

**MASTER  
MANAGEMENT**

# **THE INFLUENCE OF TRUST IN THE QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT CONSULTING SERVICES**

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Dissertation  
Master in Management

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2023



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## **Abstract**

Management consultancy is a highly intangible, professional, and personalised service, therefore one of the main criteria companies use to select a management consultancy firm is their past experience or the experience of others. Providing a high quality service and understanding which factors influence the quality of their service becomes crucial for management consulting firms to secure their future.

In the literature, several determinants of service quality in management consulting firms are identified, but there is not always a consensus among authors, namely in the role played by trust.

This study aims to clarify the effect of trust, established between client and consultant, on the quality of the service provided. Specifically, this research seeks to understand whether trust affects the sharing of knowledge between client and consultant, and whether the sharing of knowledge influences the level of quality of the service provided.

To meet the objectives of the study a quantitative methodology was used, where data were obtained from an online questionnaire, distributed among consultants. The results of the study allowed understanding that both dimensions of trust have a positive influence on knowledge sharing and that this has a positive influence on all dimensions of service quality.

Thus, it was possible to conclude that the development of a relationship between client and consultant, based on trust, allows increasing the level of quality of the service provided. Therefore, frequent interactions between both agents should be encouraged, training on how to communicate openly with the client should be intensified and staff turnover should be reduced as a way of promoting relationships of trust that increase the level of service quality provided through the sharing of knowledge between client and consultant.

**Keywords:** Management Consulting; Quality of Service; Trust; Knowledge Sharing

## Resumo

A consultoria de gestão é um serviço altamente intangível, profissional e personalizado, assim sendo, um dos principais critérios que as empresas utilizam para selecionar uma empresa de consultoria de gestão é a sua experiência passada ou a experiência de terceiros. Prestar um serviço com elevada qualidade e perceber quais os fatores que influenciam a qualidade do seu serviço torna-se crucial para as empresas de consultoria de gestão assegurarem o seu futuro.

Na literatura são identificados vários determinantes da qualidade de serviço das empresas de consultoria de gestão, mas nem sempre existe consenso entre os autores, nomeadamente, no papel desempenhado pela confiança.

Este estudo pretende clarificar o efeito da confiança, estabelecida entre cliente e consultor, na qualidade do serviço prestado. Especificamente, esta investigação procura perceber se a confiança afeta a partilha de conhecimento entre o cliente e o consultor, e se a partilha de conhecimento, influencia o nível de qualidade do serviço prestado.

Para cumprir os objetivos do estudo foi utilizada uma metodologia quantitativa, onde os dados foram obtidos a partir de um questionário online, distribuído entre consultores. Os resultados do estudo permitiram compreender que ambas as dimensões da confiança têm uma influência positiva na partilha de conhecimento e que esta exerce uma influência positiva em todas as dimensões da qualidade de serviço.

Assim, foi possível concluir que o desenvolvimento de uma relação entre cliente e consultor, baseada na confiança, permite aumentar o nível de qualidade do serviço prestado. Logo, devem ser incentivadas interações frequentes entre ambos os agentes, intensificada a formação sobre como comunicar abertamente com o cliente e reduzida a rotatividade do pessoal, como forma de promover relações de confiança que aumentem o nível de qualidade do serviço prestado, através da partilha de conhecimento entre cliente e consultor.

Palavras-chave: Consultoria de Gestão; Qualidade de Serviço; Confiança; Partilha de Conhecimento

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## 1. Introduction

The present study has as its objective to evaluate if, by directly affecting knowledge sharing, trust has an influence in the quality of the service provided by a management consulting firm.

The management consulting market has a major role in the world economy, as proven by the high growth rates experienced in recent years (Bibi et al., 2021; Haverila et al., 2011; O'Mahoney et al., 2021; O'Mahoney & Sturdy, 2018). This bigger role is reflected in a higher interest in researching the management consulting industry (Haverila et al., 2011).

According to Kubr (2002, p.10) management consulting can be defined as “[...] an independent professional advisory service assisting managers and organizations to achieve organizational purposes and objectives by solving management and business problems, identifying and seizing new opportunities, enhancing learning and implementing changes.”

As such, consultants are external entities to the firm and their services are highly intangible and adapted to each customer's needs (Bennett & Smith, 2004), and the main product of management consulting firms is knowledge sharing, when a client hires these types of firms, they intend to acquire new skills and information (Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2009; Janicot & Mignon, 2012; Huang et al., 2022).

Given the characteristics of the service provided by management consulting firms, the main factor that clients use when selecting a consulting firm is previous experience and third parties' recommendations (Bennett & Smith, 2004). As such, we conclude that quality of service is key to consulting firms' competitiveness (Liu, 2009; Huang et al., 2022; Dawes et al., 1992). In her study, Pereira (2021) concluded that a consulting client that is satisfied in terms of the quality of the service is more prone to be loyal and committed to the consulting firm. Therefore, understating which factors influence or impact the quality of management consulting firms is crucial.

The literature suggests many important factors that influence the success of the management consulting projects, they being: the consultants' education, experience, skills, and values; their integrity and willingness to prioritize the client's needs; their ability to adapt to the client; the level of investment in knowing the customer's company and capabilities; and the relationship

between consultant and client (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012; Appelbaum & Steed, 2005; Bennett & Smith, 2004; Bronnenmayer et al., 2016; Cerruti et al., 2019; Haverila et al., 2011; Jang & Lee, 1998; V. Kumar et al., 2000; McLachlin, 1999; Mustak et al., 2013; Richter & Schmidt, 2006; Srinivasan, 2014; E. T. G. Wang & Chen, 2006).

Another important factor for the success of management consulting projects is knowledge sharing, which is also the main product of these firms (Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2009; Janicot & Mignon, 2012; Ko, 2014; Huang et al., 2022). The knowledge that flows from the consultant to the client it is crucial in order for them to understand the delivery process and acquire the necessary skills (Ko, 2014). Besides, the knowledge that clients share with consultants it is essential for the consultants to better comprehend the problems that the client's firm is currently having and be able to develop the best solution (Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004). Because sharing knowledge means to lose the advantage of being its sole holder, the knowledge provider needs to trust the recipient (Ouakouak & Ouedraogo, 2019), as such, trust between the two agents becomes crucial, and it is considered one of the main precursors of knowledge sharing (Lin, 2007; Chowdhury, 2005; Ko, 2014).

A relationship based on trust, between consultant and client, has been discussed as one of the possible factors influencing service quality, however, there is no consensus in the literature regarding the impact of trust on the quality of the management consulting projects (Cerruti et al., 2019). While Bronnenmayer et al. (2016) concluded in their study that trust has no relevant influence on a management consulting project's success, Bennett & Robson (2004) propose that trust may have a real impact on the service outcome. Finally, Ko (2014) concluded in his study that mutual trust between client and consultant positively affected the outcome of a consulting project, this relation being mediated by knowledge transfer.

Therefore, and having in mind the service quality scale developed by Gounaris (2005) – INDSERV, the current study aims to clarify if trust influences the quality of management consulting services, by directly influencing knowledge sharing, which, by its turn, influences service quality.

Finally, as regards the structure of this dissertation, it will be organised into 5 chapters.

The first chapter introduces this work, followed by the literature review, which is divided into three subchapters that constitute the framework of the research carried out.

In subchapter 2.1 the quality of services will be discussed, as well as the problem of the assessment of consulting services and, finally, the existing measurement instruments. Subchapter 2.2 focuses on the review of the existing literature on the concept of trust and its presence in the consulting industry. The concept of knowledge sharing, its outcomes and its role in the consulting service will be discussed in subchapter 2.3.

In the third chapter the problematic and the methodology will be elaborated. Chapter four focuses on the analysis of the results and in the final chapter the appropriate conclusions will be presented, and the results are discussed.

## 2. Literature review

In this section, relevant concepts for the development of the objective of this dissertation will be presented. In that sense, the concepts of quality of service, trust, and knowledge sharing will be exposed and discussed. The characteristics of the consulting service, its evaluation and the models used are also explored.

### 2.1. Quality of service

Since the early 1980s, several authors have focused on the importance of service quality and have developed their own definition of what service quality is, what are its dimensions, as well as its impact for the future of the firm and the effect on the relation with the customer (e.g. Athanassopoulos et al., 2001; Gounaris, 2005; Hurley & Estelami, 1998; A. Parasuraman et al., 1985; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006). In Table 1 we can see some of the concepts of quality of service that are more relevant in the literature.

**Table 1: Relevant concepts of Quality of service**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Quality of Service</b>
Parasuraman et al. (1985)	The quality of a service can be verified by the difference between customer perceptions and expectations.
(Curry & Gao, 2012; Grierson & Brennan, 2017)	Quality of services depends on organizational resources which is not taxable like the quality of goods.
Grönroos (1988)	Service quality is the result of the comparison between customer expectations and perceived service performance.
Cronin and Taylor (1992)	Service quality is one of the main factors influencing customer satisfaction.
Hurley and Estelarni (1998)	Service quality affects customer satisfaction, which consequently affects future repurchase intention.
Athanassopoulos et al. (1998)	The evaluation of the service quality and the consequent satisfaction or dissatisfaction, is linked to the purchase, loyalty, and willingness to maintain a long-term relationship with the supplier.

Ulaga (2003)	Quality is defined as the extent to which the service meets customer specifications.
Zeithaml & Bitner (2003)	Service quality refers to consumers' evaluation of the excellence and superiority of the service encountered.
Gounaris (2005)	The perceived quality of a service reveals the degree of customer satisfaction regarding this same service, contributing to improving the performance of the company providing the service.

In 1985 Parasuraman et al., noted that quality of service is related to client satisfaction. According to him, quality of service is a global judgment made by clients about the superiority and excellence of the service. This judgment results from the direct comparison between what the service company offered and what was the actual outcome, what they received from the service (Parasuraman et al. 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Parasuraman et al., 1991). By its turn, client satisfaction refers to the feeling of disappointment or pleasure when comparing the perceived performance of a service to its expectations (Kotler, 2000).

After the first analysis of Parasuraman et al. (1985) many authors continue exploring the connection between the quality of service and client satisfaction.

Hurley & Estelami (1998) first denoted that quality of service affects client satisfaction, which by its turn influences future repurchase intention. As such, this causal relation, contributes for the improvement of the service provider's performance (Gounaris, 2005).

In this sense, the perceived quality of service is considered an element of client satisfaction (Zeithaml et al., 2006), as well as an important antecedent of customer satisfaction (Akroush et al., 2011; Dahiyat et al., 2011; Ladhari, 2009; Samen et al., 2013).

The importance of this concept relies on the evidence that the evaluation of the service quality made by the consumer, and consequent satisfaction or dissatisfaction is associated with repurchase intentions, loyalty, and willingness to sustain a long-term relationship with the service provider (Athanasopoulos et al., 2001; Iacobucci et al., 1994).

Having in mind this chain of cause and effect, we can note that for B2B service providers, quality of service becomes a critical concern since it effects subsequent services provided to customers (Izogo & Ogba, 2015).

### **2.1.1. Evaluation of the quality of a consulting service**

Management consulting is a professional service, characterized by intangibility and high level of customization, so, selecting a consulting firm is not an easy task for the client. As such, previous experience and third parties' recommendations are the main factors that costumers take in consideration when choosing a consulting firm (Bennett & Smith, 2004).

This means that, if the client is satisfied and the engagement was a success, consultant's will improve their reputation for providing top quality of service, ensuring future assignments (McLachlin, 2000).

Therefore, we can deduce that service quality is crucial to ensure long-term expectations for a consulting firm (Dawes et al., 1992).

Evaluating the quality of a service provided by a consulting firm is associated with a lot of constraints regarding the criteria to be used.

Using only quantitative measures is not the most effective in the case of professional services, especially in management consulting services (Appelbaum & Steed, 2005).

