closer monitoring and addressing any potential needs that these municipalities may have."
	#6: "Since there are several projects, yes, the demand is high, so the response also has to be significant, it has to be in the same proportion."

Limits of the collaboration	**#1:** "It was understood that there is some ambiguity regarding the part about applications, what it means to manage and execute applications. Because for us, it has one interpretation, and for them, it has another. For us, the application ends at the moment of approval. It encompasses everything up to the approval of the application. And for them, it might not be exactly like that; the execution of the application itself could be the execution of the project afterward."
	#2: "They were already counting on us continuously, as if we were already there, taking care of the next step, but we aren't. We had to stop them."
	#5: "Initially, she said we had to be there three times a week or even every day, and we even had a space for ourselves. It's not quite like that, so there was a lot of expectation management at the beginning about what the City Hall wanted."

Table 6 Analysis of Time and Task Specificity

The first characteristic identified in this paper was the need for time and task specificity. This necessity appeared due to the difficulty to define the product of the consultant, knowledge. Indeed, as it can be observed, the firm failed to establish clear and defined roles which led to problems, not only in the Client Consultant relationship, but also in capacity management of the firm. Nevertheless, even though it wasn't mentioned as a topic, time definition was clearly communicated to the participants.

The first two topics introduced by the employee's are thus, 'Task Variety' and 'Amount of tasks'. This represents a relevant addition to our notion on the importance of time and task specificity, bringing forth a completely different perspective of its influence and demonstrating that the consultants were taken by surprise by the amount and diversity of work this relationship entailed, thus, hindering their support of the strategy.

Our previous notion focused on the vitality of this characteristic in asserting clear 'Limits of the Collaboration' to serve as the basis of operation to be expected by both parties, which, as seen in the third topic of the Table 5, wasn't well established and led to a higher expectation from the client and to an added pressure on the consultant.

In fact, in the direct observation of the researcher, not only was it noticeable, but the main consultant expressed that this undefinition placed him in a difficult position of trying to maintain a good client relationship while also trying to not overload his own work.

Client-Consultant Relationship	
Internal Pressure	**#1:** "In my view, it's okay, and I think this is the direction we should go. We want to continue with financing and expand into these areas. Without a doubt, these is through the city councils."
	#8: "Strategically, we might lose clients, but we have to go where they will be now, with preparation to possibly diversify our client base in the future due to the work being done."
	#3: "With our firm being a small company, there is a risk, in my opinion, in specializing in a particular area, as it may limit financing opportunities. I think the idea of adopting such a strategy is essentially to open up new specialization opportunities. From there, we can engage with national city councils to undertake various types of projects, potentially leading to the company's growth in that direction."
Client's System Complexity	**#2:** "What we need to be cautious about is that the city councils work with many different departments and various leaders and councillors. Each councillor has their responsibilities within the council, has a leader, and within the leader, there's a team. Therefore, we need to know how to communicate with this network of people, okay? This demands from us..."
	#4: "(...)by areas, in the health sector, with social services, then with infrastructure, with engineers and architects, so we have different points of contact. That's also a challenge."
	#6: "We need to communicate with various parties to reach a conclusion."
Proximity	**#1:** "It's a more distant relationship. We are simply the ones who are there, who need to know what to do and perform the task."
	#2: "The fact that we are not there physically is very important because they don't see us as their employees. Therefore, they don't give us work that isn't ours. They do their job, and we do ours."
	#4: "It's about maximizing the development areas of our clients and almost becoming not just service testers but almost partners of the clients where we carry out our activities."

Trust and Respect	**#5:** "(…) because in the city hall, there are no rules; they do as they please. #1 experienced a burnout because he couldn't handle it. Why? Because there are no rules. (…) whereas my clients have a lot of respect for me. That is much more important to me than anything else."
	#6: "Our professionalism and dedication are questioned."
	#2: "When they are my clients, it means they always talk to me, and I am the one who faces all the problems. This builds a level of trust between the client and the consultant, as well as the consultant's dedication to the client. And this, this is a filter of ours, as a Firm... it also makes our interaction very trustworthy."

