PERCEPTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SOLUTIONS IN BUSINESS CONSULTING

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**Objectives**

The main objectives of this study were to identify the perceptions of (1) solutions and the life-cycle of a solution, (2) value and value generation processes, and (3) processes and systems in place within consulting firms. In general, the research aims to identify commonalities and differences between in-use practices in business consulting, and extant academic literature on solutions.

**Summary**

By analysing the content of interviews with industry professionals, the research aimed to establish a framework on the perceptions and implementation processes of solutions, and identify industry-specific features and processes related to solutions.

**Conclusions**

Overall, the research identified two trends differing from extant academic literature: Firstly, a unique process of problem definition-resolution was identified to exists parallel to the general solution life-cycle. Secondarily, Business consulting firms seem to provide a significant number of different solutions with varying characteristics and attributes, given widely varying requirements of different customers.

**Key words:** Solutions, Business Consulting, Value generation

**Language:** English

**Grade:**
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Solutions have significantly changed the way that business is conducted, with business moving from fixed, pre-established products and services into customised offerings that address specific and unique problems or requirements that a customer has. By providing customised solutions, a provider can more effectively address the needs of the customer by recognising the internal processes of the customer. This high level of understanding of customer’s internal processes leads to both added value and a greater degree of integration for the solution in comparison to a standardised product-centred offering.

The use of solutions has shifted the focus of businesses from sellers of individual services or into providing long-term solution offerings (French, and Knudsen (2006); Galbrath (2002); Wise and Baumgartner (1999)). Solutions are highly integrated within the customers business and internal processes (Brady, T., et. al. (2005); Storbacka (2011); Tuli, et. al. (2007)). This high level of integration enables a solution provider to take control of a larger portion of the customer’s value stream (Storbacka & Pennanen (2014)).

Overall, the most prevalent dominant logic in relevant academic literature is the service-dominant logic proposed by Vargo, and Lusch (2004), that argues for the value of a solution to be determined by customers “value in use” (Vargo and Lusch, 2006). The value itself is created through
networks in which various actors, including the customer interact and exchange services to create the solution (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

However, some argue that while highly customisable, solutions do not exist as fully unique customer-to customer offerings, but instead, solutions are based on predefined modular frameworks (Rajahonka, 2013; Storbacka and Pennanen, 2014). These frameworks are supported two integral systems. Firstly, a modular solution platform that houses the core offering that can be customised according to customers’ needs and internal processes. Secondarily, a solution-specific business model, that enables solution providers to supply a greater level of integratedness (Storbacka & Pennanen, (2014); Storbacka 2005,2007 ). This improved integratedness is created through higher level of understanding regarding customers internal operational and value generation processes (Storbacka & Pennanen, (2014); Tuli, et. al. (2007); Vargo & Lusch, (2004)).

In general, the life cycle of a solution is defined by Tuli, et.al. (2007) to consist of four separate phases focused on (1) the definition of customer’s needs and the understanding of internal processes, (2) customization of the solution in accordance to the customer's needs, (3) the deployment of the solution, and (4) the provision of post-deployment support and provision of further customisation to the solution in accordance to the customers changing needs.

1.2. Research problem
In general, prevalent academic literature argues that solutions are long-term platform-based offerings, which create value through established relationships between a solution provider and a customer (Rajahonka, 2013; Storbacka and Pennanen, 2014; Storbacka 2005, 2007).

Additionally, while solutions are extensively discussed in relevant academic literature, a major portion of extant literature addresses solutions that have the physical product as the core offering. In comparison, research on service-centric solutions is sparse.

Therefore, academic literature might not reflect the theories-in-use within consulting businesses. Thus, an interview-based approach is taken to understand both the conceptions of solutions within the business consulting industry and the prevalent theories-in use.

1.3. Research questions

Overall, this research aims to answer the general-level research question:

(1) How are solutions defined in business consulting, and what are their characteristics?

The general-level research question is further divided into the:
(1) How is the life-cycle of a solution defined in business consulting?

(2) How is the value of solutions defined in business consulting, and what are the characteristics of the value generation process?

(3) What systems and processes are present in business consulting to aid the creation and value generation process of a solution?

