

## **CONSULTING AS A TRANSFORMING PRACTICE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE APPLICATION OF THE ONTOPSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL ON BRAZILIAN COMPANIES**

### **CONSULTORIA COMO UMA PRÁTICA DE TRANSFORMAÇÃO: UMA ANÁLISE DA APLICAÇÃO DO MODELO ONTOPSICOLÓGICO NAS EMPRESAS BRASILEIRAS**

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#### **Abstract**

This research aims at investigating the results of applying the ontopsychological model of business consulting on national organisations through the multiple cases study with 100% Brazilian capital. For answered this aims was done a qualitative-exploratory. The people to respond to the semi-estructurated interview were selected according to convenience, as it depended on the consent of both entrepreneurs and consultants who use the ontopsychological consulting model. Among the results shown, we highlight the economic, individual, management and business dynamics gains. The interviews allowed us to get closer to an understanding of the kind of impact caused by the ontopsychological consulting model in three Brazilian organisations and lead us to realise the business results have been satisfactorily achieved in all of them.

**Key-words:** Business consulting. Ontopsychological model. Impact. Brazilian organizations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Business consulting formally emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries providing businesspeople with systematic ways to guide the decision-making process, solve problems or introduce innovations into businesses (PEREIRA, 1999). Kipping (2002) ascribes three generations in the development of this industry: 1) scientific management; 2) organisation and strategy; and 3) information technology. Paula and Wood Jr. (2008) indicates "knowledge management" and "strategy" as central element of a fourth generation, even though they notice the need for a deep research to characterise it adequately. In 1980, it was estimated that there were 18,000 active professional consultants in the world, by 1998 this number was recorded in 140,000 professionals, largely due to growth in information technology (Canback, 1998). While in 1980 the consultancy market around the world had an estimated revenue of \$ 2 billion (CANBACK, 1998), 20 years later it had an increase of more than 5000%, totaling a revenue of 51 billion dollars in 1995; \$ 102 billion in 1999; and \$ 205 billion estimated in 2005 (BISWAS AND TWITCHELL, 2002).

Among the approaches of business-consulting intervention models, this research delves into the Ontopsychological model in order to analyse its practice in Brazilian organisations and the perception of the results arising from its intervention. This consulting considers the company a living organism, in which the leader's *forma mentis* materialises, that is, his actions and intentions (conscious and unconscious). Is a contemporary approach, which has been in the Brazilian market for about 15 years and about which there were no academic studies in Brazil. Initially, conceptual aspects of business consulting and some models selected from the literature are presented. After, indications concerning the methodological procedures adopted are done. Finally the results and discussions arisen from the interviews that have been done are pointed out, as well as the closing remarks.

## 2. BUSINESS CONSULTING

Even if scholarly literature available suggests that the interest in the study of business consulting was expressed only from the 1980s, they've been perceived since 1950, studied under the name 'Organisational Development', which was understood as the search for increased organisational efficiency through a planned process of collaborative intervention (CLARK AND FINCHAM, 2002). Currently, this term is named 'consulting' and it is conceptualised by Greiner and Metzger (1983, p. 7) as:

counseling service hired to provide, through qualified people who are specially trained to assist in an objective and independent way, the identification of management problems in the customer-organisation by analysing problems, recommending solutions to these problems and, when required, giving assistance to implement these solutions.

Canback (1998) highlights that there are several key-terms in this concept. The "counseling service" implies the responsibility for the quality of the advice given by consultants. "Objective and independent" refers to financial, administrative, political and emotional independence from the customer, presented also by Kubr (1996). The term "qualified and trained" indicates that the consulting activity is more than the individual view and experiences, as it requires adequate training for this purpose. In order to contextualise the argument, we present some models of business consulting, devoting greater emphasis and deepening to the ontopsychological model.

### 3. CONSULTING MODELS

The consulting models are the systematised set of actions aimed at organising such activity (MANCIA, 1997). Based on commercial models of purchase and sales of specialised services, the *expert model* proposed by Schein (1978; 2008), focuses technology knowledge and mastery on the consultant, to provide the customer with information and services, offering specialised assistance. Such model assumes that the customer buys from the consultant any information or specialised service which they are unable to generate by themselves.

With a prescriptive focus and originated in a clinical and mental health referential, the *doctor-patient model* was also proposed by Schein (1978; 2008). This approach implies that the customer knows that something is wrong, but cannot identify what nor how to solve it. The consultant is sought to make a "major review" of the organisation: both to do the diagnosis and to prescribe and manage the solution. This model presents some risks in the results, as it reinforces the customer dependency, whom transfers the responsibility for the diagnosis and "treatment" to the consultant.

