

Buyers requirements and supplier marketing mix for professional services in Mauritius

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requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration**

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ABSTRACT

The demand for professional services is growing as the Mauritian economy turns to new areas of exports and restructuring of organisations to face global market environment changes.

This growth will attract players in the field of management consulting leading to a competitive local market where proper marketing of services will help in gaining market share.

The purpose of this study was to identify the buyers' requirements and the perceptions of providers of professional services for the marketing of the said services.

After a review of prior research, a qualitative research methodology was used through semi-structured interviews, and the responses obtained were analysed using mind maps for both buyers and providers.

The study uncovered six main themes for buyers and five for providers. These themes were compared to the literature review.

The study showed that buyers and providers' themes were similar; the buyers' expectations in terms of the marketing of professional services were matched by the providers though the performance of the providers as assessed by the buyers proved inconclusive.

The marketing mix elements identified in the literature were compared with the different themes uncovered, and this could assist the marketing on the providers' side and help buyers in the selection process of suppliers of professional services.

DECLARATION

I, Anthony Nicolas Daniel Grant, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Anthony Nicolas Daniel GRANT

Signed at St. Antoine, Mauritius

On the 21th day of November 2008

DEDICATION

To my daughters Héloïse & Keira

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I express my sincere thanks to Professor Geoffrey Bick, for his patience, guidance, support and help in completing this report.

My gratitude goes also to Bertrand, Sylvain and Steven who supported and encouraged me in completing this study, and to all others who brought their determining input at a one moment or another.

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1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In 2005, the service sector represented up to 78% of the private sector GDP economy of the United States of America, and a similar proportion of private employments and 19.2 million new services jobs will be created by 2012, representing 90% of all new jobs (Coalition of Service Industries). Services represent 70% of the global economy (Caplan, 2001). In Mauritius, services accounted for more than 57% of the GDP in 2004, excluding services such as Education, Health and Social Work. Other services and Public Administration, specifically, Real Estate, renting and business activities represent 9.4% of 2005 GDP, growing by 11% compared to 2004 (Central Statistical Office, 2005). In developed countries, such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, France or Australia, employment in the service industry is well above that of the Industrial and Agricultural sectors. The percentage of employment in the service sector has been growing for decades reaching in 1998 approximately 73% in the US, 71% in the UK, 69% in France and 73% in Australia (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2000).

In Mauritius, the number of service companies registered grew by 5% between June 2002 and June 2003 (Central Statistical Office, 2004).

The Mauritian economy has, for the last five years, undergone a restructuring towards the service sector, such as the freeport logistic operations with a major seafood hub, financial services, tourism, information technology and knowledge. The non-banking financial sector counted 19 349 companies registered in 2002 compared to 3272 in 1995 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003).

It should also be noted that the World Trade Organisation rules do not restrain the free trade of services, and that any company can establish itself and propose its services in Mauritius.

Given these facts above, it is clear that the service sector is expanding in Mauritius, and will represent a key sector of the economy of the country in the years to come. Competing in a small market such as Mauritius, with 1.2 million inhabitants, will need special skills in marketing. To sustain their growth, local service firms will need to export their services in the region and compete with major global players on the local and foreign markets, bearing in mind that any company could propose its services in Mauritius.

Determining the marketing mix to address these markets for Mauritian professional services is of the utmost importance for their competitive advantage.

1.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of the research is to identify the requirements of buyers of professional service firms, the perceptions of providers of these requirements and hence the marketing mix of professional services firms in the Mauritian market.

1.2.1 THE SUB-PROBLEMS

The first sub-problem is to determine the requirements of buyers of professional services and how the providers address these.

The second sub-problem is to determine the relative importance of the buyer requirements as perceived by providers of professional services in Mauritius.

The third sub-problem is to analyse gaps between suppliers' perceptions and buyers actual expectations, and hence to determine the appropriate marketing mix for professional services.

1.2.2 DELIMITATIONS

The researcher focused on management consulting and has not ventured into other types of services than professional services.

The researcher has not attempted to specify a tool for the marketing success of professional services firms.

The study has been limited to the local Mauritian market.

The study has been limited to private and public listed companies and addresses mainly business to business activities though some business to consumer research and articles have been used.

1.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Professional services are characterised by “relatively few transactions, highly customised, process oriented, with relatively long contact time, with most value added in the front office, where considerable judgement is applied in meeting customer needs” (Silvestro, Fitzgerald & Johnson, 1992:73).

In this research, the professional services are characterised by the fact that the outcome of intervention cannot be evaluated in terms of direct specifications achieved and consequently rely on credence qualities (Bendixen, Abratt & Myres, 2001).

The marketing mix is the set of controllable elements used to effectively address the requirements of a market segment.

1.4 ASSUMPTIONS

The first assumption is that providers of professional services usually aim at maintaining or increasing their market share.

The second assumption is that people sampled are competent to answer the questionnaires.

1.5 IMPORTANCE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The service industry group represents a growing share of the GDP in Mauritius. The development of our economy and the liberalisation of trade, impose on our local organisations, new management challenges. These challenges will definitely require strong and adequate support from management consulting companies to find the right solutions.

This research aims to contribute to adequately market new and existing professionals service firms on the local market.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICES

Though there is limited literature on marketing of professional services, there is a tremendous amount of literature on the marketing of services, and most of them agree, that the marketing of services is different from the marketing of goods. This difference comes from the distinct characteristics of services causing to service marketers problems not met by marketers of tangible goods (Clemes, Mollenkopf & Burn, 2000).

Goods can be described as physical objects or devices, whereas services are actions or performances (Lovelock, 2000). Services are generally described by four main characteristics (Lovelock, 2000; Kotler, 2001):

- intangibility;
- heterogeneity/variability;
- perishability;
- simultaneity/inseparability.

2.1.1 INTANGIBILITY

Services cannot be touched or held and are of an ethereal nature (Lesley, 1998). They cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard or smelt before they are bought (Kotler, 2001). Specifically for the professional services, this aspect acts as a deterrent to the buying of the services as the uncertainty and the consequences of a wrong purchase can be very significant to the client.

2.1.2 HETEROGENEITY

Services are generally rendered by people and thus are not always the same from customer to customer and from provider of service to provider of service.

2.1.3 SIMULTANEITY/INSEPARABILITY

Services are consumed at the same moment that they are produced. This implies also that the customer is present during the realisation of the service. This characteristic has particular impact on the service delivery, especially on high contact services such as management consulting.

2.1.4 PERISHABILITY

This characteristic goes hand in hand with the previous one, meaning if there is no customer then there is no service rendered, and the capacity is lost. Services cannot be inventoried.

Lovelock (2000) lists six other characteristics complementing the above.

The most relevant for the purpose of the study are:

- customers do not obtain ownership of services;
- customers are involved in the production process;
- some service outcomes are difficult to evaluate before their realisation and some of them are even difficult to evaluate after their performance; this is often the case in professional services;
- time factor is relatively more important;
- delivery systems may involve both electronic and physical channels.

In their study on marketing problems of service organisations, Clemes *et al* (2000) found that organisations experienced the following common marketing problems:

- difficulty in diffusion, that is services are mentally difficult to grasp and as such difficult to make tangible,
- protection against the copying of their services, whereas products can be protected with a patent, though the knowledge required to deliver these services may not be easy to acquire,

- preventing customers to negatively affect the service experience of others around them; this can happen in a consultancy intervention for example;
- preventing the client to see the consultant as the whole service, leading to the establishment of a personal relationship with the consultant, rather than a relationship with the firm;
- synchronising supply and demand;
- inventorying their services.

Clemes *et al* (2000) identify five specific marketing problems resulting from the intangibility and heterogeneity characteristics of services, namely displaying and communicating their services, calculating costs accurately, setting prices, promoting their services and controlling service quality.

These different characteristics have implications on the marketing of services. They will be discussed later after reviewing two classifications of services.

2.2 CLASSIFICATION OF SERVICES AND OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

To be able to determine the best way to address the requirements of the marketing of services, authors such as Silvestro *et al* (1992), Lovelock (2000), among others, have proposed different service typologies (Verma, 2000). In the proposed research, the Silvestro *et al* (1992) and Lovelock (2000) models has been used to review the different management and marketing challenges facing the service industries under study.

These models, as argued by Silvestro *et al* (1992) and Lovelock (2000), embrace narrow industry boundaries and the categorisation proposed help in the endeavour to determine the marketing mix for professional services.

Lovelock (2000) argues that services can be categorised by processes in four groups, “based on tangible actions to people’s bodies or physical possession and intangible actions to people’s minds or their intangible assets” (Lovelock, 2000:38). The professional services under study fall under the Intangible

actions – Mental stimulus processing cell of Lovelock's (2000) classification, called group three. Group one and two are named tangible actions on people's body and tangible actions on physical possession and group four is intangible actions on intangible assets. See table below.

Table 1: Categorisation of service processes (Lovelock (2000:38))

	Who or what is the direct recipient of the Service?	
What is the nature of the service act?	People	Possessions
Tangible actions	People processing (services directed at people's bodies): Passenger transportation Health Care Lodging Beauty salons Physical therapy Fitness centre Restaurant/bars Barbers Funeral services	Possession processing (services directed at physical possessions): Freight transportation Repair and maintenance Warehousing/storage Office cleaning services Retail distribution Laundry and dry cleaning Refueling Landscaping/gardening Disposal/recycling
Intangible actions	Mental stimulus processing (services directed at people's minds): Advertising/PR Arts and entertainment Broadcasting/cable Management consulting Education Information services Music concerts Psychotherapy Religion Voice telephone	Information processing (services directed at intangible assets): Accounting Banking Data processing Data transmission Insurance Legal services Programming Research Securities investment Software consulting

Silvestro *et al* (1992) proposes a model similar to the production operation models with a classification of three service archetype processes, characterised by six dimensions:

- people/equipment;
- contact time;
- customisation;
- discretion;
- front office/back office;
- process/product.

These six dimensions vary in each of the three service archetypes, namely professional services, service shops and mass services. In professional services, the six dimensions are highly involved and the people, front office and process dominate the service realisation. On the other end, the mass service requires more involvement on equipment, back office support and product, while the contact time, customisation and discretions dimensions are low. Silvestro *et al* (1992) propose that the different processes raise different management concerns.

In this model, the two services under study typically show high involvement of the six dimensions and therefore are classified as professional services. The services under study require high involvement from people, high contact time, substantial degree of customisation, reasonable discretion, full front line service, most of the time in touch with clients, and finally great orientation on the “how to”, the process rather than the product.

These two models, as mentioned earlier, are not unique and have limitations, not all services fitting in their definitions (Clemes *et al*, 2000). They however suit the purpose of this study.

2.3 THE BUYERS' PURCHASING REQUIREMENTS

The purchase process of professional services is somewhat different from the purchasing of consumer services, and can imply an important amount of money, time and human resources, without being able to determine whether the outcome will be attained or not (Mitchell, 1994). The buyers' requirements are important, and need to be identified so that the marketers of professional services can address them properly and determine their marketing strategy. The researcher attempted to list the requirements of buyers and their risk reduction strategies.

Services are generally perceived to be riskier than products (Clow, Tripp & Kenny, 1996).

Zeithaml (1981), in her continuum of Evaluation for Different Types of Products (Kotler, 2001), shows that, pure service mix, such as legal services, medical diagnoses, are difficult to evaluate, and therefore possess high credence qualities. Bendixen *et al* (2001) argue also that professional services are characterised by high credence qualities rather than search or experience qualities. Search qualities are those attributes of a product that a consumer can assess prior to purchase (Bendixen *et al*, 2001:2). Credence qualities are those attributes of a product that the consumer may find impossible to evaluate even after purchase and consumption (Bendixen *et al*, 2001:2).

High credence qualities lead the way to a higher perceived risk in the purchasing of professional services (Mitchell, 1994, 1998; Bendixen *et al*, 2001). The higher perceived risks of professional services come also from the importance for the organisation, the high time and financial costs involved, its intangibility and variability and the low purchase experience. This is due to the nature of the professional services that are low in number of transactions, often unique in management consulting services, often a "new buy" and limited in the number of objective assessment criteria (Mitchell, 1998). It can have significant

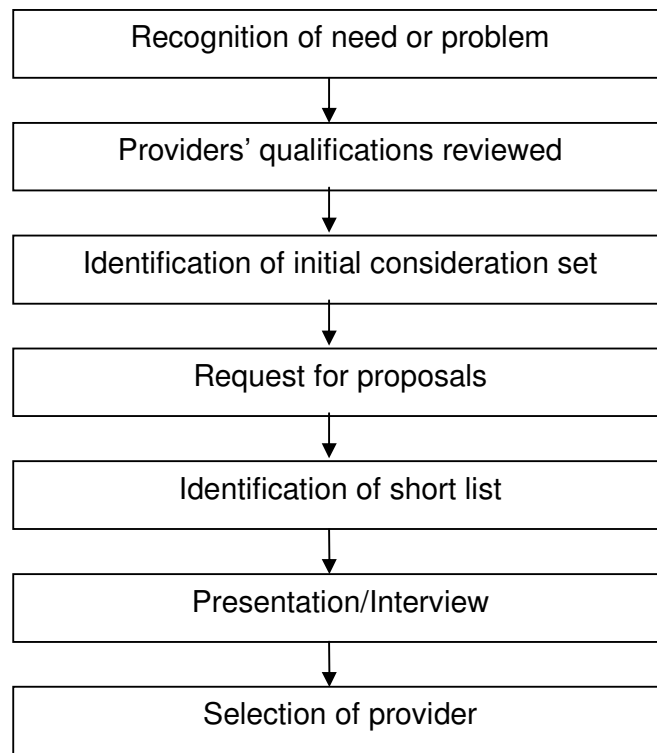
impact of the future of the organisation (Fitzsimmons, Noh & Thies, 1998) without any guarantee of success (Mitchell, 1994).

Evaluation of the credence service is even more difficult as the customer is often not educated to do it (Mitchell, 1994). The difficulty to assess the outcome, by the client, of the credence service performed is referred as performance ambiguity (Day & Hiram, 1994) and is defined as the inability of the client to measure the performance or to assess accurately the service product. This inability is decreased by the level of expertise of the purchaser, whereas the evaluation criteria is different between the experienced and the novice buyer and according to the expectations of the client.

As it has been mentioned above, the selection of professional services such as management consultancy is complex and is considered to be difficult (Corcoran & Mc Lean, 1998), as it is higher in perceived risk (Freiden & Goldsmith, 1989). This is because it requires a limited experienced purchaser to assess the supplier's ability to deliver a non-standardised intangible product. This product or service will impact on the organisation, cannot be evaluated prior to the delivery, and in some circumstances cannot be effectively assessed even after being rendered, due to high credence properties (Freiden & Goldsmith, 1989; Corcoran & McLean, 1998; Bendixen *et al*, 2002; Day & Barksdale, 2003).

All these difficulties, make the purchase of professional services risky for organisational purchasing if not completely undesirable the purchaser being unconfident in his judgment of what is being offered. The purchaser's confidence is also impacted upon by their degree of experience in the type of purchase, the multi-faceted nature of the services and the potential impact of the service itself.

The buyer needs also to use risk reducing strategy on the different steps of the purchasing framework, as proposed by Day & Barksdale (2003) and presented in the figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: The organisational selection process
(Day & Barksdale (2003:565))**

Day & Barksdale (2003) argue that selection criteria varies from the first step to the last where hard criteria are being used in the beginning such as competence and capacity, and softer criteria, such as personal chemistry, in the Presentation/Interviewer phase, to evaluate trust and commitment.

Subjective, intangible and easily gauged factors will greatly influence the selection decision among objective factors, that will be assessed during the interview/selection stage of the selection process (Corcoran & McLean, 1998. Bendixen, 2001; Day & Barksdale, 2003). The evaluation of the service provider will continue after its selection, during the service delivery, with different assessment of the quality, interaction with the employees of the professional service firm, as the different members of the serviced company and provider

firm will enter and exit the relationship. The assessment will also continue post delivery (Day & Barksdale, 1992).

The purchasing process of professional services will call different competences within the organisation and often the procurement office will not be involved, or remotely, in the selection and in the management of the PS providers' interaction (Lynn, 1987, Stock & Zinszer, 1987, Mitchell, 1994).

Purchasers and suppliers should form close relationships, to develop mutual understanding and trust and to be aware of the impact different relational style may have upon the purchase decision (Corcoran & McLean, 1998).

Corcoran & McLean (1998) stresses the following items in the purchase decision making of professional services:

- importance of the reputation of the company;
- past experience of the supplier;
- recommendations by either inside and outside the organisations;
- personal contact with the consultant;
- previous experience of the buyer.

They also note that personal sources are more highly rated than official or non-personal channels such as supplier nominated references. Stock & Zinszer (1987) also concluded that the buyer rated notably higher personal sources than non personal sources. It noted that service providers are encouraged to stress personal more than non-personal sources of information, and to stimulate positive word of mouth.

Day & Barksdale (1992, 2003) have uncovered similar dimensions, most of them subjective, in the selection decision and which are:

- perceived experience, expertise and competence of the provider;
- provider's understanding of the client's needs and interests;

- provider's relationship and communication skills; and,
- likelihood of the provider conforming to contractual and administrative requirements.

In addition to these dimensions, some insights are important to mention such as the presence of trust between the service firm and the buying organisation, commitment from the professional service provider to perform the service according to the terms of reference. Trust and commitment are paramount in the decision making and they are judged in face to face meetings using subjective criteria such as personal chemistry (Day & Barksdale, 2003). It can also be noted that Day & Barksdale (2003) found out that service firms can lose contracts because of poor presentation, interpersonal and communication skills, confirming Sparks & Areni's (2002) conclusions stating that in absence of experience-based information, the quality of the salesperson's presentation may be crucial in the progress of the relationship.

The price is not mentioned as primary criteria; however, it plays a role in the quality evaluation and ultimate evaluation.

2.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE SERVICE CHARACTERISTICS AND HOW THEY SHOULD BE ADDRESSED

After reviewing the buyers' requirements for purchasing professional services, characteristics of services and more particularly, those of professional services, their management implications and problems raised, this section of the research will review the different ways that an organisation can use to address the marketing of professional services.

Generally, marketers address the marketing of products using the marketing mix comprising four elements, the four Ps: Product, Price, Place and Promotion (Lovelock, 2000 and Kotler, 2001). However, as discussed above, services have distinct characteristics that translate into additional Ps, namely People, Process and Physical evidence (Pheng Low Sui, 1997; Goldsmith, 1999 and

Kotler, 2001). Lovelock (2000) adds an eighth P, Productivity associated with Quality. To achieve the best strategy and success to market the services, each element of the marketing mix should be carefully selected, designed and managed.

2.4.1 PRODUCTS

The products in professional services such as management consulting may be difficult to define, however the core product and the augmented product must be defined to have the necessary information to make tangible the outcome of the service.

2.4.2 PLACE AND DISTRIBUTION

Place may not have a great impact on the delivery of management consulting services, however delivery should be placed in suitable location for an efficient outcome. Bitner (1992) argues that the physical environment influences behaviours and impacts on the image of the organisation and the evaluation of the service. It conveys some of the physical evidence and cues that influence customers and their ultimate satisfaction. Ideally, the environment should support both the needs and preferences of both service employees and customers simultaneously. It can provide comfort to the client while enhancing the productivity and service delivery of the employee. Human behaviour is influenced by the typical setting in which it occurs. The setting can encourage or discourage certain types of behaviours.

Bitner (1992) proposes three dimensions that have an effect on customers:

- ambient conditions;
- spatial layout and functionality;
- signs, symbols and artefacts.

The dimensions of the servicescape act as a package, suggesting the potential usage and relative quality of the service. It aids or hinders the ability of

customers and employees to carry out their respective activities and finally may serve as a differentiator in signalling the intended market segment, positioning the organisation and conveying distinctiveness from competitors (Bitner, 1992).

2.4.3 PROCESSES

As discussed above, the outcome of professional services is difficult to evaluate and the way the services are rendered will be assessed against objective specifications. Processes should therefore be implemented to describe the methods and sequence of actions of the delivery of service (Lovelock, 2000). The service-performance process throughout the organisation should be standardised with a service blueprint and procedures (Kotler, 2001). The realisation of performance must be demonstrated (Bendixen *et al*, 2001). Improving the quality of the service delivery can help to make the difference (Maister, 1997).

2.4.4 PEOPLE

“The old adage People are your most important asset is wrong. The right people are your most important asset” (Jim Collins in Lovelock, 2000:455).

The professional services delivery relies heavily on people interaction with the customer. The consultant must possess certain qualities and competences to modify the service execution or plan during the interaction with the client, to suit his needs immediately and deliver enhanced service. As such, under certain conditions, the management of professional services firms must provide employees with discretionary powers and decision authority.

As the contact is close, prolonged and of an interacting nature with the client, personal characteristics of both service providers and the client affect the relationship. Interpersonal skills would then be a definite attribute to work for a professional services firm. Customers will judge the quality of service they receive based on their assessment of the people providing that service (Lovelock, 2000). Customers may also establish their opinion of the firm based on this interaction (Clemes *et al*, 2000).

Mitchell (1994) sees the purchaser focusing greatly on the consultant as an individual, dematerialised from the consulting organisation, as the major factor in the quality of service. Mitchell (1994) comments that the main strength of a professional services firm is directly related to the competence of its people. The development of strong processes and management of organisational knowledge of the company will avoid the situation where the entire organisation's competitive advantage is in its employees' brain.

The recruitment criteria, training in the firms processes and rewarding system of the personnel for productivity and quality will be significant advantages for successful professional firms. The professional services firm must recruit the right person for the right job and who relates better with the customer. The right people are those who would exhibit the desired behaviour anyway, as a natural extension of their character and attitudes, regardless of any control and incentive system, though a combination of those help in obtaining the desired behaviour.

2.4.5 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The professional services being intangible with strong credential qualities, emphasis should be placed on the important visible cues to provide tangible evidence of the firm's quality whether it is in the building, the staff, the cars, the reports produced (Clow, Tripp & Kenny, 1996; Pheng & Ming, 1997; Lovelock, 2000 and Kotler, 2001). Berry & Parasuraman (1991) developed extensively the management of evidence as a central concept in services marketing.

Physical evidence and the accompanying atmosphere affect buyer behaviour in three ways (Lovelock, 2000):

- as an attention – creating the medium to make the servicescape stand out from those of competing establishments and to attract customers from target segments;

- as a message – using symbolic cues to communicate with the intended audience about the distinctive nature and quality of the service experience;
- as an effect – creating a medium, employing colours, textures, sounds, scents and spatial design to create or heighten an appetite for the service experience.

To the three dimensions of the servicescape proposed by Bitner (1992) that impact on the customer, Lovelock (2000) adds the personnel. For example, the way the personnel are dressed influences and creates expectations for the customer.

Berry & Parasuraman (1991) propose to manage three categories of evidence: the physical environment, the communications and the prices.

The physical environment comprises ambient factors, design (aesthetic and functionality) and social factors (people, employees and customers). Berry & Parasuraman (1991) argue that the management of evidence is to support the firm's strategy and impacts both on customers and employees.

2.4.6 PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY

There is a direct relationship between the productivity and quality of the service. Improving the productivity may have a negative impact on the quality of the service rendered and may affect the firm's reputation in the long term. If the right balance is not found between quality and productivity, the firm may not be able to control its costs (low productivity) or its quality of service (high productivity) both detrimental to the organisation in the mid to long term (Lovelock, 2000).

Productivity and quality must be managed in the service organisation as in a manufacturing plant. The intangibility of the services and the credence quality of the professional services make it more difficult to manage the quality of the service and to avoid a poor perception of the service provided.

Furthermore, rapid growth of professional services requires adequate measurement of the productivity of the resources employed by these industries (Nachum, 1999).

2.4.6.1 Quality

One sine qua none condition of staying into business and avoid switching of customers to competition, is to keep the quality of service and products at the level expected by the customers of the professional services organisations. Therefore, quality must remain high on the agenda and the different factors affecting the quality of the service rendered must be managed (Ojasalo, 2001, Harte and Dale, 1995).

To be able to manage the way the customer will evaluate its service the service provider must manage the expectations at three steps: at the selling, during the intervention and after. This is reviewed below.

Quality is defined by the match between the needs of the customer and the service delivered. For a professional organisation whose main role is to solve customers' problems, the main deliverable is technical. However, the definition of quality should not be restricted only to technical response to a particular problem, but must also include soft issues such as how feedback is provided, timeliness, responsiveness, empathy, reliability (Hayward-Farmer and Nollet, 1993, Harte and Dale, 1995). Without a proper expanded definition, the professional service organisation will miss opportunities to satisfy their clients.

Therefore, the quality of the professional services will be assessed on two dimensions:

- the technical output or solution, the “what”
- the way the outcome has been produced while in interaction with the client, the “how” (Pheng, 1997; Gronroos, 1988, 1994).

How employees perform their tasks, what they say and do influence the customer's perception of the overall service and of the technical outcome

(Gronroos, 1988). A good technical output can be judged negatively if the service delivery has been poor.

Gronroos (1988) warns also of the risk of poor perception of service created by a gap between the marketing of the service and the actual delivery.

Finally, Day & Hiram (1994) indicate that the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction depends on the client's expectations, which are likely to evolve throughout the relationship and with the different persons met in the company by the professionals. Day & Hiram (1994) argue that it is difficult to find criteria on which professional services provided can be evaluated, as it evolves between the selection committee and the person receiving the service in the organisation. However, the quality of the service provided can be more easily evaluated if, from the start of the project, the client defines the outcome expected. Both the technical and the delivery process should be managed and controlled.

However, professional services, as mentioned above, have specific characteristics such as intangibility, heterogeneity, simultaneity and perishability, with the possibility of customisation, that are greatly influenced by the input of the customer, who takes part in the realisation of the service, (Clemes *et al*, 2000), all aspects affecting on the service delivery and its quality.

These issues are intensified by the independent nature of the professionals who are autonomous by nature (Harte and Dale, 1995). Furthermore, given the intangible and heterogeneity nature of professional services, the small output of tangibles, the uniqueness of each service, there are difficulties in defining service quality standards (Harte and Dale, 1995 /2).

Customer satisfaction can only be obtained when there is a match between customers' expectations and the perceived quality of the experienced service (Harte and Dale, 1995; Groth and Dye; 1999 and Ojasalo, 2001). Furthermore, a person's perception of a service and expectations about its delivery and its realised value vary according to various factors (Groth and Dye, 1995). The

mismatch between the perceived quality of the service delivered and the actual service is judged as poor quality from the client and creates customer dissatisfaction. The greater the deviation, the greater the risk that the “ex post” perceptions of service quality, differ from “ex ante” perceptions.

Therefore, the expectations of the customer must be managed before and during the service delivery to ensure the closest match between expectations and the actual service experienced (Harte and Dale, 1995; Groth and Dye, 1999 and Ojasalo, 2001).

Ojasalo (2001) states that customers’ expectations need to be described, recognised, as some are fuzzy, implicit and unrealistic.

What Ojasalo (2001) means by fuzzy expectations is the unclear expectations where the client knows something is wrong or expects something which he cannot describe.

Customers do expect that implicit expectations materialise as they relate to all the characteristics of service that are self-evident. If they do not occur, these unfulfilled expectations, lead to poor perception of quality by the customer and potential complaints, whereas if they are fulfilled, the client will not even recognise positively that it has been done. Self-evident expectations can also be features of the service experienced several times by the customer and which are taken for granted.

Unrealistic expectations are as harmful and dangerous as above and relate to all expectations that the client can have and that cannot be achieved by the service provider. It can be noted that both fuzzy and implicit reactions can also be categorised as unrealistic (Ojasalo, 2001).

Managing customers’ expectations implies the focusing of the fuzzy expectations by means of dialogue and ensures that the customer and the service provider identify the problems and the solutions to the problems.

Implicit expectations must be revealed in the same manner and made explicit.

Unrealistic expectations need to be calibrated and made realistic before or during the process of service delivery.

Ojasalo (2001) states that the service providers need to sacrifice short term quality by entering into discussion with the customer to identify the fuzzy and implicit elements and downgrade its unrealistic expectations and in so doing, turn these expectations into feasible ones. This fosters the feeling of overall positive quality of the customer and favours a longer term relationship by avoiding disappointment in the future, with the aim of creating a long lasting relationship by managing expectations.

Similarly, Groth and Dye (1995) suggest that reducing the gap between the expectations and the actual service features, enhances the perceived quality of the experienced service, and this must be done by identifying and specifically stating the features of the service. This allows the customer to evaluate the match between his needs and the attributes of the service, to recognise the parameters of greatest importance to him and foster the creation of realistic expectations while reducing variance from “ex ante” expectations. As indicated by Harte and Dale (1995), the danger is when the client expectations are higher than the standard of delivery.

Harte and Dale (1995) also suggest defining service delivery systems to enable standards that can be converted into achievable processes.

Strong recruitment policies as well as the training of employees and internal communications are key factors in managing the consistency of quality of the services provided and matching the needs with the service provided.

2.4.6.2 *Productivity*

Productivity measures the relationships between the outcome or output of service processes and the resources or input required to operate them

(McLaughlin & Coffey, 1990). The rapid growth of professional services requires adequate measurement of the productivity of the resources employed by these industries. In manufacturing, productivity measurement is based on quantities of standardised and clearly identified unit of measurement. This is dangerous and inappropriate for the service industry (Nachum, 1999). Heterogeneity of input and output with unique or intangible outcome, prevents the establishment of standardised quantifiable units of measurement. (McLaughlin & Coffey, 1990). One solution would be to measure both the volume of the professional services business and the enhancement of the competitive position of their clients; this improvement should be measured over a period of time to be valid (Nachum, 1999). However, a longitudinal study could prove to be difficult to conduct.

2.4.7 PROMOTION

This element is used to communicate the presence of the firm to the outer place and its capabilities to render service that must fulfil the needs of a target market as per expectations. As mentioned before, the professional services are difficult to grasp, the outcome difficult to evaluate, and the level of perceived risk is high. It follows that specific strategies must be used to address these issues. This element is therefore an important one of the mix.

The tools of the integrated communication must endeavour to reduce the perceived risk, comprising uncertainty and consequences, to the buyer.

Trust must be established through relationship (Gronroos, 1994) and personal involvement of the consultant and trainer (Bloom, 1984).

Bloom (1984) recognising the uncertainty issue of the credence service argues that firms should emphasize education of the clients, rather than persuasion using seminars, newsletters and personal selling. Professional services firms must teach the customers when an organisation should seek their services, the attributes to consider in evaluating different providers, how to communicate their concerns, desires, or other issues to professionals, and what they can realistically expect providers to accomplish. Instructional materials should be used to educate the customer (Lovelock, 2000).

Demonstration of competence can be done in seminars and current and past clients should be invited to attend to participate in the referral process and positive Word of Mouth (WOM). Interestingly, Rohrs (2003) found that unsolicited Positive Word of mouth, was not a key factor in selection of the service provider.

File, Cermak & Prince (1994) and Lovelock (2000) argue that the WOM process on the professional services firms, should be managed to develop positive WOM effect of the service. Mitchell (1994) sees the WOM as crucial to reduce the uncertainty in the decision making process, by allowing transference of the decision to someone, who can judge the credence qualities of consultants. WOM is a very credible medium when it comes from a trusted source (Lovelock, 2000).

On the selling side, Bloom (1984) and Lovelock (2000) recommend that professional services providers and consultants participate in the selling of the service themselves, as customers may be uncomfortable to buy from someone they may never see again or who is not fully knowledgeable. Wittreich (1966) argues that the service firm represented by a true professional is far more valuable to its clients than those represented by salespersons. Professionals that possess the skills to unearth the problem and propose a real solution must do the selling and must have the key ability of listening. Wittreich (1966) argues that the problem solving approach (i.e. technical outcome) is far more useful than the methodology approach where the salesperson puts emphasis on the methods used by the firm to determine the client's problems and define a solution.

It is recognised however, that professionals are sometime not salespeople and some training is required or the recruitment criteria must include selling skills (Bloom, 1984).

Little prior research has been conducted on advertising of professional services, probably because it is the least utilised component of promotion, with providers depending more on direct contact, than mass communication. An additional

reason being that advertising of professional services is often regulated and as such, not investigated by authors. However, Clow, Tripp & Kenny (1996) suggest that professional services adverts should aim to reduce the perceived risk. To attract more clients, quality cues conveying assurance, reliability and tangibles must be used.

2.4.8 PRICE

The last element of the marketing mix is sometimes the most difficult to set. However, the literature shows that generally the price of professional services is negotiated (Fitzsimmons *et al*, 1998). However, the professional services firms should take into consideration the other burdens associated with this type of service during its realisation, when deciding of price (Lovelock, 2000).

Day & Barksdale (1992) mention that buyers rarely mention price as selection criterion, however at a certain point in time, price plays a role in the client's quality expectations as well as in the ultimate evaluation.

2.4.9 RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

Bendixen *et al* (2001) propose that the professional services, knowledge products, be marketed according to a mix of four Ps and four Rs, i.e. Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Risk management, Recommendations & referrals, Relationships and Realisation of Performance.

Bendixen *et al* (2001) argue that management of the perceived risk is of paramount importance. Consumers of knowledge products seek recommendations and referrals, clients and suppliers tend to develop relationships and networks and given the knowledge gap, between the provider and the client, the latter assesses the service not on clear expectation but on desire congruency.

It can be stressed that the four Rs address the implications discussed above on service marketing and they can be integrated in the traditional marketing mix.

Gronroos (1994), recognised as one of the leading authors in the field of relationship marketing, argues that the marketing mix, as defined and recognised is actually not based on sound theory. He claims that the marketing cannot be the responsibility of a unique department which may only use one marketing mix to catch customers. In service, every front staff meets the client and every service encounter, has an important impact on the customers' future purchasing decisions.

Rohrs (2007) highlighted that relationships are made at different interfaces and with different individuals of the organisation. However, these multiple interactions make it difficult to manage the relationship.

Rohrs (2007) also uncovered that, customers of management consulting firms:

- seek personal service;
- long term focus so that the consulting firm can know the client better;
- working in collaboration and partnership, adapt to specific customer situations;
- clear communication on progress that fosters the relationship;
- trust to engage in assignment;
- satisfaction by creation of value on a continuous basis;
- loyalty to the customer;
- less price sensitive but it remains a main factor and finally access to intellectual property which the customer does not possess.

The modern marketing approach is interactive and the management of the customer's relationship is a vital cornerstone. The traditional marketing mix approach with seven or eight Ps makes the seller active and the buyer passive.

In spite of the arguments claimed by Gronroos (1994) and in the light of the work done by Rohrs (2007), it can be argued that the marketing mix approach should not be rejected, but that the relationship management system must be developed to enhance the trust and loyalty of the customers in the firm.

Therefore, an integration of both approaches is possible and may be necessary for professional services firms to address their market adequately.

3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions are derived from the literature review and against which the study is conducted to answer the research problem. Both the service providers and the buyers' opinions are considered to determine the use of elements of the marketing mix for professional services based on the literature review.

Research questions 1 and 2 relate to the buyers of professional services.

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

What are the key buying criteria in evaluating professional services and what is their relative importance?

According to the literature review, professional services are perceived as riskier than products (Clow *et al*, 1996), are difficult to assess by buyer's before, during and after performance of the professional service providers (Day & Hiram, 1994, Mitchell, 1994). These services can have significant impact on the future of the organisation (Freiden & Goldsmith, 1989, Day & Barksdale, 2003). The selection of the service provider is therefore important. The literature suggests some aspects and requirements to look for in a service provider to reduce risk and facilitate service provider selection (Corcoran & McLean, 1998, Day & Barksdale, 2003). This research uncovers the elements the Mauritian buyers wish to see in order of importance, by interviewing managers in organisations buying professional services.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

Against these key buying criteria, how well do professional service providers perform?

Based on the literature review, professional service providers performance could deviate from the actual arrangement made with the customer. They also might not manage effectively the different elements of the marketing mix in marketing their services (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991, Bitner, 1992, Mitchell, 1994, Harte & Dale, 1995, Maister, 1997, Clemes *et al*, 2000, Lovelock, 2000). This research provides a view of the performance of the service professional provider by interviewing managers in organisation buying professional services.

The Research Questions 3 and 4 relate to the providers of professional services.

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What are the perceptions of the service providers of the key buying criteria for providing professional services in Mauritius?

The literature has exposed the multiple elements that form part of the marketing mix, as well as additional elements such as relationship marketing which could be used to market professional services (Gronroos, 1988, Berry & Parasuraman, 1991, Bitner, 1992, Mitchell, 1994, Harte & Dale, 1995, Maister, 1997, Pheng, 1997, Clemes *et al*, 2000, Lovelock, 2000;). However, no particular emphasis was found to be placed on one element compared to another.

Furthermore, no literature on Mauritian context was found, all of them relating to Europe and North America. The study also uncovers the Mauritian point of view of professional service providers.

This research fills this gap in the Mauritian professional service providers through the interview of partners, managers, and practitioners of professional services.

3.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 4

What is the appropriate marketing mix for providers of professional services in Mauritius?

Despite addressing, the different elements important to market professional services (Gronroos, 1988, Pheng, 1997, Groth & Dye, 1999, Lovelock, 2000, Kotler, 2001), the literature review does not give answers on which elements the service provider would place emphasis on to market its service. This research fills the gap by matching the information collected and analysed through the interviews and the elements of marketing as uncovered, in the interviews with buyers and practitioners of professional services.

4 CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used to investigate the research questions in Chapter 3 is stated below. The type of methodology, as well as the population targeted, its sample and the analysis is discussed below.

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

“Quantitative research is used to answer questions about relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting, and controlling phenomena” (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:101).

Qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomenon” (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:101).”

The objective of this research is to determine the criteria of the buyers, in the selection of professional service providers, how professional service providers match these expectations and should market their services. The respondents were probed on these topics to explore core themes and describe elements of the marketing mix being used, but not explaining *why* an element is used instead of another, which would be a causal study.

A qualitative approach is more appropriate for exploratory research in the form of an in-depth semi-structured interview, which comprises of a list of open-ended questions, that focus on core themes probed by the researcher. An interview outline is prepared to ensure all research questions and elements of literature review are explored.

Some elements of the marketing mix and other elements that should be used for marketing professional services are identified in the literature review. The exploration revolves around the confirmation of the use of these elements. It is descriptive because the objective of the study is to determine which elements of

the marketing mix are used as opposed to a causal study which would consider *why* one or more elements would be used or not.

4.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

4.2.1 THE RESEARCH POPULATION

The research populations were the buyers of management consulting services and the providers of same.

4.2.1.1 Buyers of professional services

This population is all the personnel employed in organisations in Mauritius which at least once has purchased the services of a professional services provider, excluding government owned organisations and public administration.

4.2.1.2 Providers of professional services

The population comprises persons employed in all management consulting firms as well as the private and publicly listed organisations in Mauritius, excluding government owned companies and public administration. The population includes also the individual (sole trader) or free-lance subcontractor professionals on a full-time basis.

4.2.2 SAMPLE SIZE AND SELECTION

4.2.2.1 Buyers

Five (5) persons within different organisations, at least three (3), purchasers of professional services were selected.

Five (5) persons were sampled between different levels of hierarchy within the management and across functions of the organisations. Finally, their selection was based on whether they had been involved at least once in the selection of a

professional service provider in their organisation or previous employment to provide an “expert opinion” of the topic under study and to be available and willing to participate.

The sample is detailed in the table below.

Table 2: Details of sample for buyers’ interviews

Company name	Main business	Contact person	Position in the organisation
Administrators & Consultants Ltd.	Health Care Management	Sylvain Pascal	Managing Director
Mauritius Telecom	Mobile, Fixed telephone operator, ISP, Directory	Cyprien Mateos	Financial Controller
Mauritius Telecom	Mobile, Fixed telephone operator, ISP, Directory	Raj Coowaloosur	Group Quality Manager
Mauritius Telecom	Mobile, Fixed telephone operator, ISP, Directory	Slesha Nobaub	Assistant Group Quality Manager
The Mauritius Commercial Bank	Banking activities	Jean Michel Félix	Group Head Audit Risk
Mauritius Stationary Manufacturers	Printing, Labelling	Nicholas de l’Estrac	Operations Manager
Standard Bank	Banking activities	Roshan Nathoo	Managing Director

4.2.2.2 Providers

At least five (5) persons within management consulting organisations were selected.

Among the sample, a mix of interviewees, between partners and managers, consultants were selected that would have been involved in marketing the services of their organisations or in their previous employment, in order to provide an “expert opinion” of the topic under study and be available and willing to participate.

Table 3: Details of sample for providers' interviews

Company name	Main business	Contact person	Position in the organisation
G2D	Management Consultancy	Guy de Rosnay	Managing Partner
DCDM Consulting	Management Consultancy	Sandeep Kapre	Managing Partner
Ernst & Young	Management Consultancy	Shailen Ramgoolam	Partner
Price Waterhouse	Management Consultancy	Jean-Pierre Young	Partner
Maingard Associates	Management Consultancy	Benoit Maingard	Chairman

4.2.3 NATURE OF THE SAMPLE

The nature of this sample design is respectively “purposive” and convenient. It is purposive in that the researcher purposefully selects respondents who have the required knowledge of the subject to answer the questions. It is convenient as the interviews depend on the availability and willingness of the potential interviewees to participate.

As described by Leedy and Ormrod (2001:159), “a purposive sampling technique is one where the participants are chosen for a particular purpose”.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection was made by the way of semi-structured interviews and two questionnaires with open-ended questions were developed, one for each of the populations targeted.

The semi-structured interview revolves around few central questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The questions were in line with the objectives of the study in order to get valuable information about these central themes.

The following advantages of using semi-structured interviews for data collection are described below:

- the researcher has control over the questions asked (Creswell, 1994);
- it provided a large amount of useful information (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001);
- it is flexible and enables the researcher to prompt and probe as necessary (Pirow, 1990);
- it provides access to information that is difficult to obtain through other research methods (O'Sullivan, Rice & Saunders, 1994);
- it provides the opportunity for immediate clarification regarding misunderstanding (O'Sullivan, *et al*, 1994); and
- it provides an opportunity to cover an array of data and topics (O'Sullivan *et al*, 1994).

Despite this list of advantages, there are several shortfalls associated with this method, listed as follows:

Information provided by the respondent is coloured by their own perspective (Creswell, 1994);

- the presence of the researcher might influence and bias the answers of the respondent (Creswell, 1994);
- “not all people are equally articulate and perceptive” (Creswell, 1994:150).

The researcher attempted to mitigate some of these disadvantages by confirming that the respondent understood each question, accurately represented the company's activities, not intentionally misleading, the respondent and avoiding ambiguous words.

Information volunteered by participants was used for analysis.

On the buyers' perspective, the objectives of this interview process are to:

- determine the themes, buying criteria of the purchaser of professional services;
- confirm the theoretical aspects identified in the literature review;
- determine the performance of the professional services providers in regard to the use of buying criteria.

On the providers' side, the objectives of the interview are to:

- determine what in their perception makes them win agreements;
- determine their use of the marketing mix and of other elements to market their service.

The prospective interviewees were contacted by phone. During this initial discussion, the purpose of the study and a brief overview of the methodology was explained. After agreement, an appointment was scheduled to further explain the study and conduct the interview. The meeting was confirmed by email and prior to the interview, the key questions were emailed to the respondents to ensure they could prepare for and answer the questions.

The researcher guaranteed by email the confidentiality of the information provided and reiterated it prior to the start of the interview.

To facilitate a positive response from the potential interviewees, the researcher proposed to send a summary of the most important findings of the research, as well as meeting them for discussion after the completion and approval of the research.

The interview was conducted according to the following criteria (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001):

- all interviews were conducted by the researcher in person;
- a suitable location was chosen to avoid distractions preferably out of office;
- establish rapport and explain the purpose of the study and the definition of the marketing mix;
- the interviewees were allowed to express themselves in their own way;
- the researcher kept his reaction to himself;
- the researcher kept the interview focused on the research elements;
- all the interviews were taped with the permission from the interviewee;
- notes were taken throughout the interview; and
- the interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed in mind maps.

After the interview, a word of appreciation was sent individually by email to the interviewee.

After the transcription of the interviews, any clarifications needed, were done by phone or by email.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The content analysis is described by Leedy & Ormrod (2001:155) as “a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases”.

Given the nature of the data collected as well as the exploratory and descriptive type of research, the content analysis method was used to analyse the data collected.

The data was reviewed as many times as needed to extract the maximum usable information, get an overall sense, determine possible categories,

themes, groups and interpretations, before synthesising, keeping in mind the research questions and the literature review elements. This was done for buyers and providers separately.

The themes were organised in mind maps according to each respondent's answers. The themes were organised to relate back to the research questions and to match the marketing mix as described in the literature review.

No statistical analysis was performed on the results.

The results were enhanced by quoting some of the most appropriate comments, in the research report, without revealing the name of the respondent to respect their right for privacy.

4.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability are fundamentals in a research. In a qualitative study, the interpretation of data is influenced by the bias and the values of the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The researcher endeavoured to avoid this bias by adhering to the interview process described above.

The validity of an instrument is how well it measures what it is supposed to be measuring while reliability refers to the consistency with which the instrument produces results (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

4.5.1 EXTERNAL VALIDITY

External validity refers to the ability of the research to be generalised across persons, settings and times. Our sample was purposive and convenient, small in number and not random; hence, it was not representative of the population under study. It would therefore not be possible to generalise the results of the study across all persons and by extension to all organisations in the population.

4.5.2 INTERNAL VALIDITY

To ensure the measuring instrument provides adequate coverage of the topic under study, a literature review has been performed to assist in developing the key interview questions. Causal relationships do not form part of this research as mentioned above. The internal validity applies only to the rigour in conducting the study and not the explanation of the causal relationships.

The interview methodology minimised bias and bound the study. As this is a qualitative research, the objective is to probe the respondents' perception in a semi-structured manner, with appropriate prompting.

4.5.3 RELIABILITY

The researcher has personally conducted all the interviews to ensure equivalence, reproduction of the same interview pattern and set up, thus connecting the views of the interviewees to a theoretical framework. In addition, the persons sampled were at the level of management and/or highly educated persons (trainers, consultants), therefore increasing the chance of fully understanding the questions asked and being able to answer them adequately and consistently over time.

5 CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This chapter presents the outcome of the interviews conducted with suppliers and buyers of management consulting services. To capture the information during the interviews, mind maps were used. Mind maps were reviewed and combined buyers and suppliers' maps were respectively generated, and in which common themes appeared.

5.1 MIND MAPS

According to the Wikipedia encyclopaedia website on the Internet, a mind map is: “a *diagram* used to represent *words, ideas*, tasks, or other items linked to, and arranged radially around a central key word or idea. It is used to *generate, visualize, structure, and classify* ideas, and as an aid in *study, organization, problem solving, decision making*, and writing. It is an image-centered diagram that represents *semantic* or other connections between portions of information. By presenting these connections in a radial, non-linear graphical manner, it encourages a *brainstorming* approach to any given organizational task, eliminating the hurdle of initially establishing an intrinsically appropriate or relevant conceptual framework to work within.

A mind map is similar to a semantic network or cognitive map but there are no formal restrictions on the kinds of links used.

The elements are arranged intuitively according to the importance of the concepts, and they are organized into groupings, branches, or areas. The uniform graphic formulation of the semantic structure of information on the method of gathering knowledge, may aid recall of existing memories.”

5.2 MIND MAPS FROM INTERVIEWS

5.2.1 MIND MAPS FROM BUYERS RESPONSES TO RESEARCH QUESTION 1

The first research question was aimed at identifying the aspects sought by the buyers when selecting the service providers and what was the relative importance of these different aspects. The first two interview questions were to determine these criteria.

The different interviews were combined into a composite mind map as indicated earlier and this is presented in figure 2 below. The mind maps comprised a lot of information, however, for ease of reading, only the themes are presented; the full mind map is presented in the Appendix C.

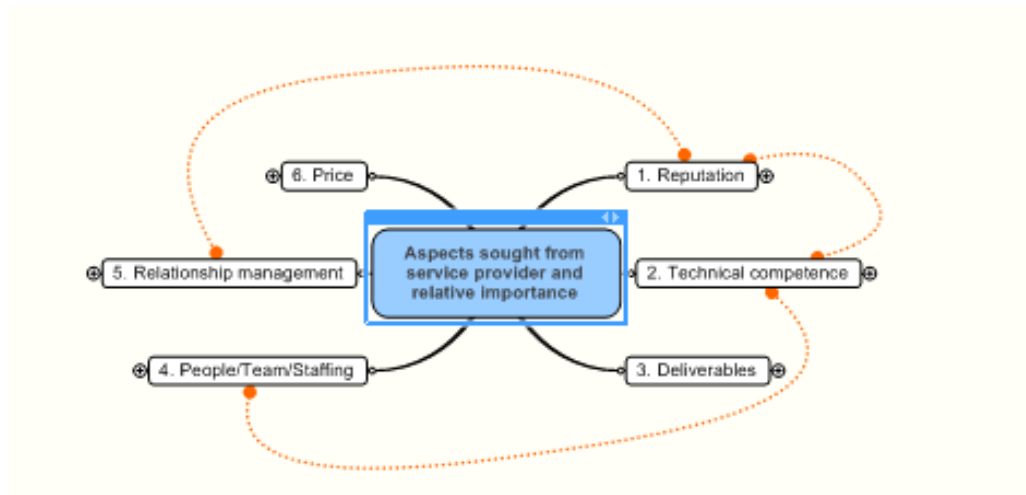


Figure 2: Buyers - composite mind map of buyers' interviews

The six themes unearthed are presented in the ranking given most frequently by the interviewees.

Half of the interviewees preferred to rank the various elements and the other half gave a relative weighting. Both methods resulted in the same configuration with higher weights on those selected first, by those who ranked them. In all

cases, except one, price appeared to be the last consideration, the reputation and the capacity to deliver being placed higher in the ranking order and in the relative weight. Only one interviewee placed the relationship, after the price, as well as a sub-theme of timeliness, encompassed in the Technical competence theme. It is to be noted that the respondents emphasized the low importance of price in the selection criteria of a management consulting firm.

5.2.2 MIND MAP FOR SUPPLIERS' PERFORMANCE TO RESEARCH QUESTION 2

The second research question aimed at determining how well the professional service providers perform in these criteria identified during the interviews.

This question was quite difficult to answer for most interviewees, if not all, and could not really qualify the performance of the professional service providers against the criteria. The most frequent comment was "quite well" in overall criteria, especially two or three big providers of international brands.

However, several interviewees confirmed the fact, that for much specialised services and/or highly strategic matters, Mauritian management consulting firms lack competence and/or, given the size of the market, the local human resource pool available, confidentiality would not be guaranteed.

One other interviewee indicated that schedules were not fully adhered to, however, this was not really considered as important given the importance of the result itself.

Finally, all interviewees mentioned that small organisations, compared to the local big 5s (KPMG, PWC, E&Y, Deloitte, DCDM Consulting) had difficulties in fully addressing the requirements.

5.2.3 MIND MAP FROM SUPPLIERS TO RESEARCH QUESTION 3

The research question 3 aimed at obtaining the perceptions of service suppliers of the key buying criteria for providing professional services in Mauritius. It could

be noted that the service providers were not asked to rank the different elements they perceived as key for marketing of services. However, all the respondents did so naturally and the results are presented below.

The responses from the suppliers were much more organised and to the point than those of buyers, indicating that a thinking of their marketing approach has already been done, one of them admitting that a similar study was performed by them by way of a questionnaire with statistical analysis. The composite mind map resulting from the interviews is presented below in figure 3. The expanded mind map is presented in the Appendix D.

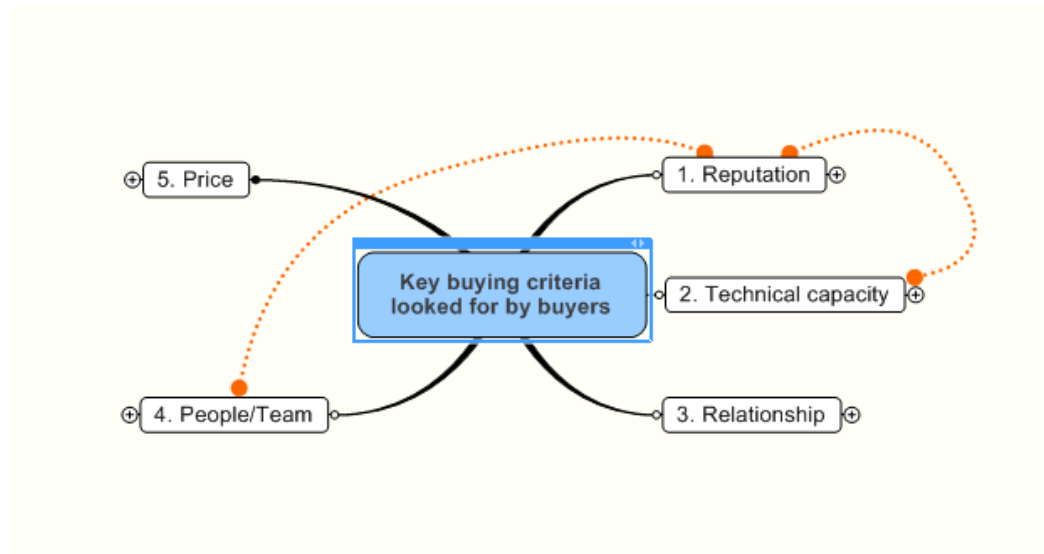


Figure 3: Providers – composite mind map of providers’ interviews

All interviewees placed the price as the least important key buying factor on the principle that the result of the management consulting effort will outweigh by far, the investment made by the client organisation, going to the point that the fees could not be discounted and stating “new price, new deal”.

Though the emphasis was placed on the technical capacity of the firm and its consultants to perform various management consulting assignments, the firms all placed the reputation as the most important key buying criteria, as an

element of risk reduction, the technical competence being levelled between competitors by the input of their foreign principals.

All these elements are however, fully linked together and none of them could be taken to stand-alone.

6 CHAPTER 6: INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the analysis of the results presented above with additional information contained in the expanded mind maps presented in Appendices C and D. The content is discussed, compared to the literature review and in relation to the research questions.

6.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1 – KEY BUYING CRITERIA AND THEIR RELATIVE IMPORTANCE

6.2.1 REPUTATION

The reputation criterion was mentioned by all the respondents in the interview, ranking it in the list of criteria five times out of six as the most important one.

The different elements encompassing this theme are presented in the mind map below, figure 4.

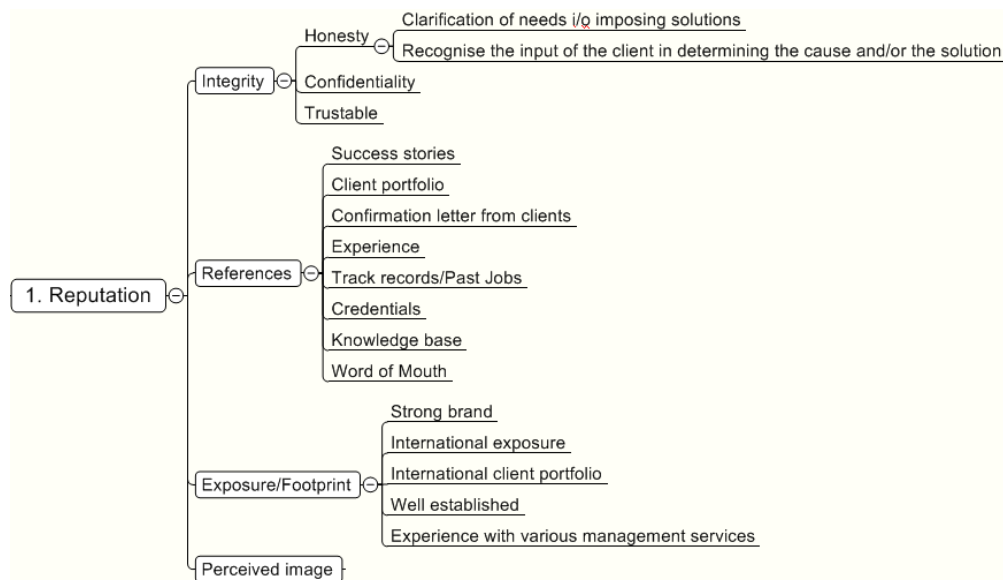


Figure 4: Buyers – Reputation criterion

The reputation of the firm revolves around four elements of related sub-themes and the following sub-themes, Integrity & Perceived image are linked, and References & Exposure/Footprint of the consulting firm are linked together.

The Integrity was mentioned only a couple of times compared to the References and Exposure sub-themes. This issue was mentioned as the consulting firms often suffer from the syndrome of “give me your watch; I’ll tell you the time”. The buyers, here, want the consultant to recognise the information provided from the client himself and unearth the root cause of the problems and its own conclusions and solutions to the issues for which he was hired, therefore, bringing real benefit to the consulting process.

The References looked for by the buyers are there to determine, if the consulting firm would be in a position to succeed in an assignment the buyer is willing an outside party to take.

In this theme, the buyers are in fact reassuring themselves on their choice by selecting a reputable consulting firm. Given the amount and strategic importance of this kind of services, they are reducing the risks of something going wrong, which would result in the waste of money and time. They are also protecting themselves internally (in their own organisation) in the event of a failure, and could claim, in this unfortunate event, that the choice was wise and reasonable given the reputation of the organisation.

As discussed in the literature review in chapter 2.3, the risk in purchasing these services are high, riskier than products, the buyers lack general experience given the experience is often unique and the outcome could not be evaluated before purchase, or before completion of the service itself. Therefore the buyers want to reduce their risk. So as mentioned by Corcoran & McLean (1998), the importance of the reputation of the company is a decision making item in the purchase of professional services.

Given all these elements, it is not surprising to find buyers looking at the Reputation and therefore placing it at top of the rank.

It is interesting to note that Reputation is also ranked top on the suppliers' point of view.

6.2.2 TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

Another recurring theme among interviewees is the Technical competence of the consulting firm, whether of its consultants or the technical approach developed by this organisation and replicated by the employees in every assignment.

The issues related to this theme are presented in the mind map in figure 5 below.

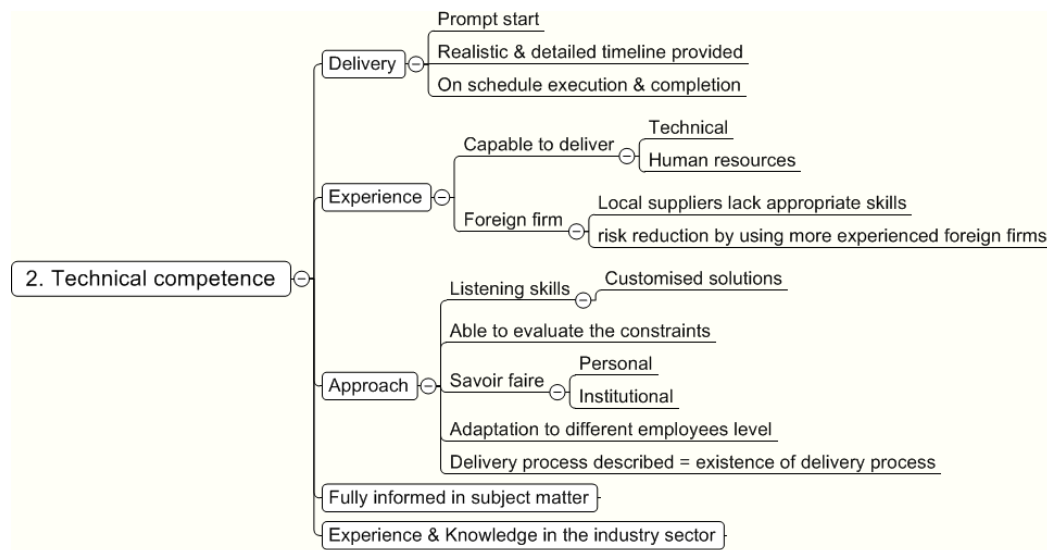


Figure 5: Buyers - Technical competence criterion

The buyers expressed a very important requirement, the capability of the management firm to deliver the technical aspects of the assignment in the timeline that needs to be defined in advance.

The delivery aspects have been placed in the technical competence as it is directly related to the control of the technical aspects of the management consulting job.

The buyer wants to know in the selling/presentation phase of the consulting firm, whether its proposal would solve the client's problems, and whether they had a similar experience or more than one, and if the firm is acquainted to the industry sector as well as knowledgeable in this area.

Adding to this, the buyer is interested in the process of the realisation of the service and wants to know the timeline and the different steps that would be taken to reach the outcome. Furthermore, the time lapse between the allocation of the contract and the start of the intervention is important, as the buyer wants his problems solved as soon as possible.

The buyer wants also to ensure that an approach exists or, said differently, that the problems will be tackled with methodologies and that processes in the organisation exist to ensure replication of service and/or improvement of the approach.

Despite the search for a replicable approach, the buyer is also fully interested that the solution for his organisation's problem will be specific and unique to his situation and not an off the shelves solution.

The buyer also expressed concern on whether the consultant would be able to get the message across to the factory workers. This was mentioned specifically in a manufacturing firm, where production people lack academic qualifications.

Emphasis could be placed on the comment made by one buyer where for some specific services, the local organisation will not have the skills and therefore a foreign, more experienced, provider would be chosen. This is not very surprising as, given the market size and human resources available, consulting firms in Mauritius could only be generalist, tackling numerous areas instead of specialising in one specific area, which would certainly not be sustainable in the long run.

The buyers here again build a risk avoidance strategy by reviewing the different technical aspects. According to the literature review and as mentioned in

section 5.2.1, risk avoidance is key in the selection in the professional service provider. However, here also appear items that are mentioned in the literature under the section 2.4.3 such as existence of processes inside the consulting firm to ensure replication in the approach to solve the problem.

This theme is also discussed in chapter 2.3 and Corcoran & McLean (1998) stress the importance of the past experience of the supplier and Day & Barksdale (1992, 2003) uncovered that perceived experience, expertise and competence of the provider is a subjective dimension of the selection and decision making process in the choice of professional services.

6.2.3 DELIVERABLES

The main issues related to this item are presented in the mind map in figure 6 below.

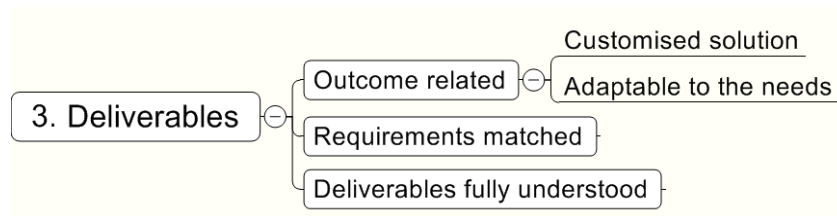


Figure 6: Buyers - Deliverables criterion

The buyer is looking here for the understanding of its requirements by the consultant, as well as whether, the solution proposed will be specific and unique to its organisation and adaptable to his situation.

The deliverables item could have been included in the technical competence. However, as the emphasis was placed on the customised solution, mentioned by all the respondents, the researcher estimated that it was necessary to highlight this aspect and make it appear as a stand-alone theme. The client does not expect an off the shelf but a particular solution. Given the investment in time, human resource and money to hire a management consultant, a generic solution cannot satisfy the buyer.

As discussed in chapter 2.3 & 2.4.1, the deliverables are very difficult to define and the buyer expects that the provider understands the client's needs and interests and therefore will deliver what is expected.

6.2.4 PEOPLE

The elements comprised in the People criterion are presented in the mind map figure 7.

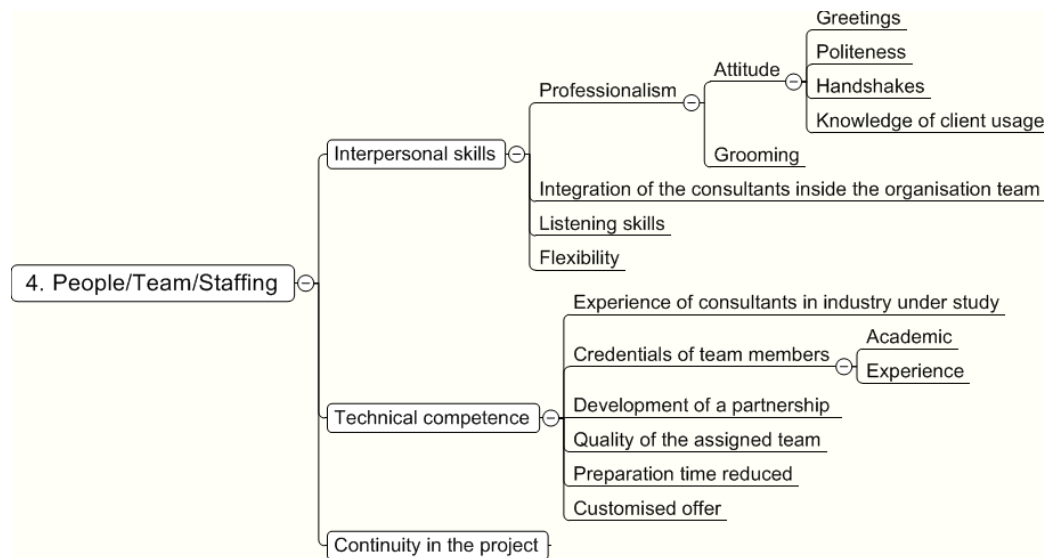


Figure 7: Buyers – People criterion

The different interviewees insisted lengthily on the people employed by the management consulting firm at their different levels. Who are the partners, the managers, as well as less senior personnel that will work with them, were the questions raised mostly during their selection experience of a management consulting firm.

It should be also noted that the buyers wants the consultant to have the technical competence with the right interpersonal skills.

The technical competence is there to ensure that the right approach is applied, the root cause uncovered and the specific solution proposed. Some elements of this aspect are similar to the technical competence theme. This is not surprising

as the technical level of the organisation, which can be leveraged by the knowledge management of the firm, is also dependent on the quality of the consultants employed. Therefore, the buyer wants to know the academic level and experience of the consultants making up the team assigned to the project, and whether they have experience in the related industry.

Similarly, given the personal interactions, sometime one on one, that occur during the delivery of the project, the interpersonal skills, behaviour and personality of the consultants are important, if not determining, in the result of the assignments.

The buyer expects that the person assigned to them will get along well with the different persons she would need to meet inside their organisation, easing the process, particularly in situations where the person inside the organisation could be directly or indirectly related to the cause of the organisation's problem.

However, some would prefer the technical competence, despite a lower interpersonal skill of the consultant, while others, would only want to work with an easy person with average technical competence, justified by the fact they expect senior, more experienced and technically knowledgeable personnel to review the junior's work at milestones and before completion of the project.

These two aspects lead to the continuity in the project element. The buyer, having spent time explaining and investing in a relationship, expects that the same team manages the project to its conclusion.

According to the literature review, people are an essential part of the marketing mix, as the quality of the service received will also be judged on the assessment of the people providing the service, and establishes the opinion on the firm based on this interaction (Lovelock, 2000, Clemes *et al*, 2000). Mitchell (1994) sees a direct relationship between the strength of the consulting firm and the competence of its people. Furthermore, Corcoran & McLean (1998) identified the personal contact with the consultant as a decision making criterion, while

Day & Barksdale (2003) found that personal chemistry could influence the decision making.

6.2.5 RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The mind map on the theme relationship management is exposed below in figure 8.

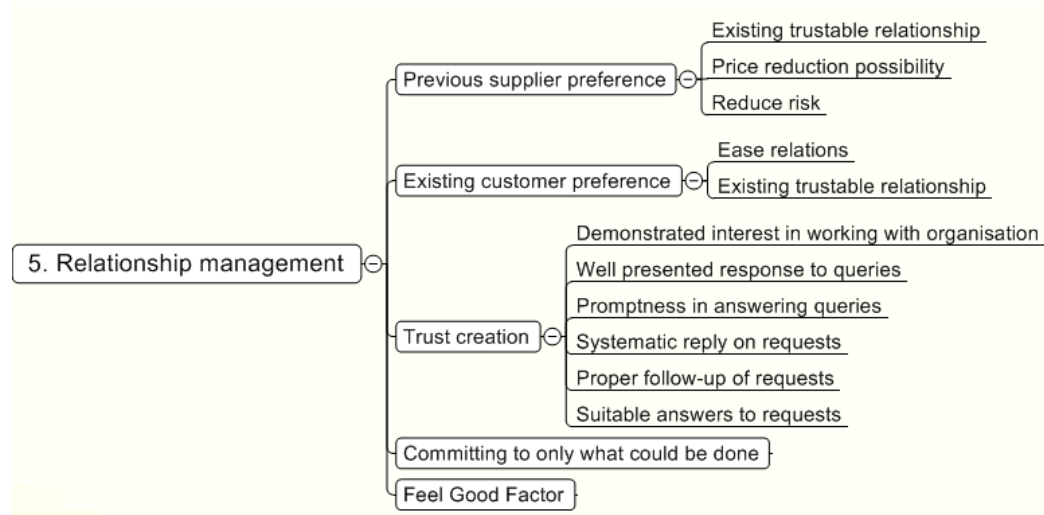


Figure 8: Buyers – Relationship management criterion

It is interesting to note here that the respondents mentioned that they will in fact be more interested to place their issues to an organisation they already know, whether being a past supplier of management consulting or a client of their own services, creating a sort of mutual dependency between them. In situations, where a new comer would need to enter the place, his efforts would need to be in the long term, with regular and prompt responses to some ad hoc requests, which will then develop the trust required to enter into the agreement.

Several respondents also raised the point that the provider must avoid to commit doing things that they would not be able to address properly. This is because it will create disappointment, which could be fatal to the relationship and confidence between the two parties.

Relationship management is mentioned in the literature review as an element in the marketing of professional services, looked for by buyers to develop mutual understanding and trust (Corcoran & McLean, 1998, Day & Barsdale, 2003). Bendixen *et al* (2001) proposed that relationship is used to market professional services. Furthermore, Rohrs (2007) found similar elements such as personal service, long term focus, collaboration, partnership, communication, engagement, loyalty, all related to the management of relations between the suppliers and the customers.

6.2.6 PRICE

The last mind map extracted from the interviews of buyers of professional services is presented in figure 9 below.

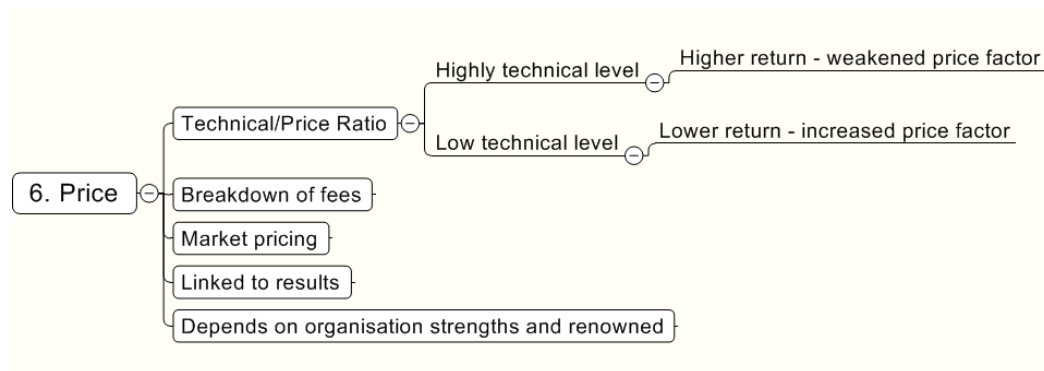


Figure 9: Buyers – Price criterion

Price was mentioned in each interview, however, as a negative factor. Price is not a selection criterion if it is in the range of the market, or according to the level expected for the type of service requested. This is confirmed by the fact that the price had always come last in the discussions and mentioned as not important by all buyers, as the price will not be an issue as long as the service is delivered to expectations and the organisation's problems solved to satisfaction. Given that often management consulting are called to solve important questions inside organisations and to work on strategic issues, the return on the investment far outweigh the costs and funds are allocated for this in the general budget.

However, this does not mean that the buyers are not vigilant to the components of the total fees and will query if something seems unclear. Some will also link the payment of the fees to the measurement of the success of the investment.

The findings above match the literature review where it was noted that buyers rarely mention price as selection criterion (Day & Barksdale, 1992), but will eventually link it to the post performance quality assessment. Rorhs (2007) found that the customer of professional services is less price sensitive when in a good relationship with his supplier.

6.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2 – PERFORMANCE OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE BUYERS

As mentioned in the Results' chapter, the interviewees were not very precise in the evaluation of the performance of the professional service providers. The main comments were “quite well” and “average”, except two or three service providers particularly above the rest, with one interviewee indicating that : “at this level of fees, they ought to be good” and in the context of marketing their services, they managed very well in their approach for most of them.

However, this comment made by a buyer, emphasises that local firms lack some specific skills and therefore only an experienced foreign supplier would be able to provide specific service requiring special competencies.

The quality and amount of elements collected here did not allow the interviewer to draw any mind maps and make any substantial conclusions.

6.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 3 – KEY BUYING CRITERION IN THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SUPPLIERS

6.4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the themes uncovered during the interviews made with professional service providers.

6.4.2 REPUTATION

The first theme mentioned by service provider is Reputation and is presented in the figure 10 below.

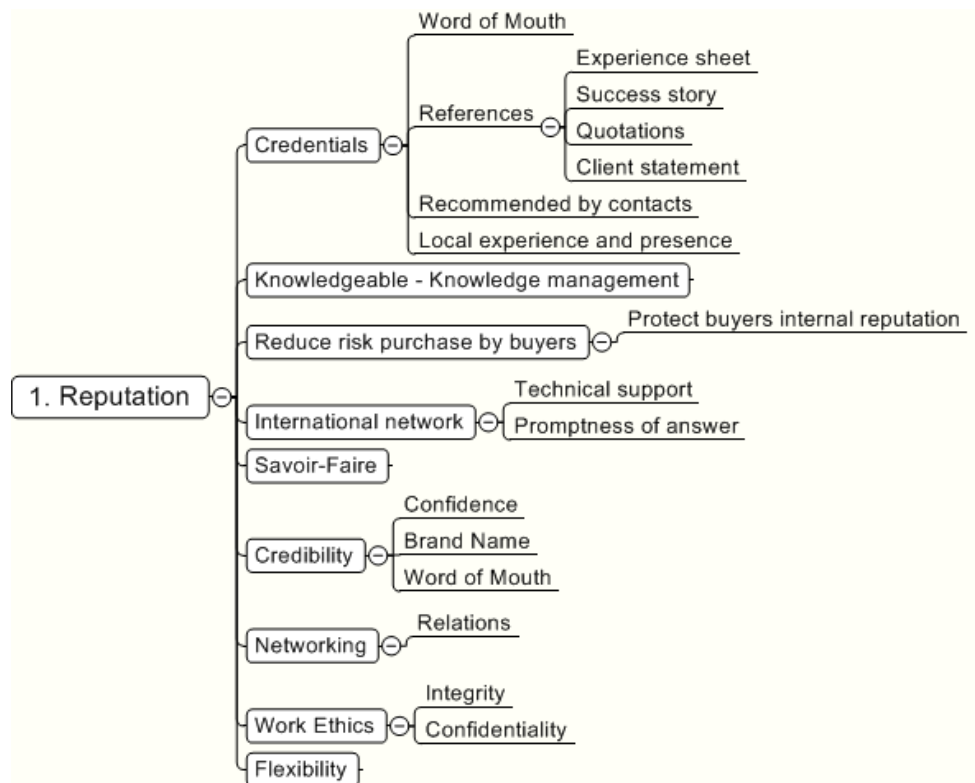


Figure 10: Providers – Reputation criterion

This theme was mentioned by all service providers and described as being the most important factor in all cases.

The interviewees stressed the importance of the credentials, past experience as well as the credibility and international network of the service provided. As mentioned earlier, the reputation of the service provider is key in reassuring the buyer, avoiding the purchasing risk and it is not surprising to have it indicated as a key buying criterion.

It relates well to the literature review where Risk management, Recommendations & Referrals (Bendixen *et al*, 2001), Word of Mouth (File *et al*, 1994, Mitchell, 1994, Lovelock, 2000) are mentioned as elements of the marketing activity in reducing the risk for the buyer.

6.4.3 TECHNICAL CAPACITY

The second theme uncovered through the suppliers interview is the Technical capacity and is presented in the mind map in figure 11 below.

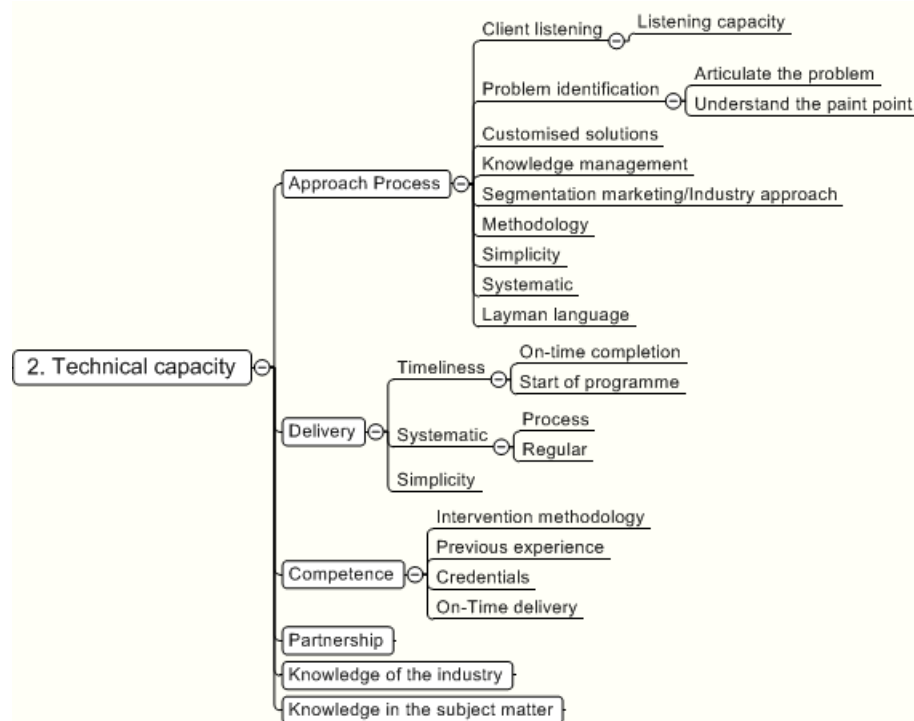


Figure 11: Providers - Technical capacity criteria

This theme revolves around the approach process used by the consulting firm, the way the service is delivered, the technical competence of the team and the

knowledge of the industry and the subject under consideration in the assignment.

These items can be found in the literature where the need for processes is mentioned in section 2.4.3, where the delivery mode, methods and steps should be described and demonstrated (Lovelock, 2000, Kotler, 2001 and Bendixen *et al*, 2001).

6.4.4 RELATIONSHIP

The third key buying criterion mentioned by the provider of service is the Relationship. The elements comprised in this theme, are presented in the mind map in the figure 12 below.



Figure 12: Providers - Relationship criterion

The main element of the relationship is the relation with partners, meaning the perception of the service provider. The buyer would like mainly to meet and see partners throughout the project and not only at the beginning or at the end of it. In addition, the service provider perceived a real need to keep the relationship with potential buyers or previous clients by either regularly telephoning them or visiting them to discuss the assignment. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the calls should not always be made when the service provider has something to propose, but mainly to enquire of any progress and/or any problems they might have, for which a solution could be given.

The service providers also insisted that it is important to get information on the client organisation, especially, the culture and practices to avoid any impairment

with the organisation personnel. These were cited as the two main elements of relationship. One service provider mentioned the concept of an exclusive relationship, but this seems difficult to practice in Mauritius given, once again, the size of the market.

The service providers recognised the creation of this professional relationship more than a personal relationship as a determining factor in winning new agreements. However, the persons interviewed also acknowledged that the relationship is difficult to manage, especially as the interactions are made at various levels within both the client and the service provider and each encounter, enquiry or request might affect positively or negatively the relationship between both parties.

The literature review also placed emphasis on the supplier side of the importance of relationship management and the multiple facets of the interactions and relationships (Gronroos, 1994, Rorhs, 2007).

6.4.5 PEOPLE/TEAM

The fourth key buying criterion mentioned by the provider of service is the People and Team placed on projects. The elements comprised in this theme are presented in the mind map in the figure 13 below.

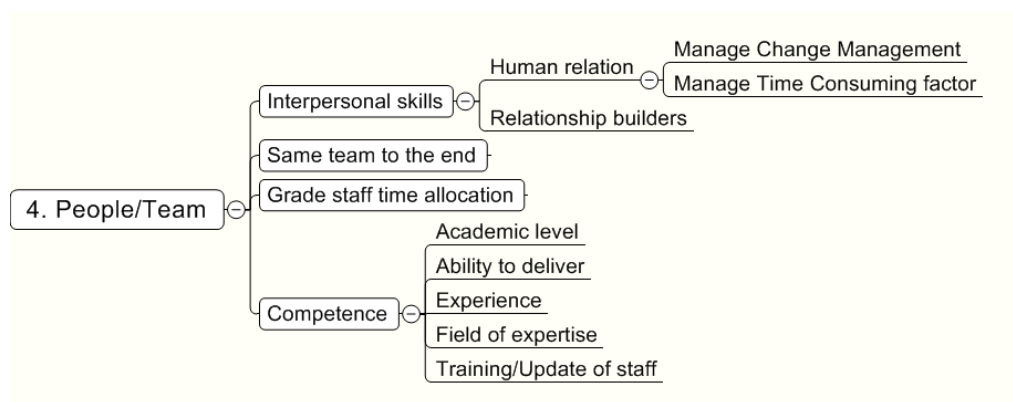


Figure 13: Providers – People/Team criterion

In the perception of the service provider, the people and the team placed on each project are of paramount importance in getting the contracts. The same

team should remain on the job until its completion to ease the delivery process and allow relationship building, while also reducing the burden of restarting the relationship with a new person and explaining again the different elements required to have the overall view of the situation. The interpersonal skills are important as the nature of the intervention itself is a hassle for the client and therefore, some proper behaviour and attitude are required. The competence of the members of the team assigned is also important. Finally, one service provider found it important to indicate to their client the allocation of time of their various levels of employees on the assignment divided between partners, managers, senior and junior consultants, to justify the fees as well as demonstrating the interest in the client's project and determination to make it happen.

The literature review refers to the importance of people given the interaction required by the nature of the consulting activity. The assessment of the quality of the work and the firm will also be based on these interactions (Lovelock, 2000, Clemes *et al*, 2000), even more, that the purchase will focus on the consultant in evaluation the service (Mitchell, 1994).

6.4.6 PRICE

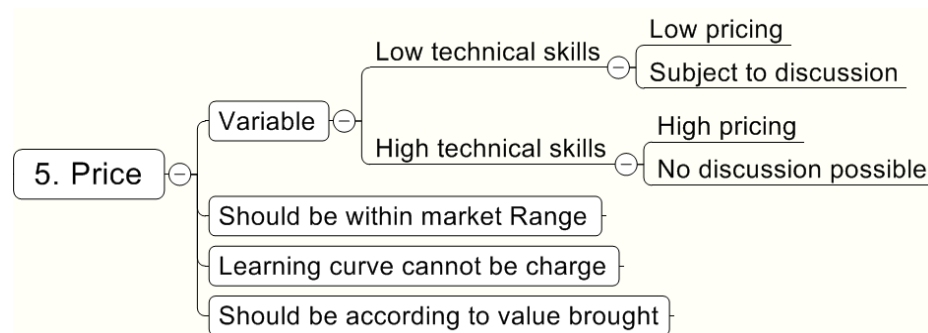


Figure 14: Providers – Price criterion

On the price point of view, all service providers mentioned it as not being most important, though, a determining in getting the contract. However, simply, they refuse to bargain and state that any substantial reduction of price can only lead to a new scope of service, “new price, new deal”.

The service provider also mentioned that they cannot charge for the learning curve with the client, and it has to form part of their investment in development of knowledge. The reason behind this is that the service provider would be able to use the knowledge acquired elsewhere.

This tallies to the literature review where the Day & Barksdale (1992) mention that price is not a selection criterion but a likely evaluation criterion and Rorhs (2007) who uncovers that the customers of management consulting firms are less price sensitive.

6.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 4 – APPROPRIATE MARKETING MIX FOR PROVIDERS OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES IN MAURITIUS.

During the interviews, no respondents discussed or mentioned the elements of the marketing mix as described in the literature review. This might be because buyers and providers might not be fully knowledgeable in the marketing mix elements, but also surely that the themes uncovered represent more precisely what has to be done to market efficiently professional services. However, it misses some systematic approach.

However, in an attempt to determine what would be the appropriate marketing mix for the provider of professional services in Mauritius, the researcher suggests a matching between the themes uncovered and the elements and criteria developed for the marketing mix in the literature review.

The elements described in the literature review are:

- Products;
- Place and distribution;
- Processes;
- People;
- Physical evidence;
- Productivity and quality;

- Promotion;
- Price;
- Relationship marketing.

The elements uncovered during the interviews are exposed in the table 4 below.

Table 4: Buyers' requirements and providers' perceptions

Buyers	Providers
1. Reputation	1. Reputation
2. Technical competence	2. Technical capacity
3. Deliverables	
4. People	3. People
5. Relationship management	4. Relationship
6. Price	5. Price

It can be noted that the buyers expectations and the providers' perceptions of what should be put forward in marketing professional services matched well together, save for deliverables, which appear on the buyers' side but not in the providers' expectations. However, as discussed above, the researcher indicated that the technical capacity theme encompasses the deliverables element. Both providers and buyers are aligned in terms of marketing of professional services.

As exposed above, the elements of the buyers are placed in order of importance from Reputation being most important to Price being less important for buyers, which is different for the providers where People was placed after the relationship.

These elements should be also compared to the elements uncovered in the literature review.

The comparison between the elements uncovered in the interviews and in the literature review is shown in the table below.

**Table 5: Comparison buyers' requirements,
service providers' perceptions and marketing mix elements**

Buyers' requirements	Marketing mix elements as exposed in the literature review	Service providers' perceptions
Reputation	Product, Processes, People, Physical evidence, Quality	Reputation
Technical competence	Processes, People, Productivity, Quality	Technical capacity
Deliverables	Products, Physical evidence, Quality	
People	People, Quality	People
Relationship management	Promotion, Relationship marketing	Relationship
Price	Price, Productivity, Quality, Promotion, Relationship marketing	Price

Each theme from the buyers and the providers encompasses several elements of the marketing mix as exposed in the literature.

It could be noted that the researcher could not match the element Place and Distribution of the marketing mix in any of the themes uncovered in the interviews. Given that management consultancy is generally delivered at the client's site, the location cannot be taken into consideration and had to be taken for granted. However, it could be argued that a minimum control on the servicescape could positively contribute to the evaluation of the overall service during the delivery.

From the interviews, the researcher has not been able to detect whether the different interviewees were knowledgeable of marketing mix theory and the usage of a marketing plan.

7 CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The first chapter described the reasons for researching this topic and detailed the problem statement.

The second chapter reviewed the literature available in the field of marketing of management consulting. The literature unveiled various elements and issues in the marketing of professional services and ways to address them.

The third chapter raised four research questions that the researcher attempted to answer in this research.

The fourth chapter described the methodology to address the research questions. The qualitative study was used with semi-structured interview with a purposive sample. The mind map technique was used to capture and present the data and the analysis.

The results were presented in chapter five of this research while the sixth chapter detailed the interpretation of the results and aimed at answering the research questions.

This seventh and last chapter deals with reviewing the objectives and discusses whether the research questions and problem statement have been answered properly. Business implications of the research and recommendations to stakeholders, are reviewed as well as the limitations of the current research with suggestions for future researches.

7.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to identify the requirements of buyers of professional service firms, the perceptions of providers of these requirements and hence the appropriate marketing mix of professional services firms in the Mauritian market.

The three associated sub-problems were:

1. to determine the requirements of buyers for professional services and how the providers address these;
2. to determine the relative importance of the buyer requirements as perceived by providers of professional services in Mauritius;
3. to analyse the gaps between suppliers perceptions and actual expectations and hence determine the appropriate marketing mix for professional services.

Following the literature review, four research questions were formulated to address the research problem. These are listed below:

1. Research question 1: what are the key buying criteria in evaluating professional services and their relative importance?
2. Research question 2: against these key buying criteria, how well do professional service providers perform?
3. Research question 3: what are the perceptions of the key buying criteria for providing professional services in Mauritius?
4. Research question 4: what is the appropriate marketing mix of professional services in Mauritius?

7.3 ATTAINMENT OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research problem for this study was to identify the requirements of buyers of professional services firms, the perceptions of providers of these requirements and hence the appropriate marketing mix of professional services firms in the Mauritian market.

The buyer's requirements were identified further to the interviews and were classified in order of importance as per the research question 1 request.

These requirements are listed below in order of importance:

1. Reputation
2. Technical competence
3. Deliverables
4. People
5. Relationship management
6. Price

The researcher could not provide a clear answer to research question 2 due to the lack of eliciting questions during interviews and therefore the meagre comments from the respondents. The answers obtained cannot provide insights into the research question 2, and hence the results are inconclusive.

The perceptions of the service providers were determined and exposed in mind maps.

The themes extracted from their perception are listed below:

1. Reputation
2. Technical capacity
3. People
4. Relationship
5. Price

The answer to research question 4 was in two sections, matching buyers' requirements and providers' perceptions and then to propose a fit between the elements of the theoretical marketing mix and the elements exposed in the interviews. This matching is presented in the table 5 above.

Further to this, it could be noted that both buyers and providers are on the same wavelength in terms of elements expected in the marketing of professional services, save for deliverables which were not identified by the providers. Providers have studied the expectations of their buyers and responded to their requirements.

As for the deliverables element, it could be reasonably suggested that this element is taken care of in the technical element of the providers, thus leading to the conclusion that there is a full match between the buyers and the providers.

Additionally, no respondents mentioned elements of the marketing mix as described in the literature. The study was not meant to determine whether the respondents were knowledgeable in this matter, however, this is quite surprising. The themes obtained from the interviews are simple elements but at the same time quite broad, encompassing multiple sub-elements as can be seen in the expanded mind maps. Much more precision could be obtained by using precise elements of the marketing mix as described in the literature review.

7.4 BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS

There are several implications of this research for the business.

1. Not all providers of professional services were at the same level of sophistication in the marketing of their services. This study could help them in improving the marketing of their services, its delivery and evaluation of their performance. Providers would gain in efficiency by

mastering the different elements of the marketing and using them in a systematic way.

2. From the interviews, not all buyers have developed criteria or thought precisely how to do evaluation, and this study would help them standardise their approach in the evaluation of the service providers during the selection process as well as the delivery process.

7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main limitation of the study lies in the purposeful sampling as well as the sizes of the samples themselves, which could have been extended, especially on the buyers' side.

Furthermore, the type of persons interviewed on the providers' side is limited. The researcher could not access the lower level employees such as managers or consultants and only the partners' view was compiled.

As the partner or the managing partner was contacted in the first place to get the interview and authorisation, they do not seem willing that junior employees be interviewed on the same subject. To get round of it, the researcher could have contacted several persons at the same time within the organisation, but this would have also raised the issue of already having the names internal to the organisation, which were not publicly available.

Based only in Mauritius with the specificities described of the market in an island, the study itself is limited by this environment. Further findings would surely be exposed by extending the study to a bigger, more sophisticated market.

The researcher might have had a bias during the interviews due to the following reasons:

- first, being himself in a professional service organisation already had his own experience and opinion of the marketing of these services;

- second, during the providers' interviews, the interviewer had all the information from the buyers' point of view, and this could have influenced the naming of some elements.

The other limitation was that some respondents, mainly buyers, although participating in the selection process of a management consultant firm, did not use specific processes, methodologies or tools. Their experience was also limited, as they did so once or twice only, participating partially to the overall selection and only in their area of specialisation or responsibility within their organisation. This situation is described in the literature review.

7.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study in its essence is exploratory. Further to the identification of the themes through content analysis, the refining of the findings could be done by using quantitative techniques which would determine the position of each of the elements against each other and their relative importance on a Likert scale.

On the provider side, the relative importance of the different elements could also be determined.

Furthermore, it could be interesting to replicate the same study in a bigger and more sophisticated market and to compare whether the same elements are exposed and on the same scale of importance.

Finally, it would have been interesting to determine whether the respondents were knowledgeable in the marketing mix theory.

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APPENDIX A: Questionnaires

Purchaser and user of professional services

The interviewer reminded the interviewee of the purpose of the study and of the interview. Professional services was defined and example provided.

Key Question 1

What are the most important aspects you seek from the provider when you purchase professional services?

Key Question 2

What is the relative importance of the criteria exposed?

Key Question 3

How well do service providers perform against each?

What are the criteria used to select and hire a professional services provider?

How do you evaluate the quality of the service provided?

What aspects do you consider in evaluating the service provided?

How relationship management influences your opinion of the organisation?

How do you use Word of Mouth?

What risk reduction strategy do you use?

Who/which function(s) of the organisation is/are involved in the purchasing of the professional services?

Supplementary questions were raised to elicit answers on other aspects of the marketing mix that the interviