

Consulting by academics: Many forms, many opinions

Jan A.C. Klakurka, C.Dir., CPA, CA, MBA, CMC.
Assistant Professor, Management and Organizational Studies
Huron University College
1349 Western Road, London, On, Canada, N6G1H3
And
Bill Irwin, MPA, PhD.
Assistant Professor, Management and Organizational Studies
Huron University College
1349 Western Road, London, On, Canada, N6G1H3

Abstract:

In early 2015 the authors were invited to deliver a keynote address at a business-educator conference. As both were late entrants to the Academy they decided to speak on the value of how their previous professional experience enhanced theory in the classroom, creating a more grounded learning environment for their students. As they prepared their presentation, it became apparent to them that some aspects of their previous professional life were still active; both are still engaged in professional consulting in addition to their academic lives. As they worked through their presentation they had a gestalt moment, their experiences as *Consulting Academics* were near identical in nature. They chose to speak on the benefits and challenges of the Consulting Academic in the field of management education as this practices related to the students, their academic peers, the academy and themselves and their own academic practice. The following reflective paper highlights the benefits and challenges of the Consulting Academic.

Keywords: Academic consulting, research-practice gap, student consulting project, Consulting Academic, professional consultant, management consultant

Introduction:

Within the academy the term “consulting” takes on nebulous connotations. While traditionally the term referred to objective, external, advisory services provided by professionals, now in some post-secondary institutions and programs it has taken a different permutation, morphing into a form of *academic capitalism*. The more academic purest continues to view their peer engagement in professional consulting activities as detrimental to the philosophical core of academic research – a questionable pursuit of “filthy lucre” versus the nobler search for a neutral knowledge. We contend that there is a definite role for professional consulting by academics, especially as it defined by D’este et al. (2103) as “a promotion of... technical or organizational innovation” consistent with the researcher’s expertise and practice. By this definition, goals and outcomes of academics engaged in professional consulting does indeed parallel the conditions of more traditional academic research. In-point-of-fact professional consulting has been added to the list of activities that support tenure at some post-secondary institutions and programs.

Practice-Research Gap

The question remains: can academic consultancy produce the same type of object research as more traditional forms of academic enquiry? While consultants strive for objectivity, we contend that they may face more susceptibility to bias than academics. Consultants do need to respond in some manner to their clients’ real-world needs. That being acknowledged, it needs also be stated that consultants are engaged in their practice specifically because they can bring to any issue or challenge an objective position from the standpoint of informed outsider.

While consulting may take time from more traditional forms of research it has been shown to positively contribute to research productivity in reasonable doses (Mitchell & Rebne, 1995) providing a benefit for researcher, university, and society through: an extension of research interests, creating new channels of opportunism and connections with the broader community; and, providing unexplored and unimagined sources of collaboration. So despite a research-practice gap (Bansal et al., 2012) that the consultant-academic may need to accommodate on some occasions, status quo silos are unlikely to alleviate resulting disconnects. Solutions for gap-closing activities range include ignoring, setting up intermediaries, and reliance on researcher integrity. While Bansal et al (2012) suggest creation of intermediaries between scholars and practitioners to bridge the chasm, the budgetary and practical constraints on a tiny liberal arts business faculty (in the author’s case, three full-time professors), may make such an option impractical at the institutional level. Other authors believe the gap is complimentary (Bartunek and Rynes, 2014). The literature more often discusses “the gap” in polarized terms – scholar vs. practitioner. The author’s espouse an “two-hat” model where meaning and interpretation are indeed client agreed, but subject to objective criteria and professional standards of consulting. The integrative Consulting Academic only progresses in the project work when bias gates are navigated and the research methodology remains logical.

Consultant Academic Mitigation Through Adherence to Codes of Ethics

In research, all academics seemingly strive for elimination of bias. The activities of the Consulting Academic,

by the uninformed business professor or even the non-business department academic colleague, may appear to contradict this research prerogative. In reality practical research approaches and various forms of consulting are known to be alive-and-well in the STEM subjects (see Perkmann and Walsh, 2008) and the authors contend in business research as well. Academics navigate ethics committees regularly during their writing. Consulting Academics face the same hurdles, as they are also imbued with professional obligations. The reconciliation between the academic and professional worlds provides a richly objective and secure environment within which to both hypothesize and solve.

