Identifying the skills for consultants working in project-based organizations

A glimpse into the Mexican consulting industry
The authors would like to thank to all the consultants who decided to be a part of this research by providing a fruitful insight regarding their jobs.

This thesis was completed with the same passion that day after day they professionally perform with.

We would also like to express gratitude to all of those involved, directly or indirectly, in this project…

Thank you!
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Summary

Purpose
To identify the skills that consulting firms claim as essential to be held by their project-teams

Design/methodology/approach
The work begins with a literature review of the major studies performed on skills and their alignment with consulting project teams. This study then specifically, through a questionnaire, surveys a group of consultants currently working in five consulting firms in Mexico City in order to determine the skills they hold as professionals and the skills their employers demand from them. Also measured are the effects of the efforts carried out by these firms in acquiring, fostering and retaining these skills. Personal interviews were also used with some of the respondents in order to grasp a deeper understanding of the topic and clarify ambiguities portrayed in some of the questionnaires.

Findings
Overall findings prove right both hypotheses established during the research design. It was found that consulting firms indeed call for a different set of skills that are not very often to be found in newcomers in the industry. Several options are being carried out by these firms in an attempt to foster and retain the skills they have realized their professionals lack from; however, the results narrate the story of how the consultants really experience these options offered by their employers.

Research limitations/applications
The small sample size does not limit generalizations but the work can serve as a framework for more extensive and industry situated studies.

Practical implications
The work suggests issues related to the impact of the skills on the job of a consultant. Practitioners could begin to focus on efforts that can improve the way firms foster and retain their skillful professionals as well as how can they build alliances outside the industry with strategic partners in order to be provided with talent ready to join the firms with the skills required.

Originality/value
There is little work done on the mapping of skills addressed specifically to project teams working for consulting firms. The study leads the way towards important aspects of skillful project teams disclosed by the consultants themselves and discussed with secondary data provided by the consulting firms through their corporate websites regarding the topic subject of this research.

Paper type
Master Thesis – Research paper

Keywords
Skills, consulting firms, project teams, consultants, skills in project teams, consulting industry
Outline of the research paper

The work begins providing an Introduction that equally includes the background, the research question and the research benefits. The purpose of this study is presented in this, the first chapter, and also through the background is portrayed the situation that leads to an opportunity of research.

In the second chapter the Literature Review is presented highlighting the most interesting academic and practitioners’ findings regarding teams, project teams, skills and the consulting sector. Also efforts being carried out by companies in order to acquire, foster and retain skillful professionals are to be portrayed in this theoretical part.

In chapter three, Methodology, are deployed all the research tools used during the study’s investigation. By making use of questionnaires and complementing with interviews, this chapter will introduce the reader into a comprehensive understanding of how the research was designed and carried out in order to gracefully lead into chapter four where the findings are to be discussed.

Through an x-ray like panorama, a detailed overview of the consulting sector in Mexico is presented. Also an introduction to each of the five consulting firms here included in the study is portrayed with the purpose to provide a glimpse of who are these firms. Discussing the findings is the title of the fourth chapter where findings will have a tête-à-tête kind of encounter with the analysis through five main correlated subtopics: (1) skills versus company, (2) skills versus roles, (3) skills versus experience held by the consultants, (4) skills accrued by consultants in other industries prior joining the consulting sector and (5) efforts being carried out by firms in an attempt to get, retain and foster these skills.

Finally chapter five, Conclusions, comprises the summary of results presented through the hypothesis testing and also highlights the problems raised during the research. At the end, recommendations followed by direction towards further research will ultimately wrap up this study.
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Skills are being considered as the real secret behind project teams (Werr et al., 1997). Sometimes is not the experience nor the background a project team member might hold; however, if the skills are the ones companies are looking for, the employee or job candidate has different advantages over others. Consulting firms live their day-after-day routine through acquiring, assigning and carrying out projects through their teams. Vast literature can be found regarding interaction and performance in teams, also some specific literature addresses its efforts to explain how project teams are useful in nowadays organizations. However it looks like academia has yet to explore more into consultancy project teams. It is well-known that usually consulting firms have more extensive and challenging recruitment processes in order to select the future consultants for their project teams. Several ways of assuring that the job applicant has what it takes to develop him/herself in this environment have been developed such as the well known assessments, that are a type of workshops where companies test the theoretical knowledge of the applicants, as well as a practical exercises with the purpose of analyzing their personality and behavior in action.

Consulting project teams are different from regular project teams and these ones are different than simply teams (Hacker, 2000). Consulting teams perform in an industry that has been growing incredibly and is becoming quite successful (Appelbaum and Steed, 2005). Companies within the consulting sector are focused on the skills held by their staff. Therefore, sometimes it does not matter the major an individual holds, whether is a degree on business, marketing, sociology, computer systems or even biology; what really matters is that he/she meets the must-have skills to work in their project-based environment. With the cross-functional and cross-cultural teams as a paramount trend, and also considering that these companies interact with personnel from their clients, the skills, abilities and capacities required have been redefined during the last years, when facing day-by-day challenges in Project Management. That is the main reason why it has become interesting to acknowledge which are these skills that consulting firms have identified in order to build their project teams and assure a better performance in projects, as well as adding value internally for the firm and externally for their clients.

Mexico has been selected as a geographical focus for this research since it holds a paramount importance for Latin America; almost all major consulting firms’ headquarters for Spanish-speaking countries in America are located in this country. Consulting firms sometimes do not have branch offices in specific locations and a team in Mexico is built and sent to these regions in order to carry out the projects. Mexico has been considered to create a waterfall effect for trends, impacts and fads to Central and South America. Therefore this country has been selected to base the research on.

However, even and when consulting firms are a key recruiter of business schools graduates and have become a desirable employer since almost 40 percent of graduates in each MBA class attempt to enter the consulting industry (Appelbaum and Steed, 2005), these firms go directly into dismay when they realize that aspirants do not have the skills they need for performing in this project-based environment (Stumpf and Tymon Jr, 2001) and sometimes, even internally among current employees, companies struggle in putting together a balanced project team with the skills the specific project demands. A situation of where and how to get these skills for the consulting project teams is driving these companies into clenching their hands. However,
firstly should be identified which ones are exactly these skills companies are demanding since literature has addressed the fact that perhaps is not that clear what do they want and if is it true they cannot find these skills or maybe their efforts towards acquiring them externally and fostering them internally are not enough or are being carried out in a non effective way. As a result, an interesting subject for research arises.

Summarizing, the aim of this research is to identify the skills that consulting firms are looking for in order to incorporate individuals into their project teams, either when attracting talent from the outside or from the inside when carrying out the team building process.

1.2 Topic selection

Choosing a topic was everything but easy. After a brainstorming for tentative topics, skills for consultants along with the relationship between the public and private sector with the institutions of higher education regarding Project Management formation ranked first. As the next step research regarding current information available was carried out in order to identify which of the two topics presents a bigger knowledge gap. Also the networking for carrying out either the first or the second topic was considered. The results of the mini-research done demonstrated how less attention has been paid to the topic of skills for a special type of project-teams: the consultants. Consultants represent an interesting sample for conducting research since they work on a project-after-project basis for companies that equally live on the same modus operandum.

Once selected the path to follow, now how to approach and build the topic itself was tricky. It was immediately recognizable how available literature was having problems in defining, for starters, what a skill is, therefore the idea of identifying the skills to be held by consultants seemed pretty tempting. Now the problem was to define the approach in how to carry out the research. One proposed idea was to go directly to the Human Resources departments of each consulting firm in order to ask directly which skills they demand. However this idea represented two main things, the first one was the networking with specifically people in this area in these firms but the second and most important one was the fact that probably the research would have been finished quite soon once each company provides a list of what they require, that equally is available through their corporate websites in Internet. Then a second idea emerged when a possible comparison of what companies say they require could be made against what their own professionals perceive as being the ones working really at the trenches. Also it was easier to have access to the type of networking required for this new study.

As a result the topic of this research is formed as follows:

1. **Identifying the skills…** => since literature has already accepted there are problems even in reaching a common understanding and also the knowledge gap regarding research done about skills for project teams formed by consultants who work for a special type of company: the consulting firm.

2. **… for consultants…** => These professionals work all the time in project teams that are different form normal organizational teams. The consultants’ perspective on their own needed skills was compared against the skills demanded by consulting firms according to their corporate websites.
3. … working in project-based organizations => the project-based companies where consultants work calls for an extra set of skills. Besides the skills pointed by literature regarding traditional project teams, this paper intends to identify those extra ones that consultants also require for finally put together a complete set of skills that consultants must-have in order to achieve the best performance.

1.3 Research Question

Once explained the aim and background of the situation surrounding this research and also by providing the need to identify and separate the skills demanded for these particular project teams, a general research question is proposed:

**Which skills do consulting firms look for in their project teams?**

*A comparative study in the Mexican consulting industry.*

In addition two hypotheses were proposed based on the literature review:

**Hypothesis 1**
Consulting firms demand a special combination of skills such as leadership, communication, problem-solving, skills and teamwork; however, the main skills currently being held by the majority of professionals working in consulting firms are technical (*hard skills*) where usually the people skills (*soft skills*) are the less developed.

**Hypothesis 2**
Consulting firms are constantly finding themselves in a state of dismay due to the lack of consulting-skills in aspirants and even among current employees, therefore it becomes difficult for them to find professionals with not only the skills probably gained in Business Schools and/or through previous job experiences but also the ones they have claimed as essentials in consulting.

1.4 Research benefits

This research goes beyond just the identification of the current skills demanded for consulting firms in this specific industry. Also an analysis of actions being undertaken, if any, by these companies is to be presented in order to identify whether these companies are not only claiming problems in finding the skills but rather, as their nature as problem-solvers consultants, taking a hands-on approach and try to reduce this gap.

The results can be a starting point for different stakeholders (*consulting firms, students, universities, employees, job applicants, the consulting industry itself, etc*) in order to:

- Benchmark the skills-checklist between consulting firms.
- Identify which skills should be more emphasized by universities through their project management programs, at both graduate and undergraduate levels.
- Be used by senior students aiming to apply with consulting firms, so they can identify the profile requested by these firms in order to determine if they meet these companies’ requirements.
- Highlight the need for more research addressed to this specific type of project teams.
The following literature review is decomposed according to the main concepts addressed in the research question explained before. These main concepts are: skills, skills in project teams, teams, project teams, consultants, skills for consulting project teams and the consulting industry. These concepts were used as keywords during the academic data collection based mainly in journals located primarily in EBSCOhost, Emerald Fulltext, Science Direct and ProQuest among others.

2.1 Skills: the real secret behind project teams

Even though and when most people share a common understanding of skill, defining precisely what it means is quite problematic (Dench, 1997). The author finds a gap when pointing that the real difficult part when trying to explain what does skill mean is that there is a lack of a common terminology, connotations and even historical traditions behind the word. And it should not be a surprise if it is realized that for instance, employers, practitioners, job applicants and academics, they all use different vocabularies from key skills to core skills and competences, then it seems to be confusing to understand what this is all about. And this problem is well identified by McKenna (2004) who explains that whatever that could be found written is, by definition, interpretations of interpretations, this means that all definitions reflect the interpretations of the authors as they interpret the interpretations of the researchers whose work they report. Moreover companies interpret skills their own way and Business schools do so as well, then at the end it seems not to be neither the right or wrong definition of skill, is to understand from which perspective we are to define it. For instance, Homer (2001) even explains that there are skills dictionaries available which include skills in sales, management, IT, marketing, accountancy, engineering and HR which are included within the available competency libraries.

Historically the word skill has been associated with being skilled which would imply gone through a (long) period of training (Dench, 1997). Lovell’s research (1980, cited in O’Donnell and Garavan, 1997) presents skill as a process and explains that all skills, whether physical, mental or social, share some characteristics, for instance they are learned. Then skills seem to be acquired through a process of coordinated activities in relation to some specific object or event in a temporal sequence. Also arguing that skills are to be fostered through what it is done and learnt, Wood (1988, cited in O’Donnell and Garavan, 1997) prefers the term expertise rather than skill. This idea is as well embraced by Gardner (1993, cited in O’Donnell and Garavan, 1997) who emphasizes that a skilled person is an individual who has mastered the concepts and skills of certain discipline or domain and who can apply this knowledge appropriately in new situations. However another part of skills seems to be highly correlated to one’s behavior, character and other personal attributes which not always are learnt but are inherited. For instance, McKenna (2004) clarifies that even and when certain skills can be developed; special attention should be granted to behavioral skills since they cannot be changed. Therefore is easy to understand that O’Donnell and Garavan (1997) conclude that skills are either innate or acquired but also highlight that the key characteristic of any skill is that they are learned.

It has been subject of study to identify if all skills are alike and if they are useful for the same purposes; for instance Whetten and Cameron (2002) have explained that there are special characteristics that demarcate management skills from others. Some of these characteristics aim to point that, first, managerial skills are behavioral; therefore they consist of identifiable sets of actions that individuals perform and as a result certain outcomes are obtained. As a second point
is addressed that managerial skills are controllable, thirdly, these skills are developable and the fourth characteristic highlights the fact that the skills are overlapping since managers have to use a combination of skills in order to be effective. And as a fifth and last characteristic the authors mention that the skills are contradictory since managers must be “hard” and “soft”, humanistic and production oriented, etc., all of it at the same time.

By analyzing all main contributions provided by literature, it seems that a solid definition of skill can be built, a definition that takes a broad view of skill on a strategic level looking at the abilities, attributes and other qualities seen by employers as necessary for people to operate effectively in a workplace and that can be taken from one job to another and used within any profession and at any stage of their career (Dench 1997; O’Donnell and Garavan, 1997; Raybould and Sheedy, 2005), definition that will be employed for this study purposes.

### 2.2 Types of skills

Literature offers different options for skills categorization, for instance Gardner (1993, cited in O’Donnell and Garavan, 1997) proposes skills that go from linguistic skills, logical-mathematical skills, spatial skills and bodily-kinesthetic skills to interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills. However, practically most of the literature’s classifications are clustered in groups and share the same essence of the human part and the technical side. Research has found an unbalanced relationship between both kinds of skills where the human part was left behind but nowadays is attracting the interest of firms of all sizes and shapes. Next, the findings of what literature says on what types of skills exist will be presented followed by a summarized table.

Cowie (2003) leads us to realize that there are mainly two types of skills: **hard skills** and **soft skills**. By adding or developing soft skills, a positive impact in the project can be materialized; however, academic literature and even practitioners have demonstrated that Project Management is taught as a set of hard skills (*setting objectives, critical path analysis, resource allocation, Gantt charts, WBS work breakdown structures and risk management*); nevertheless the softer skills, also called people skills, are essential to success and most of the time are overlooked (ibid: 2003). Trevor (1992) supports this idea by mentioning that all the skills fall under the generic heading of “management”, leaving the people factor back in the shadows. Complementing this statement, Homer (2001) argues that people skills are probably the most important foundation for a company because they impact on every aspect of corporate process and, ultimately, profit. Likewise, Kezsbom (1988) offered a list of skills required when undertaking Project Management and even the author emphasized that the characteristics and skills needed for working with and through people predominate. It is also interesting to mention that for people entering the workforce for the first time or re-entering the workforce is important to hold personal skills since it is not simply enough to be technically competent (Dench, 1997).

Simhan (2003) also addresses the fact that the skills developed and held by project teams are being mainly the hard ones; for instance, his research demonstrates how interaction and communication skills are poorly developed in a consulting project team from a renowned Indian consulting firm trying to run projects with an American client: “*In the project team they all are wizards in their area of specialty, but many lack basic communication skills*”. Research has demonstrated that some project teams tend to believe that because they are specialists in their area of expertise, they can give a go-by to their soft skills which actually has been demonstrated in the business arena as a big and painful mistake. On the other hand, literature offers as well others perspectives trying to explain why the personal skills are not as developed as the technical ones, for instance, Kotter (1990, cited in Hussko, 2006) asserts that human skills are specially required mainly when dealing with change.
A set of skills proposed by Whetten and Cameron (2002) includes something they called *Groups skills*. At the first sight it could look like they are a set of skills held by the team as a whole; however, this set of skills are to be used on the team by a third party, such as empowerment, delegation and effective team building. These *Groups skills* along with the *Personal skills* (*developing self-awareness, managing stress and solving problems creatively*) and the *Interpersonal skills* (*communicating supportively, gaining power and influence, managing conflict and motivating employees*) complement the authors’ proposal for managerial skills.

Another type of skills is suggested by Homer (2001) who explains that when applying for a job, candidates hold something he refers to as *portable skills* which are the ability to speak foreign languages, professional designations, academic degrees and facilitation skills among others. These skills are to be something between hard and soft skills, since they are not as technical as the first ones but not as human-related as the second ones, but in a way a bit of both is comprised.

Now, these *portable skills* are to be matched against the so called *generic skills* set by employers. These type of skills, usually personal, comprise the following: communication skills, the ability to apply basic literacy and numeracy in a work situation, being a “team player”, the ability to relate to customers and clients, taking initiative (*for one’s own work and personal and career development*), taking responsibility and making decisions (Dench, 1997). It is common that this matching demonstrates a gap between what firms want and what is held by candidates.

An attractive classification for skills is provided by Katzenbach and Smith (1998) who argue that team members must have three kinds of skills: (a) technical skills, (b) decision-making skills and (c) interacting skills. Benders (1995) offers a similar categorization for skills in (a) technical, (b) social and (c) organizational skills. In here, according to the author, organizational skills refer to management and the concept of “human skills” in leadership. Also an interesting approach is the mapping of different skills required at different levels of management and an option is offered by Katz (1955) who bases his research in three main skills: (a) technical, (b) human and (c) conceptual, matching them against the three basic levels of management: top, middle and supervisory. The figure 2 illustrates Katz’s matching proposal of skills needed versus the type of management.

It is common that project teams comprise team members from all three levels of management performing different tasks; therefore different skills are required at every level. Yukl (2002, cited in Huusko, 2006) supports Katz’s classification of skills in these three categories and explains that *conceptual skills* are also called “cognitive” and refer to logical thinking, analytical abilities, inductive and deductive reasoning. *Human skills* are defined by the author as the *interpersonal skills* and states or *social skills*, where the understanding of feelings, attitudes and motives of others are crucial elements for this particular type of skill as well as the abilities to communicate and diplomacy. The *technical skills* comprise methods, processes and knowledge about the organization such as products and processes, all of this being acquired by formal education, training and job experience.
An almost identical cluster of skills is offered by Roper and Phillips (2007) who recognize that teams must develop the right mix of skills and that sometimes calls for even complementary skills. Skills requirements, the authors argue, fall into three fairly self-evident categories:

1. Technical skills or functional expertise
2. Problem-solving and Decision-making skills
3. Interpersonal skills

In an attempt for not clustering the skills but more like to gathering them according to functions, Stevens and Campion (1994) have created what they call the *Five dimensions of skills*: (1) problem solving, (2) communication, (3) conflict resolution, (4) goal setting and (5) planning tasks. This contribution only considers *communication* from the entire repertoire of soft skills some literature mentions. The dimensions portray more a picture where a goal is set and through a plan, the problem is crumbled and solved. Again, as Cowie (2003), Trevor (1992), Homer (2001), Kezsbom (1998) and Simhan (2003) among others have pointed, the hard and technical skills are taking over the soft and more personal ones.

Following a similar theory as Katz (1995), regarding that different skills are to be held by different team members, Meyen (1988) claims that the nature of the project will determine the specific skills needed, even and when certain skills are always required when carrying out projects and these skills will, in the same way, dictate the need for collaboration and therefore a team approach. Iles and Hayers (1997) also propose that the project may call for different types of skills at different stages of the project. So, a more focused contribution on Project Management skills is offered by Kezsbom (1988) who describes in her research the challenges in Project Management and lists the skills needed in this sometimes overwhelming discipline. The list in figure 3 presents Kezsbom’s skills for Project Management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills needed in Project Management by Kezsbom (1988)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Technical expertise / General knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Forecasting / Planning / Scheduling / Estimating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problem identification / Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to establish project objectives / Performance criteria / Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Big picture orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Task organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexibility / Adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resource allocation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Team building / Management / Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accounting / Budgeting / Financial control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training / Development / Delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communications / Interpersonal / Written / Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict Resolution / Negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group Dynamics / Organizational development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creativity / Conceptual thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Walk on water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kezsbom’s proposal offers a mix of soft and hard skills. It is easy to identify where the author addresses the importance of technical skills (*forecasting, planning, scheduling, resource allocation, estimating, budgeting, financial control, etc.*) even the author mentions as the first skill *Technical expertise*. However, soft skills are not belittled in this proposal since it is
addressed the attention granted to skills such as communication, interpersonal skills, creativity, conceptual thinking, flexibility and adaptability among others. Nevertheless, there are skills not precisely to be deployed with all team members; perhaps some of them, who will be a part of the team later on, are active individuals in skills such as Team Building. Considering the skills proposed by the author, it would seem viable to cluster them as in the proposal provided by Roper and Phillips (2007) who categorize the skills into technical, problem solving & decision making and interpersonal.

Another interesting proposal to this subject of study is in this case a model developed by Briner et al. (1996) which aims to demonstrate how the skills to be held by team members are strongly related to the networking role each team member will perform in the project team. Through their proposal, The New Networking Roles model, the authors account for eight networking roles (investigator, developer, counterpart, animateur, integrator, mentor, broker and disseminator) and the characteristics of each call for different set of skills. Some of the main skills required in the roles are communication, time management, coaching, mentoring, facilitating learning and transfer of skills and experience. With this model, the line between skills and competences, if any, becomes quite blurry and researches address both factors as a “must have” combo-package for project-teams. As a result Competency and Skills Management have become a hot topic since few years back. Companies struggle in order to identify their competency models and therefore find implementation of skills management (Homer, 2001). The author questions if personal qualities are taken into account in skills management and the answer clarifies that any aspect of a competency is to be considered. Then, a similar model, as the one proposed by Briner et al., is offered by Margerison (2001) who explains that there are nine major team competency factors (innovating, promoting, developing, organizing, producing, inspecting, maintaining, advising and linking) but no single person can be expected to have the skills for all areas, therefore it is required team competency and teamwork. In this, The Competencies Model, as in Briner’s, each factor calls for specific group of skills that vary from communication and creativity to analysis and coordination. With these two models is demonstrated that skills are not something isolated that the employee must simply hold in order to perform efficiently in the organization, instead they interrelate and complement with other equally important characteristics such as the role they perform, the strengths they hold and the competencies they have fostered.

So far it seems that all major skills have been mentioned, all authors have addressed almost the same skills but, as mentioned when trying to define skill, with different vocabulary. However, few researchers have written about a certain skill that back in the day probably was not that important but now with the ultrafast pace of technology affecting all industries and sectors, a new type of skills has been identified and cannot be overlooked: ICT skills. Since late 80’s and early 90’s the number of jobs involving the use of new technologies has increased (Giles and Campbell, 2003). And even within the same job new technologies are often requiring new or other skills. (Van Loo et al. 2001). Employees are using computers, automated equipment and getting familiar with several types of software and applications. For each industry it seems to exist specific software to be used. From retailers and accountants to designers, architects and even Project Managers they all use different tools and software that are becoming not an option but a must in order to carry out the day-by-day activities. Research has identified that there is evidence of an ICT skills gap in the labor market as well. And this is understandable if it is acknowledged that technology is going as fast as a thunder, then the time for employees to update their knowledge and sharpen these skills is reduced time by time. So, what about those employees reluctant to learn? Those extremely loyal employees serving the company perhaps for even decades but unable to embrace these changes? Then, even and when they could probably have been with the company since its foundation, the organization faces a situation
when whether retain this unskilled staff or maintain the minimum standard of skills required. Companies dealing with these situations sometimes play the last card in order to make sure they have the skills they need within their employees; this card is of course firing.

Several activities comprise the options companies have in order to make sure they have the skills they require within their staff. These activities go from efforts in recruitment, to training and even firing. These options, depending on a specific situation, are to be selected when companies attempt to gather all the skills already mentioned and described before.

After all contributions gathered from current and available literature, the table in figure 4 summarizes all classifications of skills already presented by different authors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Types of skills and models</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cowie (2003)</td>
<td>Hard skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinhan (2003)</td>
<td>Soft skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whetten and Cameron (2002)</td>
<td>Personal skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Group skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homer (2001)</td>
<td>Hard skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Portable skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soft skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trevor (1992)</td>
<td>Management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katzenbach and Smith (1998)</td>
<td>Technical skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision-making skills</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Interacting skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benders (1995)</td>
<td>Technical skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organizational skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katz (1955)</td>
<td>Technical skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yukl (2002)</td>
<td>Human skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conceptual skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roper and Phillips (2007)</td>
<td>Technical skills or functional expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem-solving and Decision-making skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stevens and Campion (1994)</td>
<td>Problem solving skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conflict resolution skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Goal setting skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Planning tasks skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kezsbom (1988)</td>
<td>Technical expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication / Interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem identification / Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict resolution / Negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briner et. al (1996)</td>
<td>The new networking roles (counterpart, animateur, integrator, mentor, broker, disseminator, investigator, developer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margerison (2001)</td>
<td>Team competencies model (promoting, developing, organizing, producing, inspecting, maintaining, advising, innovating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giles and Campbell (2003)</td>
<td>ICT skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Summary of types of skills by authors

Literature has made clear that no team succeeds without all the skills needed to meet its purpose and performance goals; however, most teams figure out the skills they will need after they are formed (Katzenbach and Smith, 1998). This addresses back to problems in team building phase and just like Zwika and Bar-Yoseph (2004) claim, little attention is paid to this process.
since focus is granted to more technical aspects. In the same way, Rushmer (1997) attempts to depict this situation through her work entitled “What happens to the team during teambuilding? Examining the change process that helps to build a team”, where the author emphasizes the importance of teambuilding interventions (TBIs) in project teams where evaluations attempt some sort of measurements of the team before and after the team-building event in order to assess any change in skills or attitudes. In the same way, McDonald and Keys (1996) have identified what they call “the seven deadly sins of teambuilding” and in fact, the first one is ‘Malselection’ which means that selection of team members is based on personalities rather than needed skills. However, it is important to keep in mind that members must be selected with the requisite skills for the team in mind. The table in figure 5 presents all seven deadly sins the authors have identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The seven deadly sins of teambuilding by McDonald and Keys (1996)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Malselection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Impatience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Deception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Aimlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Inhibited communication systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Competitive mania</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. The seven deadly sins of teambuilding by McDonald and Keys (1996)

Although literature offers vast options about how to build an effective team (Belbin, 1981, 1993; Adair, 1986 and Blanchard, 1998; all cited in Sheard and Kakabadse, 2002), failure makes its triumphant appearance. Some of the reasons have been pointed by McDonald and Keys (1996) support that bringing together the wrong people with the wrong skills is the perfect recipe for failure (Katzenbach and Smith, 1998; Zwikael and Bar-Yoseph, 2004; Rushmer, 1997).

However, jeopardy in project team’s skills comes not only in shape of wrong teambuilding; it looks like skills may come with an expiration date as Van Loo et al (2001) refer to with the term Skills obsolescence. This process of skills depreciation may put in a high risk employees with outdated skills at the level of perhaps finding themselves unemployed (ibid: 2001). What seems to be undeniable is that the content of jobs is changing and different combinations of skills and abilities are now required (Dench, 1997).

Project Management will not be successful no matter which method is used, if there is a lack of skills (Trevor, 1992). In fact, Project Management itself is sometimes seen as an important skill for companies such as consulting firms since their business rest on delivering projects (Cowie, 2003). These firms realize that Project Management allows the right people with the right skills to come together at the right time to solve issues (ibid: 2003). Trevor (1992) also considers people as an extremely important element since the author claims that the success of projects depends solely on people. Therefore teams hold a paramount importance when carrying out projects. The sum of expertise, knowledge, abilities and skills held by all team members allow companies to move faster and to really exploit this, the most important resource of them all, the human.
2.3 The importance of teams

The nowadays fast-changing environment in which organizations operate is one in which teams and a team-based philosophy within organizations are becoming increasingly commonplace (Sheard and Kakabadse, 2002). This has been addressed by Drucker (1999) who claims that there is or must be one right organizational form but it has been changing since the nineteen century with the advent of teams and team work being a relatively recent phenomenon.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) define team as a “small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable”. Nowadays it is undeniable that teams have become quite popular in firms of all sizes and industries. Companies now believe that teams can provide better outcome than individuals (Hartenian, 2003). Some of the reasons why these enterprises are now pursuing to perform as team-based organizations are that through that they can improve processes and increase competitive advantage (Jones and George, 1998 cited in Hartenian, 2003). Hartenian (2003) also explains that teams benefit firms by improving productivity, enhancing creativity, improving communication among interdependent individuals, reducing response times, improving decision making and obtaining multiple perspectives for problem solving situations. Research has shown that working in teams promotes (a) reasoning and higher-order thinking; (b) cognitive processing such as rehearsing, organizing and integrating information; (c) perspective-taking and accommodation to others’ ideas; and (d) acceptance and encouragement among those involved (Bossert, 1988-1989 cited in Meyen, 1998).

Literature addresses the fact that teamwork is necessary for individual and team success (Banker et al., 1996 cited in Hartenian, 2003). However, sometimes individualism stands over collectivism and then problems arise mainly in forms of communication and conflict issues (Ting-Toomey, 1988 cited in Hartenian, 2003). Team members with individualism orientation pursue personal gains; therefore demonstrate less cooperation towards the team. Studies reveal that when team members focus only on individual performance, the overall team performance suffers (Liden et al., 1994 cited in Roper and Phillips, 2007). Firms must bring on board all team members aiming towards the same goal through flawless communication efforts and other tools such as rewarding. Also team members must be taught that as the team grows and matures, they will also grow and mature in their team skills (Trevor, 1992; Hartenian, 2003). It is important to keep in mind that no one can be expected to be equally competent in all areas, and therefore team competency and teamwork become the norm (Margerison, 2001).

Studies have revealed that not teams are all alike. Companies hold and foster team work for different purposes. Departments, areas and divisions disassemble the organization into small units such as Finance, Marketing and Operations among others. It is easy to find how regularly these units refer to their staff as a team since they work together, in the same area and/or department; however, that does not mean they are real teams built for a specific purpose. These departments should work as independent areas but contradictory also they depend one on another. Each area holds a team that pursues certain objectives which differ from the Marketing team to the Accounting team for instance. But when one’s work is another’s raw material to start working with, then cross-functional structure appear with members from different areas and these teams are the preamble of the project teams. Then it becomes evident that among teams there are kinds (Hacker, 2000), each one built for different reasons and with different people, and also performing and being measured in diverse ways.
2.4 Teams versus Project teams

Parker’s definition of a team (cited in Hacker, 2000) fits the most what a project team is about: “a group of people with a high degree of interdependence, aiming for a goal or the completion of a task”. Hacker (2000) emphasizes that not all teams are the same; for instance project teams are different from working teams, improvement teams and management teams in several ways. Cohen and Bailey (1997 cited in Hacker, 2000) explain that unlike other teams, project teams are time limited. Hacker (2000) also clarifies that project teams often work towards the completion of a single outcome and after the attainment of the output the team disbands. Complexity in projects and the speed in which these are to be carried out have created the need for project teams composed of team members willing and able to form quickly, reach the objectives and move on to the next project team (ibid:2000). Project teams, Hacker (2000) explains, enable multiple perspectives, a variety of experiences and a broad skill set to be brought to bear on projects. Ancona and Caldwell (1992) point that project teams are highly interdependent in that team members must work together to complete tasks and must work extensively with nonmembers. This can be better appreciated when project teams (consultants) in consulting firms must work side by side with staff of their clients, personnel they have no control over and do not know at all. Also project teams help the organization share information, knowledge and resources across boundaries, transmit and recreate corporate culture and provide examples of best practices (Heimer, 1994 cited in Iles and Hayers, 1997).

A project delineates the border line that separates teams from project teams. A project, according to the PMI Standards Committee (2000) is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service. Projects require different KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities) at different stages of the project (Iles and Hayers, 1997). These KSAs are to be held by the project team. Trevor (1992) explains that the success of projects depends solely on people; success ultimately will depend on the way people work together and they way in which the project manager enables the people on the project to perform. At this level it becomes acknowledgeable that people have a paramount importance when running projects. Kuruppuarachchi (2006) in his research highlights the fact that even the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) comprises nine knowledge areas and human resources is one of them.

Most project team performance models found in literature are similar to the initial model proposed by McGrath in 1964 (Hacker, 2000). This model presents independent variables (a) individual characteristics as in experiences and skills, (b) group characteristics such as structure and (c) environmental characteristics as in business situation and culture. McGrath’s model explains that is often hypothesized that these variables influence team interaction processes or intra-team dynamics, which in turn influence team performance.

Relationship model for project team performance

![Figure 6. Relationship model for project team performance (Adapted from McGrath’s model by Hacker, 2000)](image_url)
Many researches such as Katzenbach and Smith (1998), Ingram and Simons (2002 cited in Huusko, 2006) and Antila and Ylöstalo (2002 cited in Huusko, 2006), among others suggest that building real teams requires years. Antony (2005 cited in Huusko, 2006) refers to success “in the long run” as management by objectives is explored as a tool for team work and also Kuipers and de Witte (2005, cited in Huusko, 2006) discuss this in terms of “team development”. These researchers confirm the need of time and maturation for teams. The panorama for project teams is different since they have a limited life-time. That is why companies must carry out the best possible ways for team-building by foreseeing possible problems that might jeopardize the project.

Conflict is one dangerous guest for projects when working in teams. From hidden agendas to cultural barriers, conflict can easily bring everything down to pieces if the team has not learnt the basic rules of how to treat this unwanted guest in projects. Since one main characteristic of these teams is their limited life-time, when conflicts arise there is no time to be wasted. Meyen (1998) explains that teams working on projects have to understand the following when dealing with conflict by trying to appreciate the importance of achieving mutual beneficial solutions:

a. Conflicts may have alternatives.
b. Avoiding conflict
c. Open communication and sharing of alternatives are desirables places to begin
d. If other teams will be disadvantaged if asked to compromise their position, assistance with the project might be offered as a way to compensate for the disadvantage
e. Sometimes might look apparent that the team who recognizes the potential conflict should change rather than attempt to work out a compromise
f. Negotiation is not a manner of winning or losing, it is instead a process for solving differences and creating a win-win solution.

Overall, project teams, even with their shorter period of time compared to regular teams, can often move faster than a traditional structure, enabling the organization to react to change faster (Cowie, 2003), which does not allow companies such big time windows for teams to really settle down and reach ground as Katzenbach and Smith (1998) and Antony (2005 cited in Huusko, 2006) among others account for.

2.5 Among project teams, there are the consultants

Available literature offers a wide range of project teams, from cross-functional teams to cross-cultural teams. Most of the literature aims to explain how these project teams work and perform inside organizations. However, compared to other project teams, little has been written about the consultants as project teams performing with these organizations’ project teams. Organizations summon consulting firms when internally they either fail or recognize the lack of skills in order to carry out a specific activity or project. As a result, consultants when called indeed can be viewed as magicians and expected to perform miracles thanks to their personal skills and not so much to their technical expertise (Gbadamosi, 2005).

Consultants find themselves several times walking through rocky roads trying to fight against organizations’ mindsets. Companies sometimes really do not know what consultants do, do not trust them and find them expensive (Bennett, 1990).

Project teams in consulting firms are a bit different from the regular project teams. For starters they work inside an organization that lives by carrying out project after project and also can carry some projects simultaneously with some members of the project team performing in
more than one project at the same time. Effective resource allocation of the staff and the project life cycle somehow become the norm in the modus operandum of these companies and these project teams sharpen certain skills thanks to the project-after-project, experience-after-experience way of working.

Literature asserts that project teams, unlike regular teams, have a shorter period of life (Cohen and Bailey, 1997 cited in Hacker 2000). After the project reaches its final phase, regular teams disband and each team member comes back 100 per cent into their day-by-day activities since at the end they are a “borrowed” resource from other division, area or department. However in consulting firms these team members (sometimes specialized in a specific area such as IT, marketing, strategy, etc.) are not “borrowed” since being a consultant in a project-team is their day-by-day job, therefore they do not drastically disband since they regularly jump together or with minor changes, into the next project of more or less the same nature but with different client and the new members of the project team mainly come from the client as well. Consulting firms, unlike big companies located in other industries; do not have hundreds of employees in each branch. Sometimes not even the headquarters have more than hundred consultants; however, they balance the skills needed and knowledge-sharing necessity through their networking of different expertise accrued by all their branches around the world, then they can build cross-cultural project teams for specific cases when needed.

Also is true that clients expect so much from a consultant, not just because he/she claims expertise, but because the consultation process is far from cheap (Gbadamosi, 2005). However, there exists a belief, not least among consultants, that it is the consultant’s personal skills and experiences, rather than the methods per se, that provides value in the consulting process (Werr et al., 1997). Therefore, firms have begun to concentrate on finding or developing people with these, the must-have skills (Hartenian, 2003).

2.6 The tailored-suit skills for consultants

Not so much has been written about specific skills for a particular type of project team: the consultants. The found literature implies that consultants must hold all the skills regular project teams hold; however, there are some special skills that consultants should foster since they regularly do not pursue projects for their own organization; they work on behalf of someone else’s interests and a new set of skills becomes a “must”.

A paramount skill for consultants has been pointed by Stumpf and Tymon Jr (2001) when claiming that consultants must develop the skill of telling clients they are wrong in such way that they thank them for giving helpful advice. Skills such as learn how to disagree without being disagreeable and how to criticize one’s clients are the bread and butter for consultants. These skills at the first sight might be considered to be a part of the so called ‘interpersonal’ or ‘human’; however, these skills deal with much more than building good channels of communication for instance.

Consultants should cultivate skills on how to exhibit professional etiquette and courtesy, how to have self-confidence without being arrogant and how to exhibit integrity and be trustworthy. Also, something what regular project team members have to deal with when moving into consulting firms is that consulting, according to Stumpf and Tymon Jr, is almost never an exclusively logical process, rather it is an emotional duet played out between the consultant and the client, therefore if a project team member cannot learn to recognize, deal with and respond to clients emotions, this team member will never be an effective consultant.
Kakabadse et. al (2006) recognize that available literature suggests that the fundamental skill to be an efficient consultant is problem analysis; however, they also realize that possessing solid analytical skills is not sufficient, since experience, ability to listen and understand problems are also skills that have become necessary. The authors explain that business consultants suggest five must-have skills in order to become an efficient consultant: (1) Experience, (2) Functional skills, (3) Ability to listen and question, (4) Objectivity and (5) Self-awareness.

It has been stressed the fact that experience in a particular field primes over technical skills that are important but no crucial. Research has shown that the most important skill is not necessarily the technical one; it is the ability to understand or appreciate what is happening in a specific context dealing with a client’s situation. Objectivity is a skill that not many dear to employ, since the outcome presented by the author’s research shows that the ability to remain objective is not shared by too many, since in some cases being objective means going against one’s company interests and therefore probably retaliation makes team members think twice.

Stumpf and Tymon Jr (2001) crumble more these skills and have defined the consulting craft skills clustered in four main groups. The table in figure 7 illustrates this classification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consulting craft skills by Stumpf and Tymon Jr (2001)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systemic analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conduct efficient, accurate and useful analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Define a case or project plan and outline action steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Synthesize key learning from a case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Manage against the plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gain proficiency in proprietary expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Leverage past industry and/or functional expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Link current proprietary expertise to new casework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team leadership</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Respect and value diverse individuals and work styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Be interpersonally effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Enable teams to excel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Place team success above personal success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mentor and coach others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direction setting leadership</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communicate often and effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Enhance client knowledge / business understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shape the intellectual direction of a case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Influence clients and obtain their buy-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Demonstrate thought leadership (to help the client and team see the case differently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Establish direction and generate enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professionalism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Balance personal and professional activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comply with policies and procedures, when doing otherwise might be advantageous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Take responsibility and action for developing oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maintain and expand a contact network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Participate in events that build brand awareness and reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Take on leadership positions in professional associations and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sell, market and expand the business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. Consulting craft skills by Stumpf and Tymon Jr (2001)

Stumpf and Tymon Jr (2001) assure that in order to be a successful management consultant, skills in each of these cluster areas are necessary. The authors warn that the skills become increasingly difficult as they are read down in the table above. “The most difficult skills require experience and an expanding skill base for the skills to be developed”. The first two set of skills (systemic analysis and team leadership) are called “Fundamental Skills’ and the last two (direction setting leadership and professionalism) are referred as “Advanced Skills”.

Chapter 2. Literature Review
Consulting firms have realized that aspirants entering the consulting field do not have equally developed skills in all the four areas. This is called skill shortage, when employers are unable to recruit the workers they require because the skills they seek are not available in sufficient quantity, which is different from a skill gap since this happens when employers think that the skill levels of their existing workforce are deficient in respect of those needed in order to meet the organization’s objectives (Giles and Campbell, 2003). In order to diminish the damage created by skill gaps, “health-checks” should be undertaken by organizations in order to review their skills on a regular basis and define where the gaps are and how they can be filled (Homer, 2001).

Stumpf and Tymon Jr’s research (2001) demonstrates that top Business Schools have concentrated on the lower level skills associated with systemic analysis since these skills are still the most highly prized among business schools; however, this is leading the consulting firms into a state of dismay. These firms are lamenting the lack of fundamental skills in areas of leadership, direction in teams and professionalism since Business Schools dismiss them and even sometimes consider them as not important. This has allowed consulting firms and academic researchers to identify a major gap between corporate needs and graduate’s skills (Oblinger and Verville, 1998, cited in Neumann and Banghart, 2001). Sometimes aspirants entering the consulting environment do not have enough “real-world” experience and the skills they hold still need to be developed.

On the other hand, Oliver and Turton’s (1982) research concluded that sometimes when employers complain about a lack of skilled employees, they often mean that they cannot find people with the right attitude who could fit in the “good bloke syndrome”. Either way, recent studies have highlighted the importance of personal attributes and attitudes regarding employer’s skill needs. Raybould and Sheedy (2005) also claim that employers complaining about the lack of skills are often reluctant to invest in employee development due to perceived uncertainty about the return on this investment of time and money. The authors propose that companies should undertake this responsibility of fostering the skills inside their own walls and not only wait for skilled talent to come through the main door as easy as that. For instance, now some consulting firms, aware that the skills they require somehow differ from the ones candidates and even experienced people have accrued, have decided to go out there and in an effort hand-by-hand like, are creating partnerships with institutions in order to prepare students for the “real world”. The gap identified is being treated by a structure denominated “consulternships” where students, under a scheme of interns or apprentices, can get a preview of what the industry is about and start sharpening those skills that already are a “must-have”. For instance, it is very common to relate consulting with only problem-finding and problem solving activities where analysis and influence are the norm; however, the consultant must be able to propose solutions to often extremely difficult client’s problems and influence them to take action, then leadership and direction become the drivers of the analytical skills.

