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"However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results"

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A qualitative study on how the perceived uncertainties among Swedish state sector clients in their relationship with consultants, affect how management consulting services are evaluated

The public sector has during the last decades dramatically increased the spending on management consulting services (MCS). Academically is the subject still surprisingly unexplored. Empirical research on the interaction between public agencies and management consultants is limited, and even less is known about how the sector evaluates MCS. Research on MCS have traditionally been focused on the consultant, neglecting both the client and the contextual surrounding. More recent research has however found that managers experience uncertainties in the interaction with management consultants. The purpose of this thesis is to expand the knowledge on the client side of MCS, in the context of the Swedish public sector. The aim is to examine how buyers of MCS in the public sector perceive uncertainties linked to management consulting projects, and whether these uncertainties affect ex-post evaluation processes. Using a client-type framework sprung from research on the private sector, we test the validity of said framework and use the findings as a lense to examine patterns with agencies' evaluation routines. The collected data is qualitative and consists of 24 semi-structured interviews in total, with a main study of 21 interviews with 20 Swedish state agencies. Findings include that i) the perceived uncertainties differ from the private sector ii) a new client-type has been identified iii) the majority of agencies evaluate MCS informally iii) no clear patterns between experienced uncertainties and evaluation routines have been detected. The thesis' contribution is to the client-focused research in the contextual perspective on management consulting services

Keywords: Management Consulting Services, Public Sector, Uncertainties, Evaluations, Interviews

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1. Introduction

The volume of the European Management Consulting (MC) market totaled to € 86.2 billion in 2010 (FEACO, 2011) and has since been growing continuously. Only in the last five years, MC turnover in Europe has been growing on average 6,4 percent per year – almost three times as fast as European GDP, which in the same period has grown 2,2 percent on average per year (FEACO, 2017).

The Public Sector has been one of the fastest growing segments for Management Consulting Services (MCS) in many Western countries (Saint-Martin, 2012). In 2016 the European public sector accounted for 14.1 percent of total spending, making it the third largest sector in the European MC market (FEACO, 2017). The growth is noticeable in Sweden. Swedish state agencies spent 47 billion SEK on goods and services in 2000 (SAPM, 2001). Today, this amount has doubled (SNAO, 2017). Though their exact contribution is difficult to estimate given inadequate availability of statistics, MCS account for part of this rapid increase of expenditures (SNAO, 2017). Research analyzing spending on management consulting services by 76 of 342 Swedish state agencies from 2003 to 2011, shows a steady increase in the examined time period with spending in 2011 totaling 3,5 times higher than that in 2003 (Pemer, forthcoming). The Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO, 2017) states that the expenditures have been increasing during the last ten years, hence after the timeframe of Pemer's research.

Spending on MCS has been linked to societal developments. The growing complexity of modern organizations, as described by Farazmand (2002), is attributed to an increasing institutionalization of administrative policies and implementing generations of reform in the public sector with increasing speed (Light, 1997; Lynn, 2006). New Public Management (NPM) is one such reform (Hood, 1995; Hughes, 1998; Strathern, 2000), which aims for the public sector to adapt management techniques from the private sector to maximize the efficiency of resources available to the state (Matei & Chesaru, 2014). Management consultants have been influential in the transformation of the public sector (Hood & Jackson, 1991 p.24; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The increased involvement of MCs has led to speculation of a rising "Consultocracy," (Saint-Martin, 2004 p.20; Sturdy, 2011) alluding to the influence that private sector MCs hold over policy- and agenda-making in the public sector (Hodge, 2006; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011).

The increased spending on MCS translates into direct cost for taxpayers. Citizens have historically expressed concern with government allocation of tax money (Rosenblum and McGillis, 1979). Interestingly enough, considering the increasing importance of MCs in the public sector, there is little research and empirical evidence on the subject (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Saint-Martin, 2012) including what agencies receive for their spending (Jung & Kieser, 2012; Sturdy, 2011).

1.1 Background

As previously established, the public sector is the third largest sector in the European Consulting market (FEACO, 2017). The Swedish public sector and its agencies have evolved significantly during the last decades. As the sector performs a crucial part in society, it is important and of interest for the general public (Pierre, 2004). Reforms in Sweden have since the 1990s steadily decreased the number of government agencies, but the number of full-time equivalent employees has been relatively consistent. In the year 2000, 643 agencies existed, compared to 342 in the end of 2017 (SAPM, 2017). Smaller and regional agencies have been shut down or merged into larger. Simultaneously, state agencies have been split or corporatized to act on a competitive market (SAPM 2005). The driver is streamlining, or "specialization and expertization" (Furusten & Werr, 2005: 7-8) where exercising of public policy and state business activities were to be kept separate, but also for state authorities to be influenced by market economical practices thought to increase efficiency (SAPM, 2005; SNAO, 1996).

The government agencies have consequently become fewer but larger. Agencies are managed by a Director General (Swedish: Generaldirektör), responsible to the government and parliament. The state provides conditions for agencies through goals and budgets (The Swedish Government, 2016), however with set goals, Director Generals have a large degree of freedom in how to achieve the goals (Pemer, forthcoming). The "dualist" feature prohibits and protects government agencies from interventions by the government, called ministerial rule (Pierre et al., 2015), since an attempt to influence an agency would be a violation against the Instrument of Government (The Swedish Government, 2016). There is even a saying that the only difference between a Director General (Swedish: Generaldirektör (GD)) and God, is the letter "O", derived from their influential position (Asplind, 2009:31). Clients have traditionally been neglected in the research on MCS (Pemer, 2008). However, with influential Director Generals managing larger agencies, we believe that the client side in the growing interaction between the public sector and management consultants is important to examine.

MCS and other professional services follow a different purchase process compared to other goods and services. The commonly accepted purchasing model includes a need recognition followed by a number of consecutive steps, including evaluation that affects output of not only the current project but also future ones that follow (Day & Barksdale 1994; Liu and Walker, 1998). However, need recognition must not be rational but should rather be considered as a product of a complicated process (Werr & Pemer, 2007). The effect can be amplified by the nature of MCS. Despite previous attempts to define different subfields within MCS, a commonly accepted definition is lacking (Alexius & Pemer, 2013). The lack of a clear definition creates opportunities for consultants to adjust their offer to fit the clients' needs (Kipping, 2002). However, the unbounded profession (Alexius, 2007; Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003) also creates uncertainties in client organizations regarding what can be expected from consultants (Clark, 1995; Näslund & Pemer, 2012; Pemer, 2008, Alexius & Furusten, 2005). The perceived risks have been found to influence the client-

consultant interaction in the private sector (Pemer & Werr, 2013), however how public managers perceive these uncertainties, handle them and the extended effects of them are hitherto unexplored.

Despite the increasing spending on MCS in the public sector, the focus on measurability and efficiency by NPM-reforms and the public's concern of government allocation of tax money, little research has been conducted on how the public sector evaluate management consultants (Jung & Kieser, 2012; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Saint-Martin, 2012; Sturdy, 2011). Evaluations of MCS are described as important but neglected by many (Kubr, 2002 p.248), in part due to the "fuzzy" nature of the service rendering them difficult to evaluate (Sturdy, 2011).

1.2 Purpose, aim and contribution

The purpose of this thesis is to add to the client-focused research on MCS. We do so by focusing on hiring managers' perceived uncertainties in the client-consultant interaction. While academic investigations of this have been initiated in the private sector, we expand the focus to a new context of the public sector. Furthermore, we answer to a call for investigations of extended effects from the perceived uncertainties (Pemer & Werr, 2013) by exploring if and how the perceptions affect ex-post evaluation processes. Hence, we set out to help shed some light on a growing market with inadequate academic concern (Börjesson & Werr, 2014; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Saint-Martin, 1998; 2012) by focusing on the neglected client perspective (Jung & Kieser, 2012; Pemer, 2008) and investigating how clients' uncertainties in the interaction with management consultants (Pemer & Werr, 2013) affect the little researched topic of ex-post evaluations (Jung & Kieser, 2012; SNAO, 2017; Sturdy, 2011). The thesis can thereby be broken down into two research topics we explore:

i) State agency clients' perceived uncertainties in the client-consultant interaction

ii) If these uncertainties affect clients' ex-post evaluations of MCS

We do so by examining:

i) If clients in the state sector perceive uncertainties similarly as private sector clients.

ii) The extent of formal and informal evaluation routines considering consultants within the client organization.

Our research has practical relevance to both the public sector and consultants. A better understanding of the uncertainties hiring managers perceive can help consultants address these during the consulting process, from procurement to ex-post activities. By bridging the uncertainties, consultants might increase their possibility of engaging in business with agencies. The state sector can benefit from the study by understanding which support hiring managers might need, and how output from projects can be enhanced by investigating evaluation processes.

1.3 Research question

Our purpose, aim and contribution are together summarized in the following research question:

How do perceived uncertainties in the client-consultant relationship among Swedish state agencies affect how management consulting services are evaluated?

1.4 Research outline

The research question together with the thesis's aim and purpose led us to conduct a qualitative study in an exploratory manner. The data material consists of 24 interviews divided into a pre-study, a main study and a controlling interview. We started our data collection inductively by listening to our interviewees describing their evaluations routines and view of consultants, a material in which we found certain patterns. These findings were in the next stage analysed abductively using the study's theoretical framework. The results are presented with regard to our research question and discussed accordingly. In the final segments, our findings are highlighted and tied to the conclusions. The thesis consists of seven sections.

1.5 Delimitations

The following delimitations for the study have been made:

1.5.1 Management consultants

The field of management consulting is as mentioned vague, without clear boundaries to what MCs are, what they do or their competences (Pemer, 2008), and the industry is described as "unbounded" with unclear restrictions and is less regulated than other traditional professional service professions (Alexius, 2007; Alexius & Pemer, 2013; Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; O'Mahoney, 2010). As Management Consultants, we include temporary staff recruited on a project basis brought into the buying institution to work with matters regarding work processes, analyses, strategy, management advice and executive development. Excluded are consultants who primarily work with IT, as well as PR and other professional services.

1.5.2. Swedish state agencies

A second delimitation is made considering which public institutions we include in the study. In an international context, the growth of MCS in the public sector have primarily taken place in the central or national government as compared to local governments, and different spending patterns have been detected between them (Saint-Martin, 2012). Therefore, we decided to exclude local government authorities, as municipalities and counties. From Statistics Sweden's taxonomy of public institutions with six subgroups[1], we focus on institutions under "State agencies". The other categories have been eliminated due to dissimilar

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[1] State agencies, Agencies reporting to the Parliament, Governmentally owned companies, Pension funds, Courts and Foreign Agencies

missions, being placed abroad or as acting on a competitive market. Within the category "State agencies" further limitations have been made. SAPM (2005) makes a distinction between colleges and universities and other state agencies considering the way they operate, and they have been found to have different MCS spending patterns (Pemer, Werr & Börjesson, 2014; 2016) and are thus excluded. The remaining state agencies are hereafter the ones referred to as "state agencies" or "institutions" interchangeably.

1.5.3 Project evaluation/follow up

The terms project evaluation and/or assessment is used to denote the processes ex-post of a consulting project, attempting to create an understanding of the project's outcome, learnings, effectiveness and efficiency - as well as the consultant's contribution to these factors.

2. Theory

In the following section, we provide the reader with a review of previous research. From there we present our identified research gap and the framework utilized for the abductive analysis.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Management Consulting Services

Global spending on management consulting services has increased steadily over the last decades. Though the field of MCS has been researched since the 1950s, the 1990s saw a dramatic increase in scholarly interest sparked by tremendous growth in the market from the previous decade (Armbrüster, 2006; Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; Sturdy, 2011). As such, MCS is often described as a young academic field (Pemer, 2008).

A lack of consensus persists around what constitutes management consulting services, or what management consultants are (Pemer, 2008). Compared to traditional professional services such as medicine, auditing or law, the MCS industry lacks an "abstract expert system" (Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; Alexius & Pemer, 2013), meaning that there are no state regulations pertaining to who can call themself a management consultant or which consulting methods that are suitable for client use (Kyrö, 1995). Further, as Alexius & Pemer (2013) demonstrate, the consulting industry actively opposes the creation of standardization initiatives, both hard (e.g. state regulations) and soft (e.g. professional associations, controlling accreditations, rankings or codes-of-conduct).

Given the ambiguity around what management consultants can be and how the service can be defined, there are naturally different views of the nature of MCS. Two perspectives have traditionally dominated in academic research of the MC industry: a) the functionalist perspective, and b) the critical perspective (Alvesson, 2012; Armbrüster, 2006; Nikolova & Devinney, 2012; Pemer, 2008).

The functionalist perspective is the older of the two (Pemer, 2008) and views the hiring of management consultants as a rational process, whereby outside experts come to help the organization find optimal solutions to its problems. Management consultants are "missionaries" (Tisdall, 1982) promoting organizational change (Kipping & Clark, 2012; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001), helping to free practitioners from "iron cages" (Czarniawska, 1999:9) by adding creativity and "disrupting dominant orders" (Clegg et al, 2004, p.36).

Consultants are viewed as bearers of professional knowledge or technical expertise who are able to solve their clients´ issues (Kubr, 2002). The relationship between the consultant and the customer/client is therefore described as "client-expert" (Greiner & Metzer, 1983; Nikolova & Devinney, 2012; Wilkinson, 1995). In the client-expert relationship, the consultant is likened to a doctor, who works with the patient to diagnose the problem and prescribe a solution (Clark & Salaman, 1996; Schein, 2002). As the consultant functions as a knowledge-broker and the client as a passive receiver of professional knowledge (Armbrüster,

2006; Schein, 2002; Wilkinson, 1995), there is an assumption of knowledge asymmetry in the relationship (Armbrüster, 2006; Nikolova & Devinney, 2012).

The rationale in the functionalist perspective is that clients are convinced of the value generated by consultants (Fincham & Clark, 2002). Clients are assumed to rationally assess gains and costs from a project and act accordingly (Armbrüster, 2006). However, many of the claims of economic value generation are backed by the industry itself (Sturdy, 2011), and many key authors in the functionalist tradition are former consultants themselves (Armbrüster, 2006; Davenport & Prusak, 2005). The assumed rationality of the hiring manager, and the perception of the consultant as an expert and knowledge-broker, implies that a client may hire consultants because the company lacks competence or resources, and that the project is a financial gain. Hence, the needs of hiring managers and their organizations are impossible to separate, because the manager only acts according to its organization's needs (Pemer, 2008).

The critical perspective developed as researchers found the underlying assumptions of the functionalist perspective insufficient and as creating a naïve and idealized view of consultants (Pemer, 2008; Sturdy, Handley, Fincham & Clark, 2009). In response, the critical perspective focuses on the consultant as an actor in a political and social landscape (Pemer, 2008).

The critics posit that as the character of consulting is ambiguous, and as clients do not directly see the value of consulting services ex-ante, consultants must convince clients of any perceived value (Clark & Salaman, 1998; Nikolova & Devinney, 2012). Consulting has therefore more of a *symbolic* character, organized less around solving problems and more around impression management and selling (Alvesson, 2004; Clark, 1995; Clark & Salaman, 1998). In the critical perspective, managers are portrayed as vulnerable and in the hands of the consultants. Armbrüster (2006) states that literature from the critical perspective carries an underlying assumption that consultants have plenty of opportunities for opportunistic behaviour and use them (p. 87). By creating "management fashions," consultants levy institutional pressure onto managers, simultaneously creating certainty and uncertainty. Uncertain clients often feel dependent on consultants (Jung & Kieser, 2012), and through metaphors and rhetoric, consultants convince clients of their needs (Nikolova, & Devinney, 2012). Consulting acts as a tool to "reduce complexity, produce consensus, and [to seduce] management into simple, comfortable and secure solutions" (Clegg, Kornberger & Rhodes, 2004).

Counter to the functionalist perspective, the critical acknowledges that managers can have other motives than the needs of their organization. For example, they may hire consultants and adopt management fashions because innovation is expected (Jung & Kieser, 2012). MCS can increase the legitimacy of both the manager and their undertaken projects (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001), increase managers' self-esteem (Clark & Salaman, 1996), and be used as scapegoats (Steiner, Kaiser & Reichmuth, 2017) – though the legitimizing aspect has been described as consultants merely telling clients what they already know and charging high fees for it (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001), thereby "selling hypocrisy" (Brunsson, 1994). However, in an increasingly dynamic, complex and uncontrollable environment, the employment of MCS as a source of

legitimacy and anxiety reduction may be a sign of "collective rationality" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, cited in Jung & Kieser, 2012).

During recent years a **contextual perspective** has emerged which integrates characteristics from both older perspectives (Pemer, 2008). This perspective is a reaction to the extant focus on the consultant in both existing perspectives, which neglects both the clients and the contextual surroundings in which MCS are undertaken and delivered (Pemer, 2008) and an absence of empirical research (Jung & Kieser, 2012; Pemer, 2008). In transforming the focal point from the consultant to contextual matters, researchers have investigated institutional demands (Furusten & Werr, 2005), organizational culture (Hislop, 2002) and decision structures (Armbrüster, 2006). In particular, the notion of clients as trusting "victims" or "marionettes" in the hands of consultants' manipulation (as Clark, 1995; Clark & Salaman, 1996) has received more criticism (Jung & Kieser, 2012; Sturdy, 1997). Instead, the interaction and power dynamic between clients and consultants is increasingly regarded as dependent on situational characteristics (Jung & Kieser, 2012), for instance on the competence of the client in dealing with consulting projects (Jung & Kieser, 2012; Sturdy 1997).

An example of contextual research is Pemer & Werr (2013), who focus on the underdeveloped client perspective in the client-consultant interaction. The authors argue that the interaction is dependent on contextual matters such as clients' and organizations' perceptions of risks/uncertainties when hiring consultants. They propose three types of risks. The first type of risks are *relational,* corresponding to the functionalist perspective's view of consultants as having a knowledge advantage over the client and the critical perspective's view of consultants as opportunistic and driven by self-interest rather than delivering value to the client. The second type of risks are *performance uncertainties,* which are shaped by the difficulties in both ex-ante assessments of consultants' knowledge, and ex-post evaluations. The last group are *psychosocial uncertainties,* which stem from "managers´ own (psychological) and their colleagues' (social) reactions to their use of management consultants" (Pemer & Werr, 2013). The client-consultant relationship is shaped by how hiring managers and their organizations perceive all three types of risk.

Next, we present the *context* in which our study is conducted.

2.1.2 Management Consulting in the Public Sector

Management consultants have become central actors in the processes and restructurings of governments since the 1980s (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Saint-Martin, 2012). Even so, the subject of the public sectors' hiring of consultants has attracted more interest from journalists than academics (Pemer, Börjesson & Werr, 2014).

The increased popularity of MCS in the public sector has been attributed so several developments. Saint-Martin (2012) emphasize NPM with the following audit explosion during the 1980s, described by Power (1997), and the move towards a digitalization of society – the eGovernment (Böhlen et al. 2005. For more on eGovernment, see e.g. Homburg, 2017). However, management consultants have been used in the public

sector since before the 1980s. In the 1960s, consultants were contracted as "rational planners" in decision-makers´ attempts to strengthen and rationalize economic interventions. During the 1980s, consultants became "apostles of New Public Management," and were hired to cut costs and streamline the government. The most recent development is consultants as "partners in governance," handling e.g. policy implementation, strategy and outsourcing (Saint-Martin, 2012; Pemer, Börjesson & Werr, 2014).

Several views exist toward the public sector's use of MCS. Proponents argue that the use of consultants strengthens "policy capacities" (Saint-Martin, 2012), additionally to the classic benefits of extra staff and facilitation of organizational change as proposed by Tisdall (1982). Furthermore, consultants have been argued to be a factor of success in the implementation of management reforms and for building trust in the government – due to their "allegedly more objective nature" (Steiner, Kaiser & Reichmuth, 2017).

Furusten & Werr (2005) write that the use of outside expertise is a part of a larger trend of "specialization and expertization," whereby organizations focus on their core competencies and buy specific knowledge when needed (pp.7-8). This corresponds to the streamlining ideals of NPM (Jung & Kieser, 2012). Consultants are argued to create insecurities in managers by pointing out problems not yet identified, simultaneously providing a solution to what could become an issue, hence playing on the insecurities of managers (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001). There is an increasing focus on the public sector from management consultancies aiming to influence policies and processes, creating fashions and hence generating business opportunities (Saint-Martin, 2012). Public administrations have been identified as increasing their acceptance of management advice since the widespread diffusion of NPM doctrines (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001, p. 523).

In the public sector consultants are also hired for allegedly more irrational reasons than the ones proposed by functionalists, e.g. for symbolic management. Managers use consultants as agents of change because "change is a motivator in itself" (Sturdy, 1997a: 392). Through restructurings, or the adaptation of new processes, managers signal progress to their employees and other stakeholders (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001). Lapsley & Oldfield (2001) further write that MCS are often a form of legitimization for uncomfortable decisions, such as carrying out redundancy programs, and that their hiring is a symptom of internal politics. At the same time, management can use consultants as "scapegoats" to mitigate critique from stakeholders (Steiner, Kaiser & Reichmuth, 2017), as employees or political adversaries (Martin, 1998).

However, external consulting in the public sector is controversial (Steiner, Kaiser & Reichmuth, 2017). The growth of MCS has led some academics to warn of a rising "consultocracy" (Saint-Martin, 2004, p. 20; Sturdy, 2011). Critics question the reliability of the expert advice and its legitimacy (Kropp & Kuhlman, 2013, cited in Steiner, Kaiser & Reichmuth, 2017) since "non-democratically selected, private consultants heavily influence the public sector" (Hood & Jackson, 1991, p. 24), forming a "shadow government" (Guttman & Willner, 1976, cited in Saint-Martin, 2012). The issue stems from the "outsider" relationship between a consultant and its client, wherein consultants generally do not have the same formal responsibility or accountability as managers (Sturdy, 2011).

Despite increasing reliance on MCS in the governmental context, there is little research and empirical evidence on the subject (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001). Studies on "the extent, role in policy making, processes, and impact of management consultants in the public sector are rather scarce" (Saint-Martin, 1998, p.321; Sturdy, 2011). Some researchers argue that the government have become better purchasers of consulting services (Kipping & Saint-Martin, 2005), and that more control routines are implemented when conducting business with the public sector (Jarrett, 1998). However, a flow of government reports and guidelines on the importance of value for (tax) money in consultancy projects imply that it is a "persistent problem", and that there are no quantifications of the benefits of using MCS in a governmental context (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001). Wollman (2013), cited in Steiner, Kaiser & Reichmuth (2017), criticize that at the political and administrative level of the public sector there is a "non-use of evaluation" of consultants' contribution and their results.

2.1.3 Evaluation of Management Consulting Services

Evaluating consultancy processes and their outcomes is described in the literature as tremendously important, but often overlooked, superficial, or done in haste (Kubr, 2002 p. 248). The ambiguous nature of MCS creates difficulties in objectively assessing and evaluating their quality, leaving evaluations "subject to considerable variation and contestation" (Sturdy, 2011).

Within the field of consultant evaluation, much research is focused on how clients in the private sector evaluate consultants *ex-ante,* that is, how clients choose which supplier to hire. Intangibility and uncertainty are two factors making clients sort to other mechanisms than price when making ex-ante decisions, as impressions, trust, reputation, experience and personal connections between client-consultant (Clark, 1995; Clark & Salaman, 1998; Furusten & Werr, 2005; Glückler & Armbtüster, 2003; Pemer, 2008). Clark and Salaman (1998) argue that post-evaluation is as much influenced by impression as ex-ante evaluation.

Ex-post, researchers have stressed that the immaterial/intangible nature of MCS, the usually co-created projects and the heterogeneous outcomes as leaving an isolation of cause and effect difficult (Clark, 1995; Clark & Salaman, 1998; Furusten & Werr, 2005, pp.4-6; Kubr, 2002, pp.248-253 & Pemer, 2008). Furthermore, factors both within organizations and in their surrounding environments can change during projects. A sound implementation of knowledge and/or processes depends on capacities on the client side, and some effects of projects are only measurable in a longer time-horizon (Clark, 1995; Jung & Kieser, 2012; Pemer, 2008). Lastly, consulting projects are not always clearly limited in scope from the start, instead being subject to change throughout the process, resulting in unclearly measurable goals and targets (Pemer, 2008). This stands in contrast to the audit society's emphasis on transparency, standardization, evaluation and measurability (Power, 1994). In a Swedish public-sector context, MCS are argued to be difficult to apply the Public Procurement Act to (Lindberg & Furusten, 2005) because the nature of consultancy projects and standardized legislation have different logics, rendering both legislative and evaluative models unclear. Instead, management consultancy projects are described as a "paradox or free-zone" (Alexius, 2007; Pemer, 2008).

Research suggesting that more sophisticated and control-focused ways of managing MCS – such as "increasing formalizing, centralizing and rationalizing" (Jung & Kieser, 2012) – have begun to replace the informal, unsystematic and individual approaches of clients (Jung & Kieser, 2012; Lindberg & Furusten, 2005; Pemer, Werr & Bianchi, 2014; Werr & Pemer, 2005, 2007). However, there remains a lack of knowledge of consultants' actual impact in the public sector and how projects are evaluated (Jung & Kieser, 2017; Sturdy, 2011). Even in the public sector itself, knowledge of how projects are handled is limited, as evidenced by the SNAO's investigation (SNAO, 2017).

2.2 Research Gap

Global spending on management consulting services has grown tremendously from the 1980s and onwards (Armbrüster, 2006; Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; Sturdy, 2011). Research on management consulting has traditionally been focused on the consultant, though the client and context are increasingly receiving academic interest (Pemer, 2008). Topics include institutional demands (Furusten & Werr, 2005), organizational culture (Hislop, 2002), decision structures (Armbrüster, 2006) and how clients' perceptions of uncertainties shape the client-consultant interaction (Pemer & Werr, 2013). There is a need for more empirical research on clients and their context (Jung & Kieser, 2012), specifically on how clients' perceptions shape not just their interaction with consultants but also on the outcomes of consulting projects (Pemer & Werr, 2013).

