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Academic or Business Value

A STUDY OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES OF STUDENT CONSULTING PROJECTS

Bachelors' Thesis – Stockholm School of Economics (SSE)

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Abstract

Student consulting projects are a phenomenon in business schools around the world, which is now gaining ever more traction at SSE. As past research seems to have almost singularly focused on the educational value of the projects, a question that still remains is what value they contribute to the client organizations. Through an interpretive study of seven projects, this study aims to shed light on the students' contributions and explore their peculiar role, whilst also hopefully providing guidance for future student consultants, client organizations and faculty alike. It does so through a more active as well as a more structural perspective, concluding that students do indeed contribute a great deal, whilst the traction of the analyses being primarily affected by their low signalling value compared to established consultancies. This, it is argued, is in turn countered by embeddedness to some extent. The students at the same time face the duality of two clients, in the academic faculty and the client organizations, where the question is if the strive for securing and legitimizing the educational value does more harm than good.

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Purpose and Research Question

There is a quite "recent" concept of using so called student consulting projects, also known as "live projects", "live cases" or "capstone projects", as a form of "experiential learning" in business education. While seemingly originating from "MBA field studies" in the USA during the early 80's to mid 90's, its usage is now growing ever more frequent in business schools around the world (Sciglimpaglia, Toole 2009). This is especially visible at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), where it has lately been gaining momentum, trickling down into the curriculum of the Bachelors' degree and gaining a larger presence at the Masters' level. Hundreds of students at SSE each year go about these projects, be it as a part of the Operations Management (OM) course in the management specialization of the Bachelors' in Business and Economics or at the masters level in the CEMS business projects, the capstone projects of General Management, the executive training module (XTM) or various courses in the masters' in Marketing and Management.

The academic field has been highly interested in discussing the educational implications of using these projects and other forms of experiential learning (Kolb, Boyatzis et al. 2001). Although, a question that has yet to be answered, and is very much on the minds of both the students and client organizations, is what utility these projects actually have for the target organizations. Does anything actually change, or are ideas left without a champion left in a cupboard for the future? And even so, are the analyses and recommendations themselves the prime contribution in the projects, or is it something else and why?

In other words, what are the actual contributions to the client organizations of student consulting projects? Furthermore, this thesis seeks to discover the rationale of the client organizations for using the projects, as well as see if there are any common denominators as to why projects are implemented (or not), and further explore the peculiar role of the students, being students turned practitioners, as well as facing two clients, both in the faculty and in the client sponsor.

One should further note that the purpose of this thesis is not to provide a handful of well-sounding data points for the marketing of respective faculty members or the university itself. It is rather to provide an understanding of the end-result and utility of the student consulting projects, the role of student consultant, as well as explore of any common denominators and root causes, whilst also hopefully providing guidance for future student consultants, client organizations and faculty alike.

Delimitations

This thesis does not claim nor aim to study the type of student consulting projects that only stretch for a day up to a couple of weeks, as these types of projects are arguably more akin to case competitions or marathon style brain teasers. The projects studied, are instead more akin to management consulting projects, with project lengths being at least a month or two up to half a year or more. Additionally it is worth noting that the projects studied were all part of the curriculum of the university (even though they might have been so either as an elective course/module or as part of the mandatory curriculum). Furthermore, they have to be a form of consulting projects, and not of the pure trainee variant, where a student works in the day to day operations of the target organization (as was the case with at least one project in XTM).

Theoretical Framework

As mentioned earlier there is a theoretical gap in in regards to student consulting projects. Almost all prior research that this author has been able to find has targeted the educational and university side of the empirics, mainly framing the projects as a tool for experiential learning (Kolb, Boyatzis et al. 2001). However, little has been done to dig down into the perspective of the client organizations, as well as the consultants themselves, discussing topics such as value, impact, change, implementability and the role of the consultants; rather than learning, pedagogy and educational quality. Handily, there is a wealth of research on these and many other topics in the literature focusing on management consulting. The natural conclusion then is to use these frameworks by analogy, and see how they can apply in the live project example; only now the consultant is not a working professional, but rather a student.

The theoretical framework of this thesis kicks off with a taxonomy of (Kieser 1998), quite similar to one by (Wickham, Wilcock 2012), listing eight different types of contributions of consultants (Kieser 1998), as a way to present the empirics on a thematic, horizontal basis, given the number of projects studied. This first, more active perspective will aid in providing a micro-level perspective on the topic, focusing on the consulting process itself and its contributions, as well as a first glimpse into the roles of the consultants. The second perspective is base off of (Ambrüster 2010)'s discussion of four quite widely encompassing explanatory models, founded in both economics and sociology, complementing and contrasting the four perspectives of transaction cost economics, signalling theory, embeddedness theory and sociological neo-institutionalism, providing a more macro-level, structural perspective on the topic. The aim of this one is to look less at descriptives and more at root causes relevant to the issues facing *student* consultants specifically, as well as provide a more critical perspective, focusing on the rationale for using the consulting services.

A tertiary, supplemental theory will be introduced, but not at great length, positing the logic of the academic versus that of the practitioner, as a way to tie it all together, using (Brunsson 1990)'s theory of organized hypocrisy as a way to reconcile the duality of the two clients.

Method

The research method is that of a qualitative explorative study. The main empirical data is gathered through a series of in-depth, albeit semi-structured, interviews, targeting a number of live projects. Whilst a survey or a series of structured interviews might have been used in order to gain a wider sample, and hence an increase in reliability, they would, however, probably have lessened the explanatory value, as this is rather an interpretive study, where the author has tried to understand how the individuals experience their situation (Guba 1981).

The sample consists of six companies and their respective student consultants. The sample is drawn from projects from the last semester (fall 2014) at SSE in both Operations Management (OM) of the BSc and the Executive Training Module (XTM) of the MSc. The sampled projects have scored both high and low, both from the faculty and from their respective clients. As such, the sampling technique was not fully random, but was rather made on a theoretical basis. Here the samples were drawn based off of trying to find a balance of organizational fields, industries, size as well as projects where the difference in the grades of the faculty and of the client was positive, negative and close to zero.

Despite the small sample size, it covered two educational levels and projects that were viewed as both more successful and not, from both clients, and all in all seven projects, with one project having been removed from the sample due to issues of ease of access. In total this surmounted to 14 interviews. The interviews varied somewhat in length, but were on average a few minutes short of an hour. Additionally, three interviews with the relevant professors at SSE were made, totalling 17 interviews. Summarily, the scope and the variance of the sample should hopefully be wide enough to be provide some measure of transferability and as well as have enough depth to provide a measure of credibility (Guba 1981). The interviews were in turn recorded, but not transcribed, as per the regulations given by the faculty, but are available to the examiner should they wish it so as to enable confirmability. Similarly, this author has written four case reports, accessible in the appendix, that should also serve to give some context to the thematic description of the empirics should one wish it.

It is also worth noting that some of these projects, or just a couple of them, could in hindsight potentially have been enough in order to provide a quite similar analysis. Furthermore, one could also have shifted the focus more singularly onto the clients. However, whilst this would have increased the sample size, the interviews with the students arguably added a quite potent dimension of trustworthiness through increasing the credibility the study (Guba 1981).

The professors in charge of the various live-cased based courses were of course important gatekeepers in gaining access to the various projects. They mainly served as experts in providing an initial point of reference, as well as aggregate qualitative perspectives. It is however noteworthy how little data they had on the end-result of the live projects, even in their own courses. What little information was had been given to them by the students, such as when a project later transitioned into an internship or job offer. The clients' satisfaction levels, however, were recorded across the board and proved useful in the selection of projects. These interviews were however not recorded, just as the discussions with the thesis handler weren't, as they did not serve to provide any direct material to the empirics.

Whilst having projects representing all the various live project based courses at SSE would probably have been ideal, in order to achieve the widest range of transferability, the number of courses on the Masters' level using this method is simply too high. Instead, a choice was made to focus on two courses. This was partly done in order to make the work more manageable, but given the small sample size, it also means a greater focus (even though that paradoxically swings both ways) on the determinant factors within the courses, rather than between them. In other words, given that the sample size suffers from physical, or time-based, constraints, having multiple projects per selected course, rather than only one or two, should be more representative and provide a bit more credence to any generalizable conclusions that are drawn. As to why these two courses specifically, this was partly due to ease of access, but the main reason was that they are the two courses most apart in terms of duration of previous study, whilst still targeting a similar base population (the capstone projects of General Management do not have former SSE BSc students, whilst the regular master programs, and hence XTM, do). Furthermore, they are both in the penultimate semester, and should thus be representative of the level of their respective academic programs.

Further of note, a couple of organizations had multiple live projects active simultaneously in the operations management course. Given that the projects later received different satisfaction ratings, and also different course grades by the professor, they should be especially interesting, as the project specific settings should be more or less the same, and hence increase the portion of explanatory variation not originating from the setting of the project. These two pairs also showed two different correlations between course and client grade, one negative and one positive, which potentially increases the insights from them further, but more on that in the empirics.

Language

As the majority of the interviews were conducted in Swedish, as well as a minority of the references, in addition to an unpublished manuscript in German by Kieser, any citations stemming from another language will be this author's translation unless otherwise noted.

Empirics

Courses Studied

Following, are two brief overviews of the relevant courses/modules, and how they were communicated both internally, towards the students, and externally, towards the client organizations.

Operations Management (OM)

The OM course a 3rd year course of the BSc program in Business and Economics at SSE, as part of the specialization in management (which is one of six elective programs, of which selecting 2 is compulsory) and is currently run by associate professor Mattia Bianchi.