Productivity or profit are not used in management consulting projects as metric to evaluate these services, while client satisfaction may be. However, and according to Puyear (2008) there are different perspectives concerning the factors that contribute to the success of consulting services.

Factors like the consultant's competence, the consultant's integrity in prioritizing the client's interests and intended outcomes, the clear definition of expectations and outcomes, the adaptation to the client, the investment in knowledge of the organization and its surroundings, the client's capabilities and the type of consultancy, the client's involvement in change, the consolidated partnership between client and consultant, the involvement of top management or even the inclusion of clients in the implementation phase, are considered, in the literature, important for the successful engagement of consultants, and for a better outcome for the management consulting project (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012; Appelbaum & Steed, 2005; Bennett & Smith, 2004; Bronnenmayer et al., 2016; Cerruti et al., 2019; Haverila et al., 2011; Jang & Lee, 1998; V. Kumar et al., 2000; McLachlin, 1999; Mustak et al., 2013; Richter & Schmidt, 2006; Srinivasan, 2014; E. T. G. Wang & Chen, 2006).

The evaluation of the content or the impact of the work developed by the consultant is a factor that doesn't receive a lot of attention from the client, when compared with parameters like meeting the previously defined deadlines, developing an innovative solution, the possibility to implementing the such solution, consultants' communication with the customer, the value return on the client's investment and the flexibility shown by the service providers (Fullerton & West Michael, 1996; Puryear, 2008).

**Table 2: Factors influencing the consulting service quality**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Factors influencing quality of service</b>	<b>Perspective adopted</b>	<b>Field</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
Jang & Lee (1998)	Competence of consultants	Client's perspective	Management consulting projects	All factors improve quality
	Consulting mode			
Bennet & Smith (2004)	Client organizational characteristics	Consultant's perspective	Management consulting	All factors improve quality
	Involvement of clients in the decision-making process			
Wang & Chen (2005)	Trust	Client's and consultant's perspectives	ERP system implementation consulting	All factors improve quality
	Contract control over costs and outputs			
Richter & Schmidt (2006)	Consultant competences	Client's perspective	Management consulting	All factors improve quality
	Top management support			
Bronnenmayer et al. (2016)	Consultants Education	Client's perspective	Management consulting	All factors improve quality except trust
	Consultants Experience			
	Common vision			
	Intensity of collaboration			
	Trust			

After analysing the importance of service quality and which factors have been considered in the consulting context to influence quality of service, the next section will be focused in understanding which evaluation models have been developed and which one is the most fitted to be adopted in this research.

### **2.1.2. Evaluation models**

Due to the importance of quality of service discussed before, researchers have been developing various instruments to measure it (Gounaris, 2005). Being the one designed by Grönroos (1984) one of the pioneers. According to this scale, there are two types of perceived service quality: Technical and Functional. The first one includes the core operation-related aspects of the service, and the last one covers the interaction between individuals from the service provider and the client organizations.

Nevertheless, most research has been using the SERVQUAL scale, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), which was designed to be applied in the *Business-to-Consumer* (B2C) market and has been adapted throughout the years to better fit reality, and it is today one of the most used models of service quality.

Its application to the *Business-to-Business* (B2B) environment has been done by some authors (e.g., Pitt et al., 1996; Durvasula et al., 1999). However, the results were mixed and some of the researchers call to the attention that the SERVQUAL scale doesn't directly fit this environment since it doesn't explain certain phenomena like the client's satisfaction and the long-term commitment between both parties.

Despite that, the first developments in the B2B context were made by Szmigin (1993), which considered that outcome quality was based on hard and soft quality, that is, the quality of the service depends mainly on the service process itself. Bochove (1994), also contributed to this area considering that a critical dimension of perceived quality was the potential quality, that is, the attributes that clients consider before they hire the service.

It was only in 2005 that an integrated instrument that capture all the aspects of the process of providing a service to business clients was created. The INDSERV scale, designed by

Gounaris (2005), was developed based on the work of Szmigin (1993) and Bochove (1994) and is a more generic measuring instrument, based on the idea that B2B quality service is a second-order construct, composed of four dimensions: potential quality, hard process quality, soft process quality, and outcome quality.

According to the author, potential quality represents the attributes that clients need to search in order to evaluate and consider before the service provision. As such and considering that B2B services are more complex and have a higher level of customization, and so are hard to evaluate the service performance, potential quality becomes a key element of quality (Gounaris, 2005; Bochove, 1994).

Hard process quality is associated with the process through which the service will be provided, as well as the adequacy of that process to produce a solution in the time frame defined and according to the clients' needs (Gounaris, 2005; Szmigin, 1993).

By its turn, soft process quality relates to the interaction between client and the service provider, considering the service provider's empathic conduct, his openness to ideas and suggestions, and his benevolence and interest in promoting the client's success. These are the necessary aspects to have a positive interaction between both entities and facilitate the alignment between the service provided and the client's requirements (Gounaris, 2005; Szmigin, 1993).

Finally, outcome quality, reflects the client's concerns regarding what was actually delivered (Gounaris, 2005; Szmigin, 1993; Halinen, 1997). It also represents a very important dimension since it "captures not only the results of the technical efforts to deliver the service, but also the impact that the service delivered eventually produces for the buying organization" (Gounaris, 2005, p. 430).

This framework developed by Gounaris (2005) has been extensively used in the study of service quality in the B2B context and adapted to the most different industries. Regarding the consulting industry, the first adaptation was developed by Veres & Varga-Toldi (2020), the Expertise Relations Involvement Performance (ERIP) model. Based on 22 expert interviews conducted, the authors concluded that customers build their judgments on consulting

service quality through five main attributes: deliverables, consultants, client adaptation, consulting process and communication. Considering these five attributes, a five-element model, but with only four-pronged model was design. According to this model, clients of consulting firms elaborate their judgement on the quality of the service based on expertise, relations, involvement, and performance.

The first dimension is the one related to the project outcome, the competences, work style, attitude, and social skills of the consultants, as well as the communication of the achievements (Veres & Varga-Toldi, 2020).

Relations is the element associated with the competences, work style, attitude, behaviour, and social skills of consultants, with the level of customer adaptation, service customization, client listening skills, and the communication between client and consultant (Veres & Varga-Toldi, 2020).

The third dimension, involvement, relates to the effective consulting project management, service personalization and customer adaptation, effective resource management, transparency, budget, deadlines, and appropriate communication of the project (Veres & Varga-Toldi, 2020).

Finally, performance, refers to the formal assessment of the quality of the final project, from the effective resource management and transparency of the procedures to the quality of the outcome and communication of the achievements (Veres & Varga-Toldi, 2020).

More recently the INDSERV model was adapted to the consulting context by Venkateswaran (2022). According to the author, service quality in the consulting industry relies in four dimensions, potential service capability (PoSC), situational interaction capability (SIC), process service capability (PrSC) and service outcomes (SO).

In the first dimension is included the customers' evaluation of a company's ability to continuously provide high quality consulting services (Venkateswaran, 2022).

Situational interaction capability refers to the clients' evaluation of the interactions between both agents throughout the service process (Venkateswaran, 2022).

By its turn, process service capability is associated to the evaluation made by the client of the process service capacity during the service delivery (Venkateswaran, 2022).

Finally, service outcome relates to the evaluation made by the customer of the final outcome of the service (Venkateswaran, 2022).

Since the authors, Veres & Varga-Toldi (2020) and Venkateswaran (2022) admit that their model is very similar to the one developed by Gounaris (2005) and that the INDSERV model should be tested in the context of management consulting industry, the original version of the INDSERV will be the one used in this study.

The following section will be dedicated to the analysis of the literature regarding trust in the inter-organisational context.

## **2.2. Trust**

In an intense competitive environment, companies found that building collaborative relationships with clients and suppliers was the key to meet competition (Dertouzos et al., 1989). And trust is considered a fundamental element to build these collaborative relationships (Wilson, 1994; Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The possible returns of the relationship between client and supplier are expected to be positive when the involved parties trust in the resources and knowledge of one another and expect the other party to use them in a trustworthy manner (Peterson & Sullivan, 1982). Several authors have been analysing the benefits of trust in B2B relationships, and they are: increase the levels of cooperation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994); mitigating opportunism (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1981); the client becomes more willing to exert more efforts (Anderson et al., 1987); reduces conflict; improves satisfaction (Anderson & Narus, 1990) and, finally, the customers become more committed to the relationship and intend to stay in it (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The literature also provides strong evidence that

trusting relationships between two entities contributes to a greater knowledge exchange between them. When trust is present in a relationship, people are more willing to transfer knowledge with one another (Ko, 2014). As such, trust is seen as a key factor in relationship marketing (Gil-Saura et al., 2009).

Regardless of its importance to B2B relationships, there is no consensus regarding the definition of trust, and as we can see from Table 3, several authors have presented their own definition (Crosby et al., 1990; McAllister, 1995; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Rousseau, 1998).

**Table 3: Evolution of the Trust concept**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Trust</b>
Crosby et al. (1990)	Trust is based on the belief, by one of the partners, that the other will not act against their interests, where this belief is held without doubt or undue suspicion, based on the absence of detailed information about the actions of the other partner.
Moorman et al. (1992)	Trust is the willingness of one party to be vulnerable or to rely on another.
Morgan and Hunt (1994)	Trust exists when one party trusts the integrity of a partner.
McAllister (1995)	Trust is composed of two dimensions, affective - based on emotional bonds, and cognitive - based on competences and responsibility.
Rousseau (1998)	Trust as a psychological state that reflects the intention to convey vulnerability to another.

In all definitions it is possible to identify the two components of the definition of trust: credibility and benevolence (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Dwyer et al., 1987; Ganesan, 1994; Kumar et al., 1995; Mysen et al., 2011; O’Sullivan et al., 2010; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006).

Benevolence is related to the belief in the good intentions of the other partner and the trust that it will not take any unexpected actions that could have a negative impact in the company;

while credibility is based on the competent that one partner believes the other has, given its word, the fulfilment of its obligations and sincerity (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994; N. Kumar et al., 1995).

Despite the lack of consensus regarding its definition, most literature adopts the McAllister's (1995) concept of trust. In this framework, the author considers trust as a composition of two distinguished dimensions: affect and cognitive trust.

The cognitive dimension of trust relates to the decision to trust that is based on available knowledge and "good reasons". That is, cognitive trust is built on competence and responsibility (McAllister, 1995).

By its turn, affective trust consists of emotional bonds between individuals. In order to have a trust relationship, people make "emotional investments", express concern and genuine care for the partner's wellbeing – these constitute the affective dimension of trust (McAllister, 1995).

In order for trust to be developed repeated interactions are necessary, since they imply constant contact between both parties and exchanging information about needs, preferences, and different ways to approach a problem. As such, repeated interactions allow understanding and predictability; they give space for the development of a relationship, learning and access additional knowledge about the other agent (Vanneste & Puranam, 2010).

In the consulting industry, the relation between client and consultant crosses organizational boundaries (Ko, 2014). That is, there are differences between the two agents since they belong to different organizations, and therefore, culture, standards, incentives, expertise, and work approach aren't the same. This fact makes more challenging to predict each other behaviours. That being said, repeated interaction comes as a way of easing this process (Ko, 2014). As mentioned before, these repeated interactions lead to trust that, by its turn, help develop a deeper relationship, improve collaboration, incentivise agents to make an effort towards an effective transfer of knowledge and work to meet project tasks and goals (Ko, 2014; Wahab et al., 2011). According to Ko (2014), mutual trust allows client and consultant to develop a deeper relationship, collaborate and leads to a voluntary exchange of knowledge.

Given the fact that a relationship based on trust positively influences the level of knowledge shared (Chowdhury, 2005; Levin & Cross, 2004; Lin, 2007) and that, knowledge sharing is considered the main product of management consulting firms Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2009; Janicot & Mignon, 2012; Huang et al., 2022), the next subchapter will be focused on the concept of knowledge sharing, its relevance, its antecedents and precedents, as well as the role it plays in the context of management consulting firms.

### **2.3. Knowledge sharing**

According to Subramaniam & Youndt (2005) resources and competencies are essential for an organization to survive, innovate and grow in the present competitive business environment. And the knowledge-based theory tells us that knowledge is one of the crucial resources that companies must possess and develop (Nonaka, 1994). Share and utilize knowledge helps develop capabilities to create, which allow organizations to innovate, grow and build sustainable competitive advantages (Chen & Huang, 2009). By its turn, the core competence theory explains that duplicating the core competences of an organization across a wide range of markets is another critical factor for the organization sustainable competitive advantage. In order to duplicate those core competences, knowledge sharing between employees is necessary (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

Therefore, we can conclude that knowledge sharing - the process through which information, opinions, ideas, theories, and principles are exchanged among people (Appleyard, 1996; Argote & Ingram, 2000) - is a crucial factor for an organization to survive, grow and prosper (Desouza, 2003; Swart et al., 2014).

To promote knowledge sharing companies need to consider the different typologies of knowledge: tacit and explicit (Ouakouak & Ouedraogo, 2019).

Tacit knowledge refers to knowledge that is embodied in daily tasks and routines, it is not easy to document and share, as such to be learned requires observation and imitation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), and the best way to share it is through face-to-face interaction (Wang & Wang, 2012).

In contrast, explicit knowledge is codifiable and can be easily shared (in the form of facts, rules, and policies) (Zander & Kogut, 1995). The best way to promote explicit knowledge sharing is by implementing management mechanisms, procedures, and formal language (Coakes, 2006).

Peoples' willingness to share knowledge depends on three types of factors: *individual factors*, which includes the person's commitment; *group factors*, such as trust among the partners; and *organizational factors*, that is, the ethics of the organization(s) (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002; Mueller, 2014).

Piezunka & Dahlander (2015) and Yuan et al. (2018) revealed that the willingness to share knowledge is stronger if the relationship (formal or informal) between both entities is closer. Formal relationships (e.g., contracts and controls) facilitate the legitimacy of sharing knowledge between client and supplier (Piezunka & Dahlander, 2015), and informal relationships (e.g., trust, norms) affect the level of effectiveness of the knowledge sharing since this process is normally socially instigated (Yuan et al., 2018).

The literature regarding the outcomes of knowledge sharing is extensive. However, it can be divided into three main levels: individual, team and organization (Ahmad & Karim, 2019).

Concerning, the individual-level impact, knowledge sharing positively affects individuals performance, by increasing task accomplishment efficiency, problem solving and decision making (Y. J. Kang et al., 2008; Masa'deh et al., 2016; Reyhav & Weisberg, 2009; Zhu, 2017). Knowledge sharing also contributes for the individual learning capacity and creativity, by enhancing innovative work behaviour (Hu and Zhao, 2016), knowledge creation (Hu et al., 2009; Iqbal et al., 2015; Park et al., 2014) and original ideas (Carmeli et al., 2013). The process of sharing knowledge is also reflected in psychological effects on individuals, such as increase job satisfaction (Zhu, 2017), life satisfaction (Jiang & Hu, 2016) and reduces the intention to leave (Reyhav & Weisberg, 2009).

When looking at the team level, there are three main impacts of knowledge sharing: performance – when sharing knowledge, team members develop a transactive memory system that

enhances work efficiency, they become better prepared to deal with challenges and obstacles, and consequently, perform better (Liu et al., 2011); creativity – because it enables discussion of the feasibility of creative solutions, knowledge sharing also enhances creativity among a team (Cheung et al., 2016); climate – knowledge sharing induces interaction and reciprocity, providing a space for a team to socialize and collaborate (Radaelli et al., 2014).

Finally, regarding the organization level, knowledge sharing contributes to three different aspects: the organization performance, learning and innovation and process efficiency (Ahmad & Karim, 2019).

When is aligned with the company internal processes, knowledge sharing contributes to a better financial performance (Oyemomi et al., 2016; Z. Wang & Wang, 2012b), and when top management boards into sharing knowledge, this will contribute to new product performance (MacCurtain et al., 2010).

According to Wang et al. (2016), knowledge sharing enhances organizational learning capability and thus supports knowledge embeddedness in routines and daily tasks, contributing to the organization learning and absorptive capacity.

All of the studied effects of knowledge sharing are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Key effects of Knowledge sharing in empirical studies**

Impact level	Impact type	Key effects	Nature of effect	Empirical studies (examples)
Individual	Performance	Task accomplishment efficiency	Positive	Kang et al. (2008); Masa'deh et al. (2016)
		Problem solving efficiency	Positive	
	Learning and creativity	Innovative work behaviour	Positive	Carmeli et al. (2013); Kang & Lee (2017); Park et al. (2014); Radaelli et al. (2014)
		Creative fluency and originality	Positive	
		Knowledge creation	Positive	
		Realized absorptive capacity	Positive	
	Psychological effects	Job satisfaction	Positive	Jiang & Hu (2016); Reychav & Weisberg (2009); Zhu (2017)
		Life satisfaction	Positive	
		Intention to leave	Negative	

Team	Performance	Work efficiency	Positive	Liu et al. (2011); Song et al. (2015); Cummings (2004)
		Sales performance	Positive	
		Problem solving	Positive	
	Creativity	Creative solution and novel ideas	Positive	Cheung et al. (2016); Lee et al (2014)
		Absorptive capacity	Positive	
	Climate	Trust	Positive	Alsharo et al. (2017); Luring & Selmer (2011); Radaelli et al. (2014)
		Socialization	Positive	
		Attitude toward diversity	Positive	
	Organization	Performance	Financial performance (revenue, return on investment)	Positive
New product performance			Positive	
Learning and innovation		Ideation capability	Positive	De Clercq et al. (2015); Kumar & Rose (2012); Liao et al. (2007); Mustafa et al. (2016); Sáenz et al. (2012)
		Organizational absorptive capacity	Positive	
		Entrepreneurial orientation and corporate entrepreneurship	Positive	
Business process efficiency		Strategic alignment of business processes	Positive	Kearns & Lederer (2003); Law & Ngai (2008); Li et al. (2009); Pai (2006); Noor et al. (2015)
		Project management capability	Positive	
		Process improvement (error prevention, standardization & documentation)	Positive	
		Organizational effectiveness	Positive	

*Source: Ahmad & Karim (2019)*

There are industries to which knowledge sharing is even more crucial, those are considered the knowledge intensive industries, where consulting is included (Huang et al., 2022).

Having in mind that one of the main goals of management consulting services is to “enhancing learning and implementing changes.” (Kubr, 2002, p.10), we can infer that knowledge sharing is the main product of management consulting firms (Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2009; Janicot & Mignon, 2012).

When a company hires a management consulting firm, they typically have specific goals that they want to achieve, e.g., the effective implementation of a new system, but they also intend to acquire new skills associated with on-going operations.

As such, an effective knowledge transfer from the consultant to the client is critical and

usually is a part of the formal contract between both entities. Transferring knowledge allows business clients to better understand the delivering process of the management consulting firms, and that way they have the necessary skills to check whether the goals of the project were met or not (Ko, 2014).

According to Malhotra & Mukherjee (2004), in the service sector, customers participate in the service delivery process. In the case of management consulting the participation of clients is essential since they provide inside information about the client's company. Without these information consultants can't solve the business problems in question, neither "identifying and seizing new opportunities" for the client (Kubr, 2002 p.10).

Taking the examples given by Ko (2014), when a company hires a consulting firm to implement an enterprise system, both consultants and client assume important roles: the consultants provide critical knowledge regarding the enterprise applications, while the client gives in-depth knowledge of the business processes. This exchange of knowledge is crucial for meeting the perceived needs of the client and to achieve a successful outcome (Ko, 2014).

In his study Ko (2014) concluded that an effective knowledge exchange can lead to the improvement of a consulting firm project success, which by its turn implies that the service provided was of quality (McLachlin, 2000), as such, we can infer that knowledge sharing is a precursor of service quality.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

The literature strongly defends that quality of service is one of the main factors that affect client satisfaction, which, by its turn influences future repurchases intentions, loyalty, and willingness to sustain a long-term relationship with the service provider (Athanasopoulos et al., 2001; Hurley & Estelami, 1998; Iacobucci et al., 1994).

In the consulting industry, and because clients rely on past experience and third parties' recommendations to choose a consulting firm (Bennett & Smith, 2004), service quality becomes crucial to ensure long-term expectations for a consulting firm (Dawes et al., 1992).

As such, understanding which factors influence the service quality of a management consulting firm is essential. Many researchers have focused their studies on understanding which are

the precursors of a successful management consulting project, and the conclusions rely mainly on the consultant's knowledge, work conduct, dedication, and the involvement of top management (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012; Appelbaum & Steed, 2005; McLachlin, 1999; Mustak et al, 2013; Srinivasan, 2014).

Regarding the influence of trust in the project outcome, there is no consensus among researchers. Bennett & Robson (2004) mentioned in their study that, alongside formal contracts, trust can have an important role in the service outcome. However, when studying the success factors of a management consulting project, Bronnenmayer et al. (2016) concluded that the factor trust didn't have a significant impact. Finally, Ko (2014) proved that mutual trust between client and consultant does affect positively the outcome of a consulting project, having knowledge transfer as mediator. This lack of agreement regarding the impact of trust is the literature *gap* that the present study intends to explore.

According to McLachlin (2000) a consulting project is considered successful if the business client is satisfied and the consulting firm has been able to elevate its reputation. As it was mentioned before, the consultant reputation depends on the client satisfaction, which by its turn is highly influenced by the quality of the service provided (Athanasopoulos et al., 2001; Dawes et al., 1992; Hurley & Estelami, 1998; Iacobucci et al., 1994).

Thus, this study intends to answer to the question: *What is the influence of trust, between client and consultant, in knowledge sharing, and ultimately service quality?*, in order to clarify the literature regarding the role that trust plays on the quality of the service provided by management consulting firms.

### **3. Empirical study**

#### **3.1. Research model and hypotheses**

This study's aims to clarify if trust influences the quality of management consulting services, by directly impacting knowledge sharing, which affects service quality. More specifically, the present study uses affective and cognitive trust as antecedent of knowledge sharing, which by its turn is an influencer of service quality. For that it will be used the INDSERV model developed by Gounaris (2005) and the dimensions of trust developed by McAllister (1995).

Since management consulting services are highly professional, unique, and intangible, they rely mostly in the quality of the service and customer satisfaction to guarantee its future. As such, understanding what influences the quality of the service becomes crucial for these firms (Athanasopoulos et al., 2001; Dawes et al., 1992; Hurley & Estelami, 1998; Iacobucci et al., 1994).

The lack of consensus regarding the influence of trust on service quality is what motivated the present study, which intends to analyse the role that affective and cognitive trust play regarding the quality of the service provided by management consulting firms, by directly influencing the level of knowledge sharing.

In that sense, the general goal of the study is to understand if affective and cognitive trust influences knowledge sharing, which, by its turn, directly influences the quality of management consulting services.

As result of the general goal of the dissertation the following questions were elaborated:

- What is the influence of affective and cognitive trust between client and consultant in the process of knowledge sharing between them?
- What is the influence of knowledge sharing between client and consultant in the quality of the service provided?

The literature review allowed to justify the theme, identify the goals, define research questions, and propose the research hypotheses that will now be described.

According to Levin & Cross (2004), relationships based on competence and benevolence trust positively impact the transfer of knowledge between both entities. Share knowledge means to lose the privilege of being its sole holder, as such, the knowledge provider must trust the recipient (Ouakouak & Ouedraogo, 2019). Thus, trust is a main precursor of knowledge sharing, and the literature shows that trust among co-workers relates positively to knowledge sharing (Lin, 2007). In his study, Chowdhury (2005) concluded that both cognition and affective trust positively affect knowledge sharing.