Case in point, one of this article's authors is responsible to no less than four professional bodies, each of whom rescind credentials for ethical breaches that include those same independence and objectivity biases other academics see as the cornerstone of their research. We contend that is a higher standard of test, as the confiscation of an academic's Ph.D. for bias is practically unheard of. Professionals, including designated Consulting Academics, have no such security. Ethical breaches can lead to hard-earned designations being forever lost. A true profession's self-governing nature itself ensures bias toward member actions cannot be ignored during the member's disposition of duties. The Consulting Profession's global presence, codes of conduct (differ slightly by nation) provide a Consulting Academic with the ethical guidance and support to: turn-away biased projects, intervene with clients in an objective manner, capture and analyze information free of influence, structure questioning in line with non-consulting-based research, and report results free of "window dressing".

In one author's practice, a charity client wanted to expand their organizational model to other collaborators. This private foundation client had a specialized process within the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) space, quite useful to big business in general. The client wanted to both grow by leveraging the "business" model into new partner organizations while remaining true to its charity purpose as defined by Canadian tax law. By working with this client in this scenario the Consulting Academic (the author) became better informed both in the realm of strategy and taxation - two diverse topics taught by him in his liberal arts business program.

While traditional academic focused strategy research can address issues of competitiveness espousing growth, with the additional reality of an on-the-ground perspective of a practicing consultant the research can take on another dimension. In this case, one may miss the tight constraints over activities placed on such a foundation to be in alignment with regulation if approached from only a theoretical perspective. Similarly, the knowledge necessary of the full-time, dedicated accounting professor focused on taxation may not necessarily extend beyond personal tax credits and tax payable. Our contention is that, in these type of scenarios, to add value to students (which we contend from experience they are seeking) requires real world consulting experience. In the post-Enron Big Four accounting world, public accounting is separated from consulting of all varieties, including taxation. Having experience advising on diverse issues, like the above example, can reflect realistic client issues, producing better and more readily applicable student learning outcomes, and focusing class

time on what is professionally relevant and cutting-edge as opposed to more traditionally pedantic pedagogy.

Advising elevates the Consulting Academic out of the vocational malaise that certain disciplines, including tax, can succumb to. In the authors' example, applied expertise in charity taxation (specifically purpose-adherence) informs the more research-based strategy decisions facing the client in an integrated fashion that could not be achieved in isolation. For the Consulting Academic, it is these integration points that inform further research questions such as applicability of for-profit CSR growth models to charities and non-profits. Moreover, as this brief engagement summary demonstrates, as post-secondary institutions require professors to strive for more cross-disciplinary learning, research and course offerings, consulting may help bridge the cross-departmental (or at least sub-disciplinary) divide.

A Win-Win-Win Approach

We contend that the Consulting Academic's work can provide positive benefits to four specific groups; the academic him/her self; the client; the student; and the academy.

Benefits for the Academic who consults

Clients provide a wealth of information regarding current practice and implementation challenges that can improve upon the evolving theoretical model design. This information becomes a source for *real world* case study material and as long as ethical issues are handled appropriately, a vehicle for testing theory. As such they can provide an invaluable opportunity to ground the participating academic's institutional research in practicality and act as a point of community contact for data gathering exercises. Bartunek and Rynes (2014) question whether the research-practice gap has been widened because scholarship is sometimes viewed as being only for scholars. Bansal et al (2010), Dave (2009) and others make the point that results of academic business research may not be presented in a manner familiar to practitioners. Certainly, client representatives at various levels of an organizations have different familiarity with concepts often used to present academic research results and interpretation, such as statistics. In client settings, these competencies will be found in junior business analysts in the strategy department, but less likely in the C-suite. Equally important, client interaction becomes potential occasion for pedagogical opportunities using experiential learning and a source of networking relationships for students. Both of these two points have been recently noted as key objectives for many post-secondary recruitment and retention efforts. Finally the consulting work itself can assist the enhancement of outcomes-driven funding applications. Again a growing requirement of many government research programs.