Further, the topic of consultants in the public sector is academically underdeveloped (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Pemer, Börjesson & Werr, 2014; Saint-Martin, 2012). Previous research has investigated macro spending patterns on MCS (Saint-Martin, 2012), and trends in public management as drivers of MCS spending (Furusten & Werr, 2005). However, the role and impact of consultants in the public sector is yet to be understood (Saint-Martin, 1998, p.321; Sturdy, 2011) and there is a call for investigations of consultants' role, contribution and results in the sector (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Wollman, 2013).

For contributions to be measured, assessments are required. The vast majority of literature on evaluating management consultants is focused on the private sector. The literature stress that MCS are important but difficult to evaluate, resulting in an often-overlooked assessment (Kubr, 2002, p.248). In the public sector, empirical findings on how projects are evaluated ex-post are yet to be presented (Jung & Kieser, 2017; Sturdy, 2011).

Drawing upon these three areas, we combine the need for empirical research on clients and their context, consulting to the public sector, and evaluations of management consulting projects. Here, we find a research gap in how MCS are evaluated in the public sector, and whether clients' perceptions of the client-consultant interaction affect the role of ex-post assessments.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This section explains the framework for our attempts to map the uncertainties that are perceived by the client state agency in their relationships with MC. We do so by drawing upon the framework from Pemer & Werr (2013) on how hiring managers' perceptions of uncertainties when using MCS affect how consultants are used. The contextual field within the research on MCS is still in its infancy, and we draw upon the suggested framework as it is one of the few empirically grounded frameworks emphasizing the client-consultant interaction. We then tie this to our inductive approach where we try to capture whether and how consultants are evaluated, as described in the method section, to end up with our abductive analysis. The result is an extended model presented in Figure 2.

Pemer & Werr (2013) divide the perceived risks of using management consultants into three categories; relational uncertainty, performance uncertainty and psychosocial uncertainty. Depending on the nature and level of risk that hiring managers perceive, they are grouped into four client archetypes whom act to mitigate risks in client-specific ways. Next are the risks and their causes presented, followed by the four client types and lastly how the client types view appropriate uses of management consultants. The process is presented in Figure 1 and the framework is summarized in Table 1.

2.3.1 Uncertainties in MCS usage

As noted in the literature, clients perceive several uncertainties or risks when hiring consultants. These uncertainties are presented below.

2.3.1.1 Performance Uncertainty

Performance uncertainty regards the clients' difficulties to assess both competence and performance of management consultants. As noted, the management consulting industry can be described as an "unbounded profession" with unclear boundaries (Alexius & Pemer, 2013; Alexius, 2007; Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003). This makes an assessment of consultants' knowledge base and competence difficult, creating uncertain expectations (Pemer, 2008; Pemer & Werr, 2013). Furthermore, an ex-post evaluation of the quality of consulting work is difficult due to the often co-created, heterogeneous and re-shaped outcomes with effects emerging in a later time-period (see Evaluation in the literature review).

2.3.1.2 Relational Uncertainty

This type of uncertainty stems from the perceived risk of opportunistic behavior of consultants. Consultants are thought to leverage a perceived advantage in knowledge in regard to the client. Origins of relational uncertainty corresponds to risks raised by researchers with a critical perspective on MCS (see Critical Perspective in the literature review). Pemer & Werr (2013) state that the uncertainty increases when the client is uncertain about the nature of their problem (problem uncertainty) or the best solution to it (market uncertainty).

2.3.1.3 Psychosocial Uncertainty

Clients' psychosocial uncertainties stems from "their own (psychological) and their colleagues' (social) reactions to their use of management consultants" (Pemer & Werr, 2013). Pemer & Werr (2013) argue that previous research has demonstrated that hiring external consultants can trigger several reactions within the individual client and the hiring organization. The organization can react critically and self-protective against the consultants, limiting co-operation and support to the project which can endanger the project's success and the hiring manager's esteem and career within the organization. Furthermore, relying on consultants to help solve issues can disrupt managers' sense of being in control of the project and situation (Bäcklund & Werr, 2008), create emotional stress through the feeling of capitulation in front of important issues to consultants and generate critique from consultants for previous actions – all affecting the managers' self-esteem (Maister, 2003). (This view is contrasting to the notion of consultants as increasing managers' self-esteem as proposed by Clark & Salaman, 1996). Hiring managers must therefore legitimize the use of consultants to the organization and themselves (Bäcklund & Werr, 2008).
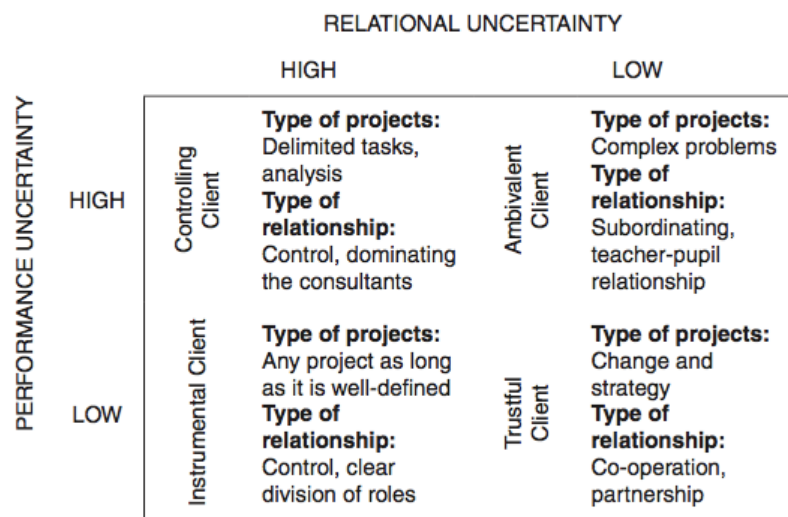
Figure 1- Uncertainties and Client types (Pemer & Werr, 2013)

2.3.2 Client Archetypes

The hiring of management consultants is thus characterized by several uncertainties. Previous research often treats these risks as inherent by the nature of the service. However, Pemer & Werr (2013) argue that the risks are subjectively perceived by hiring managers, affecting how the client views the consultant, the client-consultant relationship and the legitimate use of consultants. Depending on how clients' identify associated risks with MCS they can be categorized into four separate, distinct client-archetypes.

2.3.2.1 The Controlling Client

The controlling client experiences a high relational risk in the interaction with external consultants. One type of opportunistic behavior is the perceived risk of firms pitching to the client using senior staff, and then using inexperienced junior employees to work on the project. Controlling clients perceive consultants as parasites hard to get rid of, intending to expand projects or "milking the client organization". Clients of

this type also experience a high-performance risk. Consultants are perceived to generally be too inexperienced and lack an ability to adapt problem solving and theoretical models to the realities of the client organization. However, an experienced senior consultant from the own field of work can function as a "sounding board" to the hiring manager.

The own client organization is perceived to be competent to handle their challenges, and if anything, is too willing to hire consultants and take their advice. In this conception are managers thought to have the needed competence to solve complex issues themselves and using MCS can be regarded as avoiding their managerial responsibility. Failure in consulting projects are attributed to the client manager's inability to control the opportunistic behavior of consultants.

2.3.2.2 The Instrumental Client

Instrumental clients experience moderate to high levels of relational risk in the relationship with consultants. As controlling clients, instrumental clients identify the notion of consultants wanting to expand projects and staff them with junior personnel. This is although seen as a part of "the game" and a consequence of the partly incongruent goals of clients and consulting firms. Through direct and clear communication concerning project scope, methodology and goals the tensions can be mitigated. Identifying themselves as competent to evaluate the consultants' and own organization's levels of competency, instrumental clients experience low levels of performance risk. Hiring managers relies on the consultants to have the adequate experience and skills to deliver in a project.

The hiring organization is thought to be competent, where consultants can be used occasionally as additional "resources or expertise". Before consultants are hired, an assessment of the rationality of using external or internal resources is conducted. In projects encompassing MCS is the key aspect to know why consultants are hired, and clearly state the project goals. Failure is attributed to the hiring manager's inability to contract the right consultants or mismanage from the project manager on the client side.

2.3.2.3 The Trustful Client

The trustful client experience low relational risk. Rather than external resources, trustful clients see consultants as loyal "experienced colleagues" whom the organization can learn from and should work closely with. Consultants are perceived to be competent with the ability to identify and solve complex matters for the hiring organization. Following the perception of consultants as competent is the experienced performance risk low. The consultants bring creativity, experience and innovation they can transfer to the organization.

Instead, the hiring organization is perceived as lacking competence and being "old-fashioned". Trustful clients express almost a higher identification with the consultants than the own organization, which can be described as not understanding the pressing situation and underinvesting in the MC projects. Blame for failure is directed towards the hiring organization for not supporting the consultants and the project enough.

2.3.2.4 The Ambivalent Client

Among ambivalent clients the client organization and the hiring manager are characterized by having low self-esteem, feeling that they are inferior to the consultants regarding competence, experience and ability to solve complex matters. The perceived relational risks are low among ambivalent clients. Consultants are seen as loyal and even teachers whom the client faithfully wants to learn from, creating an unequal client-consultant relationship. Compared to previous conceptions, ambivalent clients don't necessarily want to work *together* with the consultants, the consultants should rather solve the client's problems. Performance risks are however perceived as high. Consultants are seen as having "superior competence". Thus, clients feel incapable of assessing the consultants' expert competence while simultaneously being uncertain about their own organizations' abilities. The combination of low self-esteem, a naïve view of consultants and the wish to have problems solved by the consultants make clients' expectations of consultants high. Failure leads to a feeling of betrayal with blame being directed towards the consultants, described as "false prophets", but can improve the low self-esteem in the hiring organization.

Conception				
The conceptions´ view on…	**Controlling Client**	**Instrumental Client**	**Trustful Client**	**Ambivalent Client**
Consultants	"Parasites" Disloyal, inexperienced, too dependent on theoretical models, not taking responsibility for their ideas or work	"Tools" Competent in their area of expertise but acting for their own good	"Colleagues" Very competent and experienced, loyal and taking responsibility for their ideas and work	"Saviors" More competent and experienced than the client and the client organization. Good at handling complex problems
The client organization	Skilled, knows more than the consultants but relies too much on them	Skilled, but sometimes in need of extra resources or competence	Not very skilled, needs help with complex issues. Does not always understand the importance of the consulting project	Not very skilled, knows less than the consultants. In need of extra help and expertise when difficult and complex situations arise
The client manager	Strong, controlling, dominating	"Natural" leader	Identifies with the consultants	Low self-esteem
Appropriate use of consultants	Limited tasks, analysis, data mining, secretaries	Any kind of task as long as it is well defined	Strategic issues, change projects	Complex problems, important projects
Consultant-client relationship	Unequal and distrustful. The client must monitor and control the consultants to stop them from stealing information or expanding their projects.	Equal but distrustful. As long as clear divisions of labor and responsibilities are in place, the relationship can be friendly.	Equal and trusting. Friendly relationship Close consultant-client collaboration needed to learn from the consultants.	Unequal and trusting. The client looks up to the consultant and expects them so solve the problem for him/her.

Table 1- Summary from Pemer & Werr (2013) of the client conceptions.

Controlling	Instrumental	Trustful	Ambivalent
29 %	43 %	21 %	7 %

Table 2 – Client distribution in the private sector (n=28) (Pemer & Werr, 2013)

In sum, the perception hiring managers and organizations have on risks when engaging MCS affect their view on the nature of the client-consultant relationship, how consultants should be managed - and - how managers can legitimize MCS usage. According to these perceptions, clients are categorized into four client archetypes. We build on this framework by adding an evaluation dimension and using it in the state context. For instance, is the client distribution different in the state context? Can we attribute differences in client assessment methods to the uncertainties clients perceive? How does the state context influence how clients experience the associated risks? Does the context influence evaluation processes?
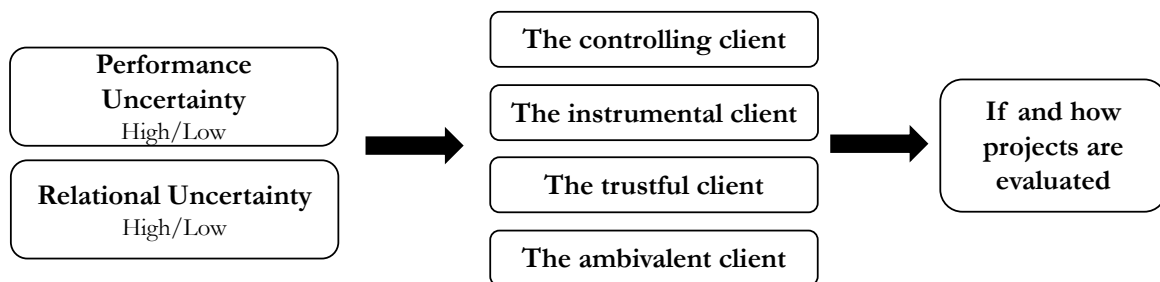

Figure 2 - The Extended Framework

3. Methodology

This section describes our approach to conducting research, beginning with an assessment of our research approach. Following, we define and justify our data collection scheme, discuss our data quality and analyze factors that may have affected it. We conclude with a summary of our methods.

3.1 Research approach

Our approach is defined by the selection of appropriate ontological and epistemological frameworks for our research goals. We start by considering what we hope to achieve, and from there select the appropriate method.