Table 7 Analysis of Client-Consultant Relationship

The literature review provided us with guidelines for a context analysis on the client-consultant relationship through a study of the firm's internal pressures, the client's systems and the interdependency between the two parties.

As for the internal pressures, it is unanimous to the participants that the Pop-up Strategy is a big decision and implicates a great commitment, but, ultimately, also believe it is the correct step towards the future of the firm. This commitment is, logically, influenced by the government's decision to transfer the competences of school's management (which are a significant portion of the firm's clients) to local governments. This alignment is essential for the success of the strategy, and it translates into a pressure, even if self-inducted by the consultants, to perform well.

The client, in this case, being a local government institution, aligns with what we learned from the literature regarding potentially lower efficiency levels and higher bureaucratization in such organizations. The interviews confirm these hypothesis and describe the client as a very complex organization, hence very demanding. Furthermore, direct observation of the communication with the city council, revealed that the high level of bureaucracy hinders collaboration, due to a tendency to avoid exiting one's responsibilities limiting themselves to remitting the consultant to contact another worker.

Although interdependency is not depicted as a topic due to it being mentioned by few of the participants, we have established that, on the one hand, the consultant firm is dependent, to a considerable degree, on the client as it is their first experience in the Pop-up strategy and this is the primary strategic bet for the future. On the other hand, there is evidence indicating that the reach of the local institution is also, to some extent, dependent on the consulting firm. For example, participant #4 referred to the firm's strong impact on the client as "They would hardly have had the capacity to submit that number of applications in such a short time." and participant #2 confirmed: "We stopped the applications and made it clear to the client that our collaboration had ended. What happened from the administrative staff to the technical staff, to the management team? Everyone became very concerned.".

Putting it all together, interdependency and internal pressures push the client-consultant relationship towards close relationship, however, there is a high client complexity adding a layer of distance to the communication. Analysing the accounts from the interviewees, there is clearly the intention of developing a partnership between the parties countered by the client's interest to maximize the consultant's assistance. Concluding, at an initial stage of the relationship it is understandable for the relationship to not be rigidly defined, literature tells us this is a dynamic process, thus the relationship appears be evolving in the direction of a partnership.

As an additional topic, when exploring the manner in which the consultants view their relationships with clients and comparing it to a client as city hall, the topic of trust and respect was identified as crucial to their relationships and as lacking in the city hall. This aligns with the literature finding that in a relationship where the consultant is not the party with the most power, building trust is serves a pivotal role in the relationship, thus, as the relationship is in an initial stage, this is seen as an issue.

Knowledge Management	
Information Storage	**#1:** "Sometimes he has a different way of organizing things. Sometimes he doesn't put everything on the server, and then there start to exist some issues. I felt that difficulty"
	#4: "Well, we need something more cross-functional where it records all the information, all the clients you had, and everyone, or those who should have it, had access to that information. If it existed, I get the idea that it would be easier with an application where we could manage each of our clients, regardless of the number of people who may have direct involvement in a set of information."
	#6: "We here in our city have more or less the same organization, but the others have their own organization, so the transition of some colleagues to others is difficult."

Verbal Communication	**#6:** "When it comes to it, national communication has always been a weak point, always something to improve. Since I've been here, it has evolved and improved, without a doubt, and proof of that is the weekly meetings and the manager of the month responsibility. It has improved a lot; much more information is exchanged during those meetings."
	#5: "There was something very, very, very positive about the firm, which is that the weekly meetings okay? Then we also have the monthly meeting, which is important, but the weekly one is more important to me. Why? Because in the weekly meeting, we can convey the problems we've had during that week, and those problems are the knowledge."
Organizational Culture	**#4:** "We rely a lot on sharing information, and often there's great flexibility among various internal participants, meaning anyone, depending on the company's needs, can be called upon to support a specific project for a specific client."
	#8: "But I always felt support from everyone, not only from the team but also from Lisbon, in helping me learn"

Table 8 Analysis of Knowledge Management

As we've learned in the literature, the transmission and storage of knowledge is necessary for the survival of the consultant firm., after all, knowledge is their product, thus, to continuously improve and learn from past versions of the product the information of past projects needs to be kept accessible to all consultants.

As we can see in Table 8 information storage exists in the form of an organized server accessible to all consultants, however, the form in which the information is stored is not uniform throughout the company, resulting in losses in the translation process between consultants. This process can be improved by a reinforcement from the top management, but also by the implementation of a new and more advanced system of storage as participant #4 mentions. This agrees with the literature finding that information storage needs to be accompanied by a continuous update of the digital tools as well as with the finding that a firm cannot leave the storage task to the individual organization of each consultant. Moreover, in the context of the Pop-up strategy where the client is complex, the use of an advanced information system seems even more relevant.

Regarding verbal communication, although there are still negative comments, the weekly and monthly meetings are considered of great importance along with the responsibility of manager of month[9], which forces the consultants to keep up with other

[9] The responsibility of manager of month is an added responsibility of the consultants of each city's team to control the progress of the team and be the point of contact for any situation that may arise unrelated to projects.

projects within their team. Literature supports this notion, emphasizing that regular meetings and effective communication channels are instrumental in facilitating the transfer of knowledge and improving the overall quality of projects.

As a final consideration, the topic of organizational culture is mentioned as facilitator to the transmission of knowledge motivating consultants to be available to assist each other. Therefore, a positive organizational culture that values collaboration, knowledge sharing, and mutual support can significantly enhance assisting the translation process inherent to the written information. This is an example emphasizing the role of upper management in shaping and fostering such a culture. Ultimately this behaviour contributes to the success of the any strategy, including the Pop-up strategy.

Internal Organization	
Team Characteristics	**#2: "**The consultant's learning ability, the consultant's willingness to take risks, and also the ability to manage the project and manage the client."
	#1: "It has to be a team that is willing to blaze a trail. Well-coordinated and more efficient. Perhaps a specialized team, meaning, let's imagine one team focuses more on social aspects, while another focuses more on infrastructure."
	#4: "There isn't an expectation to just wait for things to come pre-formatted, so on one hand, the diversity of projects is much more demanding in my opinion."
Workload distribution	**#2:** "Right now, we have a team of 5/6 members. In this case, we are preparing a sixth. Okay, what does that imply? It means taking these people who were in 'factory' operations and giving them a bit more time to work on the operation."
	#3: "You see, one thing is very good. At this moment, we have a perspective on projects and applications from these groups, but what happens in 3 or 4 months from now? Will the projects quadruple or quintuple? We can't have just one person dedicated 100%. Now imagine this in 2 or 3 city councils, we'll have moments of distress, and the workload will increase."
	#7: Plus, adding stress to #1 is adding stress to the team

Adaptation Period	**#3: "**A reassignment of people in that sense, it can't be sudden"
	#6: "It's a learning period about this, a learning period within that offering, so it's not just entering and that's it. It would be entering and observing, not being in direct contact with the client. You would have time to understand how projects happen or how to deal with clients and whether or not to assist."
	#1: "They said: We'll have 6 months to prepare ourselves well… And, in the second week of January, I was already in a meeting with City hall, talking to 40 people? The only issue is that it's been, at least for me, very abrupt, and I would even consider keeping this. If they did to me what they did with schools, where, I' was there for 6 months learning, with the colleague responsible."

Table 9 Analysis of Internal Organization

The theme of internal organization was the most explored by the participants, this stems from the significant amount and variety of work related to the Pop-up strategy discussed previously.

As was stated, the relationship with the city hall is demanding and involves a large variety of projects, thus, as literature enlightens us, general project competences are extremely important as the participants enumerate, client management and willingness to take risks as well as a learning-oriented approach. Specific knowledge is mentioned as a second step to the strategy, participants hypothesize the possibility of dividing the team in specialized areas of knowledge. However, there is the concern among interviewees that dividing a small team might compromise its ability to provide continuous support in all matters as the members lose the flexibility to substitute each other: "There always has to exist a common base of knowledge" (#3).

The interviews called the attention to workload distribution. On the one hand, the main consultant in the case-study suffered a burnout at one point due to a task overload, this was due to the lack of additional members in the team at that point, hence the correct distribution of workload requires the consideration of sudden increases in workload. On the other hand, the added workload to one consultant has consequences to the surrounding colleagues both sentimentally and work related. As participant #7 expresses, the added stress spills to those sharing a physical space, this finding is also noticeable through direct observation. The added workload isn't isolated to one project; consultants are often juggling multiple projects simultaneously, this implies that some projects will require being attributed to the consultant's colleagues.