Benefits for the Clients of Consultant Academics

For clients, they will benefit from securing advice from academics that may be quite different than the services provided by traditional consulting firms, providing a fresh or unique perspective on the issues at hand. The academic consultant, with their academic research in mind, are more likely to strive for unique insights which precludes leveraging prior project work (a reality in the professional consulting world)

leading to more custom recommendations for the client. Working with the academic consultant may also provide the opportunity to early-adopt points of view at the cusp of the academic's research activities which could prove a source of advantage for the client vis a vis their real-world competition.

Other benefits to the client include a more personalized approach to the work. Academic consultants tend to work as individuals or in small teams of researchers. This model can be more nimble and lead to a better integrated understanding of the issues. The personalized approach can show the way to potentially better (and more than likely different) outcomes than the traditional professional leveraging a standard model approach. This slant will in all likelihood not lead to a "level-setting" for the clients to an industry standard.

Benefits for the Students of Consultant Academics

From our vantage point as management educators, we can firmly attest that the experiential opportunities brought to the class room through interactions between the academic consultant and clients tend to be more representative of the educational moments that our students' seek. As Dave (2009) concludes, consulting "enhances...expertise in the eyes of...students". They thirst for those instances where we can bridge theory with practice. The academic consultant can offer students coveted real-world knowledge that can distinguish them post-graduation and hone integrative thinking, especially when paired with experiential pedagogical approaches. From our experience, these approaches take many forms, including:

- Leadership opportunities
- Project management skills
- Data capture and analysis
- Communication
- Participation in development of research studies/cases

Our experience has been that "war stories" enhance the in-class experience. Currency and timeliness of consulting work validates applicability of syllabus content for the student and makes a more positive interactive learning environment for all.

Benefits for the Institution Employing Consultant Academics

As an outcomes view of higher education is appended to traditional knowledge-building, the consulting academic can lever relationships to make a substantial contribution in areas of institutional advancement and student retention. The Consulting Academic's relationships stand "at the ready" to be leveraged for experiential opportunities and knowledge of change management which can help to positively nudge the status quo. Given their up-to-date state of practice, the professional consultant can leverage competencies to offer timely solutions to institutional challenges that bypass rhetoric and sidestep politics.

All sides win; but the biggest benefactor is *the academic*, who researches, consults and teaches, with the given possibility of deeper relationships and insights

Case Study: Major Canadian University Real-Life Consulting Project

A good case-in-point on how academic-consultation principles can be translated into classroom pedagogy is demonstrated by the "Real Life Consulting Project" (RLCP) at a major Canadian university undergraduate business program. The premise of the project is to assist students in applying academic theory to practice. This project rejects the traditional delivery of management consulting courses that exclude the "consulting" element and are inherently disconnected from the practicalities of the profession. As Holler Phillips (2010) suggests, students can "expect to develop many positive characteristics", as shown above, when acting as a student consultant.

In 2015 the project entered its fourth year, and has lead to nine out of nine successful pro-bono projects last year alone. Aligning students with actual consulting opportunities allows for linkages between learning outcomes and student professional competency development. By taking on the role of consultant themselves, students can easier formulate analogies between classroom discussions and evaluation outcomes when they have non-abstract examples they have "lived." An unexpected positive outcome of this initiative is that is has led to enhanced marketing exposure for school - associated with the very pedagogical approaches and program options that students are demanding.

Lessons

The RLCP provides valuable insight and lessons on the general positive experience that the consulting academic can bring to the classroom experience. Clients in the program are ex-consultants and strategy VP's, so they know how to run projects and understand learning objectives. As Holler Phillips (2010) outlines, such programs have existed since the 1970's, but have moved from early Small Business Initiative projects to those serving facets of even billion-dollar enterprises as in the RLCP.

The program ensures that the client-professor relationship is strong, but not without required due diligence. There is a need for additional focus on front-end design, relationship building, and as Holler Phillips (2010) noted, designation of client sponsor. Experiential teaching partnerships of this nature can be lengthy and challenging. As noted, "it is easier to employ almost any other teaching method" (McCleary, 1984) than consulting projects.

In the RLCP model the professor acts as evaluator and mentor, but not problem-solver. Still, it is common for the professor to select teams and establish upfront process-based deliverables, as self-conceptualization raises fear in some students (Holler Phillips, 2010). The benefits to the students is the provision of a practical avenue to exercise skills traditionally learned in the academy; survey design, interview techniques, compiling statistics, and research; Holler Phillips (2010) suggests this offers exposure to contexts for life-long research capability development. Although the number of graduates of the RLCP in four years limits validation of this point in this case, student feedback describing the experience as "exactly mirroring real-life consulting" (made by now top-tier consultants) suggests this is true.

Reflective Practice: Issues to Expect in a Student Consulting Project

Issue One: Should Students Choose Pro-Bono Clients?

The answer to a student inquiry about selecting their own client is not easily answered with a “yes or no”. In practice, ownership of the client relationship can often mean the difference between rising to the top of the firm or stagnation – practically speaking if you can sell more work, you’ll go far. While this is a competency and longer-term learning outcome, foundational consulting skill development should take precedence. For the professor implementing a student consulting project, the question of owning the relationship is more complex. For the RLCP, classified as a Type 3 student consulting project (per the McCleary, 1984 model) all clients are close contacts of one of the author’s, with whom a long-term and positive relationship has existed. Clients demonstrate commitment to the students and to the process of learning the consulting profession and process through interviews. This allows the Consulting Academic, in this case, to maintain the relationship, to remain at a relative distance as student teams do their work during the term, to give out marks (clients can provide feedback, but do not have any direct say in marking students), and also to intervene with ease if necessary. Still the ultimate risk rests with the Consulting Academic. Institutional risk is mitigated with human resource interventions, while students hold little personal risk (discussed below).

When the RLCP was first introduced in Winter 2012, a Vice-Dean cautioned the professor to keep clients under close watch and to “play cards close to the chest”. Student marks were indeed “on the line” and faculty needed to have the power to intervene (just like a manager or partner would intervene in a real consulting firm). As Holler Phillips (2010), risk can stem from the inherent lack of definition at the early stages of a project. This can run counter to the need for structure of some students. However, the project design of efforts like the RLCP needs to ensure that students wishing to choose their own client understand that schools will not provide advanced standing for such outside work when completed. Clear distinction needs to be established in students that “outside work is outside work”, while the RLCP work is a form of Experiential Learning. By acting as the consulting firm partner-equivalent, the Consulting Academic straddles the somewhat dichotomous roles of ultimate responsible party and evaluator of student deliverable quality. Although some literature suggests monetary gain can lead to biased outcomes, the pro bono nature of the relationship ensures objectivity in student and professor.

Issue Two: Vetting the Students

Top-tier students (those interested in a top-tier consulting role) are distinguished with believable personal statements, shown on dynamic web-sites, which support a demonstrated career progression, worthy of someone at their stage of development as student and future professional. A ongoing challenge for professors looking to “staff-up” RLCP’s is to ensure the bar stays high, rebuffing those individuals unwilling and/or unable to demonstrate the requisite skills, drive, and appreciation for this unique pedagogical experience, from participating. Of course, this selection process leads to another issue for the Consulting Academic wishing to share his/her experience in the classroom, how to deal with students who “don’t make the cut”.