It has become evident that consulting firms are demanding certain level of KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities) in order to build up certain balance and carry out better the work. But with one unbalanced element, the employee could find him/herself in disadvantage. Academics explain that this unbalanced situation is not common since knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities are closely merged together (O’Donnell and Garavan, 1997) otherwise the whole structure would fall down. However, practice has demonstrated that these unbalanced situations can indeed be found in employees when, for instance, they hold the knowledge in form of experience but they lack, most of the time, the skills. As a result, the existence of these skill gaps and shortages will probably lead to a “low skills equilibrium” where organizations may not be demanding the skills that are actually required to achieve organizational success because they do
not believe them to exist in sufficient quantity nor quality (Giles and Campbell, 2003). The authors explain that such a weak demand will also lead employees to not be willing to acquire such skills and then the organizations become somehow banned by going into a “low skills equilibrium”, in fact even the whole industry could get this status or even worse, a vicious spiral of low skills demanded and low skills supplied can be shaking and hitting these particular organizations. And this is something that undoubtedly can happen to the consulting industry if this blurry identification of skills needed and skills offered is not clarified soon.

There is another set of skills that are not considered in any of the four clusters proposed by Stumpf and Tymon Jr and has to do with image. Some consultancy firms have a fame of being elitist places where presumptuous workers in branded suits drive their expensive cars into pharaoh-like offices, some do not embrace this image quite good; however, some others perceive this as the expert they require help from. Harper (2004) introduces a set of skills called “Presentation skills” which comprises from the personal appearance to how to present to clients. Harper’s research lies on the statement that images can make or break a presentation and by that he means every single image that can be related to the firm since, he explains, presentation skills are vital to achieving success and it is important to keep in mind that is never what the consultant does what matters, it is always what he/she does and how he/she does it, there lies the importance of presentation. This set of skills acknowledges the importance of communication skills as fundamental; however, is a good presentation that influences people and sells. These project team members might be real experts in their area of specialization and know how to deal with the client’s problems; however, sometimes is even more difficult to present and explain to the clients the results, findings and suggestions. With a lousy Power Point, a poor way to communicate the key messages and a bad grooming of the presenter; a recipe for disaster is created. Harper (2004) suggests wearing your better clothes, using your best pen, create concise and direct tailor-made messages to the audience with the help of good and eye-catching visual aids and even some touch of humor in order to succeed in this consulting field. In this way, this set of skills complements the categorization offered by Stumpf and Tymon Jr (2001).

There is one last set of skills proposed by Rees and Porter (2003): chairing skills. These skills is related to how can people handle meetings effectively. Consultants interact with their local teams, the client teams and then present results on specific times. The authors clarify that who is chairing a meeting of any kind (informative, results presentation, team introduction, problems identification, etc) must hold very well developed chairing skills without taking advantage of their position by preventing people with opposing views the opportunity to speak. This set of skills comprises how to control the process of discussion, how involve everyone in the meeting, how to avoid having silent key members when paramount decisions are to be made, etc. Some interesting tools are available in order to help chairing a meeting such as sociograms and flow charts of discussion that will help to create patterns of interaction and gain control of discussions. However, the authors sadly acknowledge that very often is left to chance who will chair the meetings without analyzing whether the individual holds or not the skills to do this effectively. Consultant’s clients can be either seduced or insulted in the way their company’s problems and tentative solutions are presented to them. Consultants should be extremely careful on how they chair meetings with their clients since these not very often gatherings with the them are invaluable for feedback or also when presenting the final results and suggestions, the reputation of the consulting firm is practically at stake since clients are able to quickly form judgments in the first minutes about whether the meeting is being chaired effectively or not. So, for consultants to demonstrate that they can handle this process competently is only possible if these skills are sharpened enough.
With all these skills mentioned, project teams in this field are realizing that the rules of the game for this particular board change a bit and some of them are willing to sharpen whichever skill that needs to be developed since at the end they acknowledge they will be rewarded. It is a fact that consultants literally love financial rewarding, in fact many of the efforts to attract and retain consultants have been centered on financial incentives in different ways, also intrinsic rewards are to be considered; however, consultants have chosen already their favorite kind of recognition. This is sometimes even seen as a way for *blackmailing* those demonstrating resistance to employ certain skills in favor of projects. Consulting firms in one way or another must make sure they hold the required skills in order to carry out projects smoothly and efficiently. As mentioned before, some activities are available for companies to choose from in order to assure the skills they need within their workforce.

### 2.7 How do firms get, foster and retain these skills?

It is a function of Human Resources departments to hold the records of their workforce but few regularly go into the files again once a candidate becomes an employee. Then the skills database that could be produced out of the employees files sometimes simply does not happen at all (Ellis, 2003). Also track of professional development and skills acquired as well is lost when a record by employee is not followed by the Human Resources or Talent department. For instance, Iles and Hayers (1997) highlight that “it is possible to develop a project team profile for individual team members which reflects the experience and learning taking place as a source for a personal and individual development profile that documents the development of skills and experience in project teams”. But since this apparently is not happening for real within these firms, then there is no surprise what Hartman (2000, cited in Gardiner, 2005) tries to explain when manifesting that “the majority of project managers do not know that they are project managers”.

Gardiner (2005) argues that continuously organizations abandon projects before they are completed and sometimes this is attributed to the failure of the project manager, many of whom hold an engineering background and therefore a more deep knowledge in technical skills than people skills. Moreover, the author explains that “Project Management is first and foremost about people and then tools and techniques”. Then some skills are missing or not enough developed in these project managers who must get them or sharpen them in order to continue in the game. Hartenian (2003) explains that team members acquire these skills mainly by:

- Training
- Time spent in the team
- Being mentored
- Playing team sports
- Collectivism/individualism orientation

When project teams aim to acquire these skills, additional variables are to be considered such as gender and age of team members as well as the size of the firm.

*Training* is addressed by Gardiner (2005) as an option; however, the author clarifies that Project Management Training cannot guarantee project success; instead, it helps to avoid ignorant project managers. The author accounts for several forms in which Project Management Training can appear:
On-the-job experience seems to be an option several consulting firms go with since the employee learns at the same time that the project is being run. Through this on-the-job training in team skills, greater group cohesion can result (Martin and Davalos, 1995 cited in Hartenian, 2003). In here there is no need for pulling the employee out of the project in order to put him/her through a period of training time and also somehow this option for learning represents zero cost which is quite appealing since Training programs can be expensive to design and implement (Hartenian, 2003). Then employees continuously learn within organizations; however, they usually do it unconsciously, informally and incidentally during their work (Marsick and Watkins, 1990 cited in Poell and Van der Krogt, 2003). However, Poell and Van der Krogt (2003) themselves account for an option called “learning project” where the idea is to remove the learning from its every day context by organizing it in project form. In this way, a group of people – not necessarily working together - will be put together for the duration of the learning program. The authors clarify that is crucial that the theme of the project is important for their work and learning, since they should be able to see the relevance of the theme for themselves and want to learn about it. Another similar proposal of team learning is developed by Iles and Hayers (1997) who explain that the use of international joint ventures teams allow companies to select, retain and develop employees through HR practices.

Training is considered as an important instrument when dealing with skill gaps and skills obsolescence since it allows workers to update their skills (Bishop, 1997 cited in Van Loo et al. 2001). Moreover, Margerison (2001) has identified that Team competency is the key to team performance; however, the author affirms that few teams are trained in these concepts of team competency and even fewer measure their performance on such criteria. Nevertheless some organizations are now realizing that the link created between training interventions and skills add tremendous value since this helps to immediately identify which kind of training is required in order to develop competencies. Therefore techniques such as Gap Analysis and Vendor Training Maps are cross referenced against the skills in the various competency models. An interesting example of training programs developed by a government aiming to help employers in order to diminish the gap on skills is provided by the UK with its TECs (Training and Enterprise Councils), also by the National Skills Task Force and the Local Skill Council. TECs were designed in an attempt to focus more on the skills shortages reported by employers. This initiative was defined as local bodies led by boards of business and local leaders aiming to support youth training and helping adults back to work. In 2001 TECs were replaced by Local Skill Councils which control funding for colleges of further education as well as some government employment schemes (Ellis, 2003).
Johnson et al. (2005) have stated that when talking about training and development issues, now more attention has been granted to coaching and mentoring in order to support the employee’s development. For instance research has demonstrated that firms offering mentoring have experienced the best results. A mentor is a person with more firm-specific KSA (knowledge, skills and abilities) who is paired with someone who has less firm-specific KSAs. The goal is the exchange of knowledge and in this way the mentee is better socialized and/or becomes better prepared to take on every time more important tasks in the firm (Hartenian, 2003). The author explains that mentoring results in a co-learning environment. The best cases of success have taken place in informal mentoring relationships (protégés in informal) rather than in formal, for both, men and women mentees. Also, successful coaching requires commitment of both parts, as Bluckert (2005) accounts for when explaining that this success can only be reached by considering the skills and qualities of the coach as well as commitment to the process and desire to improve or change manifested by the coachee. Through this process the coach has the task of creating a safe space for the individual to take the risks necessary to learn, develop and change (Bluckert, 2005).

“Lessons learnt meetings” are addressed by Petrone (2004) as a very useful tool for project teams to learn and foster their skills. The objective is to bring together key members of the project team in order to analyze what went wrong, what could have been done different and also what worked well. In here, the author emphasizes, brutal honesty is the only thing that will truly help the team how to improve in the next project.

Also an apparently quite effective way for companies to make sure their employees embrace the fact that they must hold certain skills is rewarding. The company assures the retention of skills as well as persuades employees to foster them. Rewarding has helped companies into fostering more teamworking when delivering strategic results, therefore team incentives are now complementing individual incentives instead of replacing them. (Johnson et al. 2006).

Recruitment nowadays holds a paramount importance for companies in the quest for skills. Sometimes this calls for a change in the Human Resources policies. For instance, Johnson et al. (2006) explain how in the 1990s KPMG realized the need of business and managerial skills in its future partners, then the consulting firm made a twist into its policies on recruitment and assessments in order to favor those applicants holding such skills. Through new techniques for identifying these skills in job aspirants, consulting companies are able to carry out more detailed recruitment process where pointing out the most suitable candidates to incorporate into their workforce is now doable. However, a big drawback has been also identified by practitioners when explaining that even and when companies employ the best psychometric tests and personality assessments during the recruitment process, they are only used precisely there, at the recruitment procedure and firms do not continue applying these tools as a part of an on-going development process. Therefore firms fail in identifying development beyond the recruitment stage. Homer (2001) for instance emphasizes that since companies do not keep records of the skills been held by their employees they cannot review the potential competences that they already have among their current workforce. If firms would have created this skills library, as the author refers to, companies might compare the cost of developing an existing employee versus going through the recruitment process that at the end also ends in training.

Some companies foster activities outside the office such as family weekends or sport teams. These activities, besides the fact that embrace the employee in a more informal environment, are also aiming to sharpen team skills. Meyer (1997, cited in Hartenian, 2003) explains that academics and practitioners have discovered how participation in team sports contributes to employees’ behavior since they require a similar work ethic, sense of loyalty and responsibility as well as development of goal setting skills.
It has become undoubtedly that keeping the skills up-to-date is a major factor for every worker’s continuing employability. Even and when some companies have formal processes in order to identify the skills their employees need to develop or update, the employee, on the other hand, can identify areas he/she would like sharpen and then asking the employer to support by sourcing or funding training, mentoring, coaching or whichever option that fits the purpose, becomes a push-and-pull negotiation where sometimes only when the employee is able to demonstrate how will this investment is relevant to the employer’s is the key to get access to polishing these skills (Prospectus Directory 2006/7).

It is important to address that many people emigrate from different industries into consultancy. Then sometimes a complete career change takes place after several years of work experience where different skills have been fostered. When expanding their services by developing new products and services and aiming new clients, Consulting firms look for human talent in the industries they are targeting; however, there is a price left to be paid since sometimes these key people, a *stolen* human resource from other arenas, hold technical expertise in how to swim in unknown waters for the firm but lack certain skills considered as a *must* in consulting. Regularly for employees wanting to change industry into consulting is difficult to find funding for these trainings in order to get the skills required unless they have been contacted by firm already willing to do so. Recruitment consultancy William Holden (Miller Freeman, 1999) has found that candidates are now choosing employers with better training since they believe it gives them an advantage when opportunities for promotion arise or be chosen for a specific project and also acknowledge that in the long run this will also increase their earning potential, therefore they are willing to sacrifice now a higher salary over good training and development opportunities.

At the end it is a matter of “hiring right” and “training right” when developing effective skills within project teams (Hartenian, 2003). And these project teams are practically the modus operandum of a specific kind of organization: the consulting firms. These companies work on a project-after-project basis where teams are continuously built and disaggregated. These teams call for specific skills since these skills are to be portrayed as one big attractive by consulting firms when working with a client. For instance, Larwood and Gattiker (1986) have described the consultant’s role as “analyzing and bridging the gap between their (the consultants) body of knowledge and skills and the requirements of the client organization”. Therefore these skills, along with the know-how of the firm, immediately are wrapped into a mist of exclusivity and desire belonging particularly to this industry: the consulting industry.

### 2.8 The consulting industry

Consulting is an industry that has been growing rapidly in the last decades due to the enterprise focus on understanding the market and the organization in order to become competitive and ensure their survival and/or success in the marketplace. There are two main justifications for the existence of the consulting practice (Drucker, 1979 cited in Appelbaum and Steed, 2005). First, management skills, techniques and knowledge are best learned through exposure and experience with many different companies in diverse industries and executives usually do not have this exposure. Second, the executives want an external and objective opinion regarding management problems.

There is general agreement on the contributing factors for the growth of the consulting industry worldwide: a booming economy, a growing demand for the combination of up-to-date technical skills, intelligence and energy in the top tier talent, also a value orientation among younger professionals in order to take control of their own careers rather than joining a prestigious firm and putting their destiny into its hands (Stumpf and Tymon Jr, 2001).
Fortune Magazine (2000) illustrates this approach by citing ten companies which are winning the war to keep talent through a series of tips that range from ‘foster a sense of community’ to ‘allow employees decision-making authority’. These ideas have been shared in most leadership seminars during the last thirty years. Senior managers in professional service firms are trained in deductive analytic thinking and skilled at identifying actions that can quickly address a problem. They range from out-bidding their competitors in entry salaries to demonstrating interest in a candidate through more lavish entertaining, as well as by promising faster cars or attractive career paths. These approaches have yielded the obvious but somehow unexpected consequences: higher labor costs, salary compression, new hire dismay at the disparity between the actual and expected work situation and job-changing towards the next best deal.

According to the Management Consulting Association (MCA WEBPAGE), there are different types of consulting firms:

1. **Generalist.** These large consulting firms offer a wide range of services from strategy consulting and human resources to IT and in some cases outsourcing on a global basis. Many of these firms grew out of the audit firms, e. g. Accenture, KPMG Consulting, Cap Gemini, Ernst & Young, Bearing Point, Deloitte & Touche and PriceWaterhouseCoopers. Some firms were developed within IT service companies, e. g. IBM Business Consulting Services, LogicaCMG and Computer Sciences Corporation.

2. **Strategy Consulting.** Within this category are firms like McKinsey and Bain & Company, Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Booz Allen Hamilton. The majority of these organizations are American and they primarily offer strategic advice to companies on a project by project basis.

3. **Human Resource Consulting.** These firms offer specialist advice ranging from reviews of salaries and benefits to development of leadership skills. They include organizations like Hay Group, Mercer Human Resource Consulting, Towers Perrin, Watson Wyatt and Penna Consulting.

4. **Niche firms.** Many consulting firms have been created as a result of consultants leaving the larger firms and setting up their own consulting firms in a particular sector or offering a specialist service. (Everis, Fujitsu Consulting, Roland Berger)

Vault Consulting publishes every year the list of the top consulting firms, according to a criterion of revenue, prestige, worldwide offices, history, success cases and so on. In 2007, the ten top consultancy firms (most of them in the strategy consulting division) were as follows:

2. The Boston Consulting Group, Boston, MA
3. Bain & Company, Boston, MA
4. Booz Allen Hamilton McLean, VA
5. Monitor Group, Cambridge, MA
6. Oliver Wyman – General Management Consulting, New York, NY
7. Oliver Wyman – Financial Services, New York, NY
8. Deloitte Consulting LLP, New York, NY
10. The Parthenon Group, Boston, MA
Alternatively, Nees and Grenier (1985) propose five categories of consultants:

1. **The mental adventurer.** Analyzes complex problems with long-term scenarios. They work in issues requiring leading edge knowledge.

2. **The strategic navigator.** Provides in-depth quantitative understanding of the market and competitive dynamics and then recommends courses of action without too much regard of the client’s perspective. They mainly focus on formulation with little interest on implementation.

3. **The management physician.** Derives his or her recommendations from a deep understanding of the internal dynamics of the client organization, often willing to sacrifice some objectivity to gain a realistic perspective on what is achievable. They rely on qualitative research and are interested on implementation aspects.

4. **The system architect.** Impacts his or her clients by helping redesign processes, routines, and systems – always in close cooperation with the client. They prefer narrower, well-defined projects.

5. **The friendly co-pilot.** Counsels senior managers as a facilitator rather than as an expert, and has no ambition to provide new knowledge to the client. Their specialty is to provide advice.

This last categorization has been also utilized in other consulting papers such as in the one by Delany (cited in Kakabadse et al, 2006) as well as by Appelbaum and Steel (2005).

### 2.9 Knowledge gap

Skills have the ability to create confusion when neither practitioners nor academics or even the employers themselves can really agree on what does ‘skill’ mean (Dench, 1997) and which ones are the skills required in order to perform successfully in this sector. With everyone having problems on putting the finger on which ones are these skills, it becomes complicated where to find them and even how to foster them of course arise as in a domino effect.

Also important is to highlight the lack of literature addressed specifically to project-teams in consulting firms and the skills that are to be held by them. Vast contributions are to be found regarding teams and even project teams; however, most of it is addressed to multicultural or cross-functional teams performing inside traditional organizations. Nevertheless, some authors have offered their insights regarding the importance of the relationship between the consultant and the client (Fullerton and West, 1996; Appelbaum and Steed, 2005) and some others have even compared consultants versus entrepreneurs in an attempt to make clear the difference between both kinds of professionals (Stumpf and Tymon Jr., 2001) since each of them call for a different set of skills in order to obtain the best results.

Consulting firms have manifested the rocky road they go through when trying to find skillful professionals since not even the best business schools nor the best job-position held by job-aspirants have helped them in developing the set of skills that this industry demands. A gap is also to be found when trying to ferret out which efforts have been carried out by consulting firms with academic institutions who are main providers of talent for them. This and pointing out which ones are these skills per se are embodying a topic that deserves more research from which several stakeholders could benefit.
Chapter 3  
Methodology

This section explains the procedures that have been put in place and also addresses the difficulties faced when conducting this research project. According to Kaplan (cited in Kakabadse et al., 2006) the methodology section describes and analyses the methods used in the researching, explaining resources and limitations, clarifying suppositions and consequences in order to define the scope of the study.

The first part presents the study design and the research approach; describing the type of research that was performed, the characteristics of the participants and the method used to collect data. The ethical considerations are also addressed as an important part to assure the anonymity of the participants and the accurate use of the gathered information. The last part discusses the method used for data analysis. The subjectivity is the main issue acknowledged as research limitation.

3.1 Research philosophy

Saunders et al (2003) define the research philosophy as the way that everyone thinks about the development of knowledge. Since the research stands in the perception of a particular group of people (business consultants), a positivistic approach was adopted. In this line, researchers work with an observable social reality that in the end will lead to a generalization similar to those performed by scientists (Remenyi et al, cited in Kakabadse et al., 2006). On the other hand, interpretivist seeks to understand the motives, actions and intentions in a way that is meaningful for the research participants (Saunders et al, 2003). It can be argued that the overall thinking and philosophy behind the research is positivist, while the approach to the research question and participants to the questionnaire is interpretivist.

3.2 Research approach

The aim of this research project is to obtain the list of skills that are required by the consulting firms in their consultants, as well as the manner in which it is assured the maintenance and development of these skills within the consulting process. According to Saunders et al (2003) this research can be qualified as inductive because the researcher collects data and develops a theory as a result of the data analysis. The study presents a framework obtained from the data analysis performed, bringing new knowledge on the consultant skills arena, justifying the inductive approach of the research. Saunders et al (2003) also states that a research strategy is needed; the researcher must have a general plan of how the research question should be answered. It was agreed that the questionnaire was the appropriate method to answer the research question; however, in practice it was necessary to use some interviews in order to both clarify some data that seems to be interesting to itemize and information that was not clear or contradicting.
3.3 Study design

While reading the enormous amount of the literature related to skills, it was identified that the majority of the articles cover the usage of skills from a traditional business view. There are not many papers explaining skills inside project-based organizations, therefore a lack of research in the consulting arena exists.

One main characteristic of this study is that it focuses on how business consultants perceive their own skills. Since this research involves a reflective approach, it was decided that a qualitative approach would be clearly appropriate.

A qualitative focus refers to any kind of research that produces results not arrived by statistical or quantification means suggests that qualitative research methods provide opportunities for intensified inquiry into the behavior of business firms (Kakabadse et al., 2006). In this sense, the qualitative research will allow to increase the level of interaction with the consultants (respondents) as well as the quality of the data (valid and accurate information).

Nonetheless, some quantitative approach will also be undertaken in order to analyze the trends and popularity of some skills in the consulting world, i.e. the skills that has been highly ranked by the respondents.

This study is based on the qualitative approach suggested by O’Donnell and Cummings (1999) as illustrated by the figure on the right. As it can be appreciated the first section is a passive standpoint in which the researcher understands the topic based on personal thinking and theoretical exploration.

After this step, an active involvement by the researcher is visible while conducting the study, when the problem to investigate is defined, the study is designed and then implemented and the data is collected and subsequently it is analyzed. The significance of the study is achieved when the phenomena is understood, usually through the findings discussion and sometimes with a model framework or conceptualization.

Figure 8. Qualitative research approach suggested by O’Donnell and Cummings (1999)
3.4 Data sources

Primary and secondary data were used during this research project. Björk and Räisänen (2003) indicate that primary sources are the data gathered during the research from a direct source, such as company’s annual statements, field studies, laboratory experiments, interviews, questionnaires, etc. On the other hand, secondary data consist in the information from other people’s work on the same subject, i.e. text books, journal articles, books, newspaper, etc.

Primary data was collected through questionnaires, some particular interviews and information provided by the firms through their corporate Internet websites. Secondary data was acquired from journal articles of both academic and practitioner professionals. This secondary type of data was employed for the literature review and demonstrated to be useful in the discussion of the results sections when contrasting the business consultant’s perspectives with the academics and practitioners views.

3.5 Participants’ selection: a preamble to the analysis

Initially, e-mails were sent with the aim to gain contacts in major consultancies in Sweden, Italy, Mexico and United Kingdom. However, interested contacts were only found in the Mexican consulting industry, due to the previous work experience of the authors. Information about the study and instructions about the questionnaire were given to the existing contacts within the consulting firms in Mexico. In this way, it was easier to build relationship with the consultants since the level of mistrust was lower, enabling a faster communication and feedback.

The criteria for the selection of participants were varied. It was considered the types of companies enjoying an important business unit and that can be considered as consultancy in Mexico. Consultancy is a very broad field and there are numerous types of consultants specialized on a variety of fields.

In order to validate the study and provide impartial data, it was agreed that the number of consultants had to be large and varied. As a result, the consultants who agreed to participate are specialized in several areas of expertise such as management, information technology, finance, organizational change, marketing, logistics, etc.

Moreover, it was decided to extend the invitation to participate in this study to consultant with different levels within the consulting firms with the aim of wider the scope of business consultant. Therefore, the sample includes junior associates, senior associates and also those holding a managerial position in the organizations.

Five consulting firms currently performing in Mexico City were chosen for this study: KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte & Touche, Accenture and Everis. In the next chapter a complete introduction of who are these firms will be provided. A total of 40 questionnaires were sent to consultants working in these consulting firms and 45% of them participated by sending back the answered questionnaire.
3.6 Scope and limitations

The scope of this paper encompasses the consultants perspectives in the skills hold by themselves and by their companies. Therefore, it is a personal appreciation on the skills required by consulting firms in accordance to consultant’s particular experience and background.

The study was agreed to be conducted in consulting firms with local headquarters located in Mexico City. After the initial invitation to participate in the study, 18 respondents from five consulting companies (KPMG, Deloitte, Accenture, PwC and Everis) provided a positive response.

This study does not take into account other perspectives that can influence the final study about consulting skills such as:

- External view from the consulting firms’ clients, since they are important part in the day-by-day consulting work.
- Internal view from the consulting firm’s Human Resources Department, which holds the organizational strategy for human capital in the consulting firm.
- The opinion of business schools, universities, and other academic institutions; which are the entities preparing the future consulting professional and play an important role in skills-training.
- A more quantitative approach, i.e. with large scale-questionnaires. Besides, the research only includes five consulting firms from the available group of enterprises in the consulting industry that can be included in future research.
- Regional application. This study focuses on the Mexican market and cannot be generalized to consultants worldwide.

3.7 Methods of data collection

The selected initial tool to be used in this study was the questionnaire. Some interviews were performed afterwards in order to get more in-depth knowledge about some responses obtained from the questionnaires or also to clarify ambiguities in some of the answers. The next section explores the characteristics of methods as well as some benefits and limitations.

Blaxter et al (2006) argue that the use of more than one method for data collection is common in research. The use of a multiple-method aims to try and verify the validity of information being collected (known as triangulation) and is a good way to support qualitative and qualitative research in a productive manner.

3.7.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaires are completed by respondents themselves, and are one of the main instruments for gathering data using a social survey design, along with a structured interview (Bryman and Bell, 2003). The questionnaire and the structured interview are similar research methods, being the main difference that the questionnaire has no interviewer to ask the questions. The items in the questionnaire can take several forms: open-ended items, multiple-choice items and Likert-scale items.
Graziano and Raulin (2004) suggest the following steps in order to prepare for a questionnaire research:

1. Determine what area of information is to be sought.
2. Define the population to be studied.
3. Decide how the survey is to be administered.
4. Construct the first draft of the survey instrument; edit and refine the draft.
5. Pretest the survey with a subsample; refine it further.
6. Develop a sampling frame and draw a representative sample.
7. Administer the final form of the instrument to the sample.
8. Analyze, interpret, and communicate the results.

Questionnaires and interviews begin with an introduction, which explains the purpose of the survey and gives instructions to the respondent. There are two categories of data that can be collected: factual and content. The factual data is objective since the obtaining data is related to age, sex, occupation, marital status, and so on. On the other hand, the content items ask about respondent’s opinions, attitudes, knowledge and behavior.

The use of the questionnaire brings some advantages (Bryman and Bell, 2003):

1. Cheaper to administer.
2. Quicker to administer.
3. Absence of interview effects
4. No interviewer variability
5. Convenience for respondents.

Nonetheless, Bryman and Bell (2003) also identify some disadvantages when using questionnaires:

1. Cannot prompt.
2. Cannot probe.
3. Cannot ask many questions that are not salient to respondent.
4. Difficulty of asking other kinds of question.
5. Questionnaire can be read as a whole
6. Do not know who answers
7. Cannot collect additional data
8. Difficult to ask a lot of questions
9. Not appropriate for some kinds of respondent
10. Greater risk of missing data
11. Lower response rates

A very simple and friendly questionnaire was designed in order to collect data from current consultants working in Mexico City. The questionnaire comprises nineteen questions categorized in mainly three types: choosing from options available, ranking and simply open questions. The questionnaire was designed in this way in order to avoid limiting the respondent in some of his/her answers.
Chapter 3. Methodology

The information gathered with this questionnaire was extremely helpful in order to identify, through the consultants, how their employers are conducting skills issues with their workforce. The questionnaire starts asking for general information such as name of the employer and current job position, then the respondent is guided to provide information about his/her background, both academically and professionally in order to identify the main studies been held by current consultants as well as the industries, previous foster-homes of nowadays consultants, at this instant probably losing the battle against consulting firms in this war for talent.

One of the main questions asks the consultants to rank a set of skills provided by academics and practitioners from two different perspectives. One of them is from the consultant itself, requiring a self-analysis of how the respondent acknowledges his/her strengths and weaknesses as a consultant and the second approach kindly asks the respondent to answer from his/her perspective evaluating his/her current employer. This specific question provides a lot of material for analysis and skill-gaps identification.

In other section the respondents are asked to explain the different ways, if any, that their employers try to foster and retain the skills. Finally the respondents are free to add or comment anything they might consider interesting to be addressed for purposes of this research. An example of the questionnaire is available as an addendum at the end of this paper.

Complementary data collection tool: the interview

Bryman and Bell (2003) define the interview as a prominent data collection tool usable for both qualitative and quantitative research. In the business research interview, the aim is for the interviewer to obtain from the respondent (also called interviewee) all manner of information: interviewee’s own behavior or that of others, attitudes, norms, opinions, beliefs, values, etc.

There are many types of interviews. In the case of this research study, the interview is not used as the primary method. The interview was only used after the questionnaire in some cases when needed, usually with the purpose of getting a more in-depth knowledge in certain topic, or clarifying misunderstandings, missing data or contradictions.

The interview was selected as the appropriate tool to use because of its preset range of questions designed according to the researcher’s objectives as well as the flexibility provided by adding new questions during the interview as interesting replies from the respondent are emerging. The interviews were conducted via telephone, as being the quicker and most adaptable option to gather the information and meet the time availability of the interviewees.
3.8 Methods of data analysis

The most difficult part of a qualitative research project tends to be the analysis process (Sapsford and Jupp, cited in Kakabadse et al., 2006). The interpretation of data is a matter that researchers often have conflict with. There are no set of rules, but from the relevant literature on research methods, the analysis process was suggested to be done in three steps.

1. **Data organization.**
   The data recorded on the questionnaires need to be organized properly in order to be analyzed. Instruments such as tables, graphs, diagrams and conceptual maps were used to draw the general picture of skills in the consulting firms. Respondents’ answers constitute the raw material of the analysis. Therefore, researchers most carefully select the pieces of information that are relevant to their analysis (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981).

2. **Data Categorization.**
   It refers to the identification of patterns in the data that suggest a trend on the analyzed matter. Data categorization is a key step in the analysis process, it is used to break the collected material into smaller packages that are easier to understand, investigate and contrast among each other (Burns, cited in Kakabadse et al., 2006).

3. **Results Interpretation.**
   Once the findings of the study have been identified, it is important to compare the results with the literature review in order to identify evidence of support, contradiction or areas that need further research on the field of study. It is necessary to specify if the research question was fully answered and whether the expected outcome was obtained or not.

3.9 Research validity

It is necessary to recognize that in any qualitative research there is a possibility of bias due to the subjectivism of the task. Sapsford and Jupp (cited in Kakabadse et al., 2006) mention that the way in which a question is asked might influence the received answer. Potential biases have been limited by the fact that questions have not been discussed previously with the respondents, enabling a degree of spontaneity in the answers given. Sometimes, a consultant was contacted through a previous respondent; in consequence the level of trust was increased.

Ackroyd and Hughes (1981) argue that people can lie or say things with the purpose of maximizing their self-esteem or the perception of their activities. However, because a good level of trust was established with the respondents since the beginning of the study, they were sincere and spoke anonymously without fear of contradiction or disapproval. The reward came from some consultants that were interested in the lack of research regarding the topic and felt motivated to continue with the study.

On the other hand, certain favoritism from the researcher interpretation is also possible. As stated by Burns (cited in Kakabadse et al., 2006), it is easy to bias the data because of the prejudices and attitudes of the researcher. Even although a neutral approach has been attempted, a personal influence on the findings cannot be totally guaranteed.
3.10 Paper organization

In order to make easier the reading and understanding of this research, a conventional approach was taken to organize the information. Björk and Räisänen (2003) suggest the design of the paper structure based on the IMRAD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion). This method is flexible and the researcher can be easily adapted to their own needs. Following the same line, Blaxter et al (2006) recommend to use Barner’s classic dissertation structure as a possible form of academic research paper.

Both methodologies agree on the sections selected to organize this paper: abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, data analysis, conclusion and critic of findings, references and appendices. A more structured organization of this specific paper has been already provided in the initial pages. Finally, a couple of previous approved theses (Flodin, 1999; Scheneider, 2001) were skimmed with the purpose of ensuring that the structure for this thesis meets the requirements imposed by Umeå School of Business.

3.11 Ethical considerations

Research projects ought to consider the ethical aspect from beginning to end. The main ethical dilemma is the choice between right and wrong. This section aims to stress the significance of ethics in this study. Ackroyd and Hughes (1981) made a very good observation indicating that the task of the researcher is to obtain information, frequently of private nature, from a respondent who has limited time and usually has no previous relation with the researcher. Business consultants are extremely busy professionals, therefore it was necessary to respect their time and facilitate the gathering of information by creating an easy to read, simple and shaped questionnaire.

In the same line, Ackroyd and Hughes (1981) indicate that the researcher must communicate trust, reassurance, and likeableness to the respondent in order to maintain his or her interest and motivation. Respondents should not be threatened and the researcher should assume an irreproachable ethical attitude. Therefore, the anonymity of the participants and the restriction of data from external entities were guaranteed as a gratitude gesture for their collaboration.

Before the sending of the questionnaires, respondents were asked for permission to be involved in the study. A copy of the research proposal was included to ensure that those agreeing to participate in the study were aware of the aims of the research and the expected outcome. Confidentiality is also considered since it is easier to really express truly when retaliations and repercussions are out of the picture when is difficult to put a face to the questionnaire. Therefore the respondents’ identity, as in name, will not be mentioned. Consequently, it can be observed in the research results and discussion that those consultants who participated are referred as simply respondents, questionees or interviewees. Ackroyd and Hughes (1981) suggest that respondents are free to break off at any moment. Thus, further explanation and support were given to respondents when needed. The consultants were offered a copy of the results once the research project is completed.
Chapter 4
Discussing the findings

As already mentioned during the methodology, this research was carried out in consulting firms in Mexico City, where the consulting industry has demonstrated to be strong enough to capture large clients from different industries and not only nationally but internationally since most of their clients operating in Mexico also run offices in other countries in Latin America. Mexico, for some of their clients, represents the headquarters or at least main offices to consider when strategic decisions are made and deployed all over the region. The Consulting sector in Mexico has found its way and established as a renowned industry by the nineties turning itself into an attractive option for professionals aiming for fast growing and development.

4.1 Consulting sector in Mexico

Luis Carlos Ferezin, President and Partner for Accenture Mexico, affirms that the consulting industry in Mexico is a market in a maturing process. It is not yet consolidated as in other countries because of the great difficulty to guarantee to the enterprises that the ideas proposed by consultants will be translated into tangible results for the company (Uribe, 2006).

The consulting firms in Mexico are linked through a chamber known as “Cámara Nacional de Empresas de Consultoría” (CNEC). In their annual report, it is explained that the consulting industry encompasses two main types of advisory: the management consulting arena (administration, economy, finance, marketing) that represents 69% of the total consultancy demand in Mexico, and the engineering consulting arena (from technical feasibility to maintenance process design), which contribute with the other 31%.

According to the CNEC, the consulting Mexican industry presents the following characteristics: grows at higher rate than the total economy growth rate; the growth during the last decade was 12.5% annually; one unit generates trice employment than another unit in the service sector where 95% are small enterprises, 4% are medium size and 1% are the big companies. It is estimated that the consulting industry in Mexico will reach between 8,000 and 9,000 millions of US dollars by 2010, from which the management consulting firms will have the higher growth. José Tam, Director for Bearing Point Latin America, also states that the consulting market in Mexico has been growing between 8 and 10% annually; however, it grew around 18% from 2004 to 2005 (Uribe, 2006).

The CNEC also mentions that the new tendencies in the Mexican consulting market are: transparency in negotiations, free market, globalization, higher number of consultants, opportunity for small-medium companies, higher importance of certifications, enlarge on demand, increment on innovation, clients with higher requirements, use of internet, development of intellectual capital, more sensibility to competitors, involvement of academic institutions and public sector. In order to achieve the expected results, the CNEC states that there will be a higher demand for well-skilled human resources that constitute the intellectual capital for the consulting firms.
The table in figure 9 presents the main consulting companies in Mexico.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Offices</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PriceWaterhouseCoopers</td>
<td>Worldwide: 130,000</td>
<td>Mexico: 19</td>
<td>Auditing, business advisory, taxes and legal services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mancera Ernst &amp; Young</td>
<td>Worldwide: 100,000</td>
<td>Worldwide: 670 Mexico: 22</td>
<td>Auditing, business advisory, risk management, internal control, business outsourcing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deloitte &amp; Touche</td>
<td>Mexico: 4,400</td>
<td>Mexico: 22</td>
<td>Auditing, taxes, consulting and financial advisory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accenture</td>
<td>Worldwide: 123,000</td>
<td>Mexico: 3</td>
<td>Consulting, technology and outsourcing services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPMG</td>
<td>Worldwide: 94,000</td>
<td>Worldwide: 717 Mexico: 15</td>
<td>Auditing, taxes and advisory services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everis</td>
<td>Worldwide: 4,000</td>
<td>Worldwide: 15 Mexico: 2</td>
<td>Business strategy and IT services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bearing Point</td>
<td>Worldwide: 15,000</td>
<td>Worldwide: 40</td>
<td>Business strategy, CRM, supply chain management, IT services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gartner</td>
<td>Worldwide: 10,500</td>
<td>Worldwide: 75</td>
<td>Research and consulting in information technologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKinsey</td>
<td>Worldwide: 14,000</td>
<td>Worldwide: 90</td>
<td>Strategy consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bain &amp; Company</td>
<td>Worldwide: 3,700</td>
<td>Worldwide: 37</td>
<td>Strategy consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Consulting Group</td>
<td>Worldwide: 3,800</td>
<td>Worldwide: 60</td>
<td>Strategy consulting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Summary of main consulting firms in Mexico (compiled by the authors)

The main players in consulting industry used to be called “the big eight”, all of them accounting firms, but after two mergers they were reduced to “the big six” and the group was formed by Arthur Andersen, Ernst & Young (formed by a merger between Arthur Young and Ernst & Whinney), Deloitte & Touche (formed by a merger between Deloitte Haskins & Sells and Touche Ross), KPMG Peat Marwick, Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand. These “big six” were again reduced now to “the big five” when Price Waterhouse merged with Coopers & Lybrand and formed PricewaterhouseCoopers, also known as PwC. Then in 2002 again a downsizing happened when Arthur Andersen found itself grimed with the Enron scandal and stop practicing. And then only “the big four” survived. This term is equally used in America and Europe when referring to the nowadays four consulting powerhouses operating all over the globe: KPMG, PWC, Deloitte and Ernst & Young.

Nevertheless, the story for Arthur Andersen did not stop there, this accounting firm used to hold a consulting wing called Andersen Consulting; however, in 2000 the International Chamber of Commerce approved the independence of Andersen Consulting from Arthur Andersen and just in time before the Enron’s scandal. In 2001 the firm changed its name into one of the most renowned consulting firms of today’s time: Accenture.

The questionnaires for this research were answered by consultants working in three of “the big four” consulting firms in their non-accounting side but strategic consulting services plus Accenture and another company belonging to the so called Niche kind of consulting firm: the
Spanish Everis, formerly known as DMR Consulting. In fact Everis has been chosen among the top companies to work for in Spain under the survey carried out by CRF International (a research based publishing company) in 2007.

Consultants working for five of these companies are the sample for this research’s purposes: KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, Accenture and Everis. A brief description of who are these consulting firms is followed by an analysis with magnifier done in order to identify which skills are to be presumed and possessed by the consultants working for these firms. The argumentation is based in the information obtained through the firm’s corporate website (see on-line references), i.e. on-line brochures, reports and career section.

4.1.1 KPMG

With its mysterious name, KPMG, formed actually as an acronym-like using the initials of the four partners who merged in order to give birth to this giant in the industry: Klynveld, Peat, Marwick and Goerdeler coming from The Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States and Germany, this consulting powerhouse is one of the largest and most powerful firms in the world. With 113,000 professionals and operating in 148 countries this global firm offers Audit, Tax and Advisory services. The firm, interested in creating a strong organizational culture through networking, also is committed to the communities where they operate through their corporate social responsibilities efforts. In 2006 when the firm publicly announced its member firm combined revenues of US$16.9 billions, Mike Rake, Chairman of KPMG International explained how the firm was carrying out an effort in recruiting widely to meet the growing demand for their services in 2007. In 2006 KPMG was voted as one of the 20 best big companies to work for in UK in The Sunday Times. Also Canada’s Top 100 employers for 2007 include KPMG. United States did not overlook the firm either when Business week consider the firm as one of the 50 best places to launch a career. In Europe, both France and Germany awarded the firm through La Tribune in France as one of the best places to work and through a review done by Hertie Foundation in Germany recognizing the firm for its solutions concerning the compatibility of job and family.

KPMG acknowledges the high expectations its stakeholders have, from clients to investors and government, as a result, the firm explains through its Annual Review 2006, they have focused on recruiting outstanding individuals and providing them with career opportunities, training and support they need to thrive professionally and personally. The firm makes very clear its objective of being an employer of choice with the best individuals seeing KPMG as the best place to pursue their professional development.

This consultancy firm has also identified the problems when trying to get the right people in the right number since the company has realized that in high-grow markets they find fewer potential employees of the right caliber in relation to the firm’s requirements. For instance, new attractive markets such as China and India are places to pay attention to; however, the firm argues that the existing talent pool within these markets is not deep enough to meet the future demand. Then the company is bringing experienced employees from outside these countries in order to share the skills, ideas and experiences. The company finds itself in a situation where they need more great people in order to support the very strong client demand they have, as a result in 2006 KPMG hired 16,000 graduates and 13,000 experienced professionals globally and created new programs for fostering skills and knowledge and retain talent such as the Global Opportunities Program, the Tax Trek and the Retaining Talented Women Program.
KPMG explains in its annual report how they have always been strong providing technical training; however, they have realized that now the nature of business calls for other wide range of technical, professional and also personal capabilities. The firm assures that all KPMG people will have access to the core skills they need to thrive through skills programs aiming to build essential capabilities such as client skills, leadership and business management. In fact the company proudly expresses how in a second global people survey in 2006, 79% of the employees who responded to the survey agreed that KPMG has created an environment where people from different backgrounds can succeed and 75% have a clear vision of possible career paths.

The competition for great people is acknowledged by KPMG as an increasing situation where only good efforts in recruitment and development will help the firm into maintaining its aspirational status as a place where tons of people would to die to work at.

4.1.2 PricewaterhouseCoopers

Formed in 1988 PwC is the world’s largest firm of accountants with 146,000 professionals in 766 offices located in 150 countries. The firm offers services in the fields of assurance, tax, human resources, transactions, performance improvement and crisis management. PwC member firms by 30th of June in 2007 reported global revenues growing by 10.5% to US$25.2 billion and the firm explains how this has been possible by spoiling its already captive markets but also paying attention to growing markets such as China and India, just the same strategy followed by its competitor KPMG.

From the total of its workforce, 41% are located in Europe and 26% in North America and the Caribbean followed by a 16% in Asia and the rest is shared by Middle East & Africa, South & Central America and Australasia and the Pacific Islands. The firm is proud and do not hesitate when argues how students rank PwC compared to the other three consulting powerhouses that form “the big four”. Chinese students both in 2006 and 2007 ranked PwC as number one, so did students from Switzerland, Spain, United Kingdom, United States and Pan-European. Students from Denmark and Sweden voted for PwC as number one; however, by 2007 they decided to give the first place to someone else and gave the second position to PwC. The contrary effect happened with students from Germany how in the past ranked the firm in second place but now they decided to push it towards the first place. Finally, students from Czech Republic and France are firmly in their decisions when granting a not that bad second position to the firm in both years. These results may not be that surprising if is understood how PwC has gained this reputation among students all over the world thanks to its close relationship with AIESEC, the world’s largest student-run organization. AIESEC a non-for-profit group provides young people with the opportunity to take internships all around the globe with several companies it has partnerships with and PwC is one of these organizations. Every year PwC places interns in client services and operational roles in more than 50 of its offices; through this the firm aims to play a positive role in helping to develop future business leaders. PwC carried out a similar survey this time among its own employees and only the results from United Kingdom and Spain rank the firm as the best one.

The Global People survey results in 2007 demonstrates how 86% of the respondents are proud to be associated by PwC and also 77% believe they have the opportunity for personal growth and development within the consulting firm. A similar amount of respondents, 76%, would recommend PwC as a good place to work. However only 58% agreed that the people they work for are considerate of their life outside the work. And 40% manifested how in the present time they are seriously considering leaving PwC.
PwC acknowledges the high levels of competition in the industry, in fact the firms recognizes how its retention rates are still lower than expected due to the competition for experienced specialists in many markets. In three divisions they have stated – Client service, Practice support and Partners – the firm has turnover rates of 16%, 10% and 3% respectively. As a result the firm has decided to create plans to retain at least the high performers.

In its website the firm makes clear to all those aiming to apply for any job opportunity that working at PwC means to think forward and constantly strive to deliver fully-integrated client solutions. The firm holds itself to the highest standards of professional excellence and integrity. PwC is looking always for people who share those standards.

Three interesting programs aim to develop leadership within the firm’s professionals: Genesis Park, Ulysses and Oasis. All these options involve sending the employee into other regions where a social purpose is the aim or a learning experience more attached to the role they play inside the company. Responsibility, leadership and community are the main ingredients of these programs that pursue to keep and foster the best talent inside this powerful consulting firm.

4.1.3 Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (DTT)

In 1993 the firm is named Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu and this peculiar name comes from three main partners: William Welch Deloitte, George Touche and Nobuzo Tohmatsu, all of them with experience in accounting created what today is one of the most important consulting firms worldwide. Even and when the firm was named in 1993 like nowadays is known, the history of this company dates back to the 19th century with William Welch Deloitte. In fact in 2003 a branding effort was carried out in order to position the company simply as “Deloitte”. In some regions the firm was known as Deloitte & Touche or with the whole name as Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu; however now even from its own website the company refers itself as only Deloitte.

In 2007, Deloitte announced aggregate revenues of US$23.1 billion in the fiscal year ending in May, which represents an increase of 15.5% compared to 2006. This would be the fifth year of double-digit revenue growth and the 14th consecutive year of continued growth.

With offices in nearly 140 offices worldwide and offering services in Audit, Tax, Consulting and Financial Advisory; Deloitte has acknowledged that its greatest strength is its people and that is why the firm invests on its talent. Deloitte sees itself as committed to the development of both existing talent and future talent through initiatives aiming to retain women, attract new talents from disadvantaged local communities and support young professionals with on-the-job training and formal education support.

Just like other big firms, Deloitte holds a division named Deloitte Consulting LLP one of the main services provided by the firm. Deloitte through its Consulting division offers four career models that allow the employee to personalize a rewarding career path, and as the firm posted in its website: “as a Deloitte Consulting practitioner, the opportunities and possibilities are endless”.

As the skills grow, the employee is eligible to more and more opportunities regarding management and leadership as in practice operations, sales, innovation, eminence building and people development. Through these models Deloitte’s professionals progress from one level to the next one as they gain competencies at key milestones during their career plans.
Deloitte acknowledges that its client’s perception regarding quality is shaped of course by the quality of its employees, this means the knowledge and skills they hold. The firm makes use of competency maps, specialized curricula and programs as well as learning paths in order to provide the framework for meeting the employee’s performance with the career goals. Deloitte claims that within the company there are available diverse learning methods where convenience is the common denominator. Using even on-line tactics, just-in-time knowledge tools and self-study courses, the firm affirms it helps its employees to balance work and personal priorities.

Just like its counterparts, Deloitte has adjudicated some awards for itself, for instance in 2007 Business Week ranked it in the first position as the best place to launch a career. Also for the second year consecutive, Fortune’s 100 Top MBA Employers considers Deloitte as one of the main recruiters for these professionals. The company has been awarded for two years consecutively by the American Society for Training and Development for the excellence and commitment the firm has addressed in issues of education and training. In the same way, Deloitte appears for the fourth time in the Top 100 Companies for Training, in fact the firm has made it into the top 10 of this ranking.

With an attractive website for either student, graduates or already experienced professionals, Deloitte shows all aspirants a bit of how the Deloitte-world is about all with job opportunities and possibilities of development once the criteria is met. The firm makes use of the power of its brand, Deloitte, a brand that by the way was named the best brand globally in tax services in a recent review; in order to attract, retain and foster the most wanted and skillful talent.

4.1.4 Accenture

Established in 1989 as a technology consultant and systems integrator, soon the company started to offer new business solutions aligned to organizations’ technologies, processes and people regarding strategies. Accenture, a pioneer in systems and business integration, led the deployment of the famous enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM) and electronic services, positioning itself as today’s leader in these fields. Last August 2007 the firm reported net revenues of US$19.70 billion through its Management Consulting, Outsourcing Company and Technology Services.

With Tiger Woods since 2003 as the main piece in Accenture advertising and under the slogan of ‘we know what it takes to be a tiger’, the firm invites the web surfers to have a sneak-peak into its website and understand how the talent in Accenture is one of the key ingredients for the firm’s success. The company explains how it creates talented teams of real problem-solvers with members holding a variety of consulting, technology and outsourcing backgrounds and skills. In fact learning in the company begins even from its webpage where a Business Glossary of terms used at Accenture can be found.

Four workforces are available at Accenture: Consulting, Technology Solutions, Services and Enterprise. In the Consulting division, people are seen as the experts in business, industry, systems integration and technology. One of the key aspects about the Accenture Consulting Professional is that this person should be able to create global project teams that will put together the skills and talents needed in order to meet the client’s needs. The firm explains how through its envied position as leader in technology innovation its employees are able to build and expand their skills to a higher level than anywhere else. Accenture Consulting Professionals can perform in one of three workgroups the company has for this division: Management Consulting, Systems Integration Consulting or Technology Consulting. Those working in Management Consulting are
focused on strategy and work towards organizational change and business transformation with their clients. Accenture currently employs 13,000 Management Consultants in 49 countries and the firm encourages professionals into joining the firm since it realizes its practice is growing and the need for leaders that can develop quickly is increasing. One of Accenture’s Senior Executives for Management Consulting explains the top ten reasons why job-searchers should join the firm and two of them are extremely related with fostering a unique skills set. This consulting firm affirms that those successful at joining the company will be able to experience a whole pragmatic learning of business skills instead of just consulting skills, but also the skills already held by newcomers are to be valued.

Accenture offers specific training for those in Management Consulting less related to IT and more focused on building a strategic specific skills set. Rookies in this division can have the opportunity of going to Paris for one week of strategy school and/or going to Rome for another week where financial-specific skills are sharpened. The consulting firm presumes about the fact it only hires the best people and helps them to become even better. Also Accenture is proud to mention that it offers 80% more training hours than its competitors in order to keep its employees as the crème du la crème in consulting. The firm through its website makes public how in 2007 it invested US$700 million in training/professional development and provided an average of 83 hours of training per person. It also assures how its training programmes are tailored to individual needs and the courses are to be chosen by the employees themselves based on their skills, experience and areas of interest. Moreover the company clarifies that training does not happen only when people join the company, instead training is conducted through all the career development of every employee. Through coaching, well-managed combination of courses, on-the-job practical experience and feedback sessions this firm is developing specialist skills that are making this non-big-four consulting firm envy practically nothing from those who are.

4.1.5 Everis

Created in 1996 as DMR Consulting in Spain the firm has accrued some interesting accomplishments through it’s almost eleven years of existence, making this firm one of the youngest performers in the battlefield. In October 2006, celebrating its 10th anniversary, the firm decided to change its corporate image and name to Everis.

The firm offers equally services in business strategy, systems implementation and value chain among others. Its clients are key performers in industries such as Banking, Healthcare, Insurance, Media, Utilities & Energy, Telecom and the Public Sector.

In its first financial year the firm achieved a turnover of € 4.5 million and had 104 professionals, today, almost 11 years after, Everis reports an annual turnover of € 240 million and holds over 5,000 professionals working in its offices located in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil and Colombia. In 1998 the company created a division named Qualitas with the purpose of offering systems maintenance and development as well as IT outsourcing, and with this Everis complements its attractive portfolio of consulting services that also benefits from strategic alliances the firm holds with companies such as Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Microsoft, Oracle and SAP among others.

Included in its Mission is the fact that the firm aims to help its people to develop their professional talent and positive attitude. Attitude is seen as an interesting net ingredient for the firm’s success. Not only specific set of skills and certain knowledge are attributes the company looks for within its employees, a positive attitude is a must-have for all those aiming to work for
this European consulting firm. Through main values such as optimism, empathy, generosity, enthusiasm and courage of conviction, Everis can start shaping tomorrow’s business leaders in consulting. In fact when the company describes the profile of the Everis Professional a list of adjectives appear in the next order: Optimists, Risk-Takers, Entrepreneurs, Deciders, Innovators and Winners. This becomes even clearer when the company defines itself as a consulting firm formed by optimist professionals with a positive attitude.

For Everis people are the most important thing. The firm provides the mentor figure and a personalized career path for its employees. The company has developed something named The Minerva Project where an average of 90,000 hours of training are provided to Everis professionals every year in order to make sure that knowledge is one of its differential competencies and values.

The company follows a model just like its competitors where the professionals can become shareholders in the company. Through this modus operandum Everis manifests that is in the quest of entrepreneurs who by being owners can feel the projects as their own and gain a strong commitment towards the firm and its clients. In fact Everis, still under the name of DMR Consulting, was owned by Fujitsu Group and in 2004 DMR’s professionals bought the company from Fujitsu with the support of APAX Partners and FManagers, and finally in 2005 DMR cancelled the debt it had with Fujitsu and that is why in 2006 the firm decided to start over under the new name of Everis with a management based on its people, its biggest assets and competence.

Everis gives credit to all skills held by job aspirants and employees; moreover the company is highly committed to provide its employees with an environment of continuous learning and training. By making use of three types of training – practical training, project training and career training – a model is created where skills, methodologies and technical knowledge meet altogether in order to develop its professionals both professionally and personally. The firm knows exactly the kind of people it needs. Optimistic people that are quick learners and holding skills than can be sharpened in order to help Everis to reach its objectives of going public in 2008 and becoming a company with a turnover of € 1 billion by 2010.

4.2 The consultants profile

The participation by company was as follows: 17% of the respondents currently work for KPMG, another equal 17% work for PwC and a similar 17% perform at Accenture. Also Deloitte employees represent 17% of the total of participants and Everis employees, the more open consultants to be a part of this research, represent the 32% remaining.

Several articles have addressed the issue of how consultants behave, sometimes driven by some sort of elitist mist; professionals working for consulting powerhouses such as McKinsey, KPMG, PwC and Ernst & Young among others have labeled themselves sometimes as unreachable and have awakened the envy of employees performing in other industries or professionals aiming to enter into the consulting sector and have failed in doing so. Some emails were received explaining the reasons why they cannot take part of the research and the main ones were: ‘I do not have time’, ‘I have already participated in a similar research not that long ago’ and ‘I need to consult with my mentor if I can disclose this kind of information’. Due to time restriction only the questionnaires received by the deadline agreed with all invited consultants were considered for this research’s purposes.
Chapter 4. Discussing the findings

The consultants who participated in this research are mainly professionals who perform as Managers (33%), Senior Associates (39%) and Junior Associates (28%). From all of them 67% mentioned they have worked in consultancy before joining its current firm and most of these professionals have been working for their current employer for no more than two years (39%); however they assure it has been enough time to embrace the firm’s culture and how their employer cares for developing the skills they need since during the very first days 97% of them expressed they were assigned to a project with no time for training. Another 28% of the questionees have been working with its current employer for a period of time of two to four years by now and 17% joined their consulting firm in less than year back. Only 11% of the sample has been working up to six years with their current consulting firm and the main reasons have been either because they feel comfortable and have developed loyalty towards their current employer or ironically because of fear of not finding job opportunities outside due to their age or the competitive situation in Mexico regarding job-opportunities situation. The remaining 6% of the consultants have been performing with their employer for more than six years and are mainly those currently holding a managerial position.

The sample for this research comprises practically all levels in a consulting firm, except for partners who are mainly the decision-makers for the direction and strategies of the firm, including the profile of skills required in the company. Also the sample includes main consulting firms in Mexico, including three of the big four, (to be explained later on) holding professionals with diverse backgrounds. However is interesting to mention that even and when the majority of the questionees have been working for its current employer for no more than two years, 39% of all respondents manifest they have worked previously in consultancy from four to six years average prior joining its current employer. This numbers demonstrate that consultants, mainly the younger ones, are jumping from one consulting firm to the next one always looking for the firm who provides the best opportunities for development, just as literature has stated when is highlighted the fact that professionals are willing to sacrifice money for training opportunities that they know will pay back in the future. This is also supported by the 22% of the respondents who have been working in consultancy for more than six years before joining its current firm and finally a total of 17% of the consultants have worked before up to 4 years in another consulting firm and 11% have done the same for a period of time of no more than two years.

As mentioned in the theoretical part of this study, the importance of teams is paramount since they must master the art of carrying out the project within time and budget as well as satisfying all stakeholders involved. Leading a project team is not an easy task; problems begin in early phases such as in team building, in fact 50% of the questionees agreed that sometimes teams are built with members that do not fully fulfill the skills and abilities that the project demands. Therefore the role of Team Leader becomes tricky when trying to put everyone on the same page and going at the same speed of workload and learning. This role has been performed at least once by 44% of the respondents and they agree that quite often problems in structure and organization can jeopardize the team when this is not built properly. This opinion is also shared by 61% of the consultants who have been part of a project-team carrying out other roles rather than team leader.

Other two main roles held by the questionees that require certain level of leadership and control are Project Manager (39%) and Program Manager (6%). Those who currently perform or have performed at least once as Project Manager have experienced closely several problems in teams when the support of partners is not enough or training opportunities are not available yet to their team-members due to budget or the employees not gaining yet ‘the right’ of going through those kind of investments. This situation could be a real crash with what the consulting firms describe through their websites about this utopia-like environment where training and opportunities of development are offered from day one. Maybe the key is that precisely, they are
offered; however, they are not yet available unless some results are shown first as collateral of the investment that training represents. Settled like this it may sound reasonable; however, consulting firms might and are finding themselves in a vicious cycle where probably employees indeed are not performing as expected and therefore training is yet to come; however, without the training how employees are supposed to improve their shortcomings in order to gain the access to training programs? Apparently some consulting firms are overlooking this tiny detail.

All the five consulting firms participating in this research have claimed through their websites that the background held by their employees is valued. Academic formation and previous experience create a combo of skills and expertise that firms recognize in a way and try to match with their own organizational culture and needs. Consultants holding a Bachelor’s Degree represent 94% of the respondents, 39% from the total has a Master Degree and only 11% holds a PhD. It is evident how most of the consultants stopped their education after finishing their Bachelor’s Degree and started looking for the first job. More prepared professionals are emigrating. It is indeed alarming to acknowledge that Mexicans going to other countries for better job opportunities is becoming a normal situation. Companies are finding difficult to spot prepared Mexicans that do not enlarge the brain-drain statistics, in fact results of a study carried out by Georgetown University, Universidad Iberoamericana, ITAM and Colegio de Mexico in 2007 show that 19% of Mexicans holding a Master Degree are going to United States looking for better job conditions and even a more shocking 39% of Mexicans holding PhD follow the same path. This is becoming a real problem for the consulting firms since they find quite attractive professionals holding a second and third academic degree.

In Mexico education is different from Europe, first students must finish a Bachelor’s Degree that lasts regularly five years and after that is completed they might undertake a Master Degree; however most Mexicans rather start looking for a job once their Bachelor’s Degree is over. Those holding a Master Degree or PhD represent professionals making an extra effort after the first degree and in many cases after some years of work experience too. That is the reason why consulting firms are more biased towards these professionals and there is no secret how MBA’s graduates are one of their favorite kinds. In this research only 11% of the respondents hold an MBA, the majority (50%) holds merely a Bachelor’s Degree related to IT and 22% studied and Engineering major. Professionals with a Business Degree represent only 6% just like those ones holding a Degree in Finance. This is of course somehow related with what they do nowadays in their firm. Those consultants currently working in projects finance related represent 6% of the sample and those carrying out projects in IT embody 39%. The majority of the questionees (44%) perform in generalized projects comprising diverse areas.

In consultancy the academic background can open the door with it is knocked looking for a job opportunity; however, as even stated by some consultants, the project requirements will determine specific backgrounds and expertise that sometimes no one in the firm possesses and this is quite common, as one interviewee explained, in projects working with the pharmaceutical sector and specific NGO’s such as those regarding wildlife preservation or other industries where no one in the firm has worked before or knows about. Then a temporary hiring emerges looking for veterinarians, chemists and sometimes even specialist researchers in order to grasp the best possible the project’s nature. This situation has raised the freelance kind of jobs where professionals are paid based on time or task. Sometimes these temporary employees see a false opportunity of joining the firm. It is a fact that the worrying situation in Mexico regarding unemployment drives these professionals to cheapen their services in exchange of an opportunity. They carry specific skills and knowledge that consultants do not have since these skills and expertise are not part of the modus operandum of the firm, instead they are temporary needs. What is true is that in one way or another a transfer of skills and abilities is passed onto the
consultants by these other type of professionals. Consultants get to receive, although indirectly and sometimes perhaps not planned, some training. Sadly those professionals who joined the firm for purposes of a specific project, regularly soon will find themselves enlarging back again the unemployment Mexican statistics.

Occasionally even and with the best academic education held by employees and having work experience, these professionals found themselves in a weird situation when they first moved into the consulting industry. Almost 60% of the respondents consider there were specific and/or different skills to be met when they joined their jobs in consulting compared to their previous jobs. Some of these new skills they spotted are: negotiation skills, selling skills, time management, client management, multiproject management, advocacy skills, communication skills, IT skills, working under pressure, routine adaptability and people management. However an interesting 56% of the questionees admitted they knew beforehand that consulting industry requires certain skills that probably they did not hold previously.

### 4.3 Which skill for which firm?

Skills, everybody wants them but only few holds them. Academic and Practitioner Literature has made evident problems been faced by consulting firms on the quest for skills. However is still to be said if they are carrying out the correct efforts in order to get, foster and retain those skills. And most importantly, which ones are those skills? Results showed that employees and job-searchers may know this industry demands a different set of skills; however, sometimes is a mystery which ones are these skills since they change even from one consulting firm to the next one. Skills, aptitudes and abilities are aligned to the firm’s culture and organizational structure as well as the nature of the projects they carry out. Now is time to spot which skills each of these five consulting powerhouses claim are the “must have” ones.

#### 4.3.1 KPMG, the good listeners

KPMG employees consider the ability to listen and question as their strongest skills followed by problem identification skills. The company, with a powerful financial and accounting profile, looks for professionals able to understand and listen to its clients in order to easily spot the problems they face. One interviewee currently working for the firm explains: “sometimes the key is listening carefully to the client, they explain you what they think their problem is; however, if you develop this business-ear like you might realize that they are far from really identifying the problem they have”.

On the other hand, KPMG employees have also identified which skills they consider are lacking of or at least requiring to be fostered. These skills are: problem-solving skills, the ability of how to disagree without being disagreeable and ironically leadership. It might look like that even and when these professionals are able to identify the problems that their clients suffer, they could be having a hard time trying to come up with the solutions in order to mitigate them. One thing is identifying problems but solving them requires different skills and abilities and KPMG employees seem to be very aware of this.

Moreover when KPMG employees were asked about which skills they identify as the strongest ones being held by their employer as a company, surprisingly these ones do not match the ones they consider they as individual professionals hold. In this case, from the perspective of its employees, KPMG is a firm with strong problem analysis skills and flexibility and adaptability.
Also a third option chosen is a very interesting one that claims that placing team success above personal success is an important ability to handle in this firm. This company has invested in fostering skills that allow its professionals to carefully analyze problems through a teamwork culture.

KPMG possesses a global career website where the firm already lists the skills that is looking for in new aspirants and that is taking care of fostering among its current staff. The skills the company itself identifies as essential are: technical skills, problem solving abilities, teamworking, the ability to bring out the best in others and commercial focus. The requirement for getting an opportunity in this firm is to have these skills or at least the potential to develop them. Finally, ambition is the cherry on the top of this firm’s cake. KPMG emphasizes how it is on the quest for people with the desire to achieve more and more every time and developing a passion for client service. In here it could be found an interesting match in how employees manifest their desire of sharpening their problem-solving skills and the firm is also listing these skills as a must or should-have for newcomers.

By enjoying a worldwide prestige this firm pursues to have among its employees the kind of professionals that are able to finger-point the problems that their clients face and also to deliver strategic solutions through a teamwork structure where recognition and failure will be distributed equally. However even and when teamworking has been stated by the firm itself as one main ingredient for its success, respondents agreed that the so called group skills – empowering, delegating and building effective teams – are the kind of the skills the firm lacks the most.

If a simple process of identifying, analyzing and solving the problem is created, this firm somehow carries out the process by acquiring professionals with already problem-identification skills, moreover the firm is apparently good at the stage of analysis; nevertheless, employees agree they would like to develop more their problem-solving skills as they do not found them sharpened enough.

The figure 10 summarizes the skills that KPMG employees presume they hold as individuals along with the skills they have also granted to their employer as in the strongest and weakest.

![Figure 10. KPMG’s comparative skills matrix](image-url)
4.3.2 PricewaterhouseCoopers, the leaders

Employees working for PwC have identified that leadership and the ability to listen and question are their strongest skills as individuals. Probably the two big leadership programs held by PwC – Ulysses and Genesis Park – have a lot to do with this result. Through high levels of commitment and innovation, PwC makes sure its employees develop the qualities the firm values the most: leadership, teamwork and intellectual curiosity.

On the other hand, the consultants recognize they would like to receive training in technical skills and to develop the ability to influence their clients and obtain their buy-in. Ironically when these same employees were asked to identify the strongest skills that characterize their employer, technical skills and the ability to influence clients and obtain their buy-in ranked first along with problem analysis skills.

This somehow contradictory panorama was clarified by one of the consultants: “… at associate level sometimes it takes time to be considered for some training opportunities. Our firm is well recognized for its technical skills, and the way we spoil our clients in order to keep them happy and do not let them go; however, these flairs are mainly held by partners or those who perform as Project Managers. When you are ready to go into one of these opportunities, they will let you know…”

Also PwC consultants recognize its firm lacks from intrapersonal skills, mentoring programs, group skills and integrity as a value. The firm has been designing programs quite focused on leadership; however, the interpersonal skills are not yet to be fully included in the agenda of these programs according to the employees’ perspective. Also interesting is that teamwork is something the company values the most; however, consultants agreed that the company is still weak by pointing group skills, as in empowering, delegating and effective team-building, as an area of opportunity for PwC.

PwC presumes to be one of the best choices for job-searchers; in fact the firm enhances how diversity is well embraced where everyone, of course after meeting certain criteria, is welcome. From women, to gay professionals and mothers everyone seems to have a chance to work for this big consulting firm. Through Diversity Circles in Business Leadership conferences the firm promises a place where everyone can develop both professional and personally. This is not argued by employees in this research, they have no problem regarding how opportunities are provided in order to enter the firm, the problem is once inside the firm how to foster the skills they acknowledge they need to be sharpened.

The firm might be living in a curious cycle where everyone has the chance to apply but once inside the war continues trying to develop the skills they need that ironically are the skills that differentiate the company from its competitors since these skills are indeed held by employees, but only by few selected ones.

The figure 11 shows a table that portrays the skills self-assigned by the consultants and the ones that describe the most their employer also granted by them.
4.3.3 Deloitte & Touche, the technical guys

Deloitte’s employees see themselves as really holders of an interesting set of skills. By ranking equally five skills, these employees along with the ones from Everis are the ones who selected more than three skills as their strongest and are not afraid to demonstrate how well prepared and skillful they are. The top five of strongest skills held by these consultants as individuals are: conflict resolution skills, objectivity, decision making skills, leadership and initiative & proactivity. Actually the Times position the firm in the first place in terms of having confidence in the skills of the senior management team which of course might not be a surprise if the company carries out all the activities it mentions through its website regarding training and learning such as skills development, technical training, industry knowledge building and computer-based training. As a result the company aims to develop consultants with significant professional and personal skills that will prepare them in order to face the challenges that day-by-day appear at Deloitte.

This company seems to be a good example of consultants extremely well prepared in technical skills, covered under the wing of this powerful firm but lacking some human or soft skills as they ranked in first place the ability to recognize, deal and respond to the clients’ emotions as number one skill they acknowledge they are not strong with. A similar situation as the one experienced in PwC happens here since this skill, the one about recognizing, dealing and responding to the clients’ emotions is one of the best ones held by the company as an organization along with the ability to influence clients and obtain their buy-in. Its reputation and the way how the company makes use of its brand to build a strong networking have helped the organization in order to retain and spoil its clients. Equally, Deloitte employees manifest how only few are the ones allowed to negotiate and have a direct treatment with clients and those are the employees well trained in how to convince, persuade and be sympathetic with the client’s feelings and situation since they are facing a problem in their organizations and consultants then perform both as problem-solvers but also as psychiatrist listening to the problems the clients are disclosing when laying on the divan. Clients will feel secure if they get to deal and negotiate with some sort of healer or shrink disguised as consultant, that both understands and listen to their problems by being sympathetic with their situation but also provides the solution and even sometimes, if the consultant can implement the solutions provided by him/herself even better, even and when that
represents an extra cost. This sort of cycle can be extremely well performed by only few consultants with these developed skills, the rest appear in the part of research, analysis and designing tentative solutions to be proposed as well as in the implementation face. These other consultants see themselves as the stagehand in the theater that does everything backstage and even and when his/her work holds a paramount importance, the audience only gets to see those on stage.

As a result of the above, Deloitte’s consultants have manifested how the company should pay attention in fostering interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. One of the interviewees commented how delicate is to heal scratches in job-relationships with colleagues and bosses. Employees do not know how to handle situations where sometimes they just lose it and manifest their disagreements wrongly and then how to cure the damage done seems an even harder task than their most complex project ever.

Deloitte with an apparently well prepared army of professionals in over 140 countries in the world, seems to have an opportunity area in deploying soft skills into its already well technically prepared consultants.

The figure 12 represents all skills in their strongest and weakest versions held by both, the consultants and their employer from their own perspective.

![Figure 12. DTT’s comparative skills matrix](image)

### 4.3.4 Accenture, the problem-identifiers

Three were the skills Accenture’s professionals have determined as their strongest ones: problem identification skills, experience (career focus) and objectivity. With a strong expertise in IT and innovation, this firm has recruited professionals that are able to finger-point where the problems hide. The dilemma seems to be that even and when they have the eye to detect the problems, the real issue arises when models, techniques and theories are to be used in order to solve the problem, that is why Accenture’s professional have ranked technical skills as the ones they would like dig into a bit more.
As a company, the employees agreed, Accenture holds a good ability to maintain and expand a contact network, as well as objectivity and experience (career focus). Two of these three options were also selected as the ones held by the consultants as individuals. On the other hand a strange contradiction is visible when consultants assure that the company is weak regarding problem identification skills; however, this skill ranked on the top regarding the skills consultants they acknowledge they have individually as a strong one. Clarifying this, one interviewee explains: “... the company during its recruitment process makes sure you have these skills, since once inside the company focuses its trainings towards sharpening other strategic and managerial skills; however, sometimes we would like to learn about new techniques on how to spot problems faster that the way we know how to do it today…”

Accenture in its 2007 brochure for Management Consulting careers explains how working in this area will provide employees with the opportunity to develop strategic and analytical skills in a number of business functional areas or industries. By investing more than $750 million in training/professional development every year, the firm assures how all its entry-levels management consultants receive comprehensive training covering business acumen, technical and professional skills development. Its website offers something quite attractive when the job-searcher is able to explore career information at Accenture by type of skill. Once there a combo of skills options becomes available and they are: Business Analysis and Strategy Skills, Change Management and Human Performance Skills, Customer Relationship Management Skills, Enterprise Resource Planning Skills, Finance Skills, Human Resources Skills, Information Technology Skills, Internships, Marketing and Communication Skills, Office and Facilities Management Skills, Operations Skills, Procurement Skills, Records and Data Management Skills, Research Skills, Safety and Security Skills, Sales Skills, Supply Chain Management Skills and Travel Services Skills. Is quite strategic how the company dressed the experience and expertise held by job-searchers and current employees into a fancier jargon of “skills”. All these options, will lead the web-surfer into more information regarding the job opportunities in each of these areas. Accenture looks for these skills in professionals holding backgrounds in business, marketing, management, economics, finance, accounting, math, science, technology degrees, supply chain, operations and even liberal arts. With all these diverse backgrounds, consultants have manifested that group skills are to be paid attention to by Accenture, as they ranked these ones as the worst skills held by the firm. Problems in effective team-building and empowering drove these consultants into ranking this skill as poor.

A table summarizing all the skills above is presented in figure 13.

![Figure 13. Accenture’s comparative skills matrix](image)
4.3.5 Everis, the problem-analysts

By ranking more than five skills as their strongest ones, Everis consultants seem to leave aside any modesty. With problem analysis skills leading the way, these consultants also acknowledge they are good at listening and questioning, being flexible and adaptable, being trustworthy (which ironically no other firm chose!) and they equally possess good experience (career focus), interpersonal skills, leadership, integrity and ITC skills. With this firm having also a strong foundation in IT as Accenture, Everis professionals are more biased towards the technical side and recognize how they would like to improve their group skills as well as their decision making skills.

Employees consider its employer, Everis, as a holder of well developed technical skills as well as good at maintaining and expanding a contact networking through integrity. Also consultants ranked high the firm’s mentoring skills, they gave big value to the efforts the company carried out through its mentoring program. Literature has addressed how firms carrying out the figure of the mentor experience the best results compared to those that do not offer this option. On the sad part of the story, consultants have also been quite honest at pointing quite a few opportunity areas for the youngest firm in this research. Special attention they ask regarding leadership, decision making skills, flexibility and adaptability, some of the skills that by the way consultants affirm they have hold individually. This situation often happens when firms do not really use the wide offer of skills their professionals already hold. Blinded by what they think they need is very common that Project Managers do not know other talents and skills already possessed by their project-team members. This happens to all the firms in this study, for example 68% of all respondents admitted they have faced a situation where their bosses are not aware of all the skills they have and even they have found themselves proposed for trainings regarding topics the actually master but do not use currently; however, their Managers did not know. As literature states, a weak Human Resources effort in filing and tracking of skills held by consultants drives these companies into painful mistakes such as wrong team-building techniques.

Also, Everis professionals are aware that its firm is a quite young performer in the industry fighting battles versus Titans such as the other four firms comprised in this research. This David-Goliath-like situation leads the employees to suggest Everis to develop skills in order to influence clients and obtain their buy-in.

Everis has published online which ones are the skills the firm looks for in job applicants. Therefore those aiming to enlarge Everis’ workforce should hold skills such as analytical thinking, conceptual thinking, client orientation, team work, success oriented, self-confident, orderly, being capable of searching for information, initiative and flexibility. Job candidates previous scholarship-holders and skillful in languages enjoy more possibilities of joining the firm. Also a minimum academic formation of Bachelor’s Degree is needed and technical knowledge is a plus.

This young company has accrued some points with its professionals, since the majority of them feel comfortable working in Everis. By being managed by Spanish native speakers, the firm is Spanish; Mexican professionals find themselves a bit in this European-like environment right there in the middle of America having the opportunity of even speaking their own language. Also with mentoring programs and actually an impressive list of clients that include Barclays, BBVA, Daimler Chrysler, Iberia, Pfizer, Zurich, Telefónica, América Móvil, Vodafone, Iberdrola and Pemex among others, the firm is finding its way and giving fight in this grim battle within the consulting sector. However, no one denied the possibility of jumping into one of the “big four” if the opportunity arises, so loyalty-much or just learning somewhere else in order to gain skills that the big titans demand?
4.4 Which role aligns to which skill?

Due to the fact that some of the findings addressed the undeniable evidence that not all skills are available to everyone and sometimes only highly-positioned professionals have access to certain set of skills, it becomes irresistible to take this to the next level by trying to crumble a bit more to what extent this is experienced in consulting. Next, an analysis matching what the three main roles – Manager, Senior and Junior – consider as their strongest and weakest skills is presented.

4.4.1 Managers, awakening the envy of everyone

Consultants currently holding a Managerial position in the consulting firms opted for experience (career focus) and problem identification skills as their strongest holdings. An interesting finding is something already pointed before, Managers acknowledge they need to improve the way they influence clients and obtain their buy-in. By being on the front line and having more access to clients, professionals holding managerial positions need to develop even more skills such as being able to tell their clients they are wrong at the same time clients even thank them for that and somehow they awaken an idea in them that the firm’s services are going to bring everything back to normality. By first performing as the shoulder where clients cry since they were not able to deal with their problems – that is why they hire consultants – these professionals in consulting firms then must change the mask of therapist for the leader one and quickly start directing a project-team towards the problem identification and understanding as well as tentative solutions for their clients.
Chapter 4. Discussing the findings

Based on the corporate website information, it can be inferred that non-managers consultants have manifested their wishes for fostering these skills of persuasion and buying clients in since it is very often how they sometimes consider their work is not acknowledgeable and even more important they might be looking forward to pursue a promotion inside the company where the next level demands precisely this skills. It should be kept in mind that ambition is one of the main characteristics of a consultant, therefore the fact that they want to develop faster and have access to more and more skills should not be surprising at all. These firms have sometimes quite complicated structures of how the career path of the employee will look like. Through sometimes models as in pyramid-like, professionals are taught how they will be growing inside the firm. The problem here is that professionals very often see this as a resistance competition since in order to reach to a managerial or powerful associate position, they should go through several junior levels and then more senior levels and after that more and more steps in order to reach to the top of the pyramid that are translated in several years before glimpsing a managerial sneak-peak. New generations simply cannot wait and once they realise that probably murdering the hindrances is a more effective way to ascend in the company, they rather go somewhere else. Then professionals find themselves jumping from one firm to the next one just accruing skills and developing themselves professionally so at the end they can aim for their probably dream-company once they are ready thanks to the development gained in all other firms, and by the time they get there, probably they will already enjoy a managerial or powerful position that will even facilitate them the process.

Managers are, and will continue being, those playing two main roles: one to the outside with the clients and another to the inside with peers and the project-team. Even and when managers sometimes perform as mentors for senior and junior associates, this simply does not calm the choppy waters where seniors and juniors swim towards career development and still want to have the same rights to skills-training opportunities as their mentors. As a result, sometimes this unleashes uncomfortable discussions where then conflict resolutions skills, also being missed by some consultants, become the only way out before their career in consulting reaches to an end.

4.4.2 Seniors as the sandwich

This type of consultants have identified five main strong skills where the ability to listen and question ranked first. Seniors by being the sandwich between managers and juniors have already gained expertise and they feel every time closer the opportunity of reaching a managerial position. They have already knowledge of how the business works and the importance they hold inside the firm, therefore they are less restless than juniors; however more ambitious.

The other four skills considered as their strengths are: interpersonal skills, problem analysis skills, leadership and flexibility and adaptability. These skills seem very reasonable for this type of consultant. Again, as being the bridge between managers and juniors, no surprise they chose interpersonal skills and flexibility and adaptability as strong skills. Nevertheless, these consultants probably work the most since they have to work along with juniors, review their job and agree and find solutions with the managers that will be taken to the clients afterwards. Even and when managers and partners are the favorites options for mentoring, seniors are really the ones who provide the on-the-job training to juniors and rookies. And this is a very risky and powerful position since very often seniors do not fully train nor show all their cards to juniors, otherwise the competitive advantage that separates them may disappear or even worse, juniors may overrun seniors and then the saying that goes ‘the student becomes the master’ really applies all its power.
Seniors have selected decision making skills and, just like managers, the ability to influence clients and obtain their buy-in as the skills they would like to sharpen more. By already mentally getting reading for their next step in their career development, seniors start to aim towards specific skills development that will facilitate their transition to the next stage.

At this level it hits more to be behind the curtain and only overhear the greetings the client gives to the managers or partners regarding the job done. Seniors are eager of recognition and they feel they should start receiving the same opportunities in training as managers since the next layer in the organizational chart is precisely the managerial one. However complicated policies sometimes become real hindrances for seniors aiming to grow. Another situation experienced for one of the interviewees was that he as a senior started to go to the meetings with the client. He started to develop a close relationship with the Director of the client company and by nearly the end of the project, the client offered him a job in order to continue with the project in-house. When his Project Manager found out about this, immediately he stopped taking him to the meetings and he was pushed back again to the shadows behind the curtain. Managers, also performing as guardians/keepers, fight for their staff since companies invest a lot of money on them and even when probably they cannot satisfy every single wish of their consultants they will fight against wind and tide in order to retain them in one way or another.

Senior find themselves in the middle of the way where they already invested some period of time in the company and they feel that their time is coming and coming but maybe this will never come. Therefore once they have developed some hard and soft skills and holding a senior position, it is very common they decide to try luck somewhere else by already applying for a managerial position.

4.4.3 Juniors, the young and the restless

This specimen of consultant is regularly represented by graduates who recently just finished their studies. However there are also already experienced professionals but they find themselves at this level since is the first time they work in consulting.

Junior consultants have selected initiative and proactivity as their most powerful skill. It is understandable since by lacking experience their biggest assets are their attitude and the willingness to watch and learn. On the other hand, modesty apparently is not the last name for these ambitious and young professionals who equally ranked other six skills as the strong ones they admit they already hold and these ones are: ability to listen and question, problem analysis skills, decision making skills, to be trustworthy, group skills and enthusiasm. In fact, probably they are not bragging about these skills, if a comparison is to be made with the study plans that universities and institutions of higher education provide nowadays, it will be not surprising at all to run into courses such as Leadership, decision making, business and professional values in the workplace, and also interesting to highlight is that all of these courses call for teamwork and capacity of analysis and synthesis. These young professionals full of enthusiasm and capable to be trusted since they are neither wicked nor biased yet, are ready to learn and they know how to do it quickly and effectively. Besides it should be bear in mind that only those perfect performers at university stand out from the rest and attract the attention of the consulting firms. Howbeit, these recent graduates are occasionally to experience an epic fight between what has been taught at school versus the way companies perform out there in the so called ‘real world’. After this is when they realize that even and when they affirm they hold certain skills, these ones are simply not as developed as the ones held by their senior colleagues nor as how the projects they carry on demand.
This new generation of professionals also recognizes its shortcomings; technical, problem analysis skills along with conflict resolutions skills took over in this ranking. It really does make sense how juniors fit together with seniors since the first ones admit their lack of skills in problem analysis for instance, where seniors have no problem and presume those are some of their strongest ones. Nevertheless, this specific skill – problem analysis - creates contradiction since it was also selected as one of their strong possessions. A higher number of juniors selected the skill as a weak one compared to those who selected it as a strong one. This could be understood from the point of view that even among juniors there are several sublevels in this position. The difference sometimes turns into years; therefore those who have spent more time in the firm probably do not share the same idea as the newcomers regarding how strong this skill is.

Human resources departments have identified how young professionals of nowadays are not the same as the young professionals of yesterday. Back in the day professionals were looking for a job where they could start a career and remain in the company for long periods of time, in fact some professionals of yesterday’s time worked all their lives for only one or two employers. Loyalty was a common ingredient in yesterday’s boss-employee relationships. Now these young professionals are restless and are not willing to wait in order to ascend inside the organizations. They rather jump from job to job at the same time they escalate positions and gain knowledge, experience and skills that they know will pay off in the future. There is a saying in dating that goes: ‘this person is not looking for Mr. Right, is looking for Mr. Right Now’ and the same thing happens with these professionals who apparently are choosing the right-now kind of jobs that they recognize will dress their resumes and will provide a window of training and learning for a future better employment. Consulting firms should be smart enough in order to sell themselves as the Mr.-Right type of job instead of Mr.-Right-Now that will only catapult professionals somewhere else after they invest on them. Notwithstanding, when the efforts of these firms are wrongly deployed, these will suffer the loss of employees emigrating towards new places where to continue their professional development. One interviewee at managerial level admits: “... we have experienced more turnovers of employees from junior to senior than from senior to managerial positions...” Juniors possess this restlessness of wanting to eat the world in a couple of bites but they lack certain skills they will only develop once they grow both personally and professionally.

The table in figure 15 illustrates the skills being both strongly and weakly possessed by the three roles already explained.

![Figure 15. Comparative skills matrix by role](image-url)
4.5 Is it true? The older the better?