1.4. Research objectives

The object of this research is to analyse the perceptions of solutions in business consulting and to establish a typology of characteristics and in-use processes.

Overall, this paper aims to increase the understanding by focusing on three aspects of solutions:

- how solutions and their life-cycles are conceptualised within the business consulting industry
- how is the value of a solution defined in business consulting?
- what processes and systems are present in consulting businesses to improve the value generation process of a solution?

Additionally, this research aims to compare the in-use theories to prevalent theories discussed in relevant academic literature.
1.5. Definitions

Solution – A customised offering consisting of products and/or services to address a customer problem.

Value – The perceived benefit of the solution

Value-generation – The process(es) through which additional value is created

2. Literature Review

Storbacka (2011) divides extant solution literature into “research streams” that encompass:

“servitization literature, solution marketing and sales literature, solution strategy and management literature, and operations management-oriented product/service systems literature.”

While in general extant literature agrees that solutions are customised offering made to address customer-specific problems, the definition of a solution in terms of the solution offering and value generation process differs between academics.

In terms of the definition of a solution, traditional academic opinion has been that solutions are driven by product-dominant logic, arguing that a solution is a bundle of
services and/or products, with the value of the solution being based on the combined bundle to create more perceived value in comparison to the individual components (Galbraith (2002); Sawhney (2006); Davies, Brady, and Hobday (2006)). On the other hand, articles such as Storbacka (2011) and Tuli et al., (2007), discuss solutions as “integrated solutions”, in which solutions are defined not in terms their component service and products, but rather by integrated processes in which the component services and products are integrated into the customer's business, with the objective to solving the customer’s problem.

Furthermore, Storbacka & Pennanen (2014) argue that a solution is not just a singular project-based offering, but rather, extends to be a lifecycle-based solution offering that encompasses multiple projects. Additionally, ((ibid.); Storbacka, (2011)) note that for solution providers to achieve effective value capture, businesses must introduce changes at an organisational level, and establish a solution platform to create efficiencies between different interrelated organisational capabilities in the solution provider organisation.

The differences in the perception of solutions also carry over to the value perception and the dominant logic of solutions. Some academic literature considers solutions to be based on product-dominant logic (Wolcott & Arroniz, (2006); Johansson, et.al., (2003)), which argues that the value of a solution is defined solely by the solution provider. Additionally, product-dominant logic argues that the added value is created by the solution provider through the combining of products and/or services into a “bundle,”
where the combination of components inhibits a value higher than that of individualised services or products (Sawhney (2006)). Product-dominant logic argues that the value is defined entirely by the solution provider and that the customer's role is as an end-user (ibid.).

While product-dominant logic considers a customer as the receiver of the product, and the perceived value as being generated by the solution provider in the form of a tangible product offering, service-dominant logic argues that solution is value definition is co-created between the customer and the solution provider (Petri & Jacob (2006); Vargo & Lusch (2004)). According to the service-dominant logic, the solution providers role is instead the creation of value proposals on which the customer may decide to act upon Vargo & Lusch (2008).

As by the service-dominant logic, both the value definition and the value generation are done by the customer. Thus, the solution providers value extraction is not determined by the added value created by the “bundling” of individual components, but rather, is determined by the customer's value-in-use (Vargo & Lusch, (2004)).

However, Macdonald, et.al. (2016) and Tuli, et.al. (2007) note that the perceived value differs between the customer and the solution provider. With the customer's value perception being based on relational processes rather than the products and services within the solution bundle, Vargo, and Lusch (2004) argue that attention should be put in by the solution provider to understand the customer's
organisational processes, with Jaakkola & Hakanen, (2013) further arguing that this attention should not just be focused on the relationships between the customer and the solution provider, but rather across all of the actors within the customer's value network.

For the solution provider, the added value of a solution does not come solely in the form of a monetary benefit but also arises in the form of acquired knowledge of the internal functions and processes of a business. Storbacka, & Pennanen, (2014) argue that the benefit of the added knowledge is cumulative in nature and argue that to effectively utilise the value gained in the form of additional knowledge, a knowledge management system has to be integrated into the solution providers business functions(Baladi, (1999); Svarvy, (1999)). An effective knowledge management system enables a solution provider to both assist the value generation process of a solution, to provide a greater level of customisation, and to ensure a greater degree of integration of the solutions into the customer's internal processes Artto, et.al. (2015)

Tuli, et.al. (2007) notes that “it is useful to define a solution consistently with the views of customers” and defines the solution life cycle to consist of four linear processes:

“(1) customer requirements definition, (2) customization and integration of goods and/or services and (3) their deployment, and (4) postdeployment customer support”.