Issue Three: An Alternative to the RLCP for Students Unable to Advise as a RLCP Consultant

Occasionally, we see from our experience a minimal proportion of students unwilling and/or unqualified to participate in the RLCP. They may also choose not to participate for scheduling or genuine interest reasons. Still the vast majority of students that do not qualify are ones that the practicing consulting academic would be hesitant to “put in front of clients”. At this stage, a traditional academic that has not worked outside the Academy may disagree with this approach. In the “real world” it is critically important that each and every member of the consulting team maintain a professional standing in front of the client. This is often the consulting professor’s toughest challenge – it’s always a delight to teach engaged students as their swift intellect and wit keeps the professor on his/her toes. The challenge rests in providing these less engaged students a meaningful alternative to the traditional pedagogical approach within the same course, while accommodating at the same time those students that do not demonstrate the ability and / or desire for the experiential learning opportunity. The authors’ contention is that next to experiential learning of the RLCP variety, traditional lecture and memorization is ineffective and pedantic. This is especially true where professional judgment development is a professorial goal in teaching with RLCP-type methods (either the RLCP or some derivative approach). While the case learning model fits well within the gap between RLCP and traditional lecture, the challenge becomes one of case scope, context, and usefulness in extracting course deliverables from students. The authors’ experience is that utilizing an approach analogous to a business course group project is not a comparable challenge for a team of non-RLCP students. A series of challenges (cases) throughout the term provides a more consistent challenge and achieves the learning outcome of demonstrating an appropriate and representative consulting environment for students. Both time commitment and being at the disposal of a pro-bono client, even with a full complement of courses, enables a better learning outcome for RLCP students, with deliverables due according to the consulting process (i.e. proposal comes before analysis which comes before recommendations), throughout the term, culminating in a final deliverable presentation to clients and students. Having non-RLCP students do three or more large, complex cases with a consulting role and addressing relevant issues can provide close to the same time requirement and necessary rigour of analysis. Of course, such hypothetical situations can seldom replace the actual experience of sitting across from a client or facilitating a meeting with a client, but serve to offer an alternative where student schedules or simply the apprehension of working on a real project, as discussed by Holler Phillips (2010), are reasons for non-participation.

Reflection: How Consulting Impacts the Academy

The consulting academic, by the nature of their experience, brings a different mindset to the enterprise, a more open versus closed system approach. They are more apt to see the integrated organizational issues that can underpin new research questions and/or the broader program agenda. Given their open systems orientation, Consulting Academics’ case studies tend to be generally more multi-dimensional, providing students perspectives across diverse subject matter. Empson

(2013) is a shining example, in the authors' opinion, of a model business Consulting Academic - a broad and diverse pre-academic background in top-tier strategy consulting and investment banking, combined with research and teaching acumen. Fellow Consulting Academics should welcome not only direct expertise in the professional service vertical of such individuals, but also seek the wealth and depth of knowledge garnered on each past client project. The latter being the "treasure trove" of expertise and potential research questions. These individuals can present their research studies using client-palatable communication standards that in turn augment journal publication through the theory-practice bridge.

Advising clients can provide a "practical-critical eye" to evaluating the soundness of given theory. Being in practice reminds us to consider appropriate research design, providing critical oversight to where findings and approaches may not work, and pointing to where unanswered questions remain. Conversely academic standing provides credibility to potential clients, particularly when combined with industry/professional-experience. As clients evolve to assimilate new knowledge, academics' striving for unique contributions provide an antidote to stale and "over-leveraged" approaches utilized by traditional consultants. Finally academics are less prone to err on the side of advocacy and are better suited to transcend purely firm-level views of managerial issues.

Challenges for the Consulting Academic *Client Needs Should Drive What You Do*

As Bansal et al. (2012) noted in their research on academics engaged in consultative practice, scientific research is not necessarily what clients want, nor is it valued as highly by organizations to the extent of practical industry/firm-driven research by consulting firms. The communication of findings by consultants is usually plainer in language, lacking the nuance and robustness academic writing is better known for.

Academics may want to take on consulting roles (e.g. trusted advisor, strategist) for which they are unprepared. "Big wow" ideas and strategies are no longer as important to organizations, as the current business consulting climate needs continue to morph from vision to "arms-and-legs" issues. The consulting market is currently undergoing change: Only 20% of work is now strategy (Christensen, 2014) in nature. So, although "research-driven" consulting, as defined by Perkmann and Walsh (2008) is seen as both positively impacting research productivity and contributing "strategic advice" to clients, the challenge for Consulting Academics will be continuing to work in the "20%" area and avoiding much "opportunistic" consulting that may negatively affect research (Perkmann and Walsh, 2008) and be seen as "tactical".