In the context of management consulting, Ko (2014) explain that business clients depend on external consultants to transmit knowledge, and that trusting the other leads participants to work together towards project goals. In his research he concludes that affective and cognitive trust between client and consultant affects knowledge sharing effectiveness.

In this sense the following hypotheses arise:

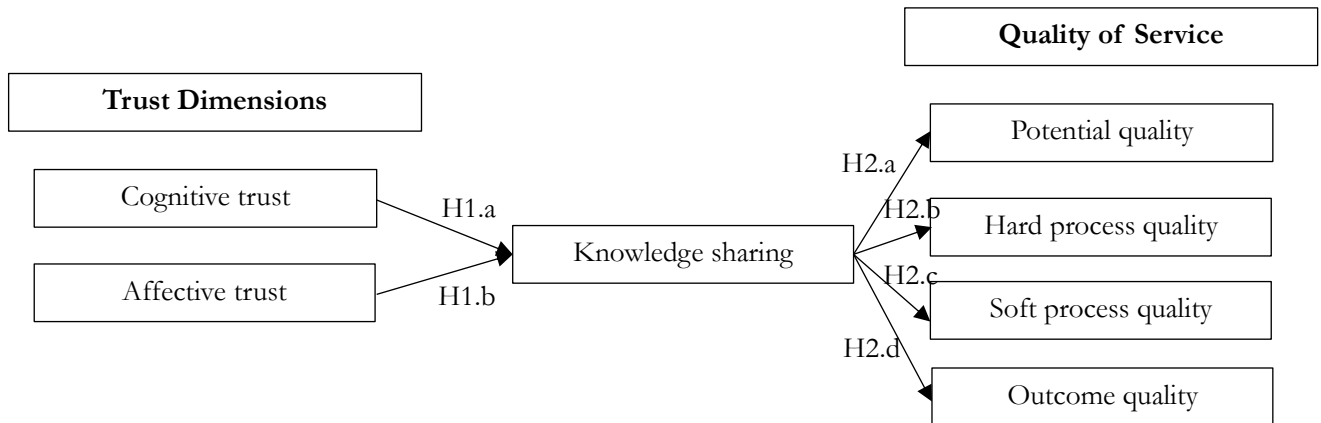
*H1.a, b:* Cognitive a) and Affective b) trust between client and consultant positively influences knowledge sharing.

As mentioned before, knowledge sharing is an important precursor of service quality, in the management consulting context (Ko, 2014). The client provides in-depth information regarding internal processes, and the consultant gives critical knowledge regarding the project in hand. These processes allow the consultant to better understand the clients' needs and to deliver service with quality (Ko, 2014; McLachlin, 2000). The literature also agrees that knowledge sharing enhances learning and creativity at both the individual and organizational level, which is one of the aspects that clients expect when hiring a consulting firm (Lin, 2007; Wang et al., 2016). As such we can postulate that a more effective process of knowledge sharing between client and consultant will contribute to a better level of service quality, considering the dimensions developed by Gounaris (2005). As such, the following hypotheses arise:

*H2.a, b, c, d:* Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences potential quality a), hard process quality b), soft process quality c) and outcome quality d).

The investigation hypotheses supported by the literature review suggest the model presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Investigation Model**



### 3.2. Methodology

Since this study needs to collect data on unobservable phenomena, assess attitudes, collect information on a sample and determine the relationships between various factors, a survey will be conducted (Ko, 2014). According to Malhotra (2009), the most adequate methodology considered is one of quantitative nature since it demands a structured data collection and statistical analysis of the data aims to quantify the data and generalize the results. The same method was used by Ko (2014) in his study where he intended to understand if mutual trust between client and consultant affected knowledge transfer as well as project outcome. When studying the success factors of management consulting as well as its dimensions, Bronnenmayer et al. (2016) also adopted this methodology.

Therefore, for the current study, a questionnaire survey (*Google Forms*), structured with closed questions will be made and distributed via LinkedIn and e-mail among consultants. This way, through the analysis of the collected data it will be possible to verify the hypotheses of investigation.

The adoption of the consultants' perspective in this study has two reasons: the first is because in similar studies, such as the one developed by Ko (2014), their perspective was also adopted; and because information is more accessible from the consultants' side than from their clients'.

Regarding the collected data, they were analysed according to a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS, since it is the most adequate way to evaluate complex predictive models with smaller samples (Hair et al., 2014).

### **3.3. Data collection**

As mentioned before, for this study, a questionnaire was used in order to collect the necessary data. This questionnaire is divided into four parts. In the first one, a filter question was made, in order to ensure that the questionnaire is only answered by consultants. Thereby, the “No” answers weren’t considered for the purposes of this study.

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents are asked to think of one client with whom they have collaborated in a management consultancy project and were asked about the type of service most frequently contracted by the client firm, as well as the duration of the relationship between the client firm and the consultancy firm, the average annual turnover (in €), and the frequency of interaction.

In the following section, 35 questions regarding the dimensions that are being studied were made.

Finally, the last section was composed by informative questions regarding the respondents and the company they work on, such as gender, academic qualifications, and the size of the company.

The variables presented in Tables 5 and 6, were selected according to the literature review and are based on previous studies.

In order to evaluate the impact of trust in knowledge sharing, the framework developed by McAllister (1995) was used (5 items regarding affective trust and 6 for cognitive trust), as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Items relative to the variable Trust**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<b>Affective trust</b>	<b>Q.1.</b> Me and this individual have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes.	<b>McAllister (1995)</b>
	<b>Q.2.</b> I can talk freely to this individual about difficulties I am having at work and know that (s)he will want to listen.	
	<b>Q.3.</b> We would both feel a sense of loss if one of us was transferred and we could no longer work together.	
	<b>Q.4.</b> If I shared my problems with this individual, I know (s)he would respond constructively and caringly.	
	<b>Q.5.</b> I would have to say that we have both made considerable emotional investments in our working relationship.	
<b>Cognitive trust</b>	<b>Q.6.</b> This person approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication.	<b>McAllister (1995)</b>
	<b>Q.7.</b> Given this person's track record, I see no reason to doubt his/her competence and preparation for the job.	
	<b>Q.8.</b> I can rely on this person not to make my job more difficult by careless work.	
	<b>Q.9.</b> Most people, even those who aren't close friends of this individual, trust and respect him/her as a co-worker.	
	<b>Q.10.</b> Other work associates of mine who must interact with this individual consider him/her to be trustworthy.	
	<b>Q.11.</b> If people knew more about this individual and his/her background, they would be more concerned and monitor his/her performance more closely.	

The following part, with the objective of analysing the results that come from trust, not only the level of knowledge sharing was studied but also the level of service quality (Table 6).

The analysis of the data collected regarding knowledge sharing it was based on the items selected by Ho & Ganesan (2013), however is important to mention that question 15 was divided into four questions. Regarding, service quality, the scale developed by Gounaris

(2005), the INDSERV scale, with 20 items covering the four dimensions of service quality was used.

**Table 6: Items of the variables Knowledge sharing and Quality of service**

Dimen- sions	Items	Authors
<b>Knowledge Sharing</b>	Q.12. This individual and I have shared a significant amount of knowledge with each other.	<b>Ho &amp; Ganesan (2013)</b>
	Q.13. This individual and I have created new skills and knowledge by working together.	
	Q.14. I have exchanged many ideas with this individual about how to improve each other's capabilities (in manufacturing, research and development, logistics, etc.)	
	Q.15. In general, the skills and knowledge that have been shared between this individual and I are: a) A limited amount/substantial amount; b) Basic/advanced; c) Of little value to both parties/of significant value to both parties; d) Of limited use/of significant use	
<b>Potential Quality</b>	Q.16. The firm offered a full consulting service to the client.	<b>Gounaris (2005)</b>
	Q.17. The consulting firm had the required personnel to provide the service.	
	Q.18. The firm had the required facilities to provide the service.	
	Q.19. The firm had the required management philosophy to provide the service.	
<b>Hard Pro- cess Qual- ity</b>	Q.20. The firm had a low personnel turnover rate who contact the client.	<b>Gounaris (2005)</b>
	Q.21. The firm used an appropriate network of partner entities and associates to provide the service.	
<b>Hard Pro- cess Qual- ity</b>	Q.22. The firm kept time schedules.	<b>Gounaris (2005)</b>
	Q.23. The firm honoured financial agreements and stayed in budgets.	

	Q.24. The firm met the deadlines of the proposals that were made.	
	Q.25. The firm looked at the details requested by the client.	
	Q.26. The consulting firm understood the client's needs.	
	Q.27. We consultants accept the clients' requests and suggestions with enthusiasm.	
<b>Soft Pro- cess Qual- ity</b>	Q.28. We consultants listen to the customer's problems.	<b>Gounaris (2005)</b>
	Q.29. We consultants have a pleasant personality.	
	Q.30. We consultants argue when it is necessary.	
	Q.31. We consultants look after consideration the customer's interests.	
	Q.32. The outcome of the firm service had a notable effect.	
<b>Outcome Quality</b>	Q.33. The result of the firm service contributes to the client's sales and image.	<b>Gounaris (2005)</b>
	Q.34. The result of the firm service demonstrated creativity.	
	Q.35. The outcome of the firm service was consistent with the client's strategy.	

Before the questionnaire was released, a pre-test was conducted with 5 people, in order to ensure that all questions and items were explicit and to make sure that consultants understood that they need to think of one client in particular with whom they have worked before, in the first part of the questionnaire, and that in the following sections that should have in mind the relation that they have developed with one of the workers from that same client. The answers and opinions were pertinent, to proceed with the restructuring of some sentences, and after the due adjustments the final version was created.

The questionnaire was distributed online, via LinkedIn, and was answered by consultants of different consultancy firms. It was also distributed among employees of two consultancy firms that agreed to collaborate in this study.

The questionnaire was available for response for one month.

Regarding the dimension of the sample, answers were collected from 114 respondents. However, during data processing, 10 missing values were identified from the 114 answers, and the final sample size was 104.

As a way of ensuring that that all items followed the same orientation, avoiding data analysis bias, it was necessary to invert one item - MUTCOGN\_6 – as it was presented in the questionnaire in a negative perspective.

Since this model has at most 4 arrows directed towards a latent variable, the minimum sample size should be equal to or greater than 65 respondents (Hair et al., 2014). And because SmartPLS is being used, samples between 100 and 200 respondents are more advisable (Hoyle, 1995). Therefore, the sample of 104 respondents for this study is considered sufficient.

For the data analysis, it will be used the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model – PLS-SEM- since it is the adequate methodology for testing and validating complex theoretical methods, with multiple constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The PLS-SEM computes partial regression relationships through separate ordinary least squares regressions, for the model structure and measurement models (Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019).

This method combines two classical statistical techniques: factor analysis – leading to the measurement model, and linear regression – translated into the structural model (Marôco, 2014).

The measurement model is assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), which defines how the latent variables are operationalised and helps to assess their reliability and validity (Marôco, 2014; Hair, 2010).

By enabling us to test a theory of casual order between a set of variables, the structural model allows us to observe how the independent variables explain the dependent variable, as well as their importance, and can incorporate latent variables into the analysis (Grimm & Yarnold, 2000).

The following chapter presents the characterization of the sample of this study, the empirical validation of the measures for the constructs of theoretical model, through a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and the testing of the proposed model through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Method– PLS-SEM.

## **4. Results analysis**

In this chapter it will be presented the sample characterization and the descriptive analysis of the variables, factor analysis, and structural equations according to the scales based on the literature – Trust, Knowledge Sharing and Service Quality.

### **4.1. Characterization of the sample**

The relationship between business client and consultancy firm was characterized by means of information related to the average annual turnover (in €) with the business client, the duration of the relationship between both entities and the frequency of interaction between them.

As we can see in Table 7, and regarding the average annual turnover with the client, 72,1% present an average annual of more than 40.000,00€.