3.1.1 Ontological considerations

Questions of social ontology are concerned with the nature of social entities - whether they should be considered as objective and have a reality external to social actors (objectivism), or as social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors (constructionism) (Bryman & Bell, 2015: 64).

Corresponding with constructivism, we assert that social phenomena and their meanings are created by social actors, produced through social interactions, and exist in a constant state of revision. The social phenomena is the degree of perceived uncertainty and its following meanings are the extension of evaluations.

3.1.2 Epistemological considerations

Epistemological issues concern what is, or should be regarded, as acceptable knowledge within a discipline (Bryman & Bell, 2015: 58). Our research takes an interpretivist stance and thus views the social world as the outcome of the interpretations of actors through a series of interactions (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 62). This paradigm includes the belief that the world is socially constructed and subjective. As we are concerned with understanding what is happening rather than establishing fundamental laws, we adopt the preferred method of examining a relatively small sample in depth (Easterby-Smith et al. 1993: 27).

3.1.3 Methodological fit

Our field of research is considered as nascent and this has implications for the suitable method for examining the topic. Qualitative methods are considered the appropriate way of collecting open ended data that need interpretation to extract further meaning (Edmonson & McManus, 2007). Qualitative methods hold promise for investigating phenomenon which are "socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values and beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their daily activity" (Thornton et al., 2012: 51). This constructivist approach to research socially constructed phenomenon underlies our chosen method for data collection, namely interviews. Twenty-four interviews have been held in total.

Our ambition is to describe the world as it is seen by our actors of interest. We want to understand and contextualize our study participants' individual perceptions and put them in a context. Within the interview schema, we have the freedom to ask follow up questions and to adapt to the answers. Fossey et al. (2002) explains that qualitative studies are especially appropriate for understanding individuals' and groups' subjective experiences, and to eliciting contextual data that would be inaccessible through a solely quantitative survey-study.

In a qualitative study, research design should be a reflexive process through every stage of the project (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). With an eye on this, and on the need for us to identify patterns through thematic content analysis (Edmonson & McManus, 2007), we have selected Gioia et al. (2012)'s systematic approach to new concept development and grounded theory articulation in order to discover patterns in how evaluations are done. The approach is designed to balance the conflicting needs to develop new concepts inductively while meeting standards for academic rigor when describing a phenomenon of interest (Gioia et. al. 2012). We avoid imposing existing constructs or theories on our informants to explain their understanding of the phenomenon, which in this case is if / how uncertainties affect how agencies evaluate consultants, but instead listen in on our interviewees' voices from the beginning of the data collection and analysis.

Then, in the analytical phase, we combine this with a pattern inducing technique, through which we tie our inductive findings to an existing framework. This is described in section 3.3 below.
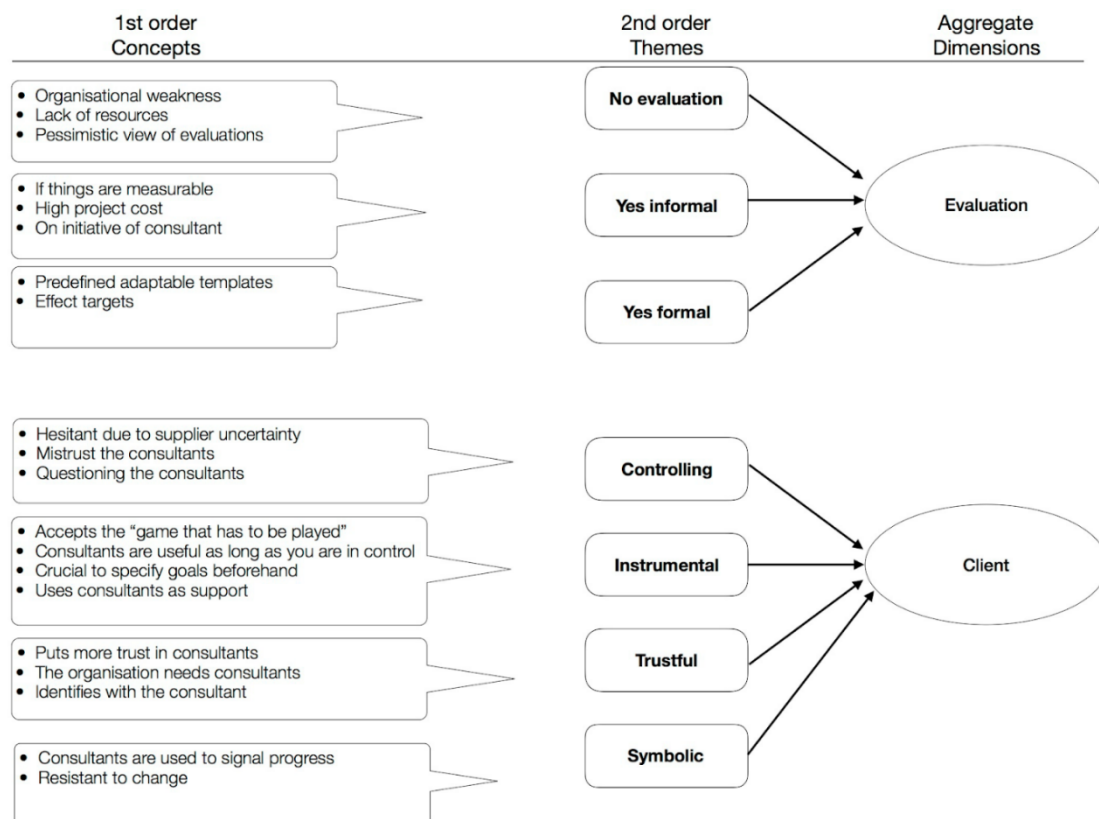

Figure 3 - Data Structure

3.2 Data collection

Data was collected in three stages: a pre-study, a main study and a follow up interview once our analysis started to reveal certain patterns. These steps of the process are described below.

3.2.1 Pre-study

Our pre-study consisted of one seminar and two semi-structured interviews. The seminar was on the topic *Consultants in the governmental sector* and held by the Swedish Agency for Public Management. The two interviews were conducted with an investigator at SAPM, and the other with the Swedish National Audit Office (NAO). SAPM is the government's organization for analyses and evaluations of state and state-funded activities and NAO is responsible for auditing government agencies.

During the pre-study, we hoped to discover any "unknown-unknowns" (Mullins, 2007). We also discussed three identified aspects of how agencies use and evaluate MCS, which could potentially bias our sampling:

i)   Agency Size

ii)   Agency governance structure

iii)   Responsible government department

The answers were conclusive. Neither the NAO, which has an ongoing investigation of the use of consultants in the government sector, nor SAPM identified any correlation or causality between any of our factors and how agencies assess management consultants. Instead, the only factor that seemed to matter was the interest of the individual Director Generals and their management team.

3.2.2 Main study

The main study data was collected in a qualitative manner via twenty-one semi-structured interviews with twelve Director Generals, three deputy Director Generals, four organization/development managers and two operation coordinators across twenty unique state agencies. One of these interviews was a follow-up interview with a second individual at the same agency.

3.2.2.1 Sampling

We ranked the agencies according to size (number of employees according to the agencies' last published annual report) due to the pre-study findings and then made contact starting with the largest. Due to the nature of some of the included agencies, a disclosure of their structure and size is not possible without making them identifiable. The method of contact was e-mail, usually to a central hub at the agencies from which the inquiry could be re-distributed to a suitable receiver. We used a more specific contact when possible. To ensure all agencies had the possibility to respond, we re-contacted agencies that had not responded to our request after one week. This procedure continued either until all agencies had responded or until we had reached interview saturation. This approach corresponds to what Healey & Rawlinson (1993) terms "polite persistence". A total of 51 government agencies were contacted for the main study. The sample

covers eight out of ten government departments with agency responsibility. We aimed to interview Director or Deputy Generals but interviewed other roles when specifically redirected by the DG or DG's office.

3.2.2.2 Interviews

Twelve interviews were held in person and the other nine by telephone. This may have produced a slightly different final result than if all interviews had been face-to-face, since facial expressions and body language were lost as tools of interpretation. All interviews were held in Swedish and the used quotes are therefore translations. As government agencies are spread out across Sweden, we visited locations in proximity of Stockholm or tried otherwise to schedule meetings when our interviewee was in Stockholm. When agencies did not have the possibility to meet face-to-face, the interview was held via telephone. The interviews lasted 40-90 minutes with an average of 59 minutes. The two of us were present on every occasion and switched tasks of leading interview and taking notes every second interview.

Transcribing and analyzing the data while still in the collection process enabled us to identify when no new patterns or themes were occurring in the data (Francis et al, 2010), i.e. when we were nearing interview saturation (Marshall, 1996). When interview saturation was reached around the seventeenth interview, we proceeded to conduct scheduled interviews but did not actively pursue more.

We began the interaction preceding each interview with an informal "chitchat" to make the meeting more relaxed and provide an opportunity to contextualize our interest in the thesis topic. Director Generals and their management teams are generally highly educated, experienced, influential and work in organizations guarding their external image, categorizing them as "elites" (Empson, 2018). Interviewing such "elites" are considered to provide certain unique methodological issues compared to "non-elites", such as receiving access and gaining trust (Mikecz, 2012:482). To build trust and receive deeper input, we prepared for the interviews by researching the interviewee and their organization to communicate professionalism and reduce information asymmetry (Odendahl & Shaw, 2002: 313).

Two major views are present on how to build interview rapports: the neopositivist and the romantic view (Alvesson, 2003). The neopositivist advocates a consistent research protocol for every interview and seeks to minimize influencer research and other sources of bias. By contrast, the romantic approach, which we have embraced in our study, focuses on building commitment and trust between interviewee and interviewer and is a more effective approach to elite interviews (Empson, 2018). Rice (2010) recommends framing interviews with elites more as intellectual discussions in order to enable increased dialogue and reflection.

3.2.3 Follow up

After the main interviews, a follow up interview was held with the NAO in which we discussed our findings and solicited final input. The NAO is currently investigating how and to what extent management consultants are used by public institutions. We spoke with the two people in charge of this investigation.

3.3 Data analysis

The Gioia method is empirically well tested. The Gioia & Thomas (1996) study is an example of a fruitful application of this method; the authors deliberately avoid the use of pre-existing concepts, which would have led them to miss key aspects of their participants´ sense making of the topic of interest. The approach is devised so that it allows for a first order analysis and a second order analysis. The first analysis is based on the terms and codes employed by the interviewees (informants), and the second on the themes and concepts used by researchers (Gioia et al. 2012).

This is why we have coded our data in two rounds: one based on our informants' codes where evaluation methods and perceived uncertainties are put into concepts, and another based our thematization of these concepts. For evaluations, these themes were constructed inductively based only on how they were described by the informants. For uncertainties, the concepts were thematized in accordance with our framework and thus leading up to our abductive analysis of these two dimensions (evaluations and client type). This allows for an inductive concept description of our results and feeds into our abductive analysis. We have done so to provide our concept development further bearing, and for the reader not to think that we have only cherry-picked quotes that suit our purpose.

We complement this approach with the *pattern inducing technique* developed by Reay & Jones (2016) for qualitatively capturing institutional logics. Although the perspective of the study is not of institutional logics, the technique offers an analysis approach highly relevant to us. In the bottom-up approach, patterns that are connected to logics appear inductively from the data and then, through qualitative analysis, can be reflected upon in relation to discoveries from other studies (Reay & Jones, 2016). The technique is similar to the one previously mentioned by Gioia et al. (2012), which is why we combine them to form the bases of our research and analysis approaches, respectively.

Following pattern induction, we gathered our textual data from interviews and then identified patterns by coding and analyzing the given answers. We have done so, in accordance with what Friedland & Alford (1991) states, to show on behaviors that are guided by logics as both symbolic and material.
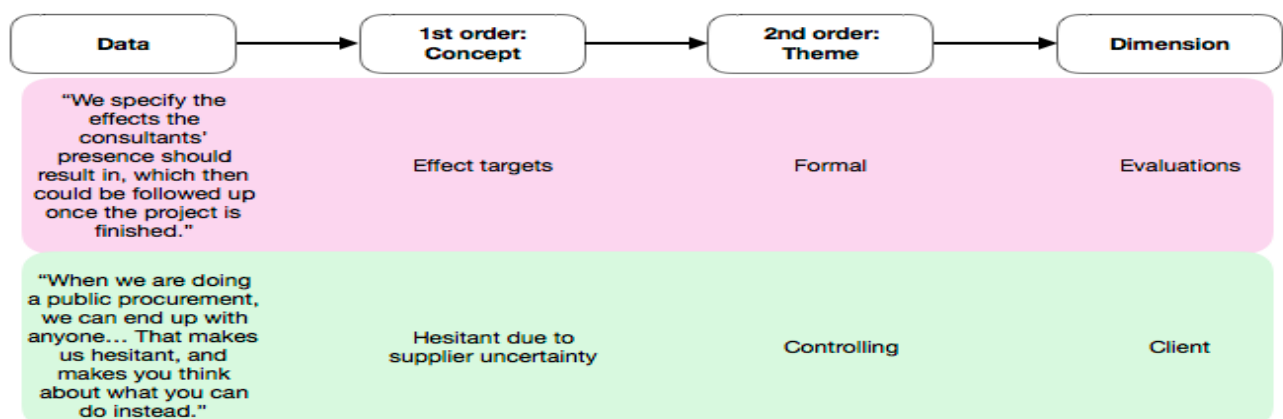

Figure 4 - Example of Data Analysis Process

Our way of "grouping" the textual data to induce patterns is grounded in the interpretivist ontology that multiple truths exist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Myers 2013). Accordingly, we start with a general research question and then move on to a research site where we believe these answers are to be found. This is also part of the reason why we turned to Director Generals (DG) since they have a significant influence and impact on how their institutions are run.