However, the perceptions of the processes that comprise the life cycle of a solution differ between customers and the
solution providers (ibid.), arguing that the solution provider’s perception of the solutions life cycle is product-centric, consisting of a singular process of which consists of customisation and integration of goods and services into a bundle (Galbraith, (2002)).

The process-centric view proposed by Tuli, et.al. (2007) is contested by Storbacka (2011), who argues that the “solution business process” begins with solution development and demand creation, which occur before any customer interaction takes place. Furthermore, ((ibid.); Storbacka & Pennanen (2014)) propose that the customer interaction only occurs during the last two stages of the “solution business process,” the solution selling and delivery stages. Finally, Unlike the singular linear process-centric view, the “solution business process” argues for two interrelated concurrent processes of “commercialization and industrialization” that operate parallel throughout the various stages of the “solution business process” (ibid.).

3. Methodology

This research aims to assess the “theories-in-use” approach is used in order to understand the perceptions of solutions within consulting businesses. Initial participants were chosen using purposive sampling, after which further participants were recruited by utilising snowball sampling in the form of participant recommendations. This data collection occurred over a timeline of 3 months. The data collection was done in the form of interviews conducted with
a total of 4 consultants working in 4 different companies, with extensive experience in delivering solutions to businesses operating in 9 different industries. The interviews each had a duration between 23 and 51 minutes.

Table 1: Background of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Interview length (In minutes)</th>
<th>Interviewee experience in business consulting industry (in years)</th>
<th>Interviewee experience with solutions (in years)</th>
<th>Industries primarily worked with in regard to solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Company 1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Retail, Consumer goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Company 2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Finance, Insurance, Logistics, Public sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Company 3</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Financial services, Insurance, public sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Company 4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3,5</td>
<td>Financial services, Logistics, Automotive, Private equity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research was conducted using a semi-structured interview format, with 12 guiding questions established to focus on the themes of the research, which are as follows:

- Perception of solutions in business consulting
- Perception and characteristics of the solution life cycle in business consulting
- Perception of value in solutions and the characteristics of the value generation process in business consulting

The questions were designed as non-directive, and the direction of an interviewer was kept minimal. However, additional questions were asked when clarification was required or additional information or exploration on
potentially relevant ideas was relevant. The interviews were recorded, and the sound recordings were transcribed and translated (where necessary)

In the data analysis stage, the transcripts were analysed, and ideas and themes reoccurring across interviews were identified and recorded in Table 1, which were as follows:

Table 2: Themes identified in the Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>themes</th>
<th>Frequency (% of participants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customisation</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integration into processes</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variability in the utilisation of solution platforms</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem definition</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solution customisation in accordance to customer needs</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment of the solution</td>
<td>4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution support Post-deployment</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous problem definition-resolution</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in defining the themes chosen from the interviews, three criteria of selection of ideas were set:

1. is the theme applicable to a variety of solutions, rather than being limited to a specific solution?
2. Is the idea or theme mentioned by multiple participants?
3. Is the idea elaborated upon, rather than just stated in a form of terminology?

Finally, the themes arising from the interviews were compared and contrasted with extant literature on solutions to search for commonalities and differences on recognised themes and overall typology.

4. Analysis

4.1. customisation

Overall, all of the interviewees noted that customisation to be integral in the solution sales process, with one noting that: “big part (of the work) comes from actually tailoring the solution to the client”.

In general, the customisation process seems to very customer dependant, with one interviewee noting:

“the processes are a bit different for different companies and different industries. Their manufacturing operations are different, and they might not manufacture anything at all, but create services instead.”

Overall, the interviews suggest that customisation to the solutions are not only tied to the company-specific requirements of solutions. Instead multitude of factors, both internal and external to the customers business are evaluated in the customizing a solution to the individual customers requirements.
Furthermore, interviewees note that businesses often have IT systems available within businesses to support the customisation process. Most often mentioned were knowledge management systems that enable consulting businesses to customise their solutions more effectively and improve the organisational memory of a business (Moorman & Miner, (1997)).

4.2. life cycle

Analysis of the interviews revealed a total of four processes occurring in stages that consists of the solution life-cycle: (1) Problem definition, (2) Solution customisation, (3) Deployment, and (4) Post-deployment support.

The interviews suggest, that while all four processes of a solution life-cycle occur in a sequence, after the initial problem definition stage, a parallel problem definition process is present alongside the further stages in the solution life-cycle. This process is in the form of a continuous problem definition-resolving process. This fifth functions to define the solution in accordance with problems that arise during the further stages of the solution life-cycle.
4.2.1. Problem definition

Problem definition refers to the first stage of the solution life-cycle and refers to the definition of the objective of the solution, in terms of what the solution aims to achieve and to determine how the success of the solution is evaluated.

In this stage, the objective of the solution provider seems to be to understand the customer’s internal processes, enabling the solution provider to better define the requirements of the solution. This is done in collaboration between the customer and the solution provider to achieve a greater degree of integration into customers internal processes, with an interviewee describing the process:

“If a customer requires a solution, after establishing the desired outcome, we look at what kind of an IT system is needed as support, as the technical side (of the solution). And also, we look at the operative aspects, what processes are affected, what has to happen on the side of the customers business.”
Additionally, At the problem definition stage the performance metrics in regards to which the success of the objectives of the solution are determined.

Overall, in business consulting these performance metrics seem to be both solution- and customer-dependant, with one interviewee describing the customisation process:

“If there is some impact, revenue, and profitability, of course, you would take that into account, but not every project is anyhow related to profitability or revenue of the company. If it is some sort of solution that improves the employee experience, it is much harder to analyse the exact revenue. But still, in the analysis stage, you always analyse the impact of the solution to the business KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and those KPI's, they fully depend on the nature of the project. So, if it is a cost-cutting project then there are clearer KPIs. But if it is, for example, a project related to employee experience improvement, the KPI's will be very different.”

This highlights the variation in how a solution is evaluated, and that the perceived success in the implementation of a solution is dependent on varying factors that vary on a per solution basis.

4.2.2. solution customisation

The Interviews indicate that the solution customisation stage begins by comparing different possibilities for a solution. At this stage, the problems within the customer's processes that were identified in the problem definition stage are assessed, and the solution is then customised in accordance with the individualised needs of the customer.
Overall, this is done to enable a larger degree of integration into the customer’s internal processes and to enable a more effective value capture. However, the degree of customisation seems to vary between individual solutions, given differing requirements of solutions:

“there is a certain level of customization in most of the cases, and the processes are a bit different for different companies and different industries.”

The customisation may, to some extent include some small-scale implementation of the solution to pre-emptively test the effectiveness of the integration of the solution, and to understand the effect the solution has on the processes of the customer business, given the costs associated with full-scale implementation of a solution, as pointed out by one consultant:

“You would also do some piloting. Especially if it is a very complex solution, you do not want to implement the solution without piloting because it can be very costly.”

4.2.3. Deployment of the solution

In general, the deployment stage is viewed by most business consultants as the stage during which the full-scale implementation of the solution occurs. At the deployment stage, the value of a solution is fully determined, as it is the first stage during which the solution is fully integrated into the customer’s processes (Tuli, et.al., (2007)).
Overall, some interviewees note the deployment stage may reveal processes that have not been integrated properly, or possible improvements in the implementation of the solution, that prompts the utilisation of the problem definition-resolution process.

4.2.4. Solution support Post-deployment

Solution post-deployment exists as the final phase of the solution life-cycle. Post-deployment support focuses on the supplying and upkeep of the solution, enabling more value capture for the solution provider. Simultaneously, the post-deployment process enables a business to extend the value capture process over longer time periods (Storbacka, and Pennanen, (2014)).

Secondarily, interviewees note that over time as the requirements of the customer’s business and internal processes change, the solution must be modified to address these changes in the customer’s business. To implement these changes, customers’ businesses internal processes have to be re-evaluated, and the effects of the solution to these processes have to be understood by the solution provider.