Regarding the duration of the relationship between the consultancy firm and the business client, 29,8% of the respondents have a relation longer than five years, while 23,1% have a relation for less than a year and 21,2% hold the relation between one year and less than two years.

Concerning the frequency of the interaction, more than five times a year is the predominant answer (90,4%), while two and four times a year are the least frequent answers (1,0%).

In addition to characterising the relationship between the parties, the socio-demographic profile of the respondents (the one who establishes contact with the client company) was characterised through information such as gender, academic qualifications, and the time they have been working in the management consultancy area. The company where they work was also characterised through information on its size (which was measured according to the number of employees).

Still in the Table 7 we can note that most of the sample is male (66,3%, against 33,7% for the female gender). Concerning academic qualifications, 97,1% of the respondents have higher education, with 25% having a degree and 72,1% a master's degree.

When talking about the number of years working the in the consulting area, 30,8% of the respondents have been working between one year and less than two years, while 25% have been working in the area for more than five years.

Finally, with regard to the dimension of the company the respondents are currently working, 74% are in large enterprises (with 250 or more employees), while 11,5% are presently working on medium enterprises (between 50 and 249 employees).

**Table 7: Demographic characterisation of the sample**

<b>Characterization of the client-consultant relationship</b>		
	<b>Options</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Average annual turnover (in €)	Less than 10.000,00€	5,8%
	Between 10.000,00€ and 19.999,99€	14,4%
	Between 20.000,00€ and 29.999,99€	6,7%
	Between 30.000,00€ and 39.999,99€	1,0%
	More than 40.000,00€	72,1%
Duration of the relationship	Less than 1 year	23,1%
	Between 1 year and less than 2 years	21,2%
	Between 2 years and less than 3 years	14,4%
	Between 3 years and less than 4 years	7,7%
	Between 4 years and less than 5 years	3,8%
	5 or more years	29,8%
Frequency of interaction	Less than 1 time a year	1,9%
	1 time a year	1,9%
	2 times a year	1,0%
	3 times a year	3,8%
	4 times a year	1,0%
	More than 5 times a year	90,4%
<b>Characterization of the respondents</b>		

Gender	Female	33,7%
	Male	66,3%
	Other	0,0%
Academic qualifications	9th grade	0,0%
	12gth grade	1,0%
	Bachelor's degree	25,0%
	Master's degree	72,1%
	Doctoral degree	1,9%
Number of years working in the area	Less than 1 year	18,3%
	Between 1 year and less than 2 years	30,8%
	Between 2 years and less than 3 years	11,5%
	Between 3 years and less than 4 years	11,5%
	Between 4 years and less than 5 years	2,9%
	5 or more years	25,0%
<b>Characterization of the company</b>		
Dimension	Micro-enterprise	6,7%
	Small enterprise	7,7%
	Medium enterprise	11,5%
	Large enterprise	74,0%

#### 4.2. Descriptive Analysis

The SmartPLS software, version 3.0, was used for the statistic treatment of the data collected on the questionnaire.

Concerning the descriptive analysis of the variables, as a way of analysing the proposed model, the mean value for each item was studied, as well as the standard deviation.

The mean results from the quotient between the sum of all answers and the total number of participants ( $n = 104$ ) and translates into the concentration of individuals' answers in each of the variables under analysis. Table 8 shows that the items with highest mean are

HARDQUAL\_4 (6,548), SOFTQUAL\_5 (6,538) and POTQUAL\_3 (6,433), which means that, for the corresponding variables, these are the items where total agreement was closest.

Regarding the standard deviation, it represents the measure of data dispersion from the mean. Once again, in Table 8 we can see that the items with higher level of standard deviation are HARDQUAL\_1 (1,945), KNOWSHA\_3 (1,837) and POTQUAL\_5 (1,808), meaning that these items are further away from the mean value.

**Table 8: Descriptive analysis of the variables under study**

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Trust</b>			
<b>Affective trust</b>			
	"Me and this individual have a sharing relationship.		
AFFEC_1	We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes."	5,212	1,335
	"I can talk freely to this individual about difficulties I am having at work and know that (s)he will want to listen."		
AFFEC_2		4,788	1,633
	"We would both feel a sense of loss if one of us was transferred and we could no longer work together."		
AFFEC_3		4,192	1,798
	"If I shared my problems with this individual, I know (s)he would respond constructively and caringly."		
AFFEC_4		4,635	1,629
	"I would have to say that we have both made considerable emotional investments in our working relationship."		
AFFEC_5		3,769	1,788
<b>Cognitive trust</b>			
	"This person approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication."		
COGN_1		5,904	0,925
	"Given this person's track record, I see no reason to doubt his/her competence and preparation for the job."		
COGN_2		5,663	1,182

COGN_3	"I can rely on this person not to make my job more difficult by careless work."	5,212	1,53
COGN_4	"Most people, even those who aren't close friends of this individual, trust and respect him/her as a co-worker."	5,26	1,185
COGN_5	"Other work associates of mine who must interact with this individual consider him/her to be trustworthy."	5,433	1,254
COGN_6	"If people knew more about this individual and his/her background, they would be more concerned and monitor his/her performance more closely."	4,712	1,758
<b>Knowledge Sharing</b>			
KNOWSHA_1	"This individual and I have shared a significant amount of knowledge with each other."	4,692	1,682
KNOWSHA_2	"This individual and I have created new skills and knowledge by working together."	5,096	1,397
KNOWSHA_3	"I have exchanged many ideas with this individual about how to improve each other's capabilities (in manufacturing, research and development, logistics, etc.)"	4,24	1,837
KNOWSHA_4	"In general, the skills and knowledge that have been shared between this individual and I are of substantial amount"	4,846	1,492
KNOWSHA_5	"In general, the skills and knowledge that have been shared between this individual and I are of advanced level"	4,913	1,462
KNOWSHA_6	"In general, the skills and knowledge that have been shared between this individual and I are of significant value to both parties"	5,26	1,293
KNOWSHA_7	"In general, the skills and knowledge that have been shared between this individual and I are of significant use"	5,452	1,262

<b>Quality of Service</b>			
<b>Potential Quality</b>			
POTQUAL_1	"The firm offered a full consulting service to the client."	6,221	1,056
POTQUAL_2	"The consulting firm had the required personnel to provide the service."	5,962	1,2
POTQUAL_3	"The firm had the required facilities to provide the service."	6,433	1,09
POTQUAL_4	"The firm had the required management philosophy to provide the service."	6,327	0,924
POTQUAL_5	"The firm had a low personnel turnover rate who contact the client."	4,635	1,808
POTQUAL_6	"The firm used an appropriate network of partner entities and associates to provide the service."	5,298	1,611
<b>Hard Process Quality</b>			
HARDQUAL_1	"The firm kept time schedules."	4,288	1,945
HARDQUAL_2	"The firm honoured financial agreements and stayed in budgets."	6,183	1,017
HARDQUAL_3	"The firm met the deadlines of the proposals that were made."	5,76	1,229
HARDQUAL_4	"The firm looked at the details requested by the client."	6,548	0,705
HARDQUAL_5	"The consulting firm understood the client's needs."	6,346	0,704
<b>Soft Process Quality</b>			
SOFTQUAL_1	"We consultants accept the clients' requests and suggestions with enthusiasm."	5,683	1,12
SOFTQUAL_2	"We consultants listen to the customer's problems."	6,356	0,865
SOFTQUAL_3	"We consultants have a pleasant personality."	6,125	0,863
SOFTQUAL_4	"We consultants argue when it is necessary."	6,24	0,904
SOFTQUAL_5	"We consultants look after consideration the customer's interests."	6,538	0,72
<b>Outcome Quality - Consultant</b>			

OUTQUAL_1	"The outcome of the firm service had a notable effect."	5,952	1,013
OUTQUAL_2	"The result of the firm service contributes to the client's sales and image."	5,942	1,183
OUTQUAL_3	"The result of the firm service demonstrated creativity."	5,712	1,198
OUTQUAL_4	"The outcome of the firm service was consistent with the client's strategy."	6,317	0,847

### 4.3. Validation of the measurement model

After the characterisation of the sample, in order to assess the validity of the constructs, we resorted to the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) algorithm of the SmartPLS 3.0 software. Once again, the use of this software is justified by the size of the sample ( $n = 104$ ), which was small to perform the estimation by covariance-based models, and the results through the PLS method are more robust in smaller sample sizes (Hair, 2011; Hair, 2010).

The CFA consists of the analysis of four major indicators: factorial validity; convergent validity; composite reliability and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Factorial validity is evaluated through the indicator loadings of each construct, which shows how well an item represents the variance of the underlying construct (Hair et al., 2019). In order to be accepted, a loading must be superior to 0,50, and to be considered reliable they must be over 0,70 (Vinzi et al., 2010).

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) helps assess a variable convergent validity, that is, the extent to which items on a specific construct correlate positively and share a high degree of variance (Hair et al., 2019). The AVE must be over 0,50 in order to be accepted, meaning that the construct explains at least 50% of the variance of the variable that is measuring.

The t-value indicates if the loadings are significant, and thus must present a value superior to 1,96. If so, they prove the existence of convergent validity. That being said, a construct

with a loading lower than 0,50 should only be eliminated if it improves the AVE of the variable (Hair et al., 2019).

Regarding the composite reliability, it is measured with the Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ), which variates between 0 and 1, and with the Composite Reliability (CR). The higher the value of CA, the more reliable is the scale. However, if the value of CA is equal or superior to 0,95, this indicates that the items are reductant, that is they are measuring essentially the same aspect of the construct (Hair et al., 2019). Regarding the CR it must be over 0,70 in order to guarantee a good reliability of the scale (Hair et al., 2020).

Finally, the last step on the measurement model is assess the discriminant validity, which represents to which extent a construct is empirically distinct from the other constructs. Mathematically, it is equal to the square root of the average variances extracted (AVE) from the variables and the correlations between constructs, which should not exceed the square root of the AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To confirm discriminant validity, the variables cannot overlap, that is, the value of the correlations between the variables must be lower than 0,85, and the square root of AVE is superior to those values (Hair et al., 2019).

Recent studies show that the analysis of discriminant validity trough the method of (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) does not present a perform adequately. The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations appears as an alternative when using PLS-SEM (Henseler et al., 2015). This method indicates the mean value of the correlations of items in constructs relative to the mean value of the mean correlations of items measuring the same construct (Hair et al., 2019).

The HTMT value should not exceed 0,90, higher values indicate no discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 9 presents a short resume of the indicators mentioned above as well as their reference values.

**Table 9: Adjustment indicators and their reference values**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Reference values</b>
Factorial validity	Loadings $\geq$ 0,5, ideally 0,7

Convergent Validity	Average Variance Extracted (AVE) $\geq 0,5$
Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) $< 0,95$ (the higher the better) Composite Reliability (CR) $\geq 0,7$
Discriminant Validity	HTMT $\leq 0,90$

From Table 10 we can see that the general of the items has loadings over 0,50, whit the exception of the constructs COGN\_6 and POTQUAL\_5, with a loading of 0,129 and 0,431 respectively. When deleted they increased the AVE of the respective constructs, and so they were excluded from the model.

Regarding the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) we can verify that in all the variables the value is over the recommended 0,50, with values between 0,504 and 0,722 proving the convergent validity of the constructs. This is also confirmed by the fact that all items present a t-value superior to 1,96.

Finally, the Composite Reliability (CR) of all variables is superior to 0,70, and that the Cronbach's Alpha are also above 0,60, proving the reliability of the variables.

**Table 10: Factor analysis of the variables**

Variables	Loadings	t-value	Average	CR	AVE
<b>Affective trust (<math>\alpha=0,871</math>)</b>				0,907	0,661
AFFEC_1	0,834	25,946	5.212		
AFFEC_2	0,738	13,774	4.788		
AFFEC_3	0,809	18,976	4.192		
AFFEC_4	0,867	29,763	4.635		
AFFEC_5	0,812	21,454	3.769		
<b>Cognitive trust (<math>\alpha=0,817</math>)</b>				0,873	0,581
COGN_1	0,706	7,815	5.904		
COGN_2	0,822	11,511	5.663		
COGN_3	0,609	5,012	5.212		
COGN_4	0,812	17,187	5.260		
COGN_5	0,828	20,711	5.433		
<b>Knowledge Sharing (<math>\alpha=0,935</math>)</b>				0,948	0,722

KNOWSHA_1	0,803	22,434	4.692		
KNOWSHA_2	0,831	24,505	5.096		
KNOWSHA_3	0,827	20,405	4.240		
KNOWSHA_4	0,89	33,043	4.846		
KNOWSHA_5	0,878	38,183	4.913		
KNOWSHA_6	0,868	35,933	5.260		
KNOWSHA_7	0,845	18,468	5.452		
<b>Potential Quality (<math>\alpha=0,773</math>)</b>				0,835	0,504
POTQUAL_1	0,673	6,091	6.221		
POTQUAL_2	0,666	4,5	5.962		
POTQUAL_3	0,591	5,135	6.433		
POTQUAL_4	0,785	12,377	6.327		
POTQUAL_6	0,691	8,174	5.298		
<b>Hard Process Quality (<math>\alpha=0,767</math>)</b>				0,842	0,519
HARDQUAL_1	0,611	3,109	4.288		
HARDQUAL_2	0,807	5,736	6.183		
HARDQUAL_3	0,697	4,369	5.760		
HARDQUAL_4	0,779	6	6.548		
HARDQUAL_5	0,69	4,089	6.346		
<b>Soft Process Quality (<math>\alpha=0,758</math>)</b>				0,835	0,505
SOFTQUAL_1	0,735	10,434	5.683		
SOFTQUAL_2	0,769	13,685	6.356		
SOFTQUAL_3	0,684	7,736	6.125		
SOFTQUAL_4	0,631	5,501	6.240		
SOFTQUAL_5	0,726	8,474	6.538		
<b>Outcome Quality (<math>\alpha=0,817</math>)</b>				0,879	0,646
OUTQUAL_1	0,828	14,355	5.952		
OUTQUAL_2	0,798	12,427	5.942		
OUTQUAL_3	0,852	24,785	5.712		
OUTQUAL_4	0,731	14,672	6.317		

Table 11 presents the analysis of the discriminant validity of the structural model variables. Here we can confirm that the HTMT value is always lower than 0,90, proving that the variables do not overlap, and thus confirming the existence of discriminant validity.

**Table 11: Discriminant validity analysis**

	HARDQUAL	KNOWSHA	AFFEC	COGN	OUTQUAL	POTQUAL	SOFTQUAL
<b>HARDQUAL</b>							
<b>KNOWSHA</b>	0.278						
<b>AFFEC</b>	0.374	0.716					

<b>COGN</b>	0.293	0.584	0.703			
<b>OUTQUAL</b>	0.604	0.525	0.356	0.350		
<b>POTQUAL</b>	0.648	0.366	0.291	0.270	0.400	
<b>SOFTQUAL</b>	0.837	0.442	0.375	0.422	0.732	0.454

As such, and given the results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis, it can be concluded that all the variables present reliability, factor validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, meaning that the research instrument of the model has the necessary reliability and quality to answer the problem and objectives of the empirical study.

#### 4.4. Validation of the structural model

Having the measurement model validated, the next step was to confirm the structural relation of the data, that is, the analysis of the casual relations between a group of variables and the confirmation of the theoretical model.

The analysis of the measurement model focus on four indicators: t-value (t); coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ );  $\rho$ -value and the  $\beta$ .

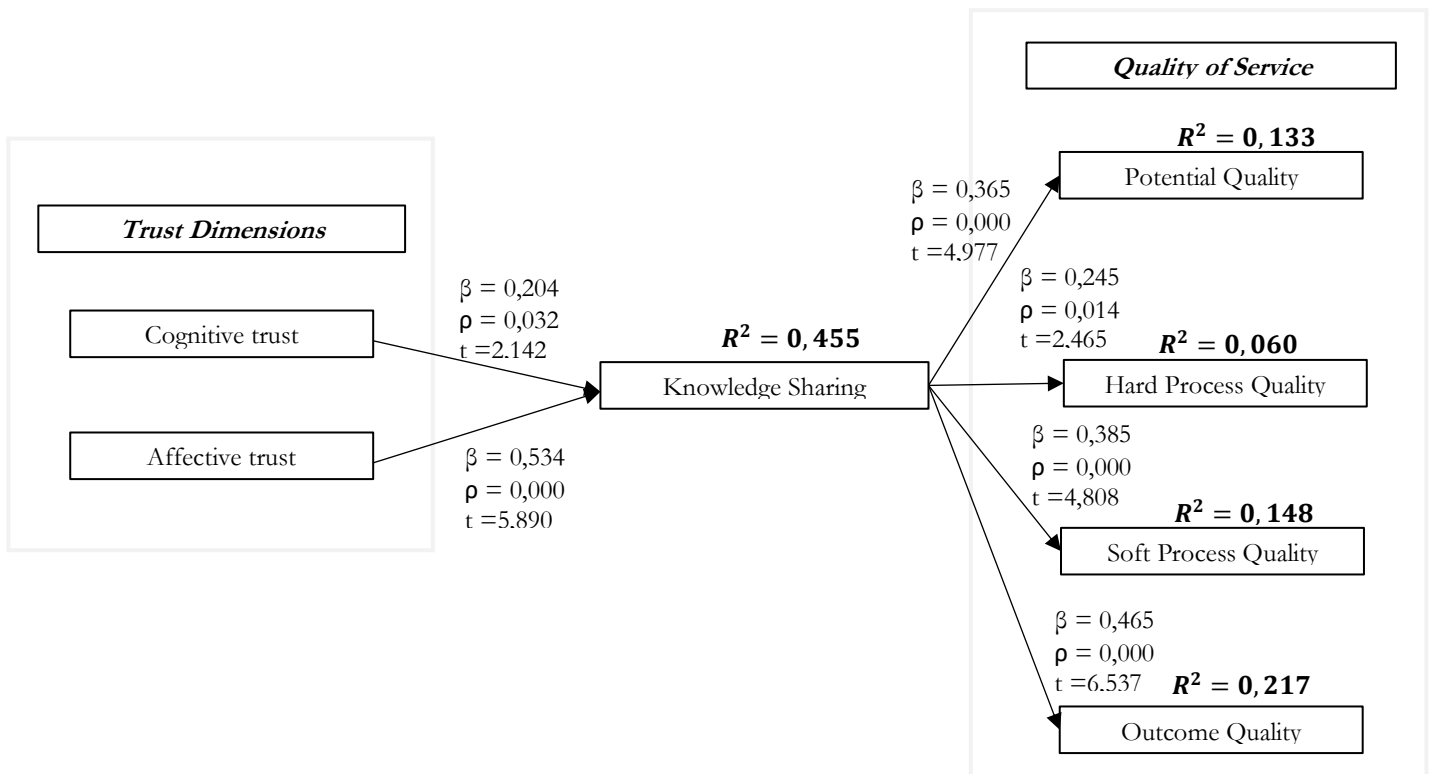
The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates how much the model can explain the observed values (Hair, 2011). A  $R^2$  value bigger than 0,25 suggests a good validity of the indicators (Marôco, 2010).

The  $\rho$ -value must be lower than 0,05, while the t-values needs to be at least 1,96, and the  $\beta$  should not be lower than 0,20 (Hair, 2011).

With the support of Figure 2 we can conclude that all variables are statistically significant, and that Affective Trust (H1.b) is the variable that contributes the most for Knowledge Sharing ( $\beta = 0,534$ ;  $\rho = 0,000$  and  $t = 5,890$ ). It is also possible to verify that the variable Outcome Quality (H2.d) is the most impacted by Knowledge Sharing ( $\beta = 0,465$ ;  $\rho = 0,000$  and  $t = 6,537$ ), followed by the variable Soft Process Quality (H2.c), with  $\beta = 0,534$ ,  $\rho = 0,000$  and  $t = 5,890$  and Potential Quality ( $\beta = 0,365$ ;  $\rho = 0,000$  and  $t = 4,977$ ). The variable Hard Process Quality (H2.c) is the least impacted by Knowledge Sharing, presenting the values of  $\beta = 0,245$ ;  $\rho = 0,014$  and  $t = 2,465$ .

Regarding the analysis of the coefficient of determination we can verify that 45,5% ( $R^2=0,455$ ) of Knowledge Sharing is explained by the variables Cognitive and Affective Trust. However, Knowledge Sharing does not have a greater explanatory power over Quality of Service. Only 6% ( $R^2=0,06$ ) of the variance of Hard Process Quality is justified by Knowledge Sharing, while 13,3% ( $R^2=0,133$ ) of Potential Quality is explained by Knowledge Sharing. Soft Process Quality and Outcome Quality, although present better values than the former variables, they still have  $R^2$  lower than 0,25.

**Figure 2: Structural Model: Hypothesis Test H1.a - H2.d**



#### 4.5. Direct, indirect effects and mediation

In this subchapter the direct and indirect effects between the variables will be analysed as well as the possible mediation. Because the direct effects of Trust on Knowledge Sharing and the direct effects of Knowledge Sharing on the dimensions of Service Quality were already discussed, because they were the hypothesis of this study, they will not be covered in this subchapter.

The effects between variables can be of two types: direct and indirect. The effects are indirect when they imply a sequence of relations with one or more variables between the constructs.

With the help of the bootstrapping procedure of the SmartPLS 3.0, the values for the coefficient ( $\beta$ ), t-value and  $p$ -value were obtained for direct effects and specific indirect effects (Table 12).

**Table 12: Direct effects and specific indirect effects**

Type of effect		$\beta$	t-value	$p$
Indirect	<b>AFFEC -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; POTQUAL</b>	0,159	2,054	0,040
Direct	<b>AFFEC -&gt; POTQUAL</b>	0,080	0,462	0,645
Indirect	<b>AFFEC -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; HARDQUAL</b>	-0,004	0,041	0,967
Direct	<b>AFFEC -&gt; HARDQUAL</b>	0,335	2,068	0,039
Indirect	<b>AFFEC -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; SOFTQUAL</b>	0,135	1,913	0,056
Direct	<b>AFFEC -&gt; SOFTQUAL</b>	0,038	0,270	0,787
Indirect	<b>AFFEC -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; OUTQUAL</b>	0,238	3,915	0,000
Direct	<b>AFFEC -&gt; OUTQUAL</b>	-0,043	0,275	0,784
Indirect	<b>COGN -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; POTQUAL</b>	0,060	1,239	0,216
Direct	<b>COGN -&gt; POTQUAL</b>	0,031	0,211	0,833
Indirect	<b>COGN -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; HARDQUAL</b>	-0,002	0,035	0,972
Direct	<b>COGN -&gt; HARDQUAL</b>	0,028	0,172	0,864
Indirect	<b>COGN -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; SOFTQUAL</b>	0,051	1,202	0,230
Direct	<b>COGN -&gt; SOFTQUAL</b>	0,203	1,559	0,120
Indirect	<b>COGN -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; OUTQUAL</b>	0,089	1,622	0,106
Direct	<b>COGN -&gt; OUTQUAL</b>	0,092	0,717	0,474

Following the reference values already mentioned before, and with the help of Table 12 we can conclude that the only relevant direct effect is between Affective Trust and Hard Process Quality ( $p$ -value < 0,05), meaning that no other dimension of quality is directly affected by any type of trust.

Regarding the indirect effects we have two significant ones: AFFEC-> KNOWSHA-> POTQUAL and AFFEC -> KNOWSHA -> OUTQUAL. These indirect effects are considered as a mediating effect, which helps explain a relationship between an independent

variable and a dependent variable (Hair et al., 2014). This means that in these two cases we are in the presence of a mediation effect of Knowledge Sharing between Affective Trust and Potential Quality and Outcome Quality. Since in all other relations the t-value is below 1,96 and the  $p$ -value is superior to 0,05, no more mediating effects were found.