3.4 Data quality assessment

We have been careful to avoid cherry-picking quotations from our interviews and situating them in a way that suits our research aim. We have thus worked thoroughly to cluster text segments from our transcribed interviews into meaningful categories, which we believe reveal the behavior of our targeted actors through identifiable institutional logics which we want to show in this section.

3.4.1 Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability

Quantitative research is best evaluated against its own aims: accurate and objective measurement, and a generalizability of the findings back to the main population (Buston et al. 1998). Accuracy and objectivity depend on the validity and reliability of the instruments employed. The validity and reliability of used instruments is therefore central to evaluating the objectivity and accuracy of measurements, while the findings' generalizability depends on representativeness and replicability (Fossey et al. 2002).

However, as the evaluation criteria of a research project must be persistent with its philosophical paradigm (Fossey et al. 2002), these parameters are less suitable for our qualitative approach. To evaluate our interpretivist-constructivist-qualitative standpoint, we chose Lincoln & Guba (1985)'s step-by-step evaluative approach for its many citations and widespread use. Trustworthiness of a qualitative research study is to be divided into four parts: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability. These parallel internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity respectively (Fossey et al. 2002)

Criteria	Technique suggested	Technique employed in study
Credibility	Prolonged Engagement	Our main study was conducted over the period of two and a half months. Prior, we spent another two months researching our topic to ensure we could make full use of our interviews and receive multiple influences once we began our study. This facilitated our orientation of the situation and understanding of the context given the time frame of the project.
	Persistent Observation	If the purpose of prolonged engagement is to provide scope, persistent observation provides depth. To identify the most relevant characteristics and factors, interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed in several layers to search for patterns.
	Peer Debriefing	Several professionals and non-professionals have been consulted regarding our findings and their underlying logics. This helped us to avoid biases and assumptions that we as writers take for granted.
	Deviant Case Analysis	Throughout our findings and analysis section, we have disclosed any results that contradict our discovered patterns.
Transferability	Thick Description	By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other settings. We account our field experiences in detail through explicit patterns of phenomenon, and contextualize them throughout our layers of analysis.
Dependability & Confirmability	External audits	External audits mean having a researcher not involved in the research process examine the research process and product. We have consulted our supervisor, the NAO, and SAP for continuous input.
Confirmability	Audit trail	We provide a transparent description of our research steps. Recordings, transcriptions and samplings have been saved, along with records of other actions taken in our investigation.

Table 3 - Data Quality Assessment

3.4.2 Pattern inducing approach

Within an interpretivist methodology, explanations are relevant to the context of the body but that it is not known (and also not the point of the study) if findings are able to be generalized beyond the studied context (Reay & Jones, 2016). The close connection between raw data and context restricts our study to our specific cases, complicating the project of drawing comparisons. It may also be challenging to convince readers that the data segments we have presented are actually representative of the general population (Smets et al. 2012).

Despite these drawbacks, the approach allows for a nuanced description of localized practices, wherein lies the aim of our research question. Using quotes does also allow for some of the data to be presented along with the rich context of the study (Reay & Jones, 2016).

3.4.3 Biases

Bias comprises systematic errors that are expected to occur in a given context of research (Kendall & Buckland, 1982). In this section we address various forms of bias that may have impacted our analysis.

3.4.3.1 Selection bias
Selection bias occurs when a selection process in the study design or real-world results in inferences that suffer from systematic error (Collier & Mahoney, 1996). One known issue with qualitative research is that

the validity of findings may be undermined by selection bias (Collier & Mahoney, 1996). This has been flagged for further research (King et. al, 1994).

It could be argued that failing to keep our sample consistent in terms of interviewees' professions could lead to a biased sample. However, it could also be argued that it is not always the Director General who has the most significant relevant impact or insight within a given organization. We have placed trust in institutions that have referred us to someone they believe to be better suited than the Director General for answering our questions. Furthermore, a specific practice or phenomenon could be perceived in different ways depending on who in the organization you talk to. People become a CEO (Director General) or a middle manager not only by modeling themselves as such, but also by gaining the acceptance as, and recognition of CEOs or middle managers (Ibarra, 1999). "Learning then, in all, involves acquiring identities that reflect both how a learner sees the world, and how the world sees a learner" (Brown & Duguid, 2001: 200). This reinforces our belief that talking not only to Director Generals could provide us with a better reflection of reality.

3.4.3.2 Researcher bias

As individuals, we risk carrying bias from our backgrounds to our research. We are both Business Management Master students at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE). Our courses have dealt with how to approach organizational problems from an outside (consultant) perspective, and it could be argued that this has instilled us with a trust in management methods that is not always congruent with the perspective of public institutions. Due to SSE's reputation, it is fair to assume that our study participants were aware of this and may have entered the interviews with some skepticism towards us and our supposed agenda. Secondly, both parents of one of the authors have spent their lives working in the Swedish public sector. This could have produced a biased effect in the opposite direction, a more positive attitude than what is suitable for conducting an objective study.

We have actively worked with each source of bias by considering ways in which our analysis would differ if we were unaware of potential influences. We neutralized the interview sessions by declaring our awareness of these biases to the interviewee, and by declaring our sole intent to map the research gap through an objective and explorative "how"-question. As a token for our success in building trust this way, we would like to highlight the fact that several of our interviewees referred to the benefit of their anonymity before developing on some of their answers. We speculate that they may not have done so if they perceived we as researches were too biased or calculating.

3.4.4 Interview quality

Our interpretations of qualitative data are always potentially influenced by our thoughts, environment, and previous experiences (Maxwell, 2013). We accounted for this by having both researchers present for every interview and by discussing all results with one another. While we cannot ensure that other researchers will come to the same conclusions given consistency in every other variable (reliability), we have been vigilant in our attempts to mitigate our own effects on the interview situation.

Validity was improved by sending the interview structure to out interviewees before the meeting and reviewing it together in person. This should have led to fewer misinterpretations of our topic and definitions such as "management consultants" or "evaluation".

3.5 Method summary

Our research started with a discovery of our targeted research gap. Very little, if anything, has been written about how Swedish state agencies perceive uncertainties regarding consultants and how that affects how they evaluate the consultants. We set out to complete all three phases of data collection and analyzing them inductively while doing so without any framing via established frameworks, in accordance with the approach developed by Gioia et al. (2012). To give our findings bearing, we used Pemer & Werr (2013) for a second abductive analysis (figure 3).

4. Empirical results

Below we describe our findings and lay the foundation for our abductive analysis where we answer our research question. We do so by describing our findings inductively via the first, informant centric order, using informant terms and codes. The section is structured through a combination of our initial interview design and the structures that the interviews formed according to our exploratory and inductive approach.

4.1 General view of consultants

The attitude towards consultants varied among the interviewed clients. Interviewees expressed skepticism as well as positive attitudes towards consultants. In some cases, both views were present in the same interview (Int_9; Int_12; Int_15; Int_18), where for instance one skeptical aspect was mentioned along with several positive. In these cases, the clients highlighted their responsibility as purchasers in whether or not consultants are useful.

> *Int_13: "If I'm facing an inexperienced consultant whose main focus is the invoice part of the assignment and I give him or her an unclear mission, the consultant starts a process neither of us feel safe with will result in what I want. A good consultant doesn't let me get away with that and instead, together with me, chops it down to something more concrete."*

Int_18 perceives no problems with allowing consultants into the organization. The reason for skepticism and limited use of consultants is due to difficulties with acceptance from the rest of the organization. The two extreme cases are made up by Int_19 who say that they normally don't get a return on consultant spending, and Int_2 who recruits consultants into the organization's core for strategic issues. Common critiques among skeptical clients are that consultants try to apply "formulae 1A-solutions", have an inadequate understanding of the public sector and the differences compared to companies and that consultants try to sell irrelevant add-on services.

It is not uncommon that people move between the public and private sector as their line of work. Thus, some of our interviewees have worked as consultants themselves or in non-governmental organizations where the use of consultants was more comprehensive (Int_5; Int_20; Int_9). These individuals expressed a more positive attitude towards consultants and identified with them to a further extent. Similarly, a more critical and uncertain attitude towards consultants were generally more prominent among individuals spending their working lives solemnly in the state sector. Many also describe how their view of consultants have changed. Int_1 is more skeptical today than initially in the career, others more positive. Several interviewees, as Int_6, believes that there is a diminishing use of consultants in the public sector, especially in strategic matters.

4.2 How consultants are used

As attitudes, do found reasons for recruiting consultants vary. More than half of the sample (thirteen) hire consultants for competencies unavailable in the organization. The absolute majority of these highlight the importance of maintaining control of projects and keeping consultants contained, something regarded as sometimes difficult. Only Int_1 states that consultants occasionally can be used as project leaders. The main competence institutions aspire is development of top management teams. Int_17 is the only interviewee who explicitly state that they do not recruit this kind of service.

Consultants are also being used for their role as an outsider when a perceived need of an external perspective exist (Int_1; Int_5; Int_10; Int_12; Int_18). Int_14 concur and uses consultants to facilitate the organization's own thinking. Int_20 hire management consultants as an external objective part in stranded negotiations with unions, and the situation requires a mediator. Common for all these agencies was that they did not perceive large uncertainties with the projects due to their envisioned short and relatively simple nature. The agencies did not evaluate any of the projects for these reasons.

Other commonly wanted competences are specialist or niche knowledge needed for a specified purpose. This niche competence is viewed to be of limited use in daily operations, and not viable to keep in-house (Int_4; Int_17; Int_15). An effect of this is that agencies recurrently hire this type of consultants. These short-term occasional efforts with consultants are usually not evaluated formally, expressed by e.g. Int_20.

Some clients recruit consultants as resources when they are to launch a larger project with an identified need of more staff than currently available. When asked about their use of different types of consultants, and whether the respondents could identify trends in the state sector, Int_6 claims that resource consultants are perceived to have a constant demand, something Int_8 agrees with. Int_8 add that their agency always uses resource consultants in combination with internal resources to secure control of projects and enhance organizational learning.

4.3 Are projects followed up on?

One of the interviewed agencies (Int_7) evaluate internal projects but not projects with management consultants. The rest either don't differentiate between internal and external projects in terms of evaluation or put in extra efforts when consultants are hired (Int_15). (Int_1; Int_8; Int_15) claim to be good at evaluating. They state that they use predefined templates adapted to the individual projects. Int_8 concretize this:

> *"[..]. we specify the effects the consultants' presence should result in, which are followed up once the project is finished."*

In_1 says that they are evaluating all project indifferent of whether they are done internally or together with consultants. The agency works according to a project model which includes an assessment of goal

achievement. Int_8 evaluates all projects regardless of driven internally or externally but put occasionally in extra effort in the assessment if the project is partly done with external resources, because an assessment of received output is even more important when external resources have been utilized. The assessment includes an analysis of whether the agency has received what was ordered, what was needed, if the agency internalized knowledge from the project and whether the project delivered insights the agency did not know it needed.

Some agencies describe their evaluation processes as, if existing, much less defined and formalized. Decisive factors are the cost of the project (Int_3), if the consulting firm takes initiative (Int_11; Int_17) or if things are "*measurable*" (Int_16). Many also hold sporadic dialogs with the suppliers that could be "*much more developed*" (Int_4). A recurrent mentioning in the interviews is the use of periodical checkpoints as a project proceeds. Int_13 explains that these replace most of the need for an extensive evaluation ex-post. What this cluster has in common with each other is that evaluations are occasionally performed, but not in the same formalized way as the first group.

Agencies state different reasons for not assessing projects. Int_6 describes the lack of evaluations as a general organizational weakness. Int_2 ascribes it to a lack of time and money, as the major focus is perceived to be on the execution part of projects, it leaves little to no room for ex-post evaluations and assessments. In the case of Int_9, there are established step-by-step processes for how evaluations should be done, but our interviewee explains that there is an ignorance of how to perform these steps. Int_9 suggest this is a general feature both in the respondent's organization, as well as other state agencies. The reason stems from a lack of knowledge, something described as symptomatic for institutions in the public sector because:

> Int_9 "*[...] these organizations don't have to be as concerned about profitability which for many leads to a lack of drive and big risks of organizations just sitting around while bleeding money*".

4.3.1 A comment on the follow up-process

A precondition for evaluations is to have something to evaluate against, as goals and targets. Goal setting strategies emerged as a relevant topic for our study through the inductive research approach. Vague goal setting appeared to be a factor for why project evaluations are occasionally neglected even in organizations acknowledging the relevance of ex-post assessments. A question that continuously surfaced was the perceived difficulties creating quantitative goals:

> Int_3: "*It's difficult to measure effects from the development of management teams. Have we received the effects that we were looking for?*

> Int_14: "*The quantifiability of targets is a big issue. There's a fluffiness in what you want to achieve that makes effect goals hard to measure and evaluations hard to perform. It has with our culture to do; the society's benefit is sometimes hard to measure but there are many projects where this could be done in a simple way.*

The most common way for our sample to measure qualitative goals such as management efficiency or social benefits are through polls and surveys among employees and stakeholders where the same questions are asked before and after an effort or action been made. The second most common way of assessing internal quality, i.e. group development or leadership skills, is through discussions among the affected stakeholders. These are by nature subjective (Int_12), meaning that it is difficult to determine an objective truth in whether goal accomplishment has been achieved. In a follow-up interview with an agency, we asked the interviewee (an activity coordinator) how an optimal project evaluation would be structured. The person expressed a wish to have more numbers and statistics when measuring effects, rather than the qualitative methods currently used.

4.4 The state context

The last quote in section 4.3 describing how state agencies can "bleed money" expresses a way of thinking that several interviewees brought up during the data collection. It concerns the role of the state sector as a mediating factor in, in this case, consulting projects and following assessments. Int_7 explains that many things are conducted only for the protocol. Agencies want to present a high level of activity, but the actual effects are of less significance:

"Evaluations of internal projects are performed, but only for the sake of it. It has nothing to do with learning, only because it's in our systems. People say that we should be better at follow-ups and evaluations. I say that's bullshit [sic!]. You can observe a failure, but from there you should just move on since there aren't two problems that are the same anyway.

This person perceives evaluations as unnecessary, although an outlier in our interviews the quote still illustrates a point similar to the previous quote about "bleeding money". The notion is that state agencies do not have profitability as a primary concern and should not either. Protocols and project evaluations are hence executed for symbolic reasons as communicating activity. Int_16 explains:

"Some things are measured to an extent that drives you crazy, but the measuring is done only for the sake of measuring, it seldom leads to anything".

This is also described in Int_4:

"You are being measured on what you do and not how it goes."

Int_14 is on to this as well:

"It's absolutely possible to sit around and bleed money. [...] I believe the reason why we don't follow up on projects, not even the ones where it could easily be done, is due to the fact that we are state

agencies. We don't have a customer in the sense that everything we do has to be relevant to him or her. They have to use or buy what we produce anyway. This removes the incentive and understanding that exists in the private sector of making money and receiving effects on investments."

In Int_3 we heard an illustrative example of when this mentality met the market outside of the public sector:

"I worked at a technology consulting company many years ago. The company was the offspring from a state-owned company that got divided in two halves. One half became a state agency and the other half turned into this consulting firm. Problems arose when those from the state sector all of a sudden were put in a situation where they were supposed to sell their services in a private sector manner, do business and be efficient in a way that they were not used to. They were all competent technicians but the pressure to do business and make money was not easy. These people might have a different inner drive, they want to make a difference in society and they might not always be individuals who are interested in business."

However, we received conflicting views as well, as in Int_15:

"My attitude is that government operations are primarily financed by tax money, and that gives me an absolute responsibility for how every SEK is being used. If you're vague when you purchase something, if you don't know exactly what you want but you think that a consultant could be fun to hire, then I don't think that you respect the need for efficient use of public means."

This individual expressed the highest internal requirements before hiring consultants. The interviewee was not averse to using consultants, however emphasized immensely heavily the need for an actual internal demand and the specifications of project planning, executions, goals and evaluations before one could credibly use consultants.

5. Analysis

The analysis section presents the findings from the second, research centric order, using research terms and codes. As described in the result section, our findings regarding evaluations follow a three-group clustering pattern. The first group of agencies claim to be good at evaluating, doing so in **formal ways** according to predefined templates adapted slightly to the individual projects. The second and largest group evaluate more occasionally and in more **informal** ways, as discussions or other less structured and more subjective forms than the predefined templates utilized by the first group. The third group end their project process once the service has been delivered, and hence **do not follow up and evaluate**.

Below follow the discovered client types in the same order as before, each with a concluding section that describe the patterns (or lack thereof) in how they evaluate.

5.1 Client types

The noticed patterns in how managers describe their attitude to management consultants could be traced to which projects they hired consultants to participate in. These were traced back to the managers' perception of consultants in general, created by the managers' impressions of risks with external help in projects. Using the client framework from Pemer & Werr (2013), we identify most our interviewees to express sentiments corresponding to Instrumental Clients while none was classifiable as ambivalent. However, we found a subgroup not classifiable into one of the four archetypes which we named *Symbolic Clients*. Table 4 shows the distribution of interviewees along with how they evaluate.

Client / Evaluation	Controlling	Instrumental	Trusting	Symbolic
Formal		Int_1; Int_8; Int_15		
Informal	Int_11	Int_3; Int_4; Int_9; Int_10; Int_12; Int_13; Int_16; Int_17	Int_5	Int_7
No	Int_6;	Int_14; Int_18; Int_19	Int_20	Int_2

Table 4 - Distribution of Client Types

5.1.2 The Controlling Clients

As noted in the theoretical framework, controlling clients perceive high relational and high performance uncertainties which affect the clients' relationship with consultants, how one handles consultants and what constitutes a legitimate use of consultants. Among our respondents, two were found to be controlling clients.

As mentioned, when public institutions buy MSC they must go through a public procurement process where the agency state their specifications of the demanded service. The agency can either use an existing framework agreement or go through a public bidding on the contract. Since state agencies are regulated by law not to specify a contract so that only one service provider can fulfil the requirements, and instead are demanded to use the supplier with the winning bid, they do not know ex-ante which firm they end up with. For the interviewees identified as controlling clients, this is a source of relational uncertainty.

> Int_11: "When we are doing a public procurement, we can end up with anyone... That makes us hesitant, and makes you think about what you can do instead."

Relational uncertainty also stems from the perceived nature of consultants. Our respondents express that they are afraid not only of not being able to control which is the winning firm, but also how the consultants act. Suppliers are seen to generally be more interested in selling and expanding their projects than delivering value to our interviewees. The hiring managers thus identify a need to constrain consultants to the agreed projects and express resentment for perceived selling pressures, which corresponds to the framework's description of consultants as "parasites" hard to get rid of.

> Int_6: "A lot of my organizational work is about securing that we stick to the ideas we have about the organization. So that's one way. When it comes to process-consultants, it's relatively often we use a combination of some consultants and then internal resources to secure that."

> Int_11: "The effect of using a consultant is that the consultants push and want us to continue [with a program], but we are not going for that again. We don't want those solutions."

Relational uncertainty spill over to performance uncertainty for our controlling clients. Consultants are viewed as having limited knowledge about the public sector and therefore unable to provide any new insights to the client. The controlling clients expressed that consultants should therefore not be used for complex matters but instead for issues of transactional character, as analyses or bases for decisions. This is congruent with the suggested response by Pemer & Werr (2013).

> Int_6: "Many consultants can't provide any new perspectives. It's not like they need a deep knowledge in the details of the point at issue, but they need a competency within the area. I think that our Director General and others with him/her can perceive it as we solve the problem ourselves while we pay for it. We're not so interested in that."

Instead, the controlling clients express a perception of their own organization as knowledgeable and capable to handle issues at hand. One of our interviewees stated that using consultants is rather an irrational response to stress and pressure to deliver results.

> Int_11: "Many times you think that you don't have time to think the thoughts. Then you think that this requires advanced tools, and we don't have those, so you hire a consultant and buy a concept."

But added,

> "This is what and how we do. This is our everyday. We have a knowing ourselves! That makes it less dramatic – we actually know quite much ourselves. We recruit experienced people we can build on. We don't have to start at zero and buy something new."

In sum, consultants are perceived by managers we identify as controlling clients as opportunistic and usually not knowledgeable enough for an agency's demand. The hiring of consultants is often a result of an irrational process rather than a way for the agency to receive competence and knowledge. Therefore, it is important for our respondents to keep consultants on an arm-length's distance. A manager that buys MCS could be accused of not thinking rationally, creating a psychosocial stress, increasing the importance of legitimate use. The combination of high relational and performance uncertainties perceived by controlling clients affect how consultants should be used, and to which types of projects. The client archetype's view can be summarized by the following quote.

> Int_6: "Our agency has a restrained attitude to consultants, especially when it comes to strategy, because that's our responsibility. That can never come from consultants. Our Director General doesn't want them too close, lurking around, but feels we have that height and competence ourselves. However, we use consultants for surveying processes or evaluations, that kind of… bases for analyses."

5.1.2.1 Evaluations

Int_11 evaluate projects informally, and the evaluation is dependent on whether the consultant takes the initiative. Why this is comes down to changing factors within the organization that can render evaluations obsolete, as mentioned by Clark (1995). Director Generals being replaced is perceived to be the most influential cause. When a DG is replaced, the organization often undertakes substantial changes with the new DG where old projects are substituted for new, leaving no time for evaluations.

5.1.3 The Instrumental Clients

The interviewees we have identified as instrumental clients have a different perception of uncertainties when it comes to hiring consultants. Relational uncertainties are often acknowledged as medium to high but are not considered as difficult to handle as controlling clients consider them. Our respondents rather see it as a part of the game and something the client has a responsibility to handle.

Int_15: "I think you just have to realize that a consultant is a consultant… The consultant's job is not to make it the best 'krona-for-krona' deal for the government, the consultant's job is to sell. So, it's just up to you to be aware of what you get when you're buying help from consultants."

For this segment, handling the perceived relational uncertainty is expressed as rather a question about the proficiency and maturity of the customer. Since they express that one must realize that they as clients and the consultants can have incongruent goals, they must be careful in specifying the goals and frame of the project for the consultant. If not, the consultant might try to expand the project or enrichen themselves on the cost of their organization, making it more rational to do the project internally.

Int_15: "You must have a really close contact with the consultants. 'I want this type of management team, I want us to get to here', and be super clear about it. Then, start working yourself when you think they're done. Even if the consultant says 'well, I think you need a couple of more sessions', you can say 'I'm good, I'll take it from here'."

Int_4: "My starting point is that it's almost always better to do things internally, because you get these incidental findings […] If you let consultants discover them, they want to either take them home with them or sell them to us in a later stage… so the starting point for us is that internally is better."

However, performance uncertainties are generally low among the identified instrumental clients. The rigid procurement process functions as a hedge towards performance risk. Consultants from winning firms are perceived to be quite knowledgeable and competent, but due to their conflicting interests, must be handled with care and control. It is again up to the hiring organization and manager to have the purchasing maturity to be completely clear in the specifications of the project and have regular mechanisms to control that the project is going in the wanted direction.

Int_9: "I'll always ask 'What have you done within this area before, how have you done it, and can you show me concrete results?' Because many management consultants say they have done a business plan. So what? What are the results? Many people can do visions and ideas, but what are the effects? Many firms got cut by those decision criteria."

Int_15: "You need to really define incredibly precise from the start what you need as an agency, which parts you want to own and do yourself and in which parts there's value of the consultant. You need to be clear about the expectations of the consultant and have a close eye on the project development pretty high up in the management."

If managers are clear about why they use consultants and rig the projects to remain control, the instrumental clients express that they see consultant's expertise as a way to enrichen the organization. The client organization is by our respondents usually perceived as knowledgeable but could be in need of occasional specialized competence that is regarded as inefficient to have in-house, a pair of (competent) extra hands or as a way to deepen internal knowledge.

Int_10: "Let's say that we need to calculate X and we feel this is a big job, we don't have the resources to do it ourselves. Then we let someone else do it. As long as we can interpret the results, which we can because we have the competency. So yeah, we use them as a helping hand and a second opinion."

Int_4: "To be a manager in the public sector today is pretty rough, it's quite multifaceted assignments. […] In this balance between being a manager of organizational development, having personnel responsibility and directing production - maybe not all are genuinely skilled and competent in working with X that way. Then we often can use support in that kind of work."

Legitimate use of consultants for these individuals thus demands a thorough process and a clearly defined need. Interviewees describe that a perceived legitimate use of consultants is crucial for the project and its results to be accepted by the environment. Furthermore, it helps to reduce relational uncertainties and help facilitate better results.

Int_1: "I think that it's incredibly important that the work is owned by the management, and that you don't uncritically buy what the consultant comes with, but that you do your own analysis and decide that yes, this is something we stand for".

Int_12: "Some managers rather wanted to get away from their responsibility and thought using a consultant would relieve them from it, because now it's the consultant's job. I think they surrender to their role as a manager. Already there you have differences. There are extremely positive examples, and extremely negative examples."

Int_3: "If we're not clear about what we want it's no good for us, but it's not good for the consultant either. If you agree what the cooperation is about and what it should lead to, you'll have a better relation as well."

In sum, our instrumental clients have a quite neutral view of consultants. Incongruent goals are expressed as a part of the deal when hiring consultants, and as long as the client can create legitimacy by having a clear understanding of why and how MCS are used – then consultants can provide important knowledge and support to the client organization. One respondent can summarize the group's view as,

Int_15: "In my world, there's no reason to hire external help if you haven't defined for yourself why it is a priority to bring in help. That's the key for success, not a vague feeling of that something needs to be done. […] It really needs to emanate from your own reality, what is it that you need to take time and money to analyze and receive help with?"

5.1.3.1 Evaluations

The Instrumental Clients is the only group where some agencies formally evaluate consultants. This might be because of the segment's size but is also congruent with the framework's description of these clients to perceive themselves as competent enough, in this case, to evaluate consultants. Furthermore, the perceived

competence together with a trust of the procurement system might also be part of the reason why they perceive less uncertainties than several other segments.

5.1.4 The Trustful Clients

Managers sorted as trustful clients experience low levels of both relational and performance uncertainties and express that consultants are loyal, knowledgeable professionals whom the client organization can learn from.

> Int_20: *"If you are working with this many actors, you need to understand how they think and work wider. So, I am going on about consultants all the time, but I've noticed that there's an immaturity, people are nervous. They say, "we can handle this ourselves",* **but no**, *we cannot do this at all! It's just too complex! That's another area where you can use consultants, in this case, to describe many actors in complex systems."*

This DG perceives the own organization as unable to handle certain issues. The employees lack competence in areas with high complexity where consultants are perceived to have better capabilities. Hiring consultants for complex problems and strategic issues relating to the agency is hence perceived as legitimate. However, the Director Generals acknowledge that the organization might disagree with the legitimacy of the undertaken projects. But, from the Director Generals' point-of-view is the disagreement created by the organization's lack of understanding of the problems at hand.

> Int_20 *"The way I understand it, I see that my employees are not going to make it. Then they question me, "this is something* **we** *can do". NO. So where's that PowerPoint then? I've been asking about it for a year but I still haven't received a useable one. relates to our administration. It's still not here. But the consultants know this stuff, and they're great! If you dare to use them."*

> Int_5: *"When it comes to management it's a bit funny, it can almost become a hot topic about 'Well, do we really need this?' At least we have some insight within the natural science community that we can undervalue social sciences, but still, it can still clash that way, 'What is this nonsense? That's not a real model from real science!'"*

Instead, the interviewees can put themselves into the role of the consultant and appreciate the competencies they bring to the agency, either as a role-model or as a complementary competence.

> Int_5: *"I had a pretty close contact with the consultant. Because I knew that when she walks out of there she's going to wonder about what's happening and think about how to plan next session, because I was thinking about those things when I had the "consultant hat" on."*

> Int_20: *"The most important thing is that you get it down and presented in a nice and professional way. These management consultants, what they do are so freakishly good PowerPoints! They describe*

the questions so clearly. We in the government administration are so academic, we write long texts

that go on forever."

Working close with the consultants to learn from their knowledge and competence is perceived as an effective way to tap into the skills, as suggested by Pemer & Werr (2013). However, despite the Director Generals' appreciation of consultants, they are clear about the boundaries of using consultants.

Int_5: "Regarding some questions we have learnt (from consultants) and they certified us in methods

that we use in the organization. We have a handful of people that been trained in using a certain

methodology that then run internally"

Int_20: "We should use them to find the right path forward. It's lethal to let consultants come even

close to taking over the exercise of public authority."

5.1.4.1 Evaluations

The trustful clients, as the controlling ones, are few and the results need further research to be generalizable. With that said, our results are in line with how the segment is described by theory. However, the trust they have for consultants is more due to identifiability with consultants and less with any felt inferiority towards them, that in theory is put forward as sometimes the case. Both the interviewees have experience working as consultants themselves and hence it perhaps is natural that the familiarity they perceive with consultants translates into trust.

5.1.5 A new group? - Symbolic Clients

The final identified group consists of agencies that do not fit under any of the four client groups from Pemer & Werr (2013). They all share similarities with the four categories, but express opinions that exclude them from being placed in just one of the epitomes. Often, this is due to the interviewee contradicting itself during the interview – or having a view of why consultants are used that is a more important driver than the factors behind the original model. This could for instance be the symbolic aspect of using consultants, as we will explore more. The interviewees acknowledge that the system of public procurement is important but also creates difficulties.

Int_7: "[...]But it's really hard, and that's why it's hard to do a specification about this when you

have a procurement. I think it probably goes wrong sometime. But it's kind of like hiring an

individual, it's not easy."

Int_7: "A Director General cannot have preferences concerning which consultant to hire. It's in our

system, it's illegal. To secure experiences and listen to the organization (about consultants) is good in

theory and sounds good, even though it's empty phrases."

The segment use consultants for aspects important to the agency and the performance uncertainties are perceived to be low. Failure of projects is not blamed on the consultants, but rather than on the hiring

organization. On the other hand, there are criticisms towards consultants and their lack of understanding of the public sector.

> *Int_2: "My experience is that you need management consultants when you're doing extensive changes or changes that are difficult."*

> *Int_7: "It was what the Director General wanted. The result was a catastrophe for the agency, but that wasn't because of the consultant. They delivered what was ordered. […] They (the consultants) were active and helped with our strategies in the top management, and I was there, and it wasn't unclear at all. Afterwards, if it's unsuccessful, you like to say that it was unclear. But I haven't experienced that has been unclear when you started."*

> *Int_7: "My perception is that consultants can't understand this. I don't have the ability to teach them either."*

> *Int_2: The credibility for the change process is lowered in the organization. Because you'll always have resistance to change, and then it's perceived that they come from the outside and don't really understand how we think or work. Instead, they just come with some weird concept that doesn't fit us."*

However, there is an expressed notion of using consultants for reasons other than usually expressed. Consultants are believed to be used to signal progress to the agency's stakeholders, as the government or the employees. This is not necessarily due to the symbolic role of consultants, rather that managers or Director Generals want progress in projects and processes.

> *Int_2: "And like this, everything has its own time. You can't come back after five years and say, 'let's do like we did five years ago'.*

> *Int_7: "You cannot blame the consultant, they have delivered what was ordered. You want to show quick resolution and change direction. Most of the time, I think you receive that. But often is the focus unbalanced compared to the operations."*

> *Int_2: "Because it's tangible, it's visible and something concrete. As a manager, you want to be able to show that you've done something. Then, I think it's easy that it becomes a restructuring, while the staff go, 'oh well, here comes a new Director General - then we'll restructure'."*

The interviewees instead indicate that the wishes for "quick-wins" in an agency context are differentiated from the slow-moving operations, tied to the responsibility as a public institution. That is, the projects become more about the symbolic aspect than affecting the actual agency.

> *Int_2: [About restructurings] "But it's the same tasks and the same staff. No, I think it's much more important to think about how you work together than in which "box" in the system you're placed."*

> *Int_7: "Well, which management would say 'Let's solve this old issue no one been able to figure out?' Not one. You say, 'we're facing a new problem', regardless if it's the same old fucking [sic!] problem all the time. So, I think that it's the classic management trick, that someone needs to say that we're having a new challenge and we need to be ready to bring it on. […] But in an agency, I'm having a really hard time understanding how things can be new challenges."*

The usage of consultants is instead tied to the individual needs of the hiring manager, either personal or the hiring manager's perception of what the organization requires.

> *Int_7: "Now, I've worked close to our Director Generals for a long time, and maybe identified with them, but I genuinely believe it's dependent on the individual. I don't think you'll get a Director General to say, "I did this for my sake", it's not in the purpose of the career. […] I'm sympathetic for using consultants, but one should be honest to yourself about why you do it. Generally, I'm not against it, but I think it's an individual need."*

5.1.5.1 Evaluations

The symbolic clients either don't evaluate (Int_2) or evaluate without following actions to learn and gain knowledge (Int_7). The numbers are once again few, but the lack of evaluation is corresponding with the high degree of symbolism these agencies put in using consultants. The agencies seem to involve consultants to signal to the organization more than focus on the results bottom-line.

6. Discussion

In this section, we discuss our findings further and combine the empirical results with the analysis from our theoretical framework. We highlight our main findings and provide our interpretations in relation to our literature review.

6.1. A new type of client?

No ambivalent clients have been found and while we cannot pin-point the underlying reasons for this, there might be a higher degree of skepticism and uncertainty towards consultants in the state sector. This could be part of the reason for why as many are found in the instrumental client group as well. Instead we came across two agencies that we were unable to fit in under any of the templates form our framework. One should be careful to jump to conclusion based on this since it is only two out of twenty, but could this maybe be an indicator of a new client type that is only existing in the state sector and not in the private?

6.2 Differently perceived uncertainties

Some differences in how the client types experience uncertainty have been found that are specific for the state sector. We have shown that controlling clients experience a higher relational uncertainty due to the rigid state sector procurement system with the consequence that you have less control over who you end up with. They also experience a higher performance uncertainty due to a perceived lack of knowledge about the public sector among consultants.

For Instrumental clients however, the procurement system leads to a lower degree of performance risk since these clients see it as a qualitative guarantee. That if the procurement is conducted based on quality rather than price, you will end up with the most competent one.

6.3 Notes on client types in the public sector.

The vast majority of our interviewees were categorized as instrumental clients. These clients perceive consultants to be useful, under the condition that the client has a complete understanding of why and how the consultants are used and perceive medium to high relational uncertainties along with low levels of performance uncertainties.

It might not be a surprise that many clients are classified as instrumental. The state sector has undergone several reforms, increasing organizational complexity, as shown in our introduction, while streamlining the agencies rendering them in a state of "specialization and expertization" (Furusten & Werr, 2005). Streamlining imply a smaller workforce and that competencies seldom used are not efficient to have in-house, and instead brought in by consultants (Furusten & Werr, 2005), something that in mentioned among

several and describes in our result section. Hence, there are multiple areas for consultants to be used – under each of the three categories 'competencies', 'resources' and 'external view'. These areas correspond to the functionalistic perspective's view of the consultant as a knowledge worker and transmitter of professional knowledge (Armbrüster, 2006; Schein, 2002; Wilkinson, 1995), providing extra staff (Tisdall, 1982) and adding creativity and "disrupting dominant orders" (Clegg et. al, 2004. p.36). Hiring consultants could therefore be a rational way of handling this new complex environment.

Simultaneously, the large segment of instrumental clients in our sample also shared views stemming from the critical perspective. Relational risks were perceived to be medium to high among the client-type, corresponding to the view of consultants' as having an aptitude for opportunistic behaviour (Armbrüster, 2006). The instrumental segment expressed the importance of being extremely precise what you need in order to avoid that consultants through rhetoric convince them of other needs, as suggested by Nikolova & Devinney (2012). The emphasis on staying in charge of projects and leading them from within the agency, and that quality is dependent on the client's purchase maturity is in line with the contextual perspective's questioning of clients as marionettes and instead that the relationship is dependent on situational characteristics as the clients' MCS purchase maturity (Jung & Kieser, 2012; Sturdy, 1997).

Views from the critical perspective dominated among the controlling clients. Consultants were perceived as more about selling and impression management, than delivering value to the clients – as suggested by Alvesson (1994), Clark (1995) and Clark & Salaman (1998). Furthermore, is MC as an "unbounded profession" with fuzzy borders (Alexius & Pemer, 2013; Alexius, 2007; Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003) a source of relational uncertainties for controlling clients. Finally, the "outsider" role without formal accountability, as proposed by Sturdy (2011), is a reason to keep consultants at arm-length's distance.
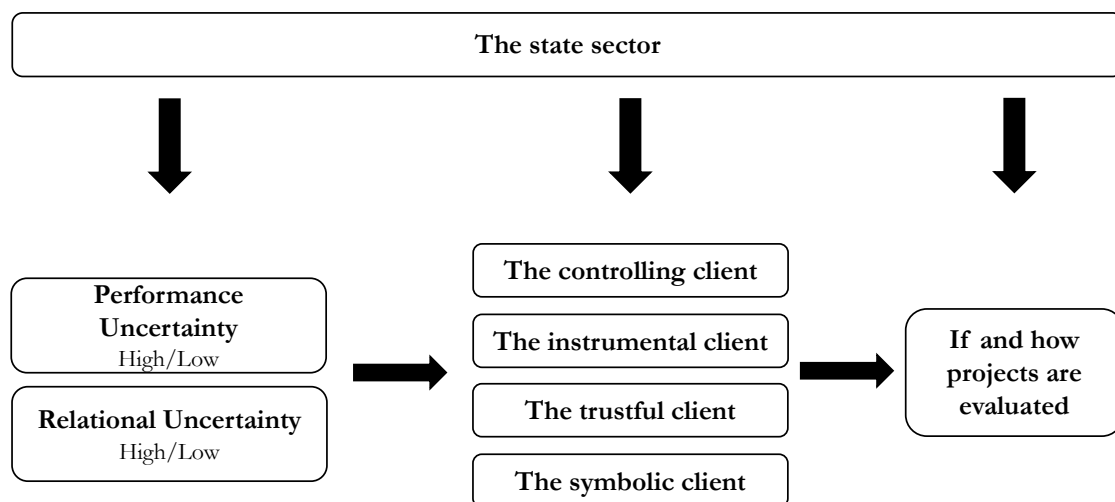

Figure 5 – The refined framework

6.4 Rationale for using MCS

The most common reason to hire management consultants in our sample was to develop executive teams and management capabilities. This could be an effect by the more complex demands on leaders in the public sector today, as noted by one interviewee. We could not detect significant patterns when comparing reasons for using MCS with the different client-types, however two smaller segments (controlling and trustful clients) showed indicators of using consultants in more distinct ways. Controlling clients used them more for resource reasons, while trustful clients focused on the knowledge capacities and competence of consultants. The results stem from small group sizes but is in line with the framework from Pemer & Werr (2013) and the views corresponding to either the functionalistic and critical perspectives.