Third model proposed by Schein (1978; 2008), the *process model* is a result of his practice within customer-organisations and it is not just a set of techniques that can be compared and contrasted with other techniques. The consulting by process is a set of activities developed by the consultant that help the customer realise, understand and act on interrelated

events that occur in their environment (SCHEIN, 2008). Such model proposes to work integrating the technical-administrative procedures with the procedures of human interaction (interpersonal conflict, power struggles, miscommunication etc.). The consulting by process has as an underlying principle the customer's need to learn to see the problem by themselves by sharing the diagnostic process and being actively involved in the generation of a solution (SCHEIN, 2008).

Enhancing the consulting analysis perspectives, *Caplan's model* (1970; 1978) differentiates the term *customer* and *consultee*. The consultee is the person who will directly receive the help of a consultant, whereas the customer refers to the system (person, group or organisation) that will directly receive the consultee's work (MANCIA, 1997). Caplan (1970; 1978) distinguished four specific types of consulting: consulting focused on the a) consultee; b) customer; c) program; and d) program manager.

The *behaviourist model*, in turn, finds in Russell (1978) one of the main scholars and practitioners. It also suggests, like Caplan, a relationship based on Consultant-Consultee-Customer. The premise of this model is that environmental influences will determine the behaviour, thus every problem expressed in terms of observable behaviour is the result of situational factors affected by the behavioural reaction (MANCIA, 1997). The purpose of this approach is change both in individual as well as in organisational spheres, starting from substantial changes in the environment.

Finally, the *ontopsychological consulting model* aims to provide the leader and the most operative employees of the company with realisation of creativity in evolution (MENEGHETTI, 2010). Simultaneously using the three discoveries made by Ontopsychology in its analysis, the ontopsycho logical model examines, on the one hand, external factors, that is, the intervention leads to an instrumental technical-practical functionality to all sectors (human resources, financial sector, production sector, commercial sector etc.). On the other hand, it focuses the intervention on an internal level: the figure of the leader and the workers who are closer to him, verifying whether their actions and intentions are functional or not to the gain (MENEGHETTI, 2008).

This model assumes that not always what one thinks is what it is in fact, which reveals a "lack of knowledge" or "partial knowledge" of reality, that is, there is something that is unconscious: even if is not seen, it exists and acts. If the subject has an unconscious dimension, this aspect will also be reflected in the product of his action, in this case, the company (MENEGHETTI, 2010).

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Authors such as Luft (1961), Morgan (1996) and Schein (2008) expose in their studies unconscious aspects of the company. Schein (2008), for example, states that the more areas of ignorance are removed, the more layers of reality are revealed and the only way to find the inner reality is learning to distinguish what I know, from what I assume I know and from what I do not really know. For him, "exploring our areas of ignorance can be a costly process to move through all of our preconceived ideas and overcome some of our defensive perceptions" (p.31).

Corroborating with this view, the scope of Ontopsychology is, through its method, making the subject recover full consciousness of himself. Authentication, affirms Meneghetti (2008), may refer to a thing or a context and it means placing oneself the same way the action is: noumenon and phenomenon coincide. In the business context, authentication refers to the coherence between what the company "is" and "how it thinks of itself," how it builds itself: moving from the microenvironment "human being" towards the macro-environment "organisation" which results from the action of these people. In its methodological procedure, the consultant, in addition to the inductive-deductive process, uses simultaneously the three discoveries of Ontopsychology: semantic field, ontic In Sé and monitor of deflection.

The leader assumes significance in this model, as this approach considers the company as a reflection of the leader's personality (MENEGETTI, 2008, 2010; BERNABEI, 2001, 2010). Meneghetti (2008) conceptualises the leader as the person who through intelligence, knows how to ensure function to all who are around them, "A leader is one who knows how to build [...] the harmony of relations among all, so that the highest level of production of values and things is achieved" (2008, p.16). In this study, the conception of leader proposed by Meneghetti will be adopted.

#### **4. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

To deepen the knowledge about the chosen business consulting model, this research assumed a qualitative-exploratory character. According to Hair et al. (2007), such data extrapolate the boundaries of quantitative tools, allowing the deepening of the studies and the discovery of new variables. The exploratory approach, in turn, helps identifying variables that are unknown or are not fully defined (Cooper and Schindler, 2003) and "aims at providing greater familiarity with the problem" (Gil, 2008, p.41). The people to respond to the semi-structured interview were selected according to convenience, as it depended on the consent

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of both entrepreneurs and consultants who use the ontopsycho-logical consulting model. We considered the feasibility of contact with the companies and consultants selected. The sample consisted of three key-employees in three companies with 100% Brazilian capital that have already used the ontopsycho-logical consulting model for, at least, three years. The characterisation of the interviewed entrepreneurs and denomination for this research are summarised in Table 01.

Table 01 - **Characterisation of the Respondent Business Entrepreneurs and Denomination in the Research**

Researched Group	Respondent Denomination	Gender	Age	Education	Time He/She Has Been Working in the Company (Years)	Position in the Company
Company A	A1	M	59	Accounting Science	32	President
	A2	M	45	Business Administration	25	Director
	A3	F	45	Business Administration	18	Manager
Company B	B1	M	46	Business Administration	20	President
	B2	M	42	Economics	17	Managing-Partner
	B3	M	41	Computer Science	19	Managing-Partner
Company C	C1	M	41	Business Administration	24	President
	C2	M	43	Law/Computer Science	9	Director
	C3	F	47	Business Administration	17	Director

Note: Gender: M = masculine; F = feminine.

Company A belongs to the industrial sector and has been in the market for over 30 years. It's one of the largest Brazilian companies in its sector, hiring approximately 6,000 employees and exporting to over 60 countries. Its billing in 2009 was 259 million dollars.

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Company B operates in the provision of information technology and has been in the market for 20 years. It currently has about 1,500 employees and operates internationally in over 16 countries. Finally, Company C has been operating in the provision of information technology for 23 years. With 300 employees, it operates internationally in over five countries and leads, in its field, the information technology Brazilian market. Both Company B and Company C do not disclose their revenues.

Five consultants who use the ontopsychological consulting model in their activities also took part on the sample, they are characterised in Table 02.

Table 02 - **Characterisation of the Respondent Consultants and Denomination in the Research**

<b>Researched group</b>	<b>Respondent denomination</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Time he/she has been a professional OC*</b>
Professional Consultant 1	<b>P1</b>	F	32	Management	9 years
Professional Consultant 2	<b>P2</b>	F	43	Psychology	19 years
Professional Consultant 3	<b>P3</b>	F	49	Psychology	22 years
Professional Consultant 4	<b>P4</b>	M	51	Economics	18 years
Professional Consultant 5	<b>P5</b>	F	32	Psychology	9 years

Note: Gender: M = masculine; F = feminine. \*OC = Ontopsychological Consultant

We have opted for semi-structured interview to collect information considering that, according to this model, the researcher is free to exercise their initiative, ask related questions that had not been previously thought, which can result in the emergence of unexpected and enlightening information (Hair et al., 2007). The collected material was treated with the technique of Bardin's Content Analysis (1994). The interviews, which average time was 57 minutes, were recorded and transcribed. After the transcriptions, the material was read many times in order to build the relationships between the information and the theoretical constructs. Therefore, some of the theoretical-empirical categories were constructed from the information collected from the subjects, while others come from the literature review.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results were organised into five categories that emerged both from the theoretical discussions and from data analysis itself. These categories are: Motivation/Recruitment; Consulting Process; Characteristics; Change; Outcome/Impact. All categories were deeply analysed and in this article we chose to develop only the category "Outcome/impact," as it was the most representative one. The capillary analysis of the data from the interviews reveals that elements from the other categories are also present there.

The category "Outcome/Impact" verifies which are the observable effects resulting from the application of the ontopsycho logical business consulting in the studied Brazilian organisations. The organisational performance has been measured by the academic community in particular in two ways: by means of objective measures and subjective measures. The first ones, objective, include revenue, number of employees, operational result, among others. Subjective measures are collected through the opinion of the subject studied (Schmidt; Bohnenberger, 2009). These two methods – indicate Venkatraman and Ramanujam's convergence studies (1987) – are correlated and can be used according to need and convenience of the researcher. Under "Outcome/Impact" an objective measure was chosen: the economic outcome, and other three subjective measures: management results, individual results and business dynamics. From the interrelation of these four results, the interpretation of the impact that consulting has in the company was done.

All entrepreneurs interviewed highlighted the economic gain resulting from the application of the ontopsycho logical model. The president of "Company C" said that, although the result is due to a number of things (the way the business is conducted, favourable Brazilian scene etc.) the intervention has been basilar in this process. He pointed out a variety of results which arose from the consulting: "we grew 700% [in ten years] [...], the relationship with the employees was improved[...], we were market leaders in Rio Grande do Sul, nowadays we are leaders in Brazil and now we're expanding to Latin America" (C1). In Company B, the associate director responsible for the finances informed: "In both occasions, our result has doubled compared to the same prior year [...]" (B3). The president of the company added: "There is technique, method and result, and it is noticeable, that is, it's worth it"(B1). The economic growth was also observed in "Company A". The company's president allowed us to access the following evolution in economic growth (Table 03):

Table 03 – ‘Company A’ Results after the ontopsycho logical business consulting

REFERENCE	REVENUE	PROFIT	NUMBER OF UNITS PRODUCED
2007	100*	100*	100*
2008	143	150	122
2009	163	166	141
2010	241	281	186

Note: \*Percentual values. The numbers of each indicator in 2007 were assumed as 100%.

Source: Data provided by Company A.

The data provided by company A use 2007 as the base year, as it's the year when the first ontopsycho logical business consulting was held in the organisation. In 2009, a second intervention was made. Subject A1 provided the revenue data, profit, and the number of units produced, from the moment the first consulting was performed in the company and made a reservation about the production volume: "the number of units produced is relative as a result, because you can increase production and decrease your return. The point is: are you growing solidly or are you inflating your numbers?" (A1). This interrogative demonstrates the importance of data cross-analysis as well as the evaluation of subjective factors which emerged from the interviews. From the data presented in Table 03, we can see there is an increase in three years of 181% in profit, far higher than revenues, which increase was 141% compared to base year 2007 and units produced, which rose by 86%.

Among the intangible results shown in the survey, the "management" is understood as the way to manage one's own business. In interviews, all nine entrepreneurs mentioned at some point that, from the ontopsycho logical consulting, they thought over their way of managing their business and the relationship with the professionals in the company. The fragments of the C2 interview's show these changes: "It helped me a lot in the matter of exercising leadership over my own business. [...] For example, before having access to the consulting I used to consider C1 [president] an opponent in the same structure. [...] So to me there was a fantastic evolution, because today it puts me into "Company C" as the operations director of the group, below the CEO. [...] It was a very clear professional maturity (C2)".

To the extent that the leader knows the characteristics and personality of their organisation, they learn the parameter through which to carry out the processes for managing people and problems that occur in their company. The statements reported throughout this research slightly present results also of individual learning that, later, project themselves in

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the organisation. Respondents end up showing that the ontopsychoological consulting adds one of the tangible values indicated by Kubr (1996): promoting learning within the organisation. About this aspect, consultant P1 reported: "[when the entrepreneur reads] [...] the diagnosis it generates knowledge, incorporates itself. [...] The entrepreneur takes that knowledge and transforms the organisation for better. Do you want to know the result? From the advice to implant that program, in the following year the entrepreneur doubled the company revenue [...]. I am not talking about one million, I'm talking about many [...]". Entrepreneur B1 pictured this element: "Somethings change in a short period of time but, as the whole work is deep, it is also acting in a medium and long-term [...]. Some changes take place in the corporate culture [...]".

Both subject P1 as subject B3 reinforce the learning aspects in their declaration. About organisational learning, Probst and Büchel (1997) note that, even if it depends on individuals and their interactions, it is greater than the sum of what they've learned. For them, organisational learning is the process through which the base values of the organisation and knowledge are exchanged, leading to an improvement in the ability to solve problems and act. Such learning can be on different levels, promoting a bigger or smaller growth according to how much the group is open to review concepts and values rooted in the organisation, transforming it into a better organisation. Subject B3 speech highlights that changes still cause an impacts in "Company B" ([...] it is acting in both medium and long-terms [...]) as it is a knowledge that promotes a change in the culture of the company. When he was questioned about if the consulting was helping to carry this change, he answered: "it is our responsibility to make it happen, but we learn, learn and transform. First inside ourselves and, as a consequence, in the company(B1).

The managing change, therefore, is a consequence of an individual change, pointed by the interviewees as a result of the model's intervention as well. Subject A1, for example, said that at his company "[the result] is both individual and in the business. [...] If I grow, the company grows [...]; if people who are with me grow they challenge me to grow. [...] Either you grow or you are no longer able to lead these people". Regarding this argument, entrepreneur C1 said the consulting work started with him and then spread to the company: "Being well organised personally, I began to understand clearly what were the points I had to improve in the business.[...] The consulting had a large initial impact, which is when you realise your responsibility[...], but I would use a different expression, the impact is permanent". Although the ontopsychoological business-consulting model is clearly focused on

economic efficiency, it was clear the result of growth, safety and individual satisfaction among the respondents from the three studied companies.