Opportunities for the Consulting Academic *What the Consulting-Academic Brings to the Table*

Academics can ensure that consulting methodologies are sound, and act as the liaison between seemingly disparate components of complex systems. With strong client relationships, the academic can effectively act as a filter in assessing the value of scientific research to each unique client. As Perkmann and Walsh (2008) suggest, where the motive is

research opportunity, long-term relationships are vital precursor. As one of the authors notes, a recent strategy engagement was built on a twenty-plus year relationship. Moreover, as the authors suggest, imbedding decades-plus relationships in pedagogy through consulting projects results in observed positive outcomes. The Consulting Academic is well placed in this case, with a foot firmly planted in both realms. Academics can complement traditional communication with alternative, "client-ready" communications that still respect underlying scientific results. Dave (2009), provided an example of this approach by emphasizing the need for conciseness - the "one-pager". This can be seen simply as a more robust version of the academic abstract.

Like many professional consultants, the retainer-based "trusted advisor" may be the ambition of the Consulting Academic. We recommend a different tack, the need to keep to roles that leverage integrated research, practical, and academic skills while tackling real organizational challenges will better aid in acceptance of recommendations

Key Success Factors *How the Consulting-Academic Delivers Value*

Large professional firms are known for *their solution*, the Big Firm Approach to particular issues. The Consulting Academic has a major advantage over the "big" firms by avoiding the giving of "their" solution, and being open to a variety of new approaches. Such "canned" solutions not only bestow discredit on the profession of consulting as a whole, they could lead to untruths in consulting outcomes. As Mooken and Sugden (2014) caution, academics that fail to communicate truths are failing at "basic needs" of academic research and could succumb to subjectivity imposed by funders. However, for the Consultant Academic and professional, objectivity is the hallmark where "data driven" are words communicated regularly to clients at project outset through delivery. The sheer volume of "change management" and "implementation" work done by large firms suggests that status quo is not being advocated. In the authors' experience, research-informed recommendations that run counter to client's original musings and/or expectations are a virtual guarantee on every engagement. The notions of consultant as scapegoat and mere validator of pre-conceived outcomes has been myth, in our experience. The Consultant Academic is able to translate the theoretical and parochial into inclusive and implementable solutions. They are used to establishing research collaborations. While personality and ability to work well are key, the number of strategic relationships can be greater from an academic perspective.

How Consulting Informs a Research Agenda:

Perhaps for the Consulting Academic, the reason for advising, scoping, and taking writing time away from papers to compose statements of work, is obvious and summed up by the phrase "saying and doing are not equal". Or rather, the Consulting Academic has the inimitable balance of perspectives to contend that "saying < doing" with respect to understanding business needs and informing decisions. A consultant's perspective provides anecdotal evidence of where an organization rests along the compendium of issues. A "moderate" amount of consulting work also contributes to

research productivity (Mitchell and Rebne, 1995), as client issues can prompt research inquiry. For instance in strategic planning in practice, concepts that were indeed developed decades ago in an academic environment such as Porter's industry analysis (Porter, 1991) or Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) Blue Ocean Strategy, may be slow to take root in industry. Our forthcoming research will expand on this issue, specifically addressing the rarity of strategic foresight and futuring abilities in strategic planning departments.

Armed with knowledge of the literature, the Consulting Academic can assist a client in customizing and utilizing applicable research results suitable for a client at a specific point in time – and through “Phase 2 projects”, future periods of time. The oft narrow research questions of pure academic research and the corresponding high level and abstract nature of management research insights in areas like strategy, can enhance the difficulty of – and even seemingly ignore – implementation. Consulting provides the intimacy with the client to understand which of the academics research insights can be applied outright today and which must be placed “on hold” as change management, technology, or process issues are first overcome. The Consulting Academic is not merely an enhanced Project Manager, for the academic insights for which the Consulting Academic is guiding a client may not even be revealed due to complexity or even the risk of spoiling current, necessary steps in a client evolution.