On the practical side of things, in terms of time management and grades, Operations Management is one of two courses in a study period with a length of about 2 months, stretching from late October to mid-December, even though it has a soft start in terms of project introduction during the prior course, and is worth 7.5 ECTS credits. Each student is graded on a 100 points scale, of which 45 are relevant to the project. Of these 45 points, 41 are based on the professor's grading of the academic report, and 4 on the client's rating of their level of satisfaction with the project (Bianchi 2014a). The remaining 55 points are dedicated to a literature test at the start of the semester worth 30, followed by a case exam at the end worth 25.

The teams consist of five or six students, of which four groups were five and eleven groups six (Bianchi 2014a), in which both exchange and non-exchange students have to be represented[1], as well as both genders. Among the sampled projects all teams consisted of six students.

The stated main objective of the course is to develop the students' skills in "*understanding and analysing various types of operations"*, whilst learning and applying a mixture of "*practically oriented models"*, analytical tools and frameworks, in order to *"assess and improve existing operations"* (Bianchi 2014b)[2].

Grades

If the judgement of quality in the projects would have been the same for the client and the university one would expect a positive correlation between them. Reversely, were it negative, one could interpret it as the two criteria being directly opposed (i.e. different interpretation of criteria), or students focusing either on doing one part of the project, or the other. Instead, we see this:

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[1] The third year of the BSc is currently the only one the BSc year that is open for exchange students
[2] This varies only very minor in the student handbook (which is a later edition).

Model Summary

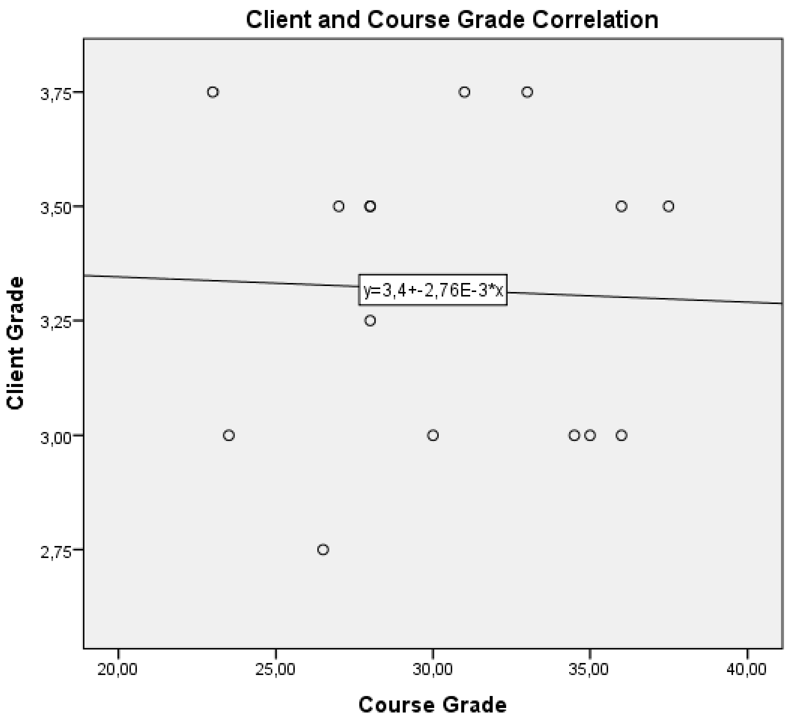
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,039[a]	,001	-,075	,34597

a. Predictors: (Constant), Course Grade

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3,401	,610		5,572	,000
	Course Grade	-,003	,020	-,039	-,139	,891

a. Dependent Variable: Client Grade



There is no statistically significant correlation between the course and client grading, with a significance level of 89.1% and an adjusted R^2 very close to 0. This should rather go to show that the criteria behind them are either weighed or interpreted very differently, or are different altogether.

Executive Training Module (XTM)

Also known as the Executive Trainee Module, XTM is a one term program for masters' students in their final year at SSE, instituted in 2012 and currently run by associate professor Henrik Glimstedt.

XTM is an elective module that students may choose to apply to instead of an exchange program, with a duration of a full semester (slightly shy of four months), worth 30 ECTS credits. The grading is based on the academic paper, but is measured in Pass/Fail, following suit from the exchange program credit transfers.

There is an academic element of an academic paper and a series of seminars with in-class discussions (formally constituting 20 course days), however, the majority of the course work revolves around a live project within the target company (formally constituting 80 course days). The topic of the academic paper also has to be "central and relevant to the trainee company", and is, given the chance, urged to coincide with the project and function as a case report including *"a careful analysis of one of the company's strategic challenges"*. The range of the projects differ a fair bit, some are more strict trainee spots, being in the operations, working with the day to day business, whilst other are various takes on strategy projects (e.g. corporate strategy, sales strategy, operations design and strategy etc.). These latter projects are more akin to working on a management consulting project, working on ad-hoc projects with an outside perspective with more of a one-off deliverable, comparative to the projects in OM, and hence, are all the more relevant for this study.

The course work is quite clear-cut in its presentation, and specifies the course's role as a "graduate-level response to a growing demand for practical learning integrated into traditional academic training of management", whilst emphasizing the role and dilemmas facing the executive in contemporary business organizations (worth noting, one of the client organizations was the Swedish Red Cross).

Sampled Projects

XTM

BMW Sweden

Sponsored by Axel Juhre, CFO of BMW Northern Europe, the team of two set out to provide a consolidated overview of all the strategic initiatives in Northern Europe and their most important issues, as well as provide recommendations for measures towards strategic alignment through the design of a strategy roadmap for the region for 2020.

Swedish Red Cross

Sponsored by Viken Wetlesen, Campaign Manager for the Swedish Red Cross, a sole student was tasked with performing a data-driven analysis of the driving forces behind campaign responses, which should then serve to move the organization towards an aligned definition of their donors and their behaviour, riding on the wave of a commercialization trend[3] within NGOs.

OM

Länsförsäkringar Stockholm

Sponsored by Anders Berglund, business developer at Länsförsäkringar (LF) Stockholm, the team set out to perform an analysis and provide an initial design of a hypothetical online sales channel for corporate clients as part of a local endeavour in a federative structure.

Vasamuseet 1 & 2

Sponsored by Peter Ryderbjörk, guide manager at the Vasa Museum, the two teams set out on two different tasks related to customer entry into the museum.

The first team focused on the building's entrance and queuing system, providing an analysis and recommendations on how to improve the flow of customers following an increase of capacity in the previous year.

The second team focused on how visitors are able to find the museum, as well as how to face the myriad of stakeholders administering Djurgården[4].

GL&V Sweden

Sponsored by Anna Leinder, general manager and managing director at GL&V Sweden, the team was initially tasked with providing a set of tools for continuous improvement, which then transitioned into the provision of an overarching framework.

GL&V had previously had another group of students which was described as very successful as well as a second simultaneous group during the project in 2014 which was less so. These two projects are not in the sample, although they were discussed with the sponsor.

ISS

Sponsored by Greger Olovsson, Service Excellence Manager at ISS, the team was tasked with providing a theoretically grounded framework for the search for best practice in the company to aid

[3] Bringing in marketing logic from the business sector, yet remaining non-profits (Castillo 2013, Wijkström, Einarsson 2010)

[4] The island on which the museum is situated, which is administered partly by the court

a simultaneous internal project on the same topic and raise the academic level in the reasoning of the organization.

ISS also had a second group of students with them for the same duration, where a representative of the group was interviewed, however their sponsor couldn't be reached and as such the project is not part of the sample.

Contributions of the Student Consulting Projects

Knowledge Transfer & Expertise

"These were the people who formally owned the question but didn't do anything about it. Anton, on the other hand, could actually do it!" – Viken Wetlesen, Swedish Red Cross

Whilst students might not carry the greatest clout in terms of being able to provide knowledge and expertise to established organizations with experienced professionals, this was actually one of the first rationales provided by all the sponsors as to why the brought in the student consultants. The students' desired expertise was however not seen as having practice or market experience from their relevant fields, i.e. they were never brought in to act as specialists and provide their take on say a specific market. Rather, the client organizations desired their *"analytical perspective"*, intellectual prowess and being able to provide a structured take on the issue at hand, their method of working and problem solving ability.

"I want to feel safe in that they can explain how they are going to solve the problem, but not solve it in the pitch itself" – Peter Ryderbjörk, Vasamuseet

In the case of both the Swedish Red Cross and the first Vasamuseet project, the skills required to perform similar analysis, grounded in a similar manner, were also quite clearly not part of their organizations typical skillset or standard operating procedure. At ISS it was also noteworthy that the employees involved and affected by the project had a very different academic background. Similarly, whilst the other organizations didn't lack the expertise entirely, it was always described as rare.

Furthermore, the students were seen as carrying with them a knowledge from the university, representing *"the latest and greatest"* from the theoretical field, or as in the case of the non-profits, having a commercial and business driven perspective.

"Just as we are experts on marine archeology, there are experts on selling tickets, but that is not us" – Peter Ryderbjörk, Vasamuseet

Many of the students interviewed in the OM course also notably used a quite expert oriented approach in their consulting process (Schein 1990), sometimes even despite the client requirements.

"We were there to explain 'this is what you can do, and this is why you have to do it'" – Carl Hemeren, BSc Student at Länsförsäkringar

However, whilst knowledge and expertise was often stated as one of the first factors, as well as a way to introduce it within the organization, this was definitely not the end of it as it seemingly acted as an enabler for the other dimensions.

"It was interesting reading… but it was nothing special as in 'oh, is it like that!?' It rather served as a confirmation as well as a mental checklist of sorts" – Anders Berglund, Länsförsäkringar

Adaptation and Further Development of Existing Solutions

Whilst expertise was sought after, it can arguably take slightly different shapes and forms. Whilst the students brought with them their working methods, built up expertise and other forms of structural capital, they also contributed through the provision and adaptation of theoretical and best practice models and frameworks. This was visible in all of the OM course projects but the second Vasamuseet project. In XTM it was rather working with the models than contributing with them that was key.