If mediation is presented it is also possible to verify if the mediation is total or partial (Hair et al., 2014). When both direct and indirect effects between variables are significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0,05$ ), this means that the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable is both direct and through the mediator (Hair et al., 2014). However, if the indirect effect is significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0,05$ ), but the direct effect is insignificant ( $p$ -value  $> 0,05$ ), then we are in the presence of total mediation – the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable is completely through the mediator (Hair et al., 2014) (Table 13).

**Table 13: Reference values of the types of mediation**

Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Mediation
Significante ( $p < 0,05$ )	Significant ( $p < 0,05$ )	Parcial mediation
Insignificante ( $p > 0,05$ )	Significant ( $p < 0,05$ )	Total mediation

**Table 14: Types of mediation**

	$\beta$	t-value	$p$	Conclusion
<b>AFFEC -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; POTQUAL</b>	0,159	2,054	0,040	Total mediation
<b>AFFEC -&gt; POTQUAL</b>	0,080	0,462	0,645	
<b>AFFEC -&gt; KNOWSHA -&gt; OUTQUAL</b>	0,238	3,915	0,000	Total mediation
<b>AFFEC -&gt; OUTQUAL</b>	-0,043	0,275	0,784	

The type of meditation was tested only in the relations where was already concluded that Knowledge Sharing had a mediating effect. As we can see in Table 14, in both cases, the mediation is complete (direct effect is insignificant and indirect effect is significant), which means that Affective Trust doesn't affect Potential Quality and Output Quality directly, only through Knowledge Sharing.

Based on all the analysis that were made, and the results of the PLS-SEM, we can conclude that all the hypothesis proposed in this study (H1.a, H1.b, H2.a, H2.b, H2.c, H2.d) were empirically validated.

In the following chapter, these results will be discussed.

#### 4.6. Discussion of the results

The present study intended to understand if Trust (Affective and Cognitive) had an influence on Service Quality, by directly influencing Knowledge Sharing, and if, by its turn, Knowledge Sharing influenced the Quality of the Service provided by management consulting firms (Potential Quality, Hard Process Quality, Soft Process Quality and Outcome Quality) (Table 13).

**Table 15: Result of the hypothesis test**

	<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Results</b>
H1.a	Cognitive trust between client and consultant positively influences knowledge sharing	Valid
H1.b	Affective trust between client and consultant positively influences knowledge sharing	Valid
H2.a	Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences potential quality	Valid
H2.b	Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences hard process quality	Valid
H2.c	Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences soft process quality	Valid
H2.d	Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences outcome quality	Valid

The Hypothesis 1.a “Cognitive trust between client and consultant positively influences knowledge sharing” was supported by the investigation and presents itself as the dimension less relevant for Knowledge Sharing in the context of management consulting. By its turn, the Hypothesis 1.b, “Affective trust between client and consultant positively influences knowledge sharing”, was also proven by the investigation, and Affective Trust appears as the dimension that has more impact on Knowledge Sharing.

Share knowledge means losing the privilege of being the sole holder of information, which implies that the knowledge provider must trust the recipient, not only in a cognitive way but also in an affective level (Ouakouak & Ouedraogo, 2019). In his study, Chowdhury (2005) concluded that cognitive trust had a stronger influence in knowledge sharing than affective trust, which is the opposite of what was concluded in this investigation. This can be explained with the sample that was used, in fact, 90,4% of the respondents mentioned that the contact with the client was more than five times a year and 29,8% have a relationship with the business client for more than five years. One of the antecedents of affective trust is the frequency of interaction (McAllister, 1995), if both agents have frequent social interactions, it is highly likely that they will share knowledge (Chowdhury, 2005). The stronger influence of Affective Trust, can also be justified with the fact that in a management consulting project the client must share in depth information regarding the firm, and the consultant must share critical knowledge regarding the processes involved in the project (Ko, 2014), thus it does make sense that emotional ties need to be develop, that is, client and consultant must also trust each other as individuals (affective trust), not only as competent employees (cognitive trust).

Regarding the Hypothesis 2.a “Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences potential quality” it was also supported by this study, and it turned out to be the second dimension most influenced by Knowledge Sharing. According to Bochove (1994), potential quality refers to the search attributes that clients use to assess the ability of the service provider to perform the required service. When a company hires a management consulting firm, they expect that not only the specific goals are achieved but they also intend to acquire new knowledge and skills (Ko, 2014), as such, the ability to share knowledge is ultimately required of a management consulting firm. This explains the strong influence of Knowledge Sharing on Potential Quality.

Hypothesis 2.b “Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences hard process quality” was proved by this investigation, however, it was found to be the dimension of service quality that is least influenced by the level of Knowledge Sharing between client and consultant. This dimension of service quality is related to what is being performed during the service process, it refers to compliance with timetables, funding agreements and meeting deadlines (Gounaris, 2005; Szmigin, 1993). This definition explains the weak influence of knowledge sharing on hard process dimension of service quality.

Concerning Hypothesis 2.c “Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences soft process quality” it was also verified by this study. According to Gounaris, (2005) and Szmigin (1993), soft process quality refers to the interaction between service provider and client, it relates to the openness to share ideas and suggestions. If we take a look at the outcomes of sharing knowledge at the team level, we see that, according to Radaelli et al. (2014), sharing knowledge promotes interaction and reciprocity within team members, creating an environment of collaboration and socialization. Thus, sharing knowledge will, develop an environment prone to collaboration and interaction, improving the soft process dimension of service quality of management consulting firms.

Finally, Hypothesis 2.d “Knowledge sharing between client and consultant positively influences outcome quality” was supported by the investigation, and it was considered the dimension of service quality that was more impacted by knowledge sharing. This dimension of service quality translates the technical efforts made by the consulting team to deliver the service, but also the impact felt by the client’s company after the service was provided (Gounaris, 2005). As mentioned before, when a company hires the services of a consulting firm, they intend to have their goals achieved, but also, they expect to acquire knowledge and new skills. So, usually, acquiring new skills is part of the formal contact, but more than that, without acquiring knowledge and the necessary skills, the business client will not be able to understand if the goals of the project were met. As such, sharing knowledge becomes crucial for the evaluation of the outcome quality in the sense that, without in depth information about the client’s company, consultants won’t be able to properly deliver the goals of the project; sharing their knowledge with the clients’ employees is part of the formal contract and without that knowledge the customer won’t be able to evaluate the service that was provided by the consulting firm (Ko, 2014).

Regarding the capability of the conceptual model to explain the variance of the different dimensions of service quality, the results were below expected. In none of the dimensions the minimum value of 25%, recommended by Marôco (2010), was achieved. These poor results may come from the fact that the questionnaire was only answered by consultants, and the fact that meeting defined deadlines, developing an innovative solution, the possibility of implementing that solution, flexibility and value return of the clients’ investments are factors

that receive more attention when evaluating the quality of a management consulting service (Fullerton & West Michael, 1996; Puryear, 2008), and that they are not directly influenced by knowledge sharing.

Despite not having been put as a hypothesis the possible mediating effect of Knowledge Sharing was also tested. In order to do it, it was necessary to evaluate the direct effects and indirect effect of trust on service quality. When doing it, it was possible to verify that only the affective dimension of trust had a direct effect on only one dimension of service quality – Hard Process Quality. No other dimension of service quality was directly influenced by any of the dimensions of trust. This means that developing a trust-based relationship between client and consultant, mainly through affective ties, can directly impact the perception of Hard Process Quality.

Regarding the indirect effects, only two were relevant, proving the mediating effect of Knowledge Sharing between Affective Trust and Potential Quality, and Affective Trust and Outcome Quality. Because no direct effect was present in these relations, the mediating effect of Knowledge Sharing is considered total in both these relations. Meaning that the influence of Affective Trust on Potential Quality and Outcome Quality is totally through Knowledge Sharing.

The results of this study suggest that a trusting relationship between client and consultant directly affects the process of sharing knowledge between both agents, which will directly influence the perception of service quality, mainly the Potential Quality and the Outcome Quality, thus proving the importance of Knowledge Sharing to the quality of the service provided, and the relevance of trust in this process.

## 5. Conclusion

The present investigation had as its main objective to clarify if trust influenced the quality of management consulting services, by directly influencing knowledge sharing, which, by its turn, influenced service quality.

Given the fact that management consulting is characterized as a professional service, described as highly intangible and customized, the process of selecting a management consulting is made mostly through past experience and third parties' recommendations (Bennett & Smith, 2004). As such, providing a high-quality service is crucial for the companies of this area to ensure future assignments (McLachlin, 2000). That being said, understanding which factors influence the perception of a service with quality is fundamental.

Despite the extensive literature regarding this topic, there were still no consensus regarding the role played by trust on the quality of the service provided. Thus, this study was proposed as a way of clarifying the literature and better understand the real influence of affective and cognitive trust, on the quality of management consulting services, by its direct effect on knowledge sharing, which by its turn, influenced service quality.

For this purpose, a quantitative methodology was used. With the help of the SmartPLS 3.0 software, the hypotheses suggested in the research model were tested, based on data obtained from a sample of 104 valid responses from consultants of different consulting firms. The software was also used to present the respective Structural Equation Model.

The results obtained proved that both Affective and Cognitive Trust had a positive impact in Knowledge Sharing, with the Affective Trust dimension playing the most relevant role. It was thus evidenced that a relationship of trust between the client of a management consulting service and the consultant, at the professional and individual level, impulses knowledge sharing between both.

Regarding the dimensions of quality of service, the results validate all hypothesis. As such it is possible to state that when the relation between client and consultant is characterised by Knowledge Sharing, the perception of quality will be impacted positively. However, this

positive influence of Knowledge Sharing is stronger in the dimensions Potential Quality and Outcome Quality, proving that trust and knowledge sharing are more relevant for the evaluation of the potential quality of the firm, and for the evaluation of the result of the project, rather than to the evaluation of the service delivery process.

When studying the direct and indirect effect, it was still possible to verify the existence of a total mediation effect of Knowledge Sharing between Affective Trust and Potential Quality, as well as between Affective Trust and Outcome Quality, thus supporting the importance of Knowledge Sharing in the management consulting service.

Besides it was possible to verify the existence of a direct effect between Affective Trust and Hard Process Quality.

The results of this study prove the importance of Knowledge Sharing for the quality of the service provided by management consulting firms, which is based in two factors: first by directly influencing all the considered dimensions of service quality; and second by having a mediating role between Affective Trust and Potential and Outcome Quality. Finally, these results also proved the importance of trust in the service quality of management consulting firms, since it directly influences the process of Knowledge Sharing and because Affective Trust has a direct impact on Hard Process Quality.

This implies that managers of management consulting firms need to incentivize consultants to work on a trust-based relationship between them and the client, as a way of increasing the level and effectiveness of knowledge sharing, in order to improve the perception of the quality of the service provided.

In summary, the results of this research confirm the hypotheses tested, which allowed the objectives to be met and the existing gap, regarding the lack of consensus on the impact of trust on the quality of the service provided by management consulting firms, to be closed.

In the following subchapters, the contributions to management and the limitations of the current study are presented. Proposals for future research will also be drawn up.

## 5.1. Contributions to management

In the present study conclusions were obtained which confirm the importance for a management consulting firm of developing a relation of trust between client and consultants to impulse knowledge sharing during the development of a project, and how it can improve the quality of the service provide. Thus, in this chapter, it will be presented some considerations to management to improve their performance.

The present investigation has proven that building a relation between client and consultant, based on trust, both at the cognitive and affective level, is an important antecedent to improve the exchange of knowledge between both agents, which, as it was mentioned before, is crucial for the development and delivery of the management consulting service. Therefore, management consulting firms must encourage consultants to develop affective trust with the business client, since this is the main influencer of knowledge sharing. That being said and having in consideration that frequency of interaction and open communication help develop effective trust, managers of management consulting firms should ensure that when working with a client the team of consultants must not rotate a lot.

Regarding the quality of service dimensions, the variable Outcome Quality was the one that presented the highest relevance derived from Knowledge Sharing. Therefore, managers must have in consideration that for a client to perceive a good quality of the service delivered, sharing knowledge needs to be incentivised, not only because in some case is part of the formal contract.

Therefore, to guarantee that knowledge sharing is powered between client and consultant, as a way for improving the perception of service quality managers must encourage the development of a trust-based relationship between both agents by promoting frequent interactions and open communication and limit the personnel rotation when collaborating with a client.

## **5.2. Limitations and suggestions for future investigations**

Like most investigations, this study also presents limitations and some of them may motivate future research.

First, the sample size of this study was limited (104 valid answers), so it would be pertinent to repeat this study with a larger number of respondents, so that comparative analyses could be made, with some reliability. Besides that, this study intends to study the relation between client and consultant, however, only consultants were inquired, as such, it would be interesting to develop this study by adopting the client's perspective or incorporate mutual trust by combining both perspectives. Lastly, the sample obtained for this investigation, was of convenience and this does not allow the generalization of the results.

Additionally, the sample shows a large discrepancy in terms of the number of years working in consultancy (25% has been working in management consulting for more than five years, while 30,8% has only been working between one year and less than two years). This may have caused some bias in the analysis of the proposed model. So, in the future this investigation should be repeated having a more homogeneous sample or study the impact of the different level of experience of consultants in the results of this study.

Finally, it may be pertinent to apply this study to a specific type of consulting services, such as IT consulting, or to focus on different areas of activity of the client company, leading to more concise and conclusive results.

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## Appendixes

### *Appendix I*

#### *Constructs regarding trust and its dimensions*

All scale measures are based on 1–7 Likert scales, using “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” as anchors.

##### **Affective trust**

- Me and this individual have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes.
- I can talk freely to this individual about difficulties I am having at work and know that (s)he will want to listen.
- We would both feel a sense of loss if one of us was transferred and we could no longer work together.
- If I shared my problems with this individual, I know (s)he would respond constructively and caringly.
- I would have to say that we have both made considerable emotional investments in our working relationship.

##### **Cognitive trust**

- This person approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication.
- Given this person’s track record, I see no reason to doubt his/her competence and preparation for the job.
- I can rely on this person not to make my job more difficult by careless work.
- Most people, even those who aren't close friends of this individual, trust and respect him/her as a co-worker.
- Other work associates of mine who must interact with this individual consider him/her to be trustworthy.
- If people knew more about this individual and his/her background, they would be more concerned and monitor his/her performance more closely.

#### *Constructs regarding knowledge sharing*

All scale measures are based on 1–7 Likert scales, using “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” as anchors, on the first 3 items.

##### **Knowledge Sharing**

- This individual and I have shared a significant amount of knowledge with each other.

- This individual and I have created new skills and knowledge by working together.
- I have exchanged many ideas with this individual about how to improve each other's capabilities (in manufacturing, research and development, logistics, etc.)
- In general, the skills and knowledge that have been shared between this individual and I are:
  - a) A limited amount/substantial amount.
  - b) Basic/advanced
  - c) Of little value to both parties/of significant value to both parties
  - d) Of limited use/of significant use

*Constructs regarding quality and its dimensions - INDSERV scale*

All scale measures are based on 1–7 Likert scales, using “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” as anchors.

**Potential Quality**

- The firm offered a full consulting service to the client.
- The consulting firm had the required personnel to provide the service.
- The firm had the required facilities to provide the service.
- The firm had the required management philosophy to provide the service.
- The firm had a low personnel turnover rate who contact the client.
- The firm used an appropriate network of partner entities and associates to provide the service.

**Hard Process Quality**

- The firm kept time schedules.
- The firm honoured financial agreements and stayed in budgets.
- The firm met the deadlines of the proposals that were made.
- The firm looked at the details requested by the client.
- The consulting firm understood the client's needs.

**Soft Process Quality**

- We consultants accept the clients' requests and suggestions with enthusiasm.
- We consultants listen to the customer's problems.
- We consultants have a pleasant personality.

- We consultants argue when it is necessary.
- We consultants look after consideration the customer's interests.

**Outcome Quality**

- The outcome of the firm service had a notable effect.
- The result of the firm service contributes to the client's sales and image.
- The result of the firm service demonstrated creativity.
- The outcome of the firm service was consistent with the client's strategy.

## A influência da confiança no serviço de consultoria

No âmbito da Dissertação de Mestrado em Gestão da Faculdade de Economia do Porto, este questionário integra-se num estudo em que o objetivo é avaliar o impacto da confiança na qualidade do serviço prestado por entidades consultoras.

O questionário é anónimo, os dados recolhidos serão utilizados para fins académicos e tratados de forma confidencial.

Para o sucesso desta investigação é crucial que o inquirido seja um dos colaboradores que, ao longo de um projeto de consultoria, teve um **maior nível de interação** com o cliente.

Não há respostas certas ou erradas, portanto, por favor, indique o seu grau de concordância com as afirmações, com sinceridade e seguindo as instruções indicadas.

O preenchimento do presente questionário tem a duração aproximada de 7 minutos.

Se você tiver alguma dúvida, entre em contato com Bárbara Bernardino - [barbarabernardino2410@gmail.com](mailto:barbarabernardino2410@gmail.com)

Agradeço desde já pelo tempo disponibilizado!

Trabalha numa empresa de consultoria em funções de consultor? \*

Sim

Não

Tendo em consideração uma empresa cliente com a qual tenha colaborado, responda às seguintes questões:

Qual o tipo de serviço de consultoria prestado a essa empresa cliente? Se tiver mais que um serviço, mencione aquele que é prestado há mais tempo. \*

A sua resposta

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Qual a média anual do volume Negócios (em €) com cliente? \*

- Menos de 10.000,00€
- Entre 10.000,00€ e 19.999,99€
- Entre 20.000,00€ e 29.999,99€
- Entre 30.000,00€ e 39.999,99€
- Mais de 40.000,00€

A relação com esse mesmo cliente mantém-se há: \*

- Menos de 1 ano
- Entre 1 ano e menos de 2 anos
- Entre 2 e menos de 3 anos
- Entre 3 e menos de 4 anos
- Entre 4 e menos de 5 anos
- 5 ou mais anos

Qual a frequência de interação com o cliente? \*

- Menos de 1 vez por ano
- 1 vez por ano
- 2 vezes por ano
- 3 vezes por ano
- 4 vezes por ano
- 5 ou mais vezes por ano

Tendo em consideração um projeto específico que tenha desenvolvido com a empresa cliente considerada anteriormente, responda às seguintes questões:

Qual foi o seu papel durante o desenvolvimento desse projeto? \*

A sua resposta

Tendo em consideração um projeto específico que tenha desenvolvido com a empresa cliente considerada anteriormente e, mais especificamente, **na relação com o colaborador dessa empresa com quem mais interagiu**, responda às seguintes questões:

Eu e o indivíduo em questão temos uma relação de partilha. Podemos ambos partilhar livremente as nossas ideias, sentimentos, e esperanças. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Posso falar livremente com este indivíduo sobre as dificuldades que estou a ter no trabalho e sei que eles vão querer ouvir. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Ambos sentiríamos uma sensação de perda se um de nós fosse transferido e já não pudéssemos trabalhar juntos. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Se eu partilhasse os meus problemas com este indivíduo, sei que ele(a) responderia de forma construtiva e afável. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Posso dizer que ambos fizemos investimentos emocionais consideráveis na nossa relação de trabalho. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Este indivíduo aborda o seu trabalho com profissionalismo e dedicação.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Dado o historial deste indivíduo, não vejo motivos para duvidar da sua competência e preparação para o trabalho. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Posso contar com este indivíduo para não tornar o meu trabalho mais difícil através de um trabalho descuidado. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A maioria das pessoas, mesmo as que não sejam amigas íntimas deste indivíduo, confiam nele(a) e respeitam-no(a) como um colega de trabalho. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Outros colegas de trabalho meus que tiveram de interagir com este indivíduo consideram-no(a) digno de confiança. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Se as pessoas soubessem mais sobre este indivíduo e os seus antecedentes, estariam mais preocupadas e controlariam o seu desempenho mais de perto. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Tendo em consideração um projeto específico que tenha desenvolvido com a empresa cliente considerada anteriormente e, mais especificamente, **na relação com o colaborador dessa empresa com quem mais interagiu**, responda às seguintes questões:

Este indivíduo e eu partilhamos um conhecimento significativo um com o outro. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Este indivíduo e eu criamos novas competências e conhecimentos ao trabalharmos em conjunto. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Este indivíduo e eu trocamos muitas ideias sobre como melhorar as capacidades um do outro (em questões de investigação e desenvolvimento, logística, etc.). \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Em geral, as competências e conhecimentos que têm sido partilhados entre mim e o indivíduo em causa são **de quantidade substancial**. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Em geral, as competências e conhecimentos que têm sido partilhados entre mim \* e o indivíduo em causa são **de nível avançado**.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Em geral, as competências e conhecimentos que têm sido partilhados entre mim \* e o indivíduo em causa são **de valor significativo para ambas as partes**.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Em geral, as competências e conhecimentos que têm sido partilhados entre mim \* e o indivíduo em causa são de **uso significativo**.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

De acordo com o projeto de consultoria que foi desenvolvido com a empresa cliente considerado até agora, avalie o grau de concordância com as seguintes afirmações relativas à qualidade do serviço prestado pela empresa onde trabalha:

A empresa de consultoria oferece um serviço completo de consultoria ao cliente. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria tem o pessoal necessário para prestar o serviço. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria tem as instalações necessárias para prestar o serviço. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria tem a filosofia de gestão necessária para prestar o serviço. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria tem uma baixa taxa de rotação de pessoal que contacta o cliente. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria utiliza uma rede apropriada de entidades parceiras e associadas para prestar o serviço. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria mantem os horários definidos. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria honra os acordos financeiros e cumpre orçamentos. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria cumpre os prazos das propostas que foram feitas. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

A empresa de consultoria analisa os detalhes solicitados pelos clientes. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Nós consultores compreendemos as necessidades do cliente. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Nós consultores aceitamos com entusiasmo os pedidos e sugestões do cliente. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Nós consultores ouvimos os problemas do cliente. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Nós consultores temos uma personalidade agradável. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Nós consultores argumentamos quando necessário. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

Nós consultores temos em consideração os interesses do cliente. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

O resultado do serviço de consultoria tem um efeito notável. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

O resultado do serviço de consultoria contribui para as vendas e imagem do cliente. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

O resultado do serviço de consultoria demonstra criatividade. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

O resultado do serviço de consultoria é consistente com a estratégia do cliente. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Discordo totalmente        Concordo totalmente

#### Informações gerais sobre o inquirido e a empresa onde trabalha

Género \*

Feminino

Masculino

Outra: \_\_\_\_\_

Quais as suas habilitações literárias? \*

- Ensino básico
- Ensino secundário
- Licenciatura
- Mestrado
- Doutoramento

Há quantos anos trabalha na área de consultoria? \*

- Menos de 1 ano
- Entre 1 ano e menos de 2 anos
- Entre 2 e menos de 3 anos
- Entre 3 e menos de 4 anos
- Entre 4 e menos de 5 anos
- 5 ou mais anos

Qual a dimensão da empresa onde trabalha? \*

- Micro empresa (máximo de 10 colaboradores)
- Pequena empresa (entre 11 a 49 colaboradores)
- Média empresa (entre 50 e 249 colaboradores)
- Grande empresa (250 ou mais colaboradores)

Muito obrigada pela sua colaboração!