6.5 Evaluations

No clear patterns were found in how perceived uncertainties affect the way in which state agencies evaluate the consultants.

Most of the interviewed agencies did not perform formalized or standardized evaluations ex-post, other than the ones required by law, which regards the procurement process rather than the consultant itself. Instead, the usual evaluation method was an informal assessment as discussing how the project went. Several of our respondents noted that they would like to see more formalized evaluation routines, but due to resources and the system surrounding procurement, project management and feedback, these do not take place. The findings are congruent with literature focused on the private sector stating that evaluations are important, but often overlooked, done in haste or superficially (Kubr, 2002, p.248). We could identify that "softer" areas of consulting, as support to managers and group development, were solemnly evaluated by informal qualitative measures. The area is supposed to be difficult to formalize in evaluations leaving the assessment, as noted by Sturdy (2011), "subject to considerable variation and contestation".

Projects being reshaped during process is in the literature found to dilute goals and evaluations (Pemer, 2008). This was not found to be a problem in the public sector because if projects evolve too far from ex-ante specifications, agencies are demanded to re-do the procurement process to align with this new goal. Instead, options are to keep or cancel the project. Hence, a changing environment to a longer project becomes an issue (Clark, 1995; Jung & Kieser, 2012; Pemer, 2008). That is, the result of a project is no longer what the agency needs, and tweaks of the project makes formal evaluations difficult. An interesting finding is that some agencies expressed a resistance to these large projects, and instead focused on a more agile process, where formal evaluations ex-post are replaced by continuous corrections during the process. The expressed idea was that if the agency has control of the process, ex-post evaluation becomes superfluous.

Additionally, for a sample of our agencies the consultants were used as "sanity checks" and as a confirmation of ideas, a form of legitimization towards the organization (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001), something Steiner,

Kaiser & Reichmuth (2017) describe as "scapegoating" in cases with sensitive projects. This use might lower the ambition for formalized evaluations.

6.6 Notes on the state sector as context

We have identified several areas where we perceive the state context to be influential. Director Generals are employed by the politics and serve tenures of 6+3 years. Several DGs have mentioned the importance of delivering results quickly during their tenure. Using consultants to facilitate organizational change is common (Kipping & Clark, 2012; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001) and is in the private sector motivated because "change is a motivator in itself" (Sturdy, 1997). In this context, DGs could hire consultants as symbolism and signal progress to their employees and other stakeholders, as the government (Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001). As some interviewees have mentioned, the symbolic action might be more influential than the results – rendering formal evaluations redundant.

Additionally, the state as context influence how projects are undertaken. The rigid procurement process is viewed as consuming considerable time and resources leaving the system "front-loaded" with agencies spending resources planning and executing – and not assessing and evaluating. Our respondents link the front-loaded project management to an unofficial incentive system, where agencies are judged on their output, not the results. The demands for how projects are undertaken in the state sector can help explain the few formal evaluations found.

Lastly, we received inconclusive feedback on characteristics of the state sector compared to the private sector. Some interviewees expressed that state agencies lack a sense of customer and the need for efficiency that exists in the private sector. These individuals related a "non-use of evaluations" concerning consultants (Wollman, 2013) to a system where underperforming agencies receive more funding following fiscal years, lowering the incentive for efficiency. One or two, on the other hand, expressed a deep concern regarding the responsibility of tax-money and how each SEK's effect should be evaluated.

6.7 Patterns between the areas

Interestingly enough, we could not detect significant patterns between the group of factors. Although we identified four distinct client-types in the state sector, these did not use consultants for clearly separate motives. Only the trustful clients hired consultants solemnly for one reason, their knowledge and competence, while in the other segments further uses existed. Furthermore, we did not find a conclusive pattern between client-type and evaluation routines. While the instrumental clients was the only segment where we found agencies using formal evaluation, this could be due to the segment's size. For example, controlling clients did not evaluate consultants differently than trustful clients – something one might have expected considering the segments' dissimilar attitudes towards consultants.

7. Conclusions

In this last chapter, we summarize our conclusions from the discussion above regarding the purpose of the thesis. Following thereafter are our theoretical contributions, identified managerial implications and a review of possible limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research.

Our purpose with this thesis was to examine how hiring managers in Swedish state agencies perceive uncertainties when recruiting management consultants, and whether these uncertainties affect ex-post evaluations.

In answering the research question, we have identified four distinct groups of clients among the interviewed state agencies depending on how they perceive uncertainties when hiring management consultants. These groups correspond to the most part with previous findings from the private sector, however a new group of clients is found. Based on our findings, state agencies act mainly as Instrumental Client. The majority of clients were identified as experiencing medium to high relational risks and low performance risks in the interaction with consultants. This group uses consultants for a variety of projects but stress the importance of control and clearly specified project demarcations. Furthermore, three groups of evaluation routines have been detected. Most clients evaluate management consulting projects informally by discussing internally within the agency. However, we have not been able to clearly link the level of uncertainties clients perceive to certain evaluation processes. We could hence not detect patterns between client types and the extent of ex-post evaluations. The state context is identified to be a factor influencing both how managers perceive uncertainties and how projects are evaluated. The rigid procurement process affects the client-types perception of uncertainties in different ways than in the private sector, and the control and incentive system in the state sector affect how projects are evaluated.

7.1 Theoretical contributions and practical implications

The study contributes to two separate underdeveloped research areas we believe have both theoretical and practical importance.

Theoretically, we contribute in various ways. First, to the client-focused and contextual research in the area of management consulting services. By analyzing the client-consultant interactions in the state sector we broaden the knowledge of hiring clients through insights of the distribution of client-types, their perceived uncertainties when hiring management consultants and some sources to these uncertainties. Second, we contribute to the contextual research by analyzing broader effects of these uncertainties than the execution of projects. This is done through investigating effects on an organizational level, in our case, evaluation processes. Third, we add some insights into an empirically inadequately researched area, namely how public agencies evaluate MCS.

Although studies focused on either uncertainties or evaluation methods could have provided more conclusive findings on the two separate subjects, we provide insights by combining the two having practical relevance for stakeholders. On the state side, we find that only three agencies follow a formal evaluation process considering MCS. Even without a generalization to the entire state sector, the findings provide an indication of how state agencies evaluate MCS, a knowledge hitherto not readily available according to the Swedish National Audit Office. Indications that agencies find formal evaluations difficult to perform and overlook due to resources can aid government support to the agencies.

Furthermore, increasing knowledge about clients in the public sector can enable management consulting firms to develop more customized approaches towards the sector. An understanding of the uncertainties clients face can assist consulting firms to bridge the perceived risks. Given the increasing importance of the public sector can these insights hold practical value for consulting firms.

7.2 Limitations

The first limitation of the current study is the self-selected sample, in that agencies either accepted or refused our inquiry. The limitation is hard to circumvent considering that we interview clients and hence need their input. Nonetheless, it might affect our findings. For the main study, we contacted 51 government agencies and 20 agreed to our request, leaving an acceptance rate of 40%. The reasons behind the 60% refusal-related nonresponse could be factors unrelated to our study, as a lack of time, but could also be due to an unwillingness to talk about, for instance, evaluation routines.

Secondly, we have in all instances but one talked to one individual per agency. This person has in most cases been a Director General or Deputy General, which we have concluded are highly influential in this matter. However, conflicting views certainly exist in organizations. We might have received different answers concerning perceptions of uncertainties and evaluation routines if we included a larger sample of individuals from each organization. Furthermore, the interviewees all have some stake in the matter. Even though the interviews were conducted anonymously might the interviewed top managers, who usually hire the consultants, be reluctant to speak freely about aspects they perceive would reflect poorly on them. Managers and employees not directly involved in the hiring of consultants could have a different opinion about the issue. Considering this, we think our respondents have been relatively open with us providing a range of views and experiences.

7.3 Future research

The current study taps in to several areas suitable for further research. While the thesis has aspired to examine how perceptions among clients in the state sector influence the extent of assessments of management consulting projects, further research is needed on the topic. We have identified five primary areas of future interest.

First, which factors influence clients' perceptions? What we have observed are already conceived notions situated in belief systems within the individual clients. A topic to pursue further remains about how these perceptions are created. How do factors as education, educational field, previous experience with consultants, work experience in different sectors and potentially a background within consulting affect the individuals' perception of management consultants? This would expand the previously neglected field of client-centric research.

Second, we did not find conclusive answers to how the MCS client-archetypes affect evaluation routines. However, more studies on the effects of the client types on project outcomes is needed.

Third, the thesis investigates how actors in the public sector evaluate management consulting services. This subject is empirically underdeveloped and future exploratory research could shed light on the routines the public sector applies to MCS.

Fourth, an empirical finding from the thesis is that many interviewees stated that they use management consultants less for "traditional areas" as organizational structures and processes, and more for leadership and executive team development. An area of interest to investigate is whether this is a new paradigm in management consulting to the public sector.

Finally, even though they are few in numbers, we have two agencies that do not seem to fit in under one of the established client types. Are there different groups of clients in the state sector than in the private sector and what would this imply for the actors operating here?

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Appendix 1 – Participant Sampling

Interview	Position	Date	Length	Type
Int_1	DG	9-mar-18	40 min	Telephone
Int_2	DG	14-mar-18	68 min	Face to face
Int_3	Org.manager	15-mar-18	70 min	Face to face
Int_4	Deputy DG	16-mar-18	58 min	Face to face
Int_5	DG	16-mar-18	50 min	Face to face
Int_6	Org. manager	21-mar-18	90 min	Face to face
Int_7	Deputy DG	21-mar-18	90 min	Face to face
Int_8	DG	26-mar-18	40 min	Telephone
Int_9	Op. coordinator	27-mar-18	91 min	Face to face
Int_10	DG	27-mar-18	46 min	Telephone
Int_11*	Op. coordinator	28-mar-18	49 min	Face to face
Int_12	Deputy DG	3-apr-18	57 min	Face to face
Int_13	Ord. manager	4-apr-18	60 min	Face to face
Int_14	DG	6-apr-18	45 min	Telephone
Int_15	DG	11-apr-18	52 min	Telephone
Int_16	DG	11-apr-18	45 min	Telephone
Int_17	Dev. manager	13-apr-18	66 min	Telephone
Int_18	DG	20-apr-18	42 min	Telephone
Int_19	DG	25-apr-18	75 min	Face to face
Int_20	DG	25-apr-18	46 min	Telephone
Int_21	DG	27-apr-18	59 min	Face to face

*Int_11 was a Follow up Interview in the same State Agency as Int_3

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide

The topics and bullet-points below were used as support for us during the interviews to make sure that we did not miss an important area. However, being semi-structured, both the authors and the interviewee were free to explore interesting field not in the interview guide. In certain interviews we asked all the questions below, and in some we circulated longer around a certain topic of interest. In general, most questions got answered in all interviews to secure comparability between the interviews.

A. Presentation
Hi and thank you for taking time to see us.
- A short presentation of ourselves.
- All answers are anonymized.
- Can we record the conversation to transcribe it later?
- Present our approach into the research area, our interests and how we came to work with the subject
- Go through relevant definitions, as what constitutes a management consultant and applicable services etc.

B. General
- Please let us know about your general view of management consultants. Has it changed during your career?
- What's your experience of working with management consultants? How has that influenced your perception of management consultants?
- Could you let us know about typical projects where management consultants could be recruited?
- How do you as organization usually make use of management consultants?
- Do you notice any trends in how management consultants are used?
- Tell us about a recent project where management consultants were used.

C. Goal specification
- How do you work with goals when using management consultants?
- How does the type of project at hand influence how you set goals?
- Do you usually use quantitative or qualitative goals, and why?
- What is usually the task of the consultant? "Problem solving or goal achieving"?

- **D. Uncertainties**
- What kind of tasks do you recruit consultants for?
- How much freedom are the consultants given?
- How do you monitor the consultants' progress?
- To what degree are consultants seen as part of the own organization?
- How does the procurement process affect how you perceive the use of management consultants?

- **E. The evaluation phase**
- Are consultants and/or their projects evaluated?
- How?
- Why/Why not? Any non-formal evaluation? / By who? Individually or in group?

- **F. Learning**
- Do you try to learn new skills or knowledge from the consultants during projects, and if so, how?
- Do you have a routine for it?
- How do you manage knowledge that enters the organization from this kind of project?
- How is the next procurement process affected by experiences from prior?

- How do you analyze the value of a service if you don't have the competence of performing it in house?

- **G. About the consultant**
- What makes a good / less good consultant?
- What could be difficult / easy when hiring and working with consultants?
- Do you have examples of when the co-operation was unusually good/bad? Why was that?

- **H. Other**
- How do you measure things?
- What is a "job well done"?
- How do you think other agencies work with and evaluate consultants?
- Do you share experiences and learnings between agencies? If so, how?
- What would you change if you were free to change anything regarding how the organization works? (And how it works with consultants?)