Challenges/Ethical Issues

Two common problems that can potentially arise in consultant-client relationships and the Consultant Academic needs to be ethically aware of are: bias in research, and the failure of some recipients to disclose their ties--thereby preventing their audiences from considering the possibility of conflict or bias. Research bias can stem from attempting to meet clients needs in a non-objective fashions, which does both parties ill good. In this scenario, applying academy ethical practices is a benefit and advantage for the Consulting Academic.

From the institutional perspective ethical challenges for the Consulting Academic may stem from time allocation rules, conflict guidelines, and the use of resources. As they are being paid for their work (except in the case of pro bono real life consulting projects), unlike most traditional academic research, care needs to be taken to ensure that resources and time are accounted for accordingly – or a contribution is made to their institutional budget to reflect the utilization of same.

Issues regarding the nexus of time and commitment can be challenging. Harvard's conflict-of-commitment policy, for example, forbids faculty members to undertake activities that take excessive time or intellectual energy away from their research and teaching. The conflict-of-interest policy focuses on the risk that a faculty member might benefit financially from a research project, compromising objectivity in teaching or research or hindering fair treatment of trainees.

Future Research into the Topic:

The intersection of consulting, research and academics has been somewhat of a background topic for research itself. This triumvirate of background-experience-theory lends itself to asking additional questions piqued in this paper. What is the motivation of prospective clients to hire an academic (vs. a traditional consulting firm) and to open themselves to additional research (perhaps as subject to a follow-up academic paper). The suitability of consulting outside of the business discipline occurs, but work done in technology, engineering, and other disciplines has not been addressed here. The influence of academic peers is also an area that requires further thought. In all likelihood, the type of structure, the nature of institution, or other Academy factors may influence a faculty member's desire to consult.

Perhaps not enough faculty agreements afford for the consulting effort to count toward tenure, or equally likely traditional academics that would otherwise care to consult face limitations in experience (e.g. selling the first job) or are discouraged by potential accusations of biased behaviour. While it has been questioned by academics whether consulting contributes to research and teaching (Perkmann and Walsh, 2008; Boyer and Lewis, 1984), the sheer immensity and individuality of consulting questions has led to continued debate. Faculty agreements have now evolved to allow such activities to count toward tenure, so perhaps institutions are now seeing the value. Nonetheless, the appeal from clients in having a university professor undertake advisory services remains. Aside from the student competitiveness benefits that result from having qualified consulting engagement experience (what consultants call “the qual”) on one's resume before graduation from an undergraduate program, clients and professors are also beneficiaries of the process. Clients can avoid the often sales-oriented nature of traditional consultants, while gaining access to new thinking – even if only part of that thinking could be applied in the short term. Academics get a source of qualitative research for case-based research and can confidentially access vast databases of enterprise data (that can be readily comparable where systems and system/data designs are compatible) against which to test theories. Perkmann and Walsh (2008) note that “consulting can enable access to research-critical elements such as materials, data drawn from real industrial processes or information on problems and challenges”. This can expedite the process, when access to reliable data is an inhibitor of research productivity. Traditionally academics seek research assistance or access without reciprocal benefits to organizations and relationship building is minimal. In building relationships that can be leveraged through a win-win approach, academic researchers may also support other unique pedagogically-innovative approaches such as experiential learning. Relationships with local business can lead to: plant tour opportunities, guest speakers, and collaborative undergraduate research experiences. Those local relationships can them blossom into larger and more global realms.

Perhaps it a matter of necessity, not only monetary gain (seen as a motive for opportunistic consulting as defined by Perkmann and Walsh, 2008), that many Consulting Academics may have begun teaching as sessional faculty before becoming full-time instructors. As the background of the two authors suggests, sessional work during pre-academic external and internal consulting careers may predispose new full-time and

tenure-track academics to approach research with a practical slant, perhaps not unlike the doctoral research of DBA students which is even marketed as being directed toward practical – and away from theoretical – research. These questions remain and will continue to be addressed by these and other authors who strive to make universities places of both true theoretical and practical business knowledge.

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