4.2.5. Problem definition-resolution process

The interviews suggested that alongside the four stages of the solution life-cycle exists a fifth process, that is in a form of a problem definition-resolution process. This problem definition-resolution process seems to be present concurrently with the solution deployment and post-
deployment support stages. Overall, the definition-resolution process seems to be characterised by two internal processes of problem definition and customisation. Of these two, the problem definition is a continuous process responsible for recognizing potential problems or optimisation opportunities within the solution, to achieve a greater degree of integration to the customer’s pre-existing processes in the deployment stage, or to address the changes in those processes due to the changing needs of the customer organisation, and modify the solution accordingly during the post-deployment stage of the solution.

While the problem definition-resolution process carries similarities with the first two stages of the solution life-cycle, it differs in terms of scope and application.

Firstly, unlike the solution life-cycle the scope of the definition-resolution process does not apply to the entire solution, but rather, is concerned with singular processes within a solution that may be in the form of modifications or additions to the original solution.

Secondarily, while the general life-cycle process is linear in structure, the problem definition-resolution process exists in parallel to the solution deployment and post-deployment support stages.

Additionally, the definition-resolution process is reactive in nature, and while some researchers argue that the process is integrated into the processes within the solution life-cycle, with Tuli, et.al. (2007) noting:
“Deployment refers to the delivery of products and their installation into a customer’s environment. The installation process frequently surfaces new customer requirement that call for additional modification of products at this stage”

However, the interviews suggest that in-use this is considered as a separate process due to its continuity across the two latter stages of the solution life-cycle. Additionally, unlike the linear solution life-cycle, the problem definition-resolution process was noted to occur multiple times over the life-cycle of a solution, and multiple individual processes may occur concurrently, depending on the changes that have to be made to the solution in question.

4.3. Variability in the utilisation of solution platforms

Storbacka & Pennanen (2014) argue that solutions are based on pre-established solution platforms that are then modified to individual customer’s processes. However, the interviews suggest that in practice, the utilisation of these platforms in business consulting varies. While one interviewee noted that:

“Every solution, it was invented at some point. And then it will be further developed in other engagements. It will be reused in several engagements, and finally it develops further in the maturity level. ... After some time it can be also created as a physical data model in a specific database and technical solution.”
Noting that the solutions in use within the consultation company were based on platforms, another one argued:

“I think that the solution depends on the problem you are trying to solve and then everything that we are now talking about depends on the kind of starting point why the solution is needed. But, I would say that for finding a solution to a business problem, the frameworks might be a bit more clear, so to say, but it is still - I would still say that they are more (of) a guideline on how you do the solutioning in comparison.”

It highlights the differences between different solution providers within the business consulting industry and the degree of ‘platformity’ between different solutions. While some business consulting businesses consider solutions as established platforms that are modified in accordance to customer needs, similar to the ‘solution platform’ proposed by Storbacka & Pennanen (2014), some consider the solutions to simply have ‘frameworks’ that act as guidance on the solution creation, or to even be fully customised and created from ‘ground-up’, without any pre-existing framework present during the solution creation.

However, one aspect where consistent differences between business consulting organisations seem to arise, is on the whether the organisations act as both the solution creators and providers, or only fulfil the role of the solution provider utilising the organisation’s established networks to provide an effective solution offering based on components acquired from actors in the solution providers supply networks.
In the case of consulting business utilising its networks to create an effective solution, the presence of platforms may exist on the level of solution components, rather than at the level of the entire solution, as consulting businesses do not have full control over individual components provided by supply network actors external to the company. One interviewee notes that:

“Well, so I would say it depends. So, let us say if a client needs - Let us say an enterprise management system: In this case, we do not customize it, and in that case, there is SAP as the biggest player there. So then, we just implement the SAP solution, and we do some customization for the particular system in that sense, but it is not like built from scratch.

Then, if a client needs to have a new web shop - For that, we will well then customize it a lot or maybe even build it almost from scratch.”

Additionally, some interviewees noted that the type of components used in the solution affects the amount of customisation required, with components based on an established solution platform requiring a lesser degree of customisation in comparison to components fully created and customised in accordance to customer requirements.