"Basing it in research gives more meat on the bones… it doesn't make matters worse." – Anders Berglund, Länsförsäkringar

In the case of ISS, GL&V and the first Vasamuseet project this was part of the core premises. This was perhaps most notably so in the case of ISS best practice project, where they even wanted to know what the currently taught models were and how they were applicable in their case, as a way to provide input to a simultaneous internal project, some of which was then later incorporated into their own operations development. With BMW it was rather the opposite, and the theoretic models were rather described as a hygiene factor and a means for self-reflection.

"Since we didn't have the knowledge of what literature there was… we wanted to be able to compare what was being said the in the course literature…" – Greger Olovsson, ISS

In both their case & that of GL&V the full analysis was however actually not part of the formal request, but something that the project grew into as they came to know what the students were capable of, as well as on the recommendation of the students themselves, as the usage of the models rather than their simple provision was viewed as having more of a potential impact. For GL&V the initial request was for easy to implement models and tools for continuous improvement, yet the problem definition itself and the implications of working with the method later proved to be most useful. At the same time though, it was notable how many of the more far reaching recommendations, whilst being described as *"spot on really"*, didn't seem to fully catch on in the client organizations. This issue of operationalization was visible across both courses, but was perhaps especially visible in the OM course.

"It was all clearly applicable, but in what time frame and to what cost?" – Anders Berglund, Länsförsäkringar

Time and Cost Savings

As the skills were viewed as scarce - as witnessed by the clear emphasis on limited analytical power in the organizations, where the relevant personnel in turn lacked the time to perform the desired analysis - saving time for the client was a key factor. Notably, the projects all used analysis methods and/or involved substance matter that were especially time consuming, with a clear emphasis on empiric and or theoretic grounding and providing full explanations. This might of course be expected given that the students come in as third parties and are sought after to provide the *"analytical perspective"* mentioned earlier.

"We wouldn't be able to have run this project without someone external coming in. No chance." – Axel Juhre, BMW Sweden

Furthermore, given this scarcity, the work provided by the students was oftentimes seen as otherwise having being highly cost prohibitive for the clients, with their delivered quality not all too seldom being described as *"as good as [an external consultancy]",* albeit with less of a pre-produced and stylized slide design but with a dash more creativity, as well as putting in a greater effort in trying to reduce the complexity of their presentations. This was the case for both the XTM and some of the OM projects.

"Hadn't he arrived we would never have done it. The work would have been extremely costly otherwise" – Viken Wetlesen, Swedish Red Cross

A Third Party Perspective and the Objectification of Information

A dimension that was clearly visible across all projects was the use of the consulting projects as a means to provide a third party perspective. Now this has two parts, the first one is quite self-explanatory: the consultants were able to provide a *"fresh set of eyes"* as they are not part of the daily life of the organization, as well as potentially have a bit different background. This was quite clearly the case for all the projects, even those that mainly dealt with the provision of theoretical frameworks.

"Above all it was about gaining another angle from people who study" – Greger Olovsson, ISS

Another element of it is not providing a stamp of approval per say, even though it oftentimes had a similar result, but rather through concretizing and dealing with and presenting the issues at hand as facts and figures. By objectifying them the sponsors thus managed to avoid having to deal with more subjective dimensions, influenced by organizational politics and personal likeability, and instead have the results presented as being highly concrete, the objective truth. The real deal, so to speak.

"He came very far in a project that had gotten into a standstill… Now we can actually have a debate about the topic… This is what is important versus I think like this" – Viken Wetlesen, Swedish Red Cross

This was also the case not only in the presentation of the end results, but also in the process itself. Be it as a way to have a third party reaching out to clients whilst avoiding the corporate label of GL&V and Länsförsäkringar, as a way to discuss with the myriad of stakeholders in Vasamuseet's second project, or dropping down the students in the organization in order to build trust and gain a face-value perspective at BMW, this dimension was in this author's opinion one of the key enablers and contributions of the student consultants. More on this and why later.

Legitimization and a Stamp of Approval

Legitimacy was a key issue in the discussions with both students and sponsors, however, as a contribution it was rather divisive between the projects, and also within the projects themselves. Whilst all project groups were met with respect and seemed to be valued by the sponsor the response within the organizations as well as among the project stakeholders differed a fair bit.

SSE as a brand or institution was always key in setting expectations for the project. Whilst this set the base level, how it was then acted upon differed something depending on the situation. With both the Swedish Red Cross and Vasamuseet it was clear that the sponsor also highlighted this to a certain degree, *"This is what he actually studies"*. In both these cases this could be seen as a way to influence the power play internally, where in the Red Cross case it seemingly served to aid the objectification of the analysis and for Vasamuseet directly served to contribute a form of stamp of approval to the recommendations, which were in turn partly originating from the sponsor himself.

"It gives some respect that he comes from SSE. It makes people listen; it is not just anyone" – Viken Wetlesen, Swedish Red Cross

However, as stated earlier, the legitimacy of the students sometimes suffers from being just that, students, and not practicing consultants, despite the reputation of the institution.

"Coming from SSE is never bad, but being students and 'telling them what to do' did not go home well with the court… other times it was the opposite" – Kim Dywling, BSc Student, Vasamuseet

Notably, it seemed as if the recommendations by the student consultants didn't seem to carry the same clout upwards, between hierarchal tiers, where they weren't able to personally present their work. This was the case both with the board of GL&V and the jointly owned "mother" company[5] LF AB of Länsförsäkringar Stockholm, despite the analysis and recommendations being fully acknowledged by the sponsor and the key stakeholders at the local level. This was especially poignant in the latter, where the project leader on the common level was described as having '*…become really inspired and thinking it was great*'.

"…on a common level I don't think this constitutes as strong an input. I don't think that they have adopted this to the same degree on that level as if we would have done it locally." – Anders Berglund, Länsförsäkringar

Finally, it was clear that whenever a previous project had been performed in the organizations hailing from SSE, and to a lesser degree also students from other universities, it influenced what preconceptions they had, and hence also their expectations and even the tasks of the new project(s). Notably this wasn't visible organization wide, but rather only on those who were somehow in on the process of the prior project.

Facilitating Communication and Change – Building Support and Aligning the Organization

Key in the XTM projects as well as the second Vasamuseet project on a direct, more overt level, and somewhat more indirect, more covert level in the other OM projects, was facilitating communication in the client organizations. These three projects all had one of their main tasks as being alignment of the organization and the stakeholders connected to the project. For BMW, this was seen as the most valuable portion of the project entirely, whereas the final deliverables (i.e. the report and presentation) were rather seen as a showcase in order to legitimize the project up the hierarchy. Whilst the analytical work in these projects were of course also of importance, the substance matter relied on anchoring and communication throughout in order to gain organization wide approval, where the students were seen as primarily benefitting the organization through acting as catalysts for discussion and agents of change, providing the first steps toward alignment.

For the overt projects, such as BMW, this was clearly part of the project charter. In the more covert projects though, such as GL&V, this was not given in the task itself, but rather came upon the students as a necessity in order to be able to have a proper deliverable based on the current situation. In the case of Vasamuseet's second project however, there was somewhat of a split initially

[5] Länsförsäkringar is a federation and as such, highly simplified, has an inverted hierarchy in comparison to the traditional mother and subsidiary company structure. Hence, saying this is upwards is a bit of a paradox.

as the project task was seen as too loose and not aligning well with the course focus and theory, later leading up to the team focusing on the academic report rather than committing fully to the task given by the sponsor, due to poor motivation and misalignment with the course directives. It was further theorized that the project was accepted anyhow, and was urged upon them, due to the course director wanting to retain the relationship with the client.

It was notable how the legitimacy and presented mandate of the students influenced their ability to facilitate communication internally within the organizations. At the Swedish Red Cross, SSE, the legitimization of the project as well as the brand of SSE was somewhat seen as a hindrance by the student. The initial reaction of many employees was one of guardedness, whereby the student had to slowly work to gain their trust, this even manifested in a change of language and the framing of the project, even though *"At the end he was highly respected and liked among everyone"*. On the other hand, at BMW Sweden, the sponsor had purposely not given the students as strong a mandate internally, by not making much of a show about it. This in turn eased them into gaining the trust of the employees and receiving answers closer to face-value than any external consultancy was said to have been able to. The students on the other hand, who didn't know this was a conscious decision then on the flip side faced a slightly more uphill battle in trying to gain the time to gather their interview data from the middle-managers.

"…that was part of at least my thinking: that we shouldn't position the project too high in the beginning, because you have to earn trust, you cannot instruct trust" – Axel Juhre, BMW Sweden

Politics – Supporting Managers' Arguments in Power Struggles & Scapegoating

The "latent factor"(Kieser 1998) of supporting managers in power struggles & scapegoating, like many of the other factors, has tie-ins to the others and is arguably most closely connected to the last three. Now, in this case, the focus of the factor is on the power struggle itself; that it serves to accomplish something, not *how* it does it. This was visible to some extent in all client organizations except GL&V, although it was only to a lesser degree so in ISS and seemingly not consciously so.