The roles being held in the consulting firms are directly correlated with the experience in the company and/or in the industry. Next an interesting analysis is presented of which skills are better possessed by those with more experience in consulting versus the skills being held by professionals with less time in the industry. Are some of the skills held by those with more time in the field about to expire? Do new generations have fostered in business schools a new set of skills that counteract the effect of not having other skills that ‘veterans’ do have?

Four windows of time-experience were presented to questionees in order to choose the time they have been working in consulting. Those working in the industry for less than two years ranked in first place initiative and proactivity. Also they granted high value to problem analysis skills, enthusiasm and group skills. Mainly the types of consultants holding this experience time are juniors. In fact if a comparison is to be made among these skills mentioned by those with less than two years in the firm with the ones chosen by juniors, then experience, problem analysis skills, group skills, enthusiasm and initiative and proactivity are the ones selected by both groups. Also, employees with this short time of experience in the field have pointed where they consider they need improvement. The skills selected here were communication skills, experience (career focus), conflict resolution skills, technical skills and decision making skills. Again if compared with those selected by juniors in the same category, will be visible how conflict resolution skills lead the ranking.

For employees working in consulting for a period of time of two up to four years, the selection of their strongest skills is comprised by interpersonal skills, objectivity, leadership and presentation skills. The ranking of their poorest skills is formed by only two selections: conflict resolution skills and the ability to influence clients and obtain their buy-in. Again, by this window-experience a great majority of consultants found will be juniors in their second or third hierarchy organizational level, depending on the firm’s structure. Seniors are more likely to be found in the next window-experience comprising more than four but less than six years of consulting experience. For this group, the strongest skills are the ability to listen and question and problem identification skills and their worst are technical skills and the ability to recognize, deal and respond to clients’ emotions. Comparing with the choices made by seniors a perfect match can be found in choices such as the ability to listen and question (as the strongest) and technical skills and the ability to recognize, deal and respond to clients’ emotions (as the weakest).

The last group of consultants, representing 22% of the respondents, has worked in consulting for more than six years by the time this study is being carried out. This experienced professionals emphasize their main strengths are to be found in skills such as experience (career focus), the ability to listen and question, communication skills, problem identification skills, decision making skills, leadership and the ability of how to disagree without being disagreeable. With a total of seven choices selected by this group as their strongest skills, these professionals immediately stand out from all other consultants. It would be logical to assume that the relation between experience and skills developed would lead to this type of result. Most of the employees holding this vast experience in the field already enjoy a managerial position. Comparing the choices of this group with the ones made by those consultants currently performing as managers, the results point similarities in experience (career focus) and problem identification skills as their strongest possessions. Also when the time of admitting which ones are their weakest skills, professionals with more than six years of experience have confessed that conflict resolutions skills and the ability to influence clients and obtain their buy-in deserve more attention. Both options also selected by those holding a managerial position.
Just as seniors embody a ruthless competition for ascending to a managerial level, an even sadder story happens when once a manager the possibilities of becoming a partner would be seen as a bold move trying to reach for the stars. Not everyone becomes a partner, several factors from huge investments, a big and fruitful networking and an impeccable repertoire of success projects might provide only the consideration of the board. However at this level, hidden agendas and rivalry will raise barriers than sometimes even the best consultants simply cannot bring down, making this situation the worse project of their lives where apparently neither all the expertise, knowledge and skills altogether will be able to come up with a solution proposal. Managers at this level are perfect target for serious health issues. By having to bring new clients, by performing as psychiatrist for the clients and leading a team at the same time that are facing problems with unbalanced skills and expertise within the project-team, managers have also to defend themselves from the constant attacks undertaken by ambitious seniors eager to escalate in the firm and snatch away their job, as a result managers are quickly finding themselves in a depressive situation where even and when they enjoy reputation and probably a good financial stability, they know that the position they hold probably is the highest one they will ever have in the firm. They will always be working for someone else and will be the owners of anything at the end. That is why is very common to find professionals that once they reached a managerial level and have accrued all the skills, experience and an interesting networking, they say good bye to their employers and start their own practices, the so called Niche firms as has been already explained in the literature review of this paper. With this theft of clients portfolio, newcomers in the industry have absorbed the best from every consulting firm they have worked for and their nature as ambitious professionals finally catapult them into new arenas where they are their own bosses and own the business at the same time. This idea of owning their own practice when the time is right once they have accrued enough experience, skills and networking has been accepted by more than 70% of the consultants. So the question now seems to be if nowadays consulting firms are fostering and investing in tomorrow’s enemies? Interesting, isn’t it?

The next chart depicts the skills being held both in a strong and in a weak way by all employees in the four windows of time analyzed in this section.

![Figure 16. Comparative skills matrix by experience](image-url)
4.6 Industries providing talent to consulting

It has been already pointed what consulting firms want, which are the profiles and skills that professionals working with them must possess. Now the dilemma lies in where to find these professionals? Some of them will come directly from the classroom but others, with faster possibilities of growing inside the firm, will come from other jobs where they already had the chance to develop certain set of skills that are to be mapped with the ones required by the consulting firms. Consultancy has been gaining the attraction of every time more job aspirants since late 80’s and 90’s where for instance the so called yuppies generation – young urban professionals - started to find in these firms an interesting way for professional development and financial security as well as status and prestige. Employees with careers in different, but somehow better established industries started to turn their backs on them and aimed to get a job in consulting firms. These professionals, having accrued expertise and skills in one or more industries prior joining consulting, have manifested as their former cradles of development the next industries:

The IT sector undoubtedly wins the trophy as the biggest supplier of talent for consulting firms since 27% of the consultants that came for different industry prior joining consulting have manifested they used to perform in IT. It could be said that there is no surprise for this result since IT professionals are well known for their technical skills and problem solving abilities, main SKAs for consulting firms. This industry has been categorized as mainly dominated by engineers rather than by any social or human educational background. Therefore, professional developing the skills that define this industry are attractive to the eyes of the consulting firms.

The second and third place, both holding an interesting 20% each of the respondents, are Manufacturing and Banking sectors. Manufacturing again is an excellent sector where to look for technical skills and also is one of the favorite choices for engineers. Banking, regularly associated with financial and accounting backgrounds, have fostered employees in developing their mathematical and analytical skills.

Another tie is represent by the Fourth and fifth positions. Ironically two industries which could even be seen as opposites sides of the coin such as Consumer goods and Government. Each hold 12% of the respondents. Consumer goods industry, more identified for its flair in social and human strategies to persuade mass markets into buying and acquiring goods, has nurtured professionals into developing social and managerial skills that consulting firms now recognize as important and crucial as the technical ones. Different backgrounds such as Management, Marketing, Communications, Administration and Economics among others have coarsened the workforce of this sector where creativity, innovation and ‘thinking-outside-the-box’ have been some of the main the drivers for success. The Mexican Government has adjudicated itself some wins when hiring people from different academic backgrounds; however, respondents have manifested that the type of work to be performed drives them to become more specialized and focused on specific topics, limiting them when trying to create new ways of learning and interaction such as the cross-functional teams structure that FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) companies use on a daily basis. Nevertheless, professionals growing in the Public sector have the advantage of becoming a real erudite regarding their area of specialization and consulting firms do not overlook this detail.

Also the king of Research and Development, the pharmaceutical sector, secures itself the sixth place by providing 8% of the respondents into the arms of consulting arenas. Research skills are immediately related to pharmaceutical companies who strive for years trying to come up with new meds through large efforts in R&D. Also abilities for selling and moving the new products
into global markets call for international and well prepared professionals who, through a mixture of social skills and technical knowledge, go out there and develop themselves into an attractive job candidate for consulting firms.

At the end, with 6% of the questionees, Oil and Gas industry makes its small but significant contribution to the consulting field. Just as the manufacturing, this industry counts with extremely good technical personnel that turns them attractive to the likings of consulting.

All of these industries mentioned have been and are current clients of consulting firms who look for and hire skillful and experienced professionals from these sectors in order to gain the know-how and understand more their needs and how these companies behave. Somehow this turns into a small consumer-behavior kind of strategy where consulting firms both get talented people and gain knowledge of the industry they come from.

Even though and when other industries have been providing talent to the consulting sector, other consulting firms have also been performing as suppliers of talent for other consulting companies. An interesting 66% of the respondents have stated that they have worked in consultancy before joining their current employer. Also, a peculiar phenomenon happens when just like the prodigal son; employees come back to the arms of consultancy after an attempt to discover new panoramas in other industries. Deloitte, Accenture and KPMG are examples of firms who receive with apparently arms wide open their former employees who come back after trying luck somewhere else. Probably there must be special occasions when this happens or perhaps the employee is an asset the firm cannot afford to give up on as easy as that once again. Another situation happening among consultancy firms are brain drains used also as a way of securing skills and abilities within the workforce. One of the interviewees manifested:

“My previous Project Manager worked for another of the ‘Big Four’ prior joining our current employer. Everybody here knew about him and his accomplishments in the rival company especially in an industry where my firm was having troubles finding its way and I remember my back in the day Project Leader saying that it would be just a matter of time before we get this guy on our side and it was indeed”

The war for talent, as the powerhouse McKinsey once refer to when looking for the best professionals, has become quite competitive and as in war, it might look like that almost everything is allowed. Are some industries then loosing employees who are seduced by the elitist mist, prestige and perks that consulting firms provide? It seems that, at the end, just like happens with customers, skillful and talented employees are being snatched away from company to company in a merciless war for talent.

The chart in the right represents the industries that according to this research provide talent to the consulting firms. It is important to remember that some of the consultants have developed themselves in more than one of these industries; as a result the total sum overruns the 100%

Figure 17. Consultant’s experience industry
4.7 Efforts being carried out by consulting firms in an attempt to get, retain and develop the skills they need

As stated in literature, recruitment process holds a paramount importance when companies look for skills and abilities in job candidates. Through different ways that go from on-line testing and application filling to assessment centers and language examinations, consulting firms are reducing the number of aspirants into only those ones really skilled and/or experienced.

Through the process of recruitment the face-to-face interview is the only stage that 100% of the respondents manifested they went through. On the other hand, phone interview was experienced only by 33% of the participants in this research. With tendencies in international teams and cross-cultural teams making use of technology, interviewing is now also happening virtually. With teleconferences and the use of webcams, recruiters are demolishing geographical barriers and interviewing and accessing to talented people everywhere. An intriguing example is that only 11% took an on-line tool, in this case an on-line test during their recruitment process. It is evident anyways that interviewing leads the way in recruitment and will continue doing so. Nowadays is face-to-face interview the most used way; however, the tendency and need to recruit international talent might shape the way this is done today.

Psychometrical tests represent a step that 83% of the respondents took when applying for their current job. Also tests about general knowledge were faced by 6% of the respondents. Literature has manifested that all these tests are used very often in this process of recruitment but also it has highlighted that once this stage is overcome, tests like these ones are practically never used again in order to keep record of the employees and identify opportunity areas. This statement seems to be supported by 96% of the respondents who mentioned that never again they have taken a psychometrical test after their recruitment process with their current employer.

Assessment centers are now being used for many other industries and consulting as one of the main users of such tool employs individual cases solving and group cases assessment with 28% and 1% of the total of the respondents going through them respectively. It is evident from this point that consulting companies are addressing their efforts in identifying the skills in a more individual way. Group assessments, more used in Consumer Goods organizations for instance, are helpful in identifying leadership skills as well as team skills in order to visualize how does the candidate behave under certain circumstances and how does he/she interact with other people apparently equally prepared and skillful that he/she has been put to work with without knowing them. Sadly, the results of this research demonstrate that this way of evaluating in groups is not been discovered yet as an interesting way for recruitment among consultants.

For the companies to get to know a bit more about the person who aims to work for them could be seen as something natural. Two main techniques for this are essays and cover letters where the applicant tries to explain the reasons for applying to the job. However, results showed that none of the questionees had to write any of these papers. Some interviewees manifested they know how other colleagues working also for consulting firms but in different countries were asked for at least motivation letters; however, in Mexico they did not have to do that. The culture is different in a way that the first opportunity for creating interest in the employer comes with the resume and the second is the face-to-face interview itself and, if successful, then psychometrical tests are the next stage regularly leading to individual and/or group assessment centers followed by meetings again with Human Resources as a last bridge for the candidate finally having access to an interview with the people from the area where the aspirant aims to work at.
Some questionees (11%) have added *language tests* as part of the recruitment process they went through. It is common that consulting companies have branches in almost every continent and sometimes projects require the alliance of teams in different countries and regions, then a Babel-Tower-like situation is created and that’s why languages have become something not ‘preferred’ but ‘needed’.

*The chart in the right illustrates graphically the efforts being carried out by these firms through recruitment in order to acquire the skills they claim they need. The percentages indicate the total of respondents who went through that specific process during the recruitment with their current employer.*

![Figure 18. Most used recruitment tools](image)

Besides recruitment, both literature and the results provided during this research demonstrate that there are other options for companies to make sure they get, foster and retain the wanted skills such as training, mentoring, coaching and rewarding among others. By both, literature and results showed through this research, *Training* is seen as the most effective way to foster skills and diminish skill gaps. With 39% of the employees affirming their employer provides training, this tool becomes undoubtedly the almost panacea-like solution for skill gaps. In fact 33% of the questionees affirmed they have gone through training processes with their current employer where leadership seems to be indeed leading the way. Other interesting topics addressed during trainings that were mentioned by the consultants are: Communication skills, Career Development, New Managers, Teamwork, Methodologies, Certifications, Time Management, Team Management, Self-Improvement, Soft Skills and ERPs among others. In the KPMG website specifically in the section entitled “People profiles”, the company has put together testimonials of current employees by publishing the text of interviews held with them and one quite interesting questions is: “*What training have you been given at KPMG?*” The responses vary from mentioning that there are many kinds of training to how useful the experience itself is. However, something attractive is what one testimonial explains about when the employee is a ‘true starter’ there is a package of courses that have to be taken and they comprise a course in English, a course in writing, a course in speed reading and also courses in how to act with clients. It might look like these courses are trying to balance the probably already technical skills held by newcomers with this set of more soft skills courses aiming to deliver a more adequate employee into the company’s workforce.

Another example is *PricewaterhouseCoopers* who has even designed two main training and development programs called *Genesis Park* and *Ulysses* respectively. The first one, a leadership program, puts together a group of people from all around the world into a five months
residence program aiming to embrace the qualities the firm values the most: leadership, teamwork and intellectual curiosity. Ulysses, on the other hand, is designed to build a global network of leaders through five learning modules and one eight-week project assignment where multicultural teams work in developing countries along with social organizations.

All this proves how training is currently employed by practically every firm in order to foster skills as it has been pointed as the main one. However, during the theoretical framework it was discussed how companies offering mentoring have experienced the best results with their people. Mentoring has been selected by 28% of the questionees as a tool they acknowledged is offered by their current employer. Even through their websites job applicants can already have a glimpse of how the companies could help them in developing their skills through the help of a mentor. KPMG's testimonials on line also include the question “How important is mentoring within KPMG?” And the responses aim to explain how helpful is to have a partner as a mentor or a manager who can provide helpful advice. PricewaterhouseCoopers through its website explains how with the support of coaching and mentoring the employee will be able to develop a personalized career path based on experiences and aspirations. The consulting firm Everis offers as well the mentor figure (either a manager or a partner) in order to teach, advise, help and guide in all aspects related to the personal and professional development. Even though and with all this efforts being undertaken by the firms, there is a saying that goes something like ‘there is always a distance between what people say they do and what they really do’ and for example when consultants were asked about if they have had the opportunity to experience either coaching and/or mentoring, only 22% responded they have had a mentor and another equally 22% have gone through coaching. It might look that even and when the options are available, they are not reachable for everyone.

Another figure are the so called workshops, sometimes included in training programs, workshops are regularly not long-lasting and aim to polish a certain skill. From all the questionees, 22% have acknowledged that their current employer offers workshops; however, only half of them (11%) have gone through one.

Rewarding has been chosen only by 6% of the respondents and all of them have experienced rewarding in exchange of fostering or accruing more skills. One of the interviewees explains: “…sometimes when if by certain check-date of your achievements you have developed new skills, you are eligible to small bonuses to be considered at the end of the year…”

On the left a column chart aims to depict the four options here explained where the first or blue column represents the percentage of consultants who have admitted that this option is available and provided by their employer. The second column in red color represents the total of consultants who have really experienced these options.

Figure 19. Offered vs taken skills development options graph
The most interesting result in this section seems to be that an alarming 44% of the questioned consultants have admitted they have not had the opportunity of taking any of the options mentioned above, neither training nor mentoring nor any of the others. At the first sight, companies through their websites promote that taking-care-of the employee by offering several options; however, the results showed in this research demonstrate that even and when the options are there, not everyone can access them equally. It could be actually understandable from the point of view that, as seen in the theoretical framework, training is everything but cheap and companies must make an analysis when deciding which employee to send to training, workshops or to be assigned a mentor. Also performance and achievements apparently do count when choosing employees for these kinds of processes. So the question would be if consulting firms are like schools where ‘bad and good students’ are found equally? Then of course some will stand out more than others and deserve more the right of development. But then, are not consulting firms always looking for the best talent available? Do not they strive in order to get only the ‘good students’? So even among the best of the best apparently only the ultra-best might have access to mentors and trainings for instance.

The above is very much reflected when the majority, and amazing 72%, of the consultants agree that the options offered by their current employer are not enough to develop and foster the skills in order to perform efficiently in their jobs. Some of the respondents have manifested that for instance the trainings offered are somehow general and rigid in a way that they are not customized to the situation the project demands. Workshops are seen as standard and lacking flexibility making them tricky for employees trying to harness them. Also some of the questionees have stated that the role of boss is shared within the consulting firm and the client, which is of course understandable in this industry where two are chiefs to be serves; however, this becomes tricky since, as respondents have emphasized, if the client’s project does not require the skills employees are missing, then is quite unlikely they will ever receive training in those areas.

Through the questionnaires and interviews undertaken, it can be said that employees are aware about the options their employers offer for development; however they also realize that even and when they are many but not enough still possibilities for improvement can be found and gained after demonstrating good performance and commitment.

This deduction probably might not be far from reality if it is considered that 50% of the consultants strongly believe that their current employer does not take a hands-on approach when skill gaps are identified among the employees. In fact an incredible 56% of the respondents
consider the actions taken by their employers as reactive trying to solve to problems after they have been identified instead of taking the employees into a proactive culture where they could be ready with the skills they need by the time demanding projects emerge and there is no time to be wasted. One of the questionees states: “My firm carries out a reactive approach since training is provided periodically rather than continuously and besides it is given only when a project requires related skills”. Another questionnaire emphasizes how late consulting firms identify opportunity areas, jeopardizing both the project and the project-team. This leads into a more than 90% of the respondents manifesting that their employers should take preventive actions before starting new projects; a situation that sadly everybody thinks is far from reality since they have already found themselves in situations like soldiers sent to war without rifle when they do not have the skills they need when they are sent to meet clients.

One of the most remarkable comments provided in one of the questionnaires is related to competitiveness. The respondent clarified how in her firm training happens mainly when its clients start to flirt with competitors holding more skillful staff pursuing a probably change of outsourcer, then her firm sends everyone involved in the project into training at the same time that they must carry out the project as well. This, the respondent comments, has driven the employees into extra-hours per week and even health problems in senior associates. In fact it has become easier and easier to find articles published in renowned magazines and journals addressing the stress and other health problems experienced by consultants. Since they are seen as the problem-solvers by their clients, all responsibility, either success or failure, rests on their shoulders. Medical research carried out in Mexico has demonstrated that in the last ten years cardiovascular diseases have become more common in professionals in consulting industry, affecting equally both men and women. In a study carried out in Mexico it was proved that 80% of the adults over 20 years old working in the consulting and financial sector did not know they suffer cholesterol problems and only 20% follow a medical treatment according to their highly competitive job. Stress, excessive work load, an accelerated life-style, bad food habits and obesity have driven these professionals between 30 and 45 years old into heart attacks and/or strokes. This health issues get worse when sometimes a lot of money is involved in projects of titanic dimensions or even worse, people might find themselves in jeopardy if bad decisions are made. Consultants suffering pressure problems and drug-dependency are becoming a worrying issue when they must face projects they are not prepared to deal with since they lack the skills and knowledge; a very common picture when firms try to react instead of prevent.

By analyzing all of the above information it becomes easy to believe that consulting firms put under training only those employees already facing a project where their skills turned out not to meet to minimum requirements for carrying out the project properly (reactive approach), then the employee “must” go to training instead of the employee “gaining the right” to go to training. This addresses another issue on how project-teams are built and 50% of the respondents agreed that the project-teams are built more based on personality and previous achievements of the team members rather than on the skills held by them. But even a more alarming 56% acknowledge that regularly project teams are built before identifying the skills that the project demands which has been proved as a big and painful mistake by practitioners but is still happening. Literature has highlighted this as some of the main problems when putting together a group of people trying to build project-teams and this research apparently proves this right.
Chapter 5
Conclusions

Consultants’ profile differs from the common business employee. General conception mentions agile mind, proactive behavior, fast thinker, leader, confident, well-spoken, analytical, and team-oriented as their main characteristics. This idea has contributed to the creation of a myth: the mighty consultants; the highly-skilled professionals that know the solutions to business problems. They arrive to a company, identify the difficulties and solve them in just a blink. At least, this is the slogan that top consulting firms have known how to use in their benefit, maintaining the mystery around consulting while harvesting more and more projects with new and previous clients.

The literature review shows that the consulting industry is a growing business worldwide. The advisory provided by this type of companies is their core process. Their services have a wide range including market analysis, setting strategies, client understanding, change management, information technologies implementation, process reengineering and so on.

Stumpf and Tymon Jr (2001) explain that consulting is essentially a problem-finding and problem-solving activity with respect to the more complex, ill-structured issues being confronted by the organization. A prospective client shares with a prospective consultant some ideas around a gap in thinking or activity. It may be a gap in direction (Where should we expand or invest?), a gap in performance (How can we increase sales and reduce costs?), or a gap in understanding (How do we enter that market?). The sharing of possible problems leads to an engagement; as a result a team with the right consulting skills is formed to address the situation.

This study has revealed the skills possessed by consultants. As stated in the research question, the aim of the research is to be acquainted with the mix of skills that consulting firms demand from their consultants, who represent the most significant asset for them in such a competitive market.

There is no definitive answer on the puzzle of consultant’s skills. Different combinations of skills are better suited for certain types of circumstances. The consultant’s perception itself, basis of this study, is different from one individual to another. Massey (2003) makes an interesting remark when asking three business consultants how they perceive their job; they compared themselves to a gardener, a pilot and a guide. This is a clear example that illustrates the subjectivity of consultant’s perception and therefore the prejudice of the consulting skills.

5.1 Summary of results

A table in figure 22 shows a summary of results emerged from the data analysis presented previously.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultant’s firm</td>
<td>• Accenture (17%)</td>
<td>Consultants in five top consulting firms participated responding the questionnaires and interviews during the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Deloitte (17%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Everis (32%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• KPMG (17%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• PWC (17%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants’ role</td>
<td>• Manager (33%)</td>
<td>Respondents belonging to a balanced sample represented by the main roles in consulting project teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Senior (39%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Junior (28%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants’ experience</td>
<td>• 0-2 years (22%)</td>
<td>Most of the respondents have been working in consulting for a period longer than 4 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2-4 years (17%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4-6 years (39%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 6+ years (22%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in project teams</td>
<td>• Team member (61%)</td>
<td>A diversity of roles performed so far by the consultants has let them developed and acquired a diverse set of skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Team leader (44%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project Manager (39%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Program Manager (6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic formation</td>
<td>• Bachelor (94%)</td>
<td>In the consulting industry experience seem to be more important, most of the consultants only hold a bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Master (39%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• PhD (11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills not meet when joined consultancy</td>
<td>• Agree (56%)</td>
<td>Consulting firms demand skills that professionals not always possess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Disagree (44%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry focus</td>
<td>• IT (27%)</td>
<td>Most of the consultants have gained experience in more than one industry prior joining consulting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manufacturing (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Banking (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumer Goods (12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Government (12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• R&amp;D (8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Oil &amp; Gas (6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongest skills</td>
<td>• Problem analysis</td>
<td>These 7 skills were the most voted among the five consulting firms as the must-have for consultants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ability to listen and question</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexibility and adaptability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Objectivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakest skills</td>
<td>• Mentoring</td>
<td>Consultants overall admitted that there were four skills they would like to develop in order to perform better in their jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intrapersonal skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conflict resolution skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Group skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills acquisition filters</td>
<td>• Interviews (100%)</td>
<td>Consulting firms utilize mainly interviews and psychometrical test as filters in recruitment to determine if consultant posses the skills they are looking for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Psychometrical tests (83%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assessment centers (29%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Language test (115)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills fostering tools</td>
<td>• Training (39%)</td>
<td>Four tools were identified as commonly used by consulting firms. However, not all consultants have participated on them. Training was voted as the most accessed fostering tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mentoring (28%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Workshops (22%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rewarding (6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Options offered by employer to foster skills are…</td>
<td>• Enough (28%)</td>
<td>Surprisingly, although consulting firms offer different tools to foster skills, consultants do not believe they are enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Not enough (72%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 22. Summary of results (Compiled by the authors)
Throughout this research’s results, it was demonstrated that consultant’s perception of their work is a key element to determine the required skills for working in project teams within consulting firms. Consultants appear to be worried in developing skills that enable them to help the clients by solving their problems and creating a good relationship with them.

The study is helpful in reaffirming how the mist wrapping the word ‘skill’ changes even from one consulting firm to the next one. Even and when all firms participating in this paper share a similar profile and services and competing one against each other, the skills each of them have fostered and looked for in their professionals differ from company to company. For instance, with a strong focus in problem-analysis skills KPMG employees might face some uncomfortable situations if they try to move to PricewaterhouseCoopers where leadership seems to be the norm. This embodies the perfect example of the consultant that literature mentions so often: a professional who is well skilled in technical knowledge and abilities but is limping from people or soft skills.

Also has been shown how even inside the firm a fierce competition takes place when some consultants aim to get the job of others at the same time that everyone demands more opportunities in training in an attempt to calm their ambition and professional greed and restlessness. When this balance is not achieved these professionals with their formation and nature that characterizes them, become a worrying threat where several outcomes can happen from sabotaging the newcomers in training and mentoring to stealing portfolio of clients or go somewhere else where they can apply what they have learnt in an attempt of pursue a faster ascent and then the investment made in them really flies away from the hands of the firm.

The research results also suggest that the consulting firm where the consultant works, the role of the consultant in the project teams and the experience in consulting affects the skills that consultants identify as the vital ones in order to perform their work. This issue is clearly exemplified during the data analysis by company; the skills-ranking among consultants differs from one consulting firm to another. It indicates that each organizational culture influences the consultant’s conceptions regarding the ideal skills that will allow them to get the job done.

In order to create this team that will solve the client’s problem(s), it is necessary to build it with the right consultants holding the right skills. According to this paper’s findings, it is possible to propose a framework to understand the skills that are needed in the consulting industry by considering three aspects that change the perception on skills: the type of consulting firm, the consultant’s role and the previous experience in consulting. This statement is exemplified on the illustration on the right.

Another interesting finding is that consulting firms do not hire the people with the required skills developed at a 100% because they are a scarce resource; instead they hire those professionals who have the potential for developing in the future basis after this new employees go through a training process and are integrated into the organizational culture, in other words, when they share the same professional perspective with the consulting firm and embrace a new set of skills to achieve the firm’s goals.

Figure 23. Consultant’s Skills Framework
A battle to get the best people with the required skills for consultancy, or at least with the potential to develop these skills, has risen in recent years. The consulting firms have very sharp recruitment procedures at universities for fresh graduates. However, Neumann and Banghart (2001) argue about the gap existing between corporate needs and recently graduate skills when it comes to practice communication and problem-solving skills. The graduates usually start working in teams on their first jobs while developing initiative, persistence and integrity.

An alarming issue is that although consulting firms have different tools to foster skills (training, mentoring, rewarding system, workshops), there is still a gap from what theory points to what practice says. Many consultants have manifested that they have not had the opportunity to experience these available options or not with the expected frequency. Therefore, there is a failure in the compliance and applicability of these tools to maintain and develop skills on consultants, turning this into a vicious cycle.

The consulting industry has also experienced different problems regarding its prestige as a trusty sector. Complaints about incompetent consultants are common due to lack of experience and arrogant attitudes (Adams and Zanzi, 2004). This industry needs personnel with special capabilities in order to be competitive in such a fierce environment.

### 5.1.1 Hypothesis testing

**Hypothesis 1**

Consulting firms demand a special combination of skills such as leadership, communication, problem-solving skills and teamwork; however, the main skills being currently held by the majority of professionals working in consulting firms are technical (hard skills) where usually the people skills (soft skills) are the less developed.

**Result:** The first hypothesis has been proven to be true. Leadership and problem-solving accounted higher response rates by the consultants as must-have skills, communication and teamwork were mentioned in a more plausible way but yet important for the consulting work.

It was also interesting to notice that as addressed by the literature review consultants feel more confident about their technical/hard skills. In addition, although they do possess people/soft skills, they have also manifested that the soft skills are the ones that they need to foster the most, especially considering that this type of skills become more significant in long-term basis for managerial positions.

**Hypothesis 2**

Consulting firms are constantly finding themselves in a state of dismay due to the lack of consulting-skills in aspirants and even among current employees, therefore it becomes difficult for them to find professionals with not only the skills probably gained in Business Schools and/or through previous job experiences but also the ones they have claimed as essentials in consulting.

**Result:** This hypothesis also claims to be true. As declared by the consultants, they did not have many of the skills required by the consulting firms when joining the company, or at least not in the desired level. This was true for both fresh graduates and experienced professionals. Hence, it is clear why consulting firms struggle to find the best among the best in order to obtain the better-skilled human resource available in the market.
5.1.2 Problems during research

As previously explained in more detail in the methodology chapter, some problems emerged along the research, being the most important a change in the scope to perform the study only in the Mexican consulting industry due to a lack of positive response and strong networking in the three proposed countries (United Kingdom, Italy and Sweden) initially included in the research.

There were also some limitations in the analysis. For practical purposes it was intended to have a sight at the consultants’ perspective about the skills that are most important to perform their job, since they are the ones capable to offer the best opinion on the topic by being involved in the consulting activity on a daily basis. Other perspectives no included in this study are: client perspective, human resources perspective, more numerous consulting firms, business schools opinions and larger number of countries sampled in the study.

During the data collection phase, it was identified that some respondents did not answered all the questions or did not do it in the expected manner. As a result, it was necessary to add the interview as a complementary tool to refine the gathered information. When it comes to the data analysis stage, some interesting, controversial, contradictory and surprising results were found. Once again the interview was selected as the suitable tool to ferret out about these findings.

5.1.3 Recommendations

A. To professionals searching a career in consulting
Aspirants who are willing to have a career in the consulting industry, whether if they are fresh graduates or more experienced employees, should pay attention in identifying the skills demanded by the consulting firms in order to take the necessary actions to meet the skills criteria. By doing this, those eager professionals will increase their probability to join such a competitive labor market as the consulting industry.

B. To existing consultants
As discussed in the literature review, when consultants feel that the mechanisms provided by their employers are not enough to develop their skills, it is recommended to communicate this problem to the direct supervisor rising the importance on this matter, always bearing in mind that skills-training is not an expense but and investment.

C. To academic institutions
Universities should pay constant attention to the professional market. Especially for business and engineering students, who are the ones most likely to pursue a career in consulting. It is necessary that they are educated with the appropriate skills required by consulting firms. A bilateral cooperation between academic institutions and employers in the consulting industry will bring positive results to this matter.

D. To consulting firms
Organizations working in the consulting industry are supposed to include skills assurance for their consultants as a continuous activity. Having this issue as a priority, the firms should be able to acquire, foster and retain the talent with the required skills to get the job done. The findings in this study demonstrate that consultant do not feel that actions towards skills training are enough. It is vital that consulting firms establish an ongoing process able to guarantee that the initiatives in recruitment, mentoring, coaching, training, rewarding and promotions are effective not only in theory but in practice. As mentioned before, a conjoined effort with academic institutions is needed in order to facilitate the student preparation to meet consulting skills criteria.
5.2 Contribution to the knowledge gap

As stated at the end of the Chapter 2, the Literature Review, a knowledge gap emerges from the lack of research regarding the skills for this specific type of project-teams: the consultants. Both, definition and identification of these skills call for more efforts in research. This paper provides a small insight of how consultants, the ones really at the trenches in the projects, perceive themselves as possessors of a determined set of skills and findings in this study have pointed how some of these skills held by the consultants are overlooked or simply not considered by their employers. Sometimes even worse, the employers do not even know the wide repertoire of skills it already has through its consultants. That is why identifying which ones are those skills is crucial, since, as literature has mentioned, no one shares the same understanding. By going from company to company this paper has brought interesting issues of self-appreciation and honest evaluation of the consulting firms as fosterers of skills and talent.

The results showed in this document demonstrate how there is no ‘right or wrong’ definition of skill. Just like the saying goes: ‘everything depends on which type of crystal you are looking through’ and this paper proves this true. As mentioned before, literature has highlighted the lack of agreement regarding the term skill and the analysis proved how even this skill’s definition is built differently from one consulting firm to the next one according to their own needs and type or work/projects they carry out, for example Accenture through its online glossary available in its website, starts guiding regarding what do they mean by certain terms.

Results point that not the same skill has the same importance for all consulting firms even though when they compete one against each other and perform on a similar basis. Therefore, it is recognizable how nor in theory or in practice will be an accepted-by-everyone standard for skills. This paper exposes perceptions from these five companies and immediately is acknowledgeable the differences among all of them and how they align them to what they do, therefore to what they need.

This paper hopefully will detonate the attention of researchers either academics or practitioners who perhaps will turn to pay attention to these project teams that even and when probably are not comparable in quantity as the traditional project-teams that can be found in practically every company worldwide, consultants have demonstrated they are to use a different set of skills besides the one regular project-teams use as well. The study aims to raise awareness through controversial and even contradictory results between what consultants say about themselves versus their perceptions regarding their own employers or also what employers claim through their websites versus what consultants have disclosed they really experience. Hopefully this paper will help to encourage more research on this topic.

5.3 Further research

The findings of this study have opened a door to more studies in the research topic: consultant’s skills. In addition to the implications suggested before for specific kind of skills required in the consulting project teams and the dismay of consulting firms they suffer when trying to incorporate skilled personnel into their teams, it becomes evident that research is needed on consulting skills for these specific project teams.
The research’s results model might also provide researchers with an opportunity to complement, develop and test the consulting skills framework by taking different approaches into consideration. These approaches coincide with the aspects that are part of this research’s limitations, as it is logical that those limitations need to be reduced in order to complement the findings. Consequently, some areas that could be included for further studies are:

1. **Client Perspective**
   As mentioned by the respondent through the questionnaires and during the interviews, it is a must to meet and even exceed client expectations, therefore it is vital to include the client perspective when analyzing the skills. The discussion on consulting skills should be put on the client’s table as well in order to obtain their input about which skills consultants should hold in order to facilitate the consultant-client relationship before, during and after the project. For instance, how well developed are these skills in new and aged hires through a 360° sort of way, from internal clients to external clients could provide interesting material for analysis and decision-making regarding the topic.

2. **Human Resources Department Perspective**
   The internal perspective of the Human Resources Departments is not part of the scope in this study. The value of their contribution relies on the alignment of the HR programs with the business strategy. There are different programs managed by this business unit related to the acquirement and enhancement of consultant skills such as: recruitment, training, mentoring, rewarding. Not all consulting firms are taking action in trying to reduce the gap found between what these companies require in their project teams and what they found available from universities and even from experienced applicants but again without the skills required. A comparative study in order to identify the key players in this industry and the actions undertaken towards minimizing this gap should be of interest of several stakeholders in the industry. Relationships between experience, background, rewards, retention, commitment, job satisfaction, loyalty to the employer, job stress and performance are all important areas for further research with regard of the hypercompetitive industry such as consulting which is becoming more and more attractive both for aspirants and clients, but at the same time the requirements for getting in will be even higher and more difficult to match.

3. **Academic Institutions Perspective**
   Since universities prepare professionals that will become future consultants, it would be interesting to analyze which elements these academic institutions are taking into account when it comes to foster skills in their students. It seems that even the most renowned business schools in prestigious universities worldwide are failing in delivering students with right consulting skills for these firms. Are the consulting organizations communicating adequately with universities in terms of what is needed in the market and vice versa?

4. **Selected Consulting Firms**
   This study was based exclusively in responds from five selected consulting firms and only taking into account their business consulting or advisory section. It would be good idea to extend the research to the audit areas and encompass a larger diversity of consulting firms.

5. **Regional Applicability**
   For purposes of this research, the consulting market in Mexico City was chosen for the data collection and analysis. However, the findings cannot be generalized to other regions reality. Extensive studies can be performed in other countries, where different factors (social, economical, cultural) can affect the obtained results.
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Addendums

Questionnaire

This questionnaire will be used within company and the information you provide will be used only for purposes of assessment and evaluation in a confidential manner as per our current project terms. Confirmed questions are to be completed and highlighted in blue.

1. Company name

2. Contact job title

3. Position held with us:
   - Partner
   - Manager
   - Senior
   - Junior
   - Other, please specify

4. Please indicate areas of interest, specify career level or position:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Degree</th>
<th>Obtained or Expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Experience consultant: □ yes □ no

6. How long have you worked with us?
   - □ 0 - 1 year
   - □ 1 - 2 years
   - □ 2 - 4 years
   - □ 4 - 6 years
   - □ > 6 years, please specify: □

If the position selected is one of the junior categories, please specify the minimum year your position can be in the line

7. Have you worked in constituency-based voting for your present employer? □ yes □ no

   Please specify the location your term existed before voting in counting.

8. Have you worked for company at project (must utilize 2 years minimum): □ Partner/Manager
   - □ Program Manager
   - □ Team Leader
   - □ Team Member - differentiate
   - □ Other, please specify: □

9. Have you ever been in a very challenging situation that necessitates short duration jobs? Please specify.
   □ Yes □ No
Addendums

10. Do you consider these core qualitative skills when applying for your job with your current employer? (Circle closest number below)

- Yes
- No

If “Yes,” please restate core skills

11. Most with an “X” the sequence we used through in recruitment and selection with your current employer

- On-line application
- Motivation letter
- Assessment Center
- Group assessment session
- Other, please specify

12. All the skills you identified as core skills are essential in our business. Four columns are located on the right where you must rank two columns concerning skills related to you as an individual and the second two columns concerning your perspective about the firm itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
<th>Column C</th>
<th>Column D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Competence</td>
<td>Core Competence</td>
<td>Core Competence</td>
<td>Core Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Skills</td>
<td>Leadership Skills</td>
<td>Leadership Skills</td>
<td>Leadership Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Skills (e.g., software, techniques, tools, etc.)</td>
<td>Technical Skills (e.g., software, techniques, tools, etc.)</td>
<td>Technical Skills (e.g., software, techniques, tools, etc.)</td>
<td>Technical Skills (e.g., software, techniques, tools, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Skills</td>
<td>Problem Solving Skills</td>
<td>Problem Solving Skills</td>
<td>Problem Solving Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision Making Skills</td>
<td>Decision Making Skills</td>
<td>Decision Making Skills</td>
<td>Decision Making Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence and Vocal skills</td>
<td>Influence and Vocal skills</td>
<td>Influence and Vocal skills</td>
<td>Influence and Vocal skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intra-Departmental Skills</td>
<td>Intra-Departmental Skills</td>
<td>Intra-Departmental Skills</td>
<td>Intra-Departmental Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter-personal Skills</td>
<td>Inter-personal Skills</td>
<td>Inter-personal Skills</td>
<td>Inter-personal Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Skills (e.g., software, techniques, tools, etc.)</td>
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<td>Problem Solving Skills</td>
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<td>Intra-Departmental Skills</td>
<td>Intra-Departmental Skills</td>
<td>Intra-Departmental Skills</td>
<td>Intra-Departmental Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-personal Skills</td>
<td>Inter-personal Skills</td>
<td>Inter-personal Skills</td>
<td>Inter-personal Skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Place of the options above corresponds to fully describe any case)
Addendums

36 Competence - Awareness & dedication and ability to operate technical
37 Creativity - Proficiency in operating, control of process of operating
38 Enthusiasm
39 Flexibility and adaptability
40 Initiative / proactivity

If none, please add them in the blank below

13 When audit-gap becomes evident, does your current employer take a hands-on approach e.g. exposes, tackles, encourages, etc?  

Yes  No

*If your answer goes to question 15, please go to question 16

14 Material on "If audit fails to identify your current employer are in order to reduce audit gap?" Please provide with some examples of tests or methodologies relevant clauses d.e. Technical manuals, operating procedures, test procedures, etc.

Examples

Training  Coaching  Mentoring  Workshops  Competitive examinations / Improvement  coursework, exam

15 With working with your current employer, have you gone through any of the processes mentioned above?  

Yes  No

If yes, please specify which process you went through and when.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Topic or skill sharpened</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

16 Have you taken any courses taken in your current employer when dealing with skills Vacancy?  

Present  Future  Executive  Does not carry out any constructive learning - if yes, please specify, cover to q. 4

In other courses, why?

17 Do you consider that the options offered by your current employer are enough to develop particular talents you require in order to perform your job sufficiently?


Please mark all of the following factors that influence your mental well-being.

- The project team can build trust based on personality and previous achievements of the team members
- The project team can build trust based on the skills of the team members
- The project team can build trust based on the skills of the team members
- In order to succeed in the organisation is different set of skills that the project team needs, rather than the skills that are available for other projects.
- Sometimes teams are motivated to succeed because they are the only ones with the skills that are available for other projects.
- Sometimes teams are motivated to succeed because they are the only ones with the skills that are available for other projects.
- The development and promotion of team members is based on their achievements and skills.
- Recognition and rewarding team members for success and achievement is valued and promoted within the company.
- Sometimes team members are motivated through the skill gap among team members is labelled as skill gaps through training or other means.
- When I joined the team I was immediately assigned to a project with no further training.
- After the outcome process has never been clarified and fair.
- Even though in a situation where my manager was not aware of the project, I had already
- Even though I was aware of the process, many people have not been able to understand it.
- Even though I was aware of the process, many people have not been able to understand it.
- Even though I was aware of the process, many people have not been able to understand it.
- Even though I was aware of the process, many people have not been able to understand it.
- Even though I was aware of the process, many people have not been able to understand it.

If there is anything else you would like to add to the question checklist, you can write it in the box below.

Thank you very much for your participation.