In general, the interviews utilisation of pre-established platforms seems to vary between different solutions, even in the same organisation.

5. Discussion
5.1. Solution perception

Overall, solutions were perceived by interviewees as offerings customised in accordance with individual customer's needs.

In general, the solution life-cycle described by most interviewees was found to closely reflect the model proposed by Tuli et al., (2007). However, while the model notes that further requirement definition is done during the solution deployment and post-deployment stages, the interviews suggest that in business consulting, this requirement definition is considered a separate process that occurs parallel to the solution life cycle, with multiple instances of the problem definition-resolution process present concurrently.

Additionally, the research highlighted the solutions supplied by consulting businesses to be varied in structure. While some business consultants describe solutions based on extensive pre-existing frameworks similar to ‘solution platforms’ described by Storbacka & Pennanen (2014), the existence of pre-existing solution frameworks seem to vary widely between both different companies and solutions. As one interviewee noted:

"I would say that again, it depends. I think that the solution depends on the problem you are trying to solve and then everything that we are now talking about depends on the kind of starting point why the solution is needed."

This variance in established frameworks of solutions used by the business consulting industry seem to be dependent
on the requirements of the individualised solution, and the problem it attempts to solve.

5.2. Value perception implications

Vargo & Lusch (2004), describe the value of a service-centred dominant logic as follows:

“Value is perceived and determined by the consumer on the basis of “value in use.” Value results from the beneficial application of operant resources sometimes transmitted through operand resources. Firms can only make value propositions.”

Overall, in-practice perception of value seem to reflect the one proposed by the service-centred dominant logic - In general, all of the interviewees note that the value of a solution is based on the customer perception of the effect that the solution has in improving the business’s internal processes. With the role of the solution provider, in this case, the consulting company, is to provide proposals of value, while customer acts as the value creator.

Overall, the interviewees note that the benefits of the improvements are solution-specific and can be both in form of tangible and intangible benefits, such as monetary benefits, efficiencies in a manufacturing process or employee wellbeing.

Some interviewees note, that at the initial stage of the solution life-cycle, the aim is to define and understand the customer’s internal processes and to assess how the implementation of the solution generates value.
Additionally, some interviewees elaborated further, that while a majority of the value quantification occurs during the initial stages of the solution life-cycle, problem definition processes later in the life-cycle of a solution enable some further value creation.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Main Findings

This research aimed to investigate solutions and the theories in-use within consulting businesses and evaluated how the solution life-cycle and value generation processes are understood.

The research suggests that the business consulting industry considers solutions as offerings customised in accordance with customer needs, consisting of integrated processes, that are supported by supplied products and services aimed to address problems in customers internal processes.

The research identified four processes in the solution life-cycle and additional proposed the existence of a fifth, problem definition-resolution process in use within consulting businesses that acts to address possible changes requirements of a solution. The research shows that solutions created by consulting businesses are very varied in their content. Additionally, solutions supplied by consulting businesses seem to have
a large degree of variation in the utilisation of established frameworks and the degree of customisation associated with individual solutions.

Overall, value seems to be considered to be generated in-use by the customer, however, the metrics with which the value is evaluated, seem to vary on per solution basis, and be dependent on the desired objectives of the solutions.

6.2. Implications for International Business

Solutions provided by business consulting firms appear to have a large degree of variation, with customers operating in various industries operating in diverse geographical and cultural environments.

Due to these varying operating environments of solutions provided by business consulting firms, it is useful to establish a framework on how solutions are perceived and to identify the common processes present in the provision of a solution that are irrelevant of the specificities of individual solutions.

6.3. Suggestions for further research

6.3.1. Perception of solutions based on solution platforms

This research discussed solutions in terms of a singular solution offering. However, some researchers argue that solutions should be considered as long-term customer relationships that are based on platforms into which multiple
integrated systems, are implemented. In general, these integrated systems would qualify as individual solutions in terms of scope.

Given the radically different framework and the limited scope of this research, the perception of these types of solution platforms is not investigated. Therefore, it would be useful to understand, how these types of solutions are perceived, and how the theories in-use may differ from those of individual solutions.

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