"It is hard to get acceptance for my own expertise" – Peter Ryderbjörk, Vasamuseet

In general, the work of the student consultants has partly been to aid an ulterior motive of the client, either organization-wide or specific to the sponsor themselves. At BMW the work of the students helped through presenting a structured overview of all the strategic initiatives across the region, creating freedom for the CFO to mete out resources based off an 'objective analysis', as well through creating space towards Germany in the provision of a strategic roadmap, as had been demanded at an earlier date. At the Red Cross it was supporting and enabling a push towards data-driven analysis for the campaign manager. At Länsförsäkringar the consultants were part of providing input to a discussion that seemingly conflicted between the different regional constituents of the federation for the local business developer and circle of managers, and whilst input was given it failed to gain traction at the common level. At Vasamuseet 1 the students' helped legitimizing a series of improvement measures for the entrance of the museum on behest of the guide manager, as well as legitimize and give credence to his own expertise internally. Notably, whilst they seemingly got their point across towards the board, the interim museum director personally seemingly lacked the clout to push the recommendations towards the stakeholders outside of the organization, *"I guess this is something we can push when the next museum director arrives"*, posited the sponsor. With Vasamuseet 2 the task, although loosely formulated, was to provide an action plan on how to navigate the political landscape of the myriad of stakeholders governing Djurgården, as well as perhaps to take the first steps towards doing it, even though it later failed in doing so. At ISS the students rather seemed to somewhat act the scapegoat in piloting the recommendations, so the manager would be able to see the responses internally and act upon them in turn. Apart from that any other forms of scapegoating weren't visible.

"We wanted to see how these ideas would be responded to in other parts of the organization" – Greger Olovsson, ISS

Now, this does not mean that the managers nor the student consultants necessarily are scheming sociopaths, but rather that the students through their work aided their sponsors in the political and micro-political processes of the client organizations and their environment (Pfeffer 1981, Moss Kanter 1979). Most often these power struggles weren't fully evident though to the students from the start, but rather dawned on them as the work progressed.

It was also worth noting that some students in OM consciously chose not to actively deal with this political dimension, despite it influencing their work and their work influencing it, and instead hunkered down and maintained their work seemingly not cognizant of it.

Interpretation – Sound-boarding & Sense-making

The final latent factor, despite possibly being somewhat harder to grasp as it lacks in tangibility, was even so visible in varying degrees across the board. Consultants can contribute through acting as sound-boards to the client, a confidant of sorts, stimulating discussion. The heightened version of this is when the consultants even act as interpreters in the framing and sense-making of the client's issues, helping the managers find confidence and freedom to act in the *"chaos"* surrounding them (Kieser 1998), rather than eliminating it.

"Then it was more about gaining input and inspiration and laying a foundation for our future work" – Anders Berglund, Länsförsäkringar

At Länsförsäkringar the sound-boarding contributed through the student's inputs and discussions were clearly emphasized by the sponsor as the main source of contribution in the end, where the work of the students worked as a *"confirmation*" and *"mental checklist"*, as described earlier. At Vasamuseet on the other hand, it wasn't perhaps as unilaterally so, but the element of *"seeing something we've missed"* and coming with a different take on it was most definitely present and desired in both projects.

"It was a very good analysis, and it showed us where we actually have our issues" – Anna Leinder, GL&V, speaking of a former project

With ISS and GL&V the theories and understanding of them served in their own right to create operational understanding for the managers and in both cases creating a sustained discussion internally among them. At GL&V this also took the turn of the students helping the organization in re-shaping the questions they asked themselves and create a wider understanding of continuous improvement, rather than simply contributing the set of *"easy tools"* first requested. Through reshaping the issue and positing it as larger than initially thought the client was also wowed far more than otherwise, which Kieser described as also being part of the core .

Notably, this was a somewhat recurrent theme and dilemma among most of the projects - providing suggestions for long term organizational change versus ad-hoc solutions to the issues at hand - and their response and subsequent implementation by the client, but more on this later.

At the Red Cross the student served to find meaning in chaos through the analytical work itself, finding customer groups and the driving forces behind donations in troves of data. This in turn legitimized the approach of the sponsor internally and created a freedom to act as a result. At BMW, whilst the sponsor seemingly had quite a clear cut view of the problem definition, the overview of the various strategic initiatives contributed as decision-making support, elucidating what the alternatives and who the various players were. In both the XTM projects though the students seemed to act less as a sound-board.

Other Notable Observations

Reputation and Relationships

"It is about being helpful, but also about gaining interesting inputs from your end"

– Anders Berglund, Länsförsäkringar

SSE being the institution it is, many have some connection to it, either by reputation or through personal connections. Apart from the pure reputation side of things, where the students described it as being met internally with *"great respect and high expectations"*, this was in turn visible in the reasons for why the projects were brought in. For example both the ISS & GL&V projects were initiated because a manager in each company having studied there in various capacities. A manager's child studying at SSE for one of the other projects was also described as being a probably influence by the students. This also extended to both personal and professional relationships and ties between the clients and the course professors, which was described as the foot in the door for some of the projects, as well as being theorized the reason for one of the projects continuing despite a miss-match towards the academic requirements.

Hiring and Branding

Branding was described as naturally being part of the reason for bringing in the projects. The projects were seen as contributing to the hiring effort by placing the companies on the map, as well as in BMW's case acting as a trial for bringing in younger people into an organization previously mostly consisting of experienced hires. The organizations involved described it as the establishment of personal relationships (instead of solely organizational), and on a number of occasions this later led to jobs, internships or even theses being written at the organizations. In some cases this also extended to students working there later during an internship partly to work on implementing and operationalizing the projects having been worked on before. That being said, this was never described as the raison d'être. Many of the projects were also described as having been worked on no matter what, although not with the same amount of analytical backing and rigor if done internally.

Academic Requirements

"We would have done this twice as good hadn't we had the theoretical requirements" – Anonymous Student, Operations Management

In the XTM projects, the academic requirements were never described as being directly conflicting with the projects. Instead, both students wrote their reports separately from the work in the organizations as per the course design, according to the professor.

In the OM projects studied[6] on the other hand, all groups had both their academic report and their presentation as part of the deliverables. The academic requirements and "two clients" notably created some issues. The students often described it as whilst being good support for their learning often being in the way of their delivery, either due to the course content and theories being too narrow and not tackling the issues at hand, or through otherwise shifting focus away from solving the

[6] There were however at least one project that didn't have the report as their deliverable, but this was outside the sample

clients' issues. *"We didn't do as much as we could have done if we had not focused on the academic portion"*, argued one student. This was in turn affected by the widely different incentives offered in the weighting of the grades. When coupled with pre-existing motivational issues this was worsened. This duality of the client relationship was something that on multiple occasions was described as having been communicated by the course director in various forms.

"'You shouldn't think that you can solve the entire problem for the client, because you won't. You are students. Focus on doing a good theoretical project instead'" – Said by the faculty during a seminar discussion according to an Anonymous Student, Operations Management

The academic reports in turn received somewhat differing responses from the clients. However, the general sentiment seemed to be that it was a good in-depth look, but the language, length and references made it somewhat unwieldy to actively use. This was sustained by the students who sometimes described it as being an ineffective means of communication due to its complexity and academic focus. It was rather described as *"interesting reading"*, but the presentations were overall deemed somewhat less complex and actionable.

Empirics in Brief

Themes	Key Points
Expertise	The students' method of working and problem-solving ability was one of the first reasons stated across the board. This expectation was mainly set through the reputation of the university.
Models & Frameworks	Despite being a core premise in some projects, the theoretical models seemed to be a hygiene factor more than anything. Whilst the recommendations were seen as *"spot on"* there was a widespread issue of operationalizing them, especially on the OM level.
Time & Cost	As analytical capacity was viewed as scarce, where key personnel lacked the time, outside help was crucial to perform the deeper analysis and data gathering. Given the cost of management consultancies, they were not always an option, and students were oftentimes described as doing on par.
Third Party	A *"fresh set of eyes",* and a different angle on the issues was key. Being a third party enabled many of the more political dimensions. The students also contributed through the "objectification" of information.
Legitimization	SSE as a brand contributed legitimacy internally and enabled the work. On the OM level the students managed to sway those working close to them, but their suggestions rarely carried clout upwards between hierarchical levels, where the students didn't have the chance to personally present their work. The response internally shifted depending on the experiences with former students having been there, even if they didn't come from SSE.
Facilitating Communication	The student image was key in instilling a higher level of trust. The *presented* mandate on the other hand also seemed to affect the employees, where a greater mandate instilled less trust. This factor most noticeable in XTM, whereas it didn't seem to be the focus of most OM projects.
Politics	Nearly all groups took part in organizational in one form or another in their work. On the OM level it was notable that their points didn't seemingly carry across hierarchy, as well as some students not dealing with the political dimension, despite being affected by it as well as affecting it in their work.
Interpretation	Students acted as sound-boards to the clients and stimulated discussion among management, especially on the OM level where they had a slightly more distanced relationship to the organization, which was emphasised as a major source of contribution, if not the greatest by some. Redefining the issues created a "wow"-factor. Helping the sponsor gaining an overview to grasp the issues at hand was key.
Reputation & Relationship	The reputation of the university contributed to legitimizing and setting the expectations of the students, whilst its ties were key bringing in some of the projects.
Hiring & Branding	Branding was seen as a natural part of the projects, but wasn't essential, given that many projects would have been worked on at any rate, either internally or externally. A closeness to the students was however appreciated, and later led to jobs, internships and theses.
Academic Requirements	In XTM no visible conflicts were observed. In OM there was an expressed duality between "the two clients" and their differing requirements. The academic format was viewed as inefficient form of communication, where it was deemed overly complex and off in terms of focus.

Analysis

Ambrüster discusses four main theories on the mechanisms of management consulting. The primary analysis will be based on two of them, namely signalling and embeddedness theory, with neo-institutional theory acting as a supplement, given their ability to contribute meaningful analysis as judged by the author. The analysis aims to provide a more structural perspective in contrast to the active perspective used in the empirics.

Signalling

Quality, Standing & Expertise

Externally

An understated, but rather obvious reason for bringing in business school students is signalling a closeness to highly valued institutions. This functions in the same way as when management consultancies bring in graduates and undergraduates from them, as a way to showcase the quality of their work, and by extension when organizations bring in the consultancies (Ambrüster 2010). However, there were never any mentions of how this was actually interpreted by the client organizations' clients or other stakeholders, nor that it was clearly communicated outwards. The only observed occasions where the teams had contact with the clients and/or stakeholders were in the gathering and anchoring of data in the cases of GL&V, Länsförsäkringar and Vasamuseet's second project. The only signalling effect this seemingly had was that the extremely few number of clients that had been contacted heard that a team of students from SSE were doing some form of study at the client organization. On the other hand the stakeholders approached in the case of Vasamuseet did show somewhat more interesting reactions. As mentioned earlier, the students received quite different reactions depending on the stakeholders they spoke to, ranging from sneers at the court to a more astounded response at some of the other museums. SSE was universally seen as highly valued, whilst being students had a widely different response, which was generally more lacklustre.

Internally

On a more intimate level the signalling effect was seemingly a lot more important. One can imagine that among the managers across various organizations, or internally within the client organization, having students working for them showcased a contact web and standing above the ordinary. For example, having students from SSE was seemingly a way for BMW Sweden to signal towards the Munich head office that they are more than a small sales region and take their long term growth seriously, as well as act as a signifier of their current level of establishment having access to premier talent. This showcasing of the quality of management, whereby the managers furthermore display a significant effort to take matters seriously, was also visible in the way the students worked to provide a proper analytical perspective across all projects, be it in the creation of a strategic roadmap for BMW, contributing academic theory for ISS or creating new methods for working with continuous improvement at GL&V.

"It is hard to get acceptance for my own expertise" – Peter Ryderbjörk, Vasamuseet

Another way the projects helped support this appearance of quality internally was through legitimizing the expertise of the manager, which was primarily visible in the case of Vasamuseet's first project and the Red Cross. In both cases the managers had been long term proponents of a more data-driven, economically founded, reasoning. This was now supported by a representative(s) from a business school, who was presented internally with the by-line *"this is what he actually studies"* in the case of the Red Cross[7]. It should further be noted, that both these projects were in non-profit organizations, which were based on distinctly different academic backgrounds.

"Just as we are experts on marine archaeology, there are experts on selling tickets, but that is not us"
– Peter Ryderbjörk, Vasamuseet

One can wonder if the potential for signalling and legitimization is a reason for why the sponsors generally emphasised the analytical method and perspective rather than the suggestions themselves.

Towards the Students

The projects also served to show the organizations as being on the map, with interesting opportunities for work and employment. This in turn necessitates interesting projects, showing interest from the side of the client, which was most commonly done so through taking their time as well as engaging entire management teams during the presentations (to good effect, where the clients were often described as making a *"considerable effort"*), and perhaps also in creating a potential for impact.

Compared to Management Consultancies

Whereas the core analysis is made by more or less similar people as the students, given that analysts commonly work one to three years as entry-level consultants in Sweden, and the student consulting projects often being described as on par with that of a consultancy, there are still some notable signalling differences, apart from those mentioned above.

To begin with the projects weren't paid for, which means that the self-costs incurred by the projects, should they fail, are not great, *"If the projects don't work out then it doesn't really cost us anything…*

[7] Where the manager had earlier studied methods of working with the topic at hand at NEPA

apart from my time of course…" as stated by Anna Leinder, at GL&V. This might lower its signalling value, especially for go/no-go sign-offs, in comparison to the advice of costly management consultancies (Ambrüster 2010), despite being a quite cost-efficient alternative for the analysis itself. On the other hand, there may still be some potential costs incurred in terms of both personal and organizational reputation should the projects fail. This might be an additional reason for why some of the projects were run in parallel with internal projects on the same topic, rather than creating a new project entirely, i.e. as a way to mitigate that potential down-side.

Secondly, the students, whilst being backed by the brand of SSE, still lack the brand value of the consultancies, giving them less credence to function as a stamp of approval. Lastly, the difference in appearance, especially in regards to age, apparent experience and professional and polished conduct, of having a partner who looks just like the CEO facing the clients and presenting in the board-rooms compared to a group of students is notable.

Legitimacy & Mandate of the Students

Legitimacy or Trust

"If a management consultancy would be sent in they [the employees] would have been scared… But if students come in they normally say 'ok, they are here to learn' … you have no politics … they are not perceived as someone who can do everything better" – Axel Juhre, BMW Sweden

Being student consultants from SSE presents a quite interesting duality. Being from SSE was always seen as a good thing, being met with *"great respect and high expectations"*. However, being students, even though they were there in de facto capacity as consultants, they seemingly had a lower signalling value internally. Whilst this somewhat diminished their ability to legitimize whatever was being worked on by the sponsor, it enabled them to be highly innocuous. The students were seen as a benign third party, on par or lower than who they were speaking with; *"there was no suspicion"*, as described by a student, they were seen as being there to learn. This in turn enabled them to instil a level of trust that might otherwise be hard to reach. Not being seen as a threat, they were also able to challenge the status quo without also challenging the individuals, with their questions coming from a 'naïve' third party.

"…that was part of at least my thinking: that we shouldn't position the project too high in the beginning, because you have to earn trust, you cannot instruct trust" – Axel Juhre, BMW Sweden

However, the initial level of trust towards the students seemed to differ depending on how their mandate was presented internally. At the Red Cross, the student was introduced in a way that emphasised the brand legitimacy, solidifying and showcasing his mandate. This in turn created some initial barriers of trust and *"guardedness"* among the employees. At BMW on the other hand, it was underplayed, creating some issues for the students in gaining the time of some of the managers, due to their weaker mandate, but thus also reinforcing their image as harmless students, lowering the initial barriers of trust in the organization.

"It gives some respect that he comes from SSE. It makes people listen; it is not just anyone"
– Viken Wetlesen, Swedish Red Cross

Crossing Hierarchical Tiers I

The level of the sponsor also seemingly had an effect on how the students and their results were perceived in the client organizations. The higher the sponsor the clearer the mandate towards the managers. However, whilst the students were clearly capable of swaying those close to the project or witnessing the presentation, their analysis did not carry enough clout to cross hierarchical tiers, that they did not personally anchor their analysis with, such as in the case of Länsförsäkringar, Vasamuseet or GL&V. Signalling theory can do little to explain this, unless one assumes the same signals to be interpreted in a vastly different ways across the tiers, but that seems unlikely.

"…on a common level I don't think this constitutes as strong an input. I don't think that they have adopted this to the same degree on that level as if we would have done it locally."

Embeddedness

Crossing Hierarchical Tiers II

It was noticeable how the students, through the work process, convinced the sponsors and client organizations of their worth and competence. They slowly built up trust, even on the occasions where they had an uphill battle such as at the Red Cross where the student ending up being *"…highly respected and liked by everyone"*. By establishing closer ties to the sponsor and the various stakeholders the students could be seen as embedding in the organizations. This seemingly decoupled the more distanced relationships' focus on signalling as a means to reduce uncertainty (Ambrüster 2010), instead basing it on the trust and confidence in the social relationship, in addition to the analysis, which remained the same in the first place. This was in turn supported by the sponsors. As the OM project groups spent less time on-site than the XTM students, this was arguably a reason for why they spent less time anchoring the projects internally, despite commonly being viewed as key among them for a set of recommendations to gain traction with the client. Instead, the focus was on a more formalized presentation at the end for the key people involved, of which many had seen or heard of the project earlier, which still seemingly did its job. However, as their analyses were to be taken across hierarchical tiers, the embeddedness effect through the established social relations were no longer there, which offers one possible explanation as to why they did not gain traction in both tiers.

Establishing and Maintaining Connection with SSE & the Students

It was notable how influential personal ties were in the sponsors' responses as to why they brought in the projects (Ambrüster 2010). This was visible in the personal relationships between faculty and the client, a sponsor's daughter studying at the university, which arguable eased the response. However, it was not only about the relationships between individuals, but seemingly also about individuals having relations to an institution, with a sponsor or their boss having studied there previously in some capacity, or individuals to an institutional field. The latter was especially visible at Vasamuseet, where the administration is firmly rooted in academia, which the sponsor personally looked especially favourably upon. Furthermore, many sponsors described it as having been in similar situations themselves during their study period and as such it was now natural to help out.

"It is about being helpful, but also about gaining interesting inputs from your end"
– Anders Berglund, Länsförsäkringar

It was also about client organizations wanting to create exchanges between them and SSE as an institution, which was visible in the repeat projects where the sponsors shifted. Either this is again about signalling quality or goodwill, or it is because of the projects function as a bridge across a structural hole, where the relations to the students are what's desired. I.e. it is also about hiring, where the establishment of social relations mean that students, either themselves or by functioning as nodes for their peers, which is also filled by the faculty, gain a connection to the organization and a point of contact, enabling them to ease their way in. The general sentiment was that it was about showing oneself in the right locations and timing with a positive flair, *"being on the map"*. Other times, such as in the case of Vasamuseet, the personal relationships were much more important, given the client organization's profile.

Neo-Institutionalism

The Role of Theory

Given that some students described it as *"We didn't have the legitimacy and knowledge to say this is what you should do."*, invoking their academic background, through the use of theoretical models to present their analysis, arguably worked as a tool to create legitimacy in the client organizations. This was in turn confirmed by the sponsors, who commonly described the theoretical models and frameworks as a means for legitimization as well as self-reflection, giving the analysis more *"meat on the bones"*, but not being essential. Some took the more hardline stance, saying the presentation itself is only a symbol. It is a way to show off the work, creating legitimacy, especially towards those up the hierarchy. The real, efficient, contribution was in their view rather the process itself. Once it is at the presentation stage, the majority of the work is already done, both in terms of idea generation and the more process based consulting (Schein 1990). Common though was that the best, most efficient, (and highest graded) solution would be the one that fits the bill the best, no matter the reasoning behind it or the flash of the presentation.

However, not all projects were designed in order to gain the best or most legitimate analysis. ISS notably sought to raise the academic level of their best practice project through isomorphism, integrating contemporary management models provided by the students as a way to legitimize their project (Ambrüster 2010). This on the other hand doesn't contradict what is said above.

On the other hand, one could argue that the academic background brings with it an analytical method that is presentable in a fashion that gives a good overview and is based off a common language and thus a more efficient means of communication, enabling a higher degree of sound-boarding as well as knowledge transfer. However, the academic requirements, rooted in academia's own basis of legitimacy, were shown to make the academic reports overly complex in nature, making them inefficient tools of communication for the client organizations. Similarly, it is debatable whether or not a report that is so foreign that it is not understandable is truly convincing and best way to create legitimacy. This is in turn supported by the students' analyses inability to cross social gaps unaided by embeddedness.

Conclusions

The Contributions of Student Consultants

"Paradoxical as it may sound, the inability to evaluate consulting services with any accuracy, increased by the state of uncertainty in management, generates the demand for consulting."

– Alfred Kieser (Kieser 1998)

The primary contribution of student consultants to the client organizations seems to be a fresh set of eyes and a capacity for sound-boarding, making sense and interpreting the issues facing the managers. This is coupled with giving the clients ways to tackle their issues, which is grounded in an analytical perspective based on contemporary theoretical models and frameworks. Furthermore, given that the student consultants have less of a signalling value internally in the client organization, depending on how their mandate is presented, they are able to gain a higher degree of trust. This dodges much of the influence and resistance of organizational politics otherwise described as facing management consultants, enabling them to gain a closer take on the organization, as well as being able to challenge the status quo through their innocuous questioning.

The flipside of the coin is that, whilst their work was often described as being on par with that of management consultancies, the actual acceptance of their analyses and recommendations seemingly suffers from not having as high legitimacy due to their lower signalling value as students. This primarily hits on the organizations' implementation of recommendations that demand a higher degree of investment, both in terms of time and money. This is also visible in how their analyses are seemingly unable to cross tiers upwards in the hierarchy without personal anchoring, or social gaps if you will. This seems to be due to embeddedness not being allowed to take place, given the lack of the establishment of social connections, which might otherwise have lessened the emphasis on mitigating uncertainty through signalling in favour of built up trust and confidence.

"It was spot on really... and all clearly applicable, but in what time frame and to what cost?"

– Anders Berglund, Länsförsäkringar

The Dilemma Facing Student Consultants

Kieser describes the 'art' of management consulting as managing the balance of power between the expectations of the client and the interests of the consultancy (Kieser 1998). Now, rather than having to manage the interests of a consultancy, the students have to face the university faculty, who have a different interpretation of what constitutes a valuable delivery, based on educational value and academic rigor, than one might imagine a senior consultant to have, and that definitely differs from that of the client sponsors.

The use of academic methods, theories, models and frameworks are key in creating the academic reports and are also to some extent potent tools in the creation of legitimacy for the analyses of the students, as they lack notable experience or costly signalling effects to support them. However, given that theory only seemingly serves to provide legitimacy up to a certain point in the client organizations, and the rest being based on the solutions themselves as well as their anchoring internally, maintaining a stark focus on legitimizing the analysis in order to gain academic merit has seems to be a burden rather than an aid. This has been shown to detract focus in the projects, mainly by forcing the analysis to deal with areas that are seen as contributing little to the clients, increasing the complexity up to the point of where it is noticeably making communication of the analysis and recommendations inefficient as well as taking time from the students, which is already scarce given the differing communications internally and externally.

Whilst this might seem to be a structural issue of what constitutes academic vs business value, the reconciliation of the requirements of the two clients is handled in different ways in the two courses studied. In OM there is an incentive system as well as an outspoken favouring of the academic judgement of value, leaving it up to the students to decide on if they should make an effort to either translate or loose-couple their work, which has been shown to rely on individual motivation more than anything. In XTM on the other hand the work is loose-coupled by design, which solves the issue of different bases of legitimacy and efficiency (Brunsson 1990).

"We would have done this twice as good hadn't we had the theoretical requirements"
– Anonymous Student, Operations Management

On the other hand, it should be noted that whilst this duality creates some issues for the students, they still describe it as a valuable learning experience. The question is if the strive for securing and legitimizing the educational value does more harm than good, and should rather be set in the project settings than in the incentive systems of the students?

"When students come in like this, it is important that they actually learn things, as they are supposed to, and not just work as cheap labor" – Viken Wetlesen, Red Cross

Critical Review

Potential Risks of Bias

There is a possibility of a slight bias stemming from this author's acquaintance with the subject matter. Firstly, the author completed a project in operations management, just like the ones studied, this fall. However, this should be properly counter-acted by not including that project in the empirics and by the open ended questions employed in the semi-structured interview method. On the other hand, it served as an important introduction into the subject matter, and served as one of the reasons for the existence of this thesis. Secondly, the students interviewed are this author's peers, in addition to both courses' professors having had one course each in which the author took part, and most probably also will during future studies. This should however not pose much of an issue as the subject matter is not the professors or their respective courses, but rather the projects themselves.

There is also a risk of a slightly inherent self-serving in the interviews. People generally do not want to present their projects as being bad. Likewise, the client organizations, if they value their relationship with SSE, might give a positively biased view of the projects. Furthermore, they as persons might not enjoy doling out harsh criticism. This was later noticeable during some of the interviews. This is however also partly the reason the semi-structured interviews as they allowed the researcher to poke deeper and re-view the same topic from various angles, and thus, hopefully, gain a picture closer to reality.

As with any study, there might also be a risk of bias in the presentation of the empirics. The author might, consciously or not, select various parts of the empirics to present or omit, as well as give them a value-laden judgement. This issue of verifiability was also the main reason for the recording of the interviews, apart from acting as a mnemonic, which will then be available to the examiner.

Research Ethics

Each interviewee was given the option of complete and/or discretionary anonymity before the interview, as well as gave approval of having their interview recorded. Any anonymity requests were of course complied with. Furthermore, anything material deemed exceedingly sensitive, or revealing of critical strategy of the client organizations that is not publically available will not be disclosed, at the author's discretion. It should further be noted that many of the workings of the projects, are not necessarily relevant to the research topic, but are more anecdotal contextual reference.

All the interviews are stored in a secure cloud service, and were given additional overviews during the research process. The interviews were however not transcribed, as per faculty regulations, given little need for it, combined with their partly sensitive nature.

In the selection of the sample projects from Operations Management this author was given the client grades and the course grade of the projects. Now, it is always a fine line to tread when speaking of grades, especially if the people involved are your peers. However, given that these grades were not on an individual basis (which was specifically not requested), but rather on a group level with six students per group, as well as only accounting for 45 % of their individual grades in the course, this should not be an issue. Furthermore they are not disclosed here.

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Appendix

List of Interviews

#	Name	Title	Relevant Program	Company	Date
1	Axel Juhre	CFO Northern Europe	XTM	BMW	2015-04-24
2	Angelica Idenving	MSc Student	XTM	BMW	2015-04-12
3	Anna Leinder	GM & MD	OM	GL&V Sweden	2015-04-29
4	Veronica Råberg-Schrello	BSc Student	OM	GL&V Sweden	2015-05-05
5	Ludvig Ekman	BSc Student	OM	ISS	2015-05-06
6	Marcus Jäxvik	BSc Student	OM	ISS	2015-04-21
7	Greger Olovsson	Service Excellence Manager	OM	ISS	2015-04-24
8	Anders Berglund	Business Developer	OM	Länsförsäkringar	2015-05-04
9	Carl Hemeren	BSc Student	OM	Länsförsäkringar	2015-04-21
10	Anton Astner	MSc Student	XTM	Red Cross	2015-04-16
11	Viken Wetlesen	Campaign Manager	XTM	Red Cross	2015-05-06
12	Kim Dywling	BSc Student	OM	Vasamuseet	2015-04-21
13	Sam Strandberg	BSc Student	OM	Vasamuseet	2015-05-05
14	Peter Ryderbjörk	Guide Manager	OM	Vasamuseet	2015-04-27
15	Henrik Glimstedt	Associate Professor	XTM	SSE	2015-04-06
16	Mattia Bianchi	Associate Professor	OM	SSE	2015-04-17
17	Andreas Werr	Professor	MSc Management	SSE	2015-04-14

Case Reports

BMW Northern Europe

The Task

Sponsored by Axel Juhre, CFO of BMW Northern Europe, the team of two set out to provide a consolidated overview of all the strategic initiatives in Northern Europe and their most important issues, as well as provide recommendations for measures towards strategic alignment through the design of a strategy roadmap for the region for 2020.

Why Student Consultants

Branding was naturally a part of it, and the project functioned as a trial for bringing in younger people into the organization. Given that they are a small company (the northern Europe offices, and Sweden specifically) with almost exclusively experienced hires, they wish to bring in more young people and fresh ideas into the company. However, that was definitely not the end of it. Most of the company was in standard operating procedure mode – a status quo, where a short term results focus resulted in very little extra-capacity in terms of time allowance. Furthermore, only *"very few"* people in the organization would have been capable of doing similar analysis, and these were even more so the ones that had little spare time in their hands, as they do not have their own strategy department for the sales organization.

"We wouldn't be able to have run this project without someone external coming in. No chance."

The expectations were set through the credibility of SSE as an institution in Sweden, more than anything else. Even though the project scope, given its duration, was seen as "ambitious", they had faith that the student team should be able to deliver, given the solid reputation of the university.

Project Setting

"…that was part of at least my thinking: that we shouldn't position the project too high in the beginning, because you have to earn trust, you cannot instruct trust"

The sponsor purposefully gave less support than might be expected, by making a more silent announcement of the project internally. This enabled a view of the students as being a 3rd party, innocuous and benign, and in turn a higher degree of trust, giving more honest replies in return. The students weren't seen as being there to deliver a cutback, as sometimes expected from a management consultancy.

"If a management consultancy would be sent in they [the employees] would have been scared… But if students come in they normally say 'ok, they are here to learn' … you have no politics … they are not perceived as someone who can do everything better"

This was a way to circumvent the politics in the organization and get a take closer to the face value. By then increasing the trust level through the quality of their performance, they were seen as being able to grow closer to the employees than any external consultancy would have been able to. The only issue was that this implied an additional challenge for the students, who didn't know it was a conscious decision. The sponsor did however step in to provide support, in the odd cases where the process grew too slow due to their limited mandate, e.g. if a manager didn't take the time to properly give the project what it needed to succeed.

Furthermore, BMW showcased a clear inclination in its organizational style among the sales companies in northern Europe. It was very much a bottom-up approach, as showcased in their somewhat decentralized method of developing strategy, in its way of sourcing ideas internally, as well as in the managers' way of viewing the company. This was also showcased in the consulting process, by focusing on building trust on a personal level and growing closer to the client organization. Furthermore, this seen as a necessity in order to gain legitimacy, being students and not from an external consultancy, coupled with the low-balling of the project presentation initially.

Process

For BMW, the process itself was seen as the most valuable part of the project, as opposed to the final deliverables. These were rather seen as a symbol or token that was partly used as a showcase, but also as a way to legitimize the project towards those further up in the hierarchy.

The consultants, apart from their analytical work, was seen as primarily benefitting the organization through acting as catalysts for discussion and change, providing the first steps towards aligning the middle-managers across the region through facilitating communication. In this process they interviewed about 40 managers, and established an initial footbridge for communication with the financial services branch of BMW.

By both being external and younger, they were also seen as more naturally inclined to pose questions and challenge the status quo.

Furthermore, the consultants employed a very hands-on and practical method, where the academic paper was seen as a by-line, providing legitimacy for the course towards the National Agency for Higher Education.

End Result

BMW Northern Europe decided to implement part of the recommendations, specifically in regards to the communication between various projects, on a pilot basis in some offices around the region, as part of a gradual roll out. Why some offices and not others were selected for the first trial however remains unknown. The reason for the gradual rollout though, was using it as a means to avoid possible organizational chaos, as well as backlash in case of a project failure.

The forecasting model used to project car sales and their allocation developed by the students was also seen as more valuable than the internal production based forecasting models. This partly resulted from it being market based, but also in its provision of key figures that were then used in budgetary and political processes. However, the model itself was only used on an ad-hoc basis as it was seen as having a question-dependent nature.

The main end result was seen as the creation and anchoring of a starting point for a change initiative across the region through elevating the question internally on a managerial level.

Furthermore, the project quality was seen as being *"as good as Accenture,* albeit perhaps with less of a pre-produced and stylized slide design but with a dash more creativity.

"The findings, the way they structured it, it could have been from an external consultancy. It was really good."

Possible Changes and Other Remarks

An open ended project like this one is definitely useful, but a follow up project, that is more focused, and in depth, in order to come closer to grasping and wrestling with the de facto operational limitations would have been useful. This would have been a way to more fully flesh out the positions of the different parts of the organization, as well as give a more in-depth and actionable implementation plan.

Swedish Red Cross

The Task

Sponsored by Viken Wetlesen, Campaign Manager for the Swedish Red Cross, Anton Astner, riding on the wave of a commercialization trend[8] within NGOs, was tasked with performing a data-driven analysis of the driving forces behind campaign responses, in the creation and analysis of a survey reaching 30 000 people, that should then serve to move the organization towards an aligned definition of their donors and their behaviour.

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[8] Bringing in marketing logic from the business sector, yet remaining non-profits (Castillo 2013, Wijkström, Einarsson 2010)

Why Student Consultants

Unfortunately the rationale for actually bringing in student consultants could not be fully established in this case, and would have demanded additional interviews with the initial points of contact at the Swedish Red Cross.

Once it had been decided that they would bring in two students from XTM (where this is one of the projects), it was described as a lucky coincidence that a student, with the correct profile, ended up working on this project. Anton's profile was circulated internally, and it happened to be the case that he had previously worked at NEPA[9], where the sponsor had previously attended a course, and as such had the perfect fit for an agenda that had been in the works by the sponsor, but ended up in a standstill due to internal politics.

For completing the project itself though, there was the question of cost. The organization did not have the expertise to do the analysis themselves, and bringing in an outside consultancy to do this would have been far outside their price range.

"Hadn't he arrived we would never have done it. The work would have been extremely costly otherwise"

Project Setting

The introduction of the student was in the open and given high priority with a clear mandate from the sponsor, albeit with a softer introduction during the "fika" a couple of weeks before the formal introduction. It was emphasized that topic is on what he actually *studies*. Hence, SSE was also highlighted, which introduced skepticism or respect depending on who you asked, or perhaps both at the same time, given the school's reputation. Perhaps this was due to a need to legitimize the project, as it had gotten into a standstill, and needed a push towards the acknowledgement of the results of the consultants.

"It gives some respect that he comes from SSE. It makes people listen; it is not just anyone"

It was also expressed that the organization belonged to a very different field, with its own language and logics, as separate from the traditional business orientation of SSE. This in turn demanded some translation, adaptation and framing in the presentation of the findings.

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[9] A Swedish market research company

The ownership of the project itself was very clear cut, and it was expressed as an *"utterly concrete project with a quite specialized role"*. However, the ownership of the questions itself was a bit more unclear, and part of the dilemma. This in turn created some *"territorial behavior"*.

Process

As described by Anton, the biggest issue was in getting everyone on-board. As such, it started out with a great deal of anchoring the project with the key stakeholders in order give them the chance to make their voices heard, as it was *"somewhat sensitive to send out a survey to 30 thousand people*". It then transitioned into the survey being sent out followed by a great deal of statistical labour, in order to discover the driving forces behind the donations. This was then presented through a couple of presentations in order to re-anchor it in the organization.

Coupled with this work there was the academic report, however, the academic portions did not have much of a place in work in the organization. It was rather about *"delivering a good project"*.

The introduction and connotation of SSE resulted in scepticism from some members of the organization, enhanced by a large age gap as well as a prior student in an unrelated project having apparently not done too great of a job. Due to the topic's sensitive nature in the somewhat tangled political process there were also some moments of territorial behaviour, where the sponsor or another manager sometimes stepped in to set things straight. As the work progressed however, the acceptance of the student increased as his work started to show, as well as due to the emphasis on properly anchoring it internally and creating a higher degree of trust.

"At the end he was highly respected and liked among everyone"

After the first analysis, a new task was created, albeit with a slightly different group constellation, now involving the party that had previously been opposed of the agenda. This group then focused on the creation of an initial segmentation analysis. Despite the prior conflicts of interest, where the discussion was seen as stepping on someone else's toes, the first analysis seemed to have established the data-driven approach internally and re-framed the issue.

"These were the people who formally owned the question but didn't do anything about it. Anton, on the other hand, could actually do it!"

Lastly, there was a consultant of the non-student variant working internally on a somewhat similar project, although not directly related. This man then acted as something of a *"mentor"*. However, given the mandate of Anton, it was on equal terms, even during potential disagreements.

End Result

The initially divided departments now seemed to have aligned and the analysis has now been accepted by the organization and become a founding part in the creation of a definition of the target audience. In a side project, a donor group with 10x the single donation amounts of SMS-donations was found, and then followed up on, resulting in the highest conversion rate of any group. Furthermore, a permanent analyst role is now instituted in the department.

"He came very far in a project that had gotten into a standstill... Now we can actually have a debate about the topic... This is what is important versus I think like this"

Possible Changes and Other Remarks

There were primarily two things that could have been improved according to the sponsor. Firstly, a bit more work on the segmentation, which now felt a bit lacking. Secondly, it was expressed that they might not have given the student enough of a closeness to top management.

"When students come in like this, it is important that they actually learn things, as they are supposed to, and not just work as cheap labor"

Länsförsäkringar

The Task

Sponsored by Anders Berglund, business developer at Länsförsäkringar (LF) Stockholm, the team of six set out to perform an analysis and provide an initial design of a hypothetical online sales channel for small to medium sized enterprises as part of a local endeavour in a larger federative structure.

Why Student Consultants

LF Stockholm had previously been involved with a project in the OM course, although with a different sponsor internally. As such, this project started with a project request from associate professor. The project acceptance was *"without question"*.

"It is about being helpful, but also about gaining interesting inputs from your end"

Helping the school "*in getting real projects"* was emphasized as being part of it, but there was also a measure of gaining a theoretically grounded analysis to help out an existing topic. It was not about elevating it internally as *"it was already such a hot topic, and as such it was natural to give the project to SSE"*, and the legitimacy side of things wasn't explicitly thought of at all during the ordering of project.

"Then it was more about gaining input and inspiration and laying a foundation for our future work"

Branding to gain possible hires was not expressed as being on the forefront of their rationale, but rather as a bonus, *"being on the map"*. However, for it to convert into anything it also *"demands some interesting job openings"*

No matter the student consultants, it was expressed that LF Stockholm would have progressed with the project at any rate, although it wasn't certain from their end if they would have employed an external consultancy to do so. Given that the project to a certain extent was about information gathering and analysis, *"which might not be our strengths here locally"*, they needed some outside expertise due to the capacity constraint on the personnel capable of performing this type of analysis.

Project Setting

During the project ordering phase the project parameters were tweaked a fair bit in conjunction with the professor to align it to fit the course focus. The team was then selected based off a project pitch by two different teams and this one was selected as *"their proposed method harmonized the most".*

There was to some extent a light version of a digital platform already in place, however, this platform was rather a hybrid solution between analog and digital, and relied on follow-up via phone.

The number of stakeholders internally for the project itself wasn't huge, but rather involved a few positively oriented managers within LF Stockholm, in both vertical and horizontal positions. Similarly these stakeholders were also among the few people actively informed of the project. The topic of the project had been a long term baby of the manager in charge of company sales, and was already *"as elevated as can be"* in the local branch. For the actual implementation stage of the project however, it was described as a being a somewhat politically divisive situation, where the phone-based salespeople might be the ones to object. However, they did not seem to be included in the project, and as such didn't have any direct impact on the work of the team.

Worth noting is that LF is a federation, where LF AB, the mother company, is a support company without formal deciding power. This creates a quite special dynamic in the power structure, especially in regards to the development and implementation of inter-regional initiatives. This had some implications on this project as the online platform is shared among the companies. However, this won't be dug into any deeper here, and is now actually the thesis topic of one of the student consultants of this project. Part of this though, was that this project was part of a local initiative in order to drive change in the organization. As it progressed, a similar initiative appeared and was thought of in the group, and this project then to some extent ended up as a source of input and backing in the group-wide discussions.

Process

The process was quite straightforward. The team dedicated time to both interviewing and anchoring the project with various employees, as well as a handful of clients, chosen freely by the team. From the students the company was described as highly engaged and providing a high degree of accessibility.

The team did however not actively work in the offices of LF, but rather performed their interviews there, as was the standard for all projects in the OM course.

"We were there to explain 'this is what you can do, and this is why you have to do it'"

The team decided on giving the client a structured process and solution, but didn't dedicate any effort towards an implementation process as that was seen as being *"too high-tech"* for them (given that it was an IT solution). The 'why you have to do it' part on the other hand seems to somewhat conflict with the legitimization part as posited by the client.

The project development was regularly anchored with the sponsor and the other stakeholders at LF Stockholm, and the deliverable consisted of the written academic report as well as a presentation. The presentation was made in front of six high level managers, both from LF Stockholm, but also the project manager of the similar project of LF AB. However, the team described it as having little incentive to ace the presentation of the project coming into it. Given that the end of the course had already passed by the presentation date (which was highly common among the projects), coupled with a poor grade incentive by way of the client (i.e. the majority of the grades were already set and the presentation wasn't reviewed by the professor).

"Our presentation could have been better, considering what resources they put into it"

End Result

The reaction from the team was "very positive", but due to a similar project appearing in the support company LF AB the analysis set forth by the team seemingly dissipated, as LF Stockholm put their own initiative on hold.

"…on a common level I don't think this constitutes as strong an input. I don't think that they have adopted this to the same degree on that level as if we would have done it locally."

However, this was not the end of the story. The project leader for the inter-regional project joined the presentation and "…g*ot really inspired and thought it was great"*. Yet, exactly to what degree the ideas put forth by the team are implemented into the strategy being developed federation wide remains unknown. Similarly it is not entirely certain that the ideas and analysis put forth was entirely different from what already existed. From what he had seen in the group, the project touched upon many things from the report, but if it was from there or *"simply sound reasoning"* he could not tell. On the other hand, the report was viewed as being able to act as a form of verification.

"It was interesting reading… but it was nothing special as in 'oh, is it like that!?' It rather served as a confirmation as well as a mental checklist of sorts"

The analysis was furthermore described as being *"spot on really",* but the issue was rather how to transition this into practical action, *"It was all clearly applicable, but in what time frame and to what cost?"*.

Possible Changes and Other Remarks

Should they have done the same project again, LF Stockholm would have liked to prepare an action plan on what to do once the report comes in, i.e. how to operationalize it.

They also thought that the delimitations of the project they experienced due to time constraints didn't fully match the initial communication and their expectations, leading to *"a very limited client pool"* in the study.

Furthermore, language was described as an issue as the team included an exchange student, which made things slightly awkward during some interactions, especially given the terminology used.

Vasamuseet

The Task

Sponsored by Peter Ryderbjörk, guide manager at Vasamuseet, the two groups set out on two different tasks related to customer entry into the museum. The first group focused on the building's entrance and queuing system, providing an analysis and recommendations on how to improve the flow of customers following an increase of capacity in the previous year. The second group focused rather on the external side of things, and how visitors are able to find the museum, as well as how to face the myriad of stakeholders administering Djurgården[10].

Why Student Consultants

This was the first set of projects for Vasamuseet with OM. However, the original point of contact was between a professor at SSE and the former museum director, which translated into having a case competition of sorts in the museum for one of the master programs, which was then judged by Peter. Following a reconstruction of the museum, which raised its maximum capacity, some

[10] The island on which the museum is situated, which is administered partly by the court

deficiencies were highlighted regarding the point of entry by the course professor during the last competition, and as such the project came to be.

"Just as we are experts on marine archeology, there are experts on selling tickets, but that is not us"

Using a management consultancy for these issues was out of the question as the issues weren't viewed as large enough internally, given their high cost. Furthermore, a management consultancy was described as probably not having been able to reach an acceptance internally, and as such student consultants fit the bill. The consulting teams were then used as a way to gain new ideas to an existing problem, as well as gaining input from a third party. Furthermore, the museum administration is quite firmly rooted in academia, which the sponsor looked notably favorably upon, *"we view ourselves as an institution of knowledge".* This was coupled with him having an economist background, which differed from most of the other members of the organization, which needed a backing in terms of legitimacy.

"It is hard to get acceptance for my own expertise"

Project Setting

The museum had initially committed to having one group, but as there was a large demand among the students in pitching for the project, it was decided to commit to two instead. The group judged as the stronger of the two, based on the initial pitch, got the first task.

"I want to feel safe in that they can explain how they are going to solve the problem, but not solve it in the pitch itself"

The first task was viewed as somewhat more important, and also had very clear delimitations with a focus on the provision of operational models and reasoning. Furthermore, it was an issue that was in the process of being elevated and discussed internally, although not as their prime concern, and was pushed as an agenda towards other parties. As such, the project could be seen as a way to provide legitimacy to strengthen their case.

The second task on the other hand was somewhat of a political minefield, with various organizations around Djurgården as important and non-budging stakeholders, where the court has executive power, and was given quite free reigns. It is also questionable whether or not the museum saw it as 'fixable' at all, *"It is easier to fix something if it is broken"*. The second task was posited as a way to have a third party investigate, without being seen as having an agenda.

Process

The two groups followed the praxis of the course, in working off-site site, but performing interviews there and with the stakeholders as they went. They both described it as having a very easy access to the sponsor, who seemed to be dedicating a good deal of time to enabling the projects, and open in terms of their data access. The second group however, had to deal with a whole range of other stakeholders, and faced varying amounts of resistance depending on the organization.

"Coming from SSE is never bad, but being students and 'telling them what to do' did not go home well with the court… other times it was the opposite"

Somewhat similarly, the second group received different information, and different orders, from the various internal stakeholders due to its divisive nature.

Unfortunately, the second group underwent some shifts in the group structure leading up to this course and suffered from a non-defined leadership and differing levels of expectation. This was furthered by a task that was very loose, and didn't match well with the course content (given that it was focused on the operations management rather than political alignment and driving change). Given this, the group thought for quite some time on whether or not they would take the project and discussed it with the course handler. In the end they were urged to do it anyhow by the professor as he said it aligned, and it was theorized that this was as a way to keep good relations with the sponsor. This was partly visible in the fact that only two students from the group held the presentation, which should be noted was held in January, after the end date of the course.

"'You shouldn't think that you can solve the entire problem for the client, because you won't. You are students. Focus on doing a good theoretical project instead'"

During a seminar discussion on the projects the course handler urged the groups to focus on creating a good academic report, rather than trying to solve the problem. Despite the academic requirements, the first group tried to balance it, *"you still want to do a good project".* The second group went more fully on the academic line and described it as not having enough motivation and incentives to *"write two reports".*

End Result

The main recommendations of the first group used part of what had been proposed by the sponsor and another member of the organization, only now providing it with a theoretical and analytical backing. Their analysis then became part of the argumentation towards the other stakeholders, both inside and outside, and is now part of the internal action plan. However, given the power play between the various levels in the organization, as well as between various organizations, some crucial points of the project, despite being proposed, came to a standstill. This was possibly due to an interim museum director lacking the political clout to drive the issue towards the other stakeholders.

"I guess this is something we can push when the next museum director arrives"

The second group's suggestions were described as knocking down a lot of open doors, but at the same time coming with a handful of good recommendations. Part of their proposal was centered on aligning the organization internally as well as increasing communication between the various stakeholders. Unfortunately most of these seemed to also be affected by the political minefield they were set upon dealing with. Partly the group attributed it to client organization only seemingly accepting easy to implement solutions with a short term perspective, and partly the delivery of the project itself.

"The highest grade would have been given to the group that gave us something that we had missed entirely and could be implemented tomorrow to solve our problems"

According to the second group, their performance and alignment with the client's objectives came from the course dictating an operations management analysis, whilst the task itself was oriented around navigating a political minefield and trying to align it.

"We would have done this twice as good hadn't we had the theoretical requirements"

Results-wise the first group scored far higher than the second in the client grade, but the course grades were very similar, with a slightly higher grade for the second group.

Possible Changes and Other Remarks

The first group was seen as being more responsive and adaptive to the client in their approach, where part of it was a mid-project review which was appreciated by the client, as well as being noticeably more motivated.