As change is an inevitable result of any consulting activities (Greiner & Metzger, 1983; Kubr, 1996; Block, 2001; Schein, 2008) resistance necessarily derives from it, as well as innovations and new perspectives. All this impacts on the dynamics and business relationships. We've opted for the term "business dynamics" as another indicator of "Outcome/Impacts" due to the frequency with which this term appeared in the interviews: there were 36 direct quotations. The dynamic impact on the studied organisations proved to be both in the sense of refinement and harmony in relations (A1, "satisfaction of the people who work with you[...], suppliers, [...] customers") and in the difficulties arising from the reimposition of situations which were not functional to the company (B3, "that person was no longer functional, had no more goals in the company, [...], was not interested in their professional growth [...]"). Under the perspective of consultants on this cutting of "Outcome/Impacts", subject P4 highlighted: "[...] It is not about firing people [...]. The entrepreneur starts to 'drive' the organisation to another level; the quality, reliability, positioning towards the clients. He wants everybody to follow this, [...] otherwise it's impossible to change".

Like any complex systems, the group also requires maintenance and strengthening. Schein (2008) points out that the operational evolution of the group is not possible if some interpersonal functions are not systematically practiced. Directly and indirectly aspects of interpersonal relationships can be seen in the studied companies as a factor that directs the business actions (dynamic). About that, subject C3 stated: "it became clear [after the consulting] that I do not need to 'love' the co-workers in the workplace, it is not true that everyone has to have some kind of feeling. We need to have respect, a healthy relationship. As obvious as it sounds, sometimes what's obvious needs to be said to improve relations". Entrepreneur B3, in turn, pointed out: The consulting enters a context where you need to work an inner sphere of the company[...], all that refers to the unity of action of the partners and how much it projects in the company structure. [...] It is a consulting that changes the dynamics of the company [...], then later you change the strategy, positioning, identity".

Checking the "Economic", "Management", "Individual" and "Business dynamics" results, interviews with entrepreneurs revealed a strong impact of the ontopsychological-consulting model in their organisations. The interviews reveal evidences of contribution to organisational learning, which is strongly identified as a reflection of individual attitudes.

Financially, all of them reported satisfaction with the growth of results. They also expressed a reimposition in the way of managing the business and the perception that this model causes an impact not only at the moment of consulting, as it is also a perennial result in the organisation. Table 04 summarises the main results derived from the application of the model in the studied companies.

Table 04 – **Synthesis of the Ontopshychological Consulting Results in the Studied Companies.**

Results	Company A	Company B	Company C
<b>Economic</b>	Increase of 186% in profit, 141% in revenue And 86% in the production volume in 3 years.	Revenue grew 50% compared to the previous year, after each intervention.	The company grew 700% economically between 1998-2008; growth of the company's range of action from a regional to a national leadership and expansion to the international market.
<b>Management</b>	Management amplitude; way to carry changes in production	Reimposition of the relationship among the partners and consequent communication with the internal public	Property and safety in the business management
<b>Individual</b>	Self confidence	Interior confidence (existential gain)	Re-vision of the attitude in the relationship with partners and employees; personal satisfaction; exercise of leadership
<b>Business dynamics</b>	Harmony in the relationship with clients, suppliers and among employees	Employees leave and new talents are identified	Respect for differences

## 6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This multiple cases study aimed to investigate the application of the ontopsycho logical business consulting model in three organisations with 100% Brazilian capital and their respective results. With a qualitative-exploratory character, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews and processed through the content analysis. Among the five

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categories of analysis that emerged from the theoretical discussions and data we chose to develop in this article only "Outcome / Impact".

The results, summarised in Table 04, refer to financial growth; management reimposition and growth, safety in business management, self-confidence, improvement in personal relationships and in business dynamics, among others. Entrepreneurs revealed that the implementation of the policy advised by the consulting is accurate and reversed into economic, management, individual and business dynamics gains. They expressed satisfaction in obtaining, in a short period of time, a deep and accurate diagnosis, which reversed into short, medium and long-term policies with permanent impacts. They took more or less time due to resistance and/or historic time needed to be achieved (for example, the time to 'raise' new directors). All categories contributed to the understanding that the results in the studied companies spread from the individual to economy, that is: rethinking their own postures, the ways they saw their company and themselves, the subjects changed their management style. This boosted a new dynamic in the organisation – focused on corporate identity – which was finally seen in economic outcomes.

One limitation of this research is due to the fact that the analysis of results and impacts involves a great complexity of factors. For this reason, the results and impacts derived exclusively from the application of the ontopsychoological consulting model in the studied companies cannot be accurately outlined. Moreover, as it is a multiple cases study, it is not possible to generalise the results, although we expect they are able to contribute to the construction of indicators in future works.

Finally, we hope this research has contributed to the knowledge of business dynamics and provided useful elements for rethinking the dialectic between organisations and individuals.

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