Finally, the significant challenge of adaptation to a novel task emerged as a general concern between the consultants. In novel contexts, such as the Pop-up strategy for the case-study firm, there is no prior knowledge, the team is required, as identified earlier, to pioneer a path through uncertainty. For the case-study firm, the team was initially composed of only one member, thus he had to carry the burden of the strategy's success while feeling constantly unqualified and lost. At the time of the interview, he expressed that the compensation he valued the most was the addition of an adaptation period emphasizing the importance of providing consultants with the time and resources needed to adjust to new and complex tasks. A colleague was empathetic with the difficulty of the task, "Now, one thing that a person is doing alone, so there's no one to talk to. You have doubts and no one to clarify them with.". This topic reveals the tremendous value of teamwork, specially in a context of constant novelty.

The ability to adapt to new challenges and tasks is a crucial skill for consultants, and effective teamwork can play a significant role in addressing these challenges and navigating uncharted territory. It also aligns with the findings in the literature regarding the importance of team adaptability in consulting firms.

Transversal Opinion	
Learning Period	**#1:** "Obviously, at the beginning of a new project, there is not much excitement. It's something added because in this type of consulting, learning is often done through doing."
	#3: "Nevertheless, if I had to venture a guess, I would say that these calculations will be made at the end of the contract. I would say that the financial return may not be significant, but everyone who has been involved here in the city hall continues to be involved. They are also continuing their learning journey, thus in this regard it's considered an investment"
	#4: "And also because for the firm, it's the first client in this area, it's also, in quotation marks, 'going through its learning journey'. In other words, this service provision can be seen almost as an investment."

Table 10 Analysis of Transversal topics

As a final note, an opinion transcended all themes. The recognition of the necessity and value of practical hardships to reach a desired level of competence. Consultants expressed their acceptance of failures and less favourable results as a part of the indispensable process of learning by doing.

This is also found in the literature as a crucial step in the learning process and gathering of information in the consulting field. It reflects an imperative mentality in a context of exploration such as the Pop-up Strategy. In essence, the willingness to embrace practical challenges and learn from them is a fundamental aspect of building expertise and achieving success in consulting, especially when venturing into new and uncharted territories like the Pop-Up Strategy.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 RQ1: How can the Pop-Up strategy be effectively implemented within the context of a public sector project-based consulting firm?

After the analysis of the interviews with pioneering agents of the Pop-up Strategy in a public sector project-based consulting firm and discussion with application of theoretic concepts, a few considerations can be concluded with a significant level of confidence.

Firstly, task and time specificity are of the utmost importance for the effective implementation of the Pop-up strategy. Through our case-study, we have demonstrated that the lack of definition causes pressures to both the client-consulting and to the team of consultants hindering performance. Time wise, it is important to establish a short period of relationship review in the beginning of the strategy execution, this allows for the opportunity to correct differences in expectations. The relevance of this topic to the Pop-up strategy is infatuated by the continuous nature of the strategy, the continuous availability of the consulting firm sets a vulnerable position, therefore it is vital to specify the requirements of the task to be requested by the client to the firm.

Secondly, building on the vulnerability of the consultant firm, the client-consultant relationship to be established is that of a partnership where trust is predominate. Through our analysis we found that the lack of task specificity allowed for an overburden of the consultant, thus building trust so that the client respects the consultant is important for the maintenance of the Pop-up strategy. Additionally, and once again, motivated by the continuous nature of the strategy, it is beneficial to establish healthy boundaries in the relationship. In our case-study, an initial phase mandated the presence of the consultant in the client's premises, however, this proved inefficient, and the establishment of online communication took place. Nevertheless, communication must be constant in this relationship to guarantee client adaptation, improve workload prediction capabilities and ensure firm's growth and diversification within the partnership.

Lastly, as with all strategies, a profound compatibility study is advisable before the establishment of partnerships. This conclusion originates from the general sentiment of found in our case-study of size unsuitability due to the client's high demand. This analysis should be performed in the plains of size and systems compatibility. The latter due to the high level of complexity of the client suggesting a high level of information systems.

In the end, the Pop-up strategy represents a long-term relationship combining project execution with a flexibility of demand through a continuous availability. This creates a confrontation between a highly specific process that is a project with a high level of freedom of choice by the client created to facilitate the client's access to services. Consequently, the resultant relationship is significantly delicate requiring nurturing of trust and establishment of boundaries to foster respect.

4.2.2 RQ2: What organizational changes and adaptations are necessary when implementing the Pop-Up strategy in a public sector project-based consulting firm?

As stated in the initial chapters of this paper, the case-study firm is a small family-owned firm with 50 years of experience. That being so, the implications and adaptations provided in this research may be context specific and require an analysis rather than a blind acceptance. Bearing this in mind, the implementation of such a delicate strategy as is the Pop-up strategy warrants careful maintenance and adaptation.

As the client organization as the freedom to request the consultant's services at the time of its choosing, workload can shift rapidly from low to critical levels. In our case-study, the main consultant and those around him suffered greatly from this unpredictability which led to the addition of team members. Therefore, an adaptation of the consultant firm is to establish a flexible workload distribution in order to capably respond to demand peaks without inhibiting other projects.

The second organizational change required when performing the Pop-up strategy is the oriented focus towards the optimization of knowledge management. A local government institution is complex, thus, to maximize knowledge gains, which are specially desired due to the great variety of tasks demanded from the client, the consulting firm is required to create a firm-wide language of information, optimally through the use of modern digital information storage tools.

The final organizational change follows the previous in that it aims at the optimization of knowledge transmission. The firm should strengthen the communicational spine of the firm through the establishment of project and team routines in the form of regular meetings and managerial responsibilities for the consultants. As well as the foster a company culture of collaboration, availability and mutual growth, not only of the consultants, but also demonstrated by the support of upper management to the teams.

5. Conclusions

This paper endeavoured in the exploration of the Pop-up strategy, aiming to address a literature void related to this strategy. Through a literature review and a case-study analysis, complemented by direct observation, it reached key insights to understand the how the strategy is implemented and what it implicates to the public sector project-based consulting firm.

The research found the delicacy of the strategy when implemented within the client context of a local government. The success of the strategy, consequently, depends on the consulting firm 's capability to adapt its communication and organizational systems to accommodate the flexibility of a partnership of a continuous service nature and on the firm's establishment of task specific boundaries harmonized through regular communication with the client. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of experiential learning as a growth mentality.

This paper contributes to the literature by providing a steppingstone in the research of the Pop-up strategy, from which several literature avenues can be followed. It also provides the literature with a rare consultant perspective of the client-consultant relationship with a governmental institution, thus contrasting with the vast research on the political implications and dynamics, often viewed through a government-focused perspective.

Regarding the contributions to the business world, this investigation assists decision makers in better understanding and implementing the Pop-up strategy as it identified the primary considerations that should serve as the foundation for an analysis of the Pop-up Strategy as well as the possible implications for the consulting firm.

As the final remarks, it is necessary to note the limitations of this research. Firstly, a single case-study on such a specific context does not represent a strong enough approach to ensure a comprehensive view, thus this paper invites fellow researchers to test this results. The investigation does not contemplate economic analysis of the strategy, which is fundamental for the business decision maker, nor does it contemplate the political dynamics of a relation with a local government. Additionally, this paper its lack of client-side participants as part of the interviews and acknowledges the incompletion of the research it implies.

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Appendix

Interview Guides in Portuguese:

CEO	Main Themes
Knowledge Management	Qual é a sua perceção das estratégias de armazenamento e organização de informação utilizadas na empresa?
Internal Organization	Este projeto significa uma responsabilidade nova para os consultores, como é gerida esta acrescentada necessidade de esforço? Como avalia a adequação dos sistemas de incentivos e compensação a esta visão de crescimento?
	Que desafios é que esta estratégia implica para a empresa? Em termos de Organização interna e estratégia geral da empresa.
Client-Consultant Relationships	Consegue descrever a relação sua relação com a CMM? De que forma é que se compara a outros clientes?
Time and Task Specificities	Como se atinge uma projeção do tempo gasto com a câmara? Que métodos de avaliação? Foram estabelecidos alguns KPI's ou métricas para avaliar o sucesso da estratégia? Quais e como serão medidos? Na sua análise, para além de si, quantos consultores deveriam estar total ou parcialmente ligados a uma CM? Em que consiste a Estratégia? É possível clarificar quais são os objectivos-chave e metas que procuram atingir com esta estratégia?
Basis of Opportunity for the Firm	Quais foram as considerações principais para definir o cliente alvo desta estratégia? Que problemas identificou na Câmara para a existência desta oportunidade? E na empresa? Quais foram as razões para decidir que era necessária uma estratégia deste tipo?

11 Appendix of the Interview Guide for the Executive Administrator (in Portuguese)

General Consultants	Main themes
Knowledge Management	Qual é a tua perceção das estratégias de armazenamento e organização de informação? Se precisasses de ajuda para a equipa da Câmara, sentes que existe acesso às ferramentas e informação necessárias? Como é feita a escolha do armazenamento da informação?
Internal Organization	Como encara a possibilidade de trabalhar no projeto da Câmara? A sua perceção sobre o projeto e esforço envolvido no projeto com a Câmara alterou após observar os colegas que trabalham no mesmo? Qual é a sua avaliação sobre a compensação do esforço na empresa? Especificamente, relacionado ao Projeto Câmara.
	Pode descrever a natureza do trabalho de equipa que experiência na empresa? Há algum desafio ou obstáculo em alinhar a equipa com esta nova estratégia? Consegue detalhar? Que recursos ou apoios considera que seriam benéficos para a equipa aperfeiçoar a execução desta estratégia? Como é que a equipa foi afetada pela estratégia?
Client-Consultant Relationships	Pode descrever a natureza da sua relação com um cliente?
Time and Task Specificity	Quais são as métricas utilizadas pela empresa para avaliar o sucesso das tarefas?
Basis of Opportunity for the Firm	Qual a sua avaliação sobre a estratégia seguida pela empresa com esta colaboração?

12 Appendix of the Interview Guide for the consultants not directly involved in the Pop-up strategy (in Portuguese)

Pop-Up Consultants	
Knowledge Management	Qual é a tua perceção das estratégias de armazenamento e organização de informação? Se precisasses de ajuda para a equipa da CITY HALL, sentes que existe acesso às ferramentas e informação necessárias? Como é feita a escolha do armazenamento da informação?
Client-Consultant Relationships	A relação com a Maia envolve colaboração com diversas pessoas dentro da hierarquia CITY HALL, consegue descrever, se existirem, os tipos de relações entre consultor-cliente? Nesta equipa tem a capacidade de aconselhar a câmara em candidaturas e projetos através da direção, que diferenças traz esta proximidade ao seu trabalho? Como compara este cliente de outros com quem já trabalhou?
Internal Organization	Como classifica a maneira como a comunicação desta estratégia foi feita entre todos os consultadores da Firm? Quão confiante está de que a Firm consegue implementar esta estratégia e atingir os objetivos propostos? No funcionamento normal da Firm, como se assegura a continuidade de projetos? por exemplo se um consultor não estivesse disponível. Como te sentes por fazer parte desta equipa? De que modo é que o trabalho real com a CITY HALL se aproxima do expectado? Como encara esta responsabilidade, que é nova, tanto para si, como para a Firm? De que forma é que a Firm o tem apoiado neste projeto?
Time and Task Specificities	Quanto se avalia dentro do espectro de subcontratação a conselheiro? Explique, por favor. Qual a razão para um cliente considerar os serviços da Firm? Quais são as métricas utilizadas pela Firm para avaliar o sucesso das tarefas? Considera que o acordo entre a Firm e CITY HALL reflete o esforço do consultor?
Basis of Opportunity for Firm	Que problemas identifica na gestão da CM, considera que o envolvimento da Firm ajuda a eliminar esses problemas, apenas elimina a responsabilidade de os resolver ao transferi la para a Firm ou é indiferente? Qual a razão para um cliente considerar os serviços da Firm?

13 Appendix of the Interview Guide for the consultants directly involved in the Pop-up strategy (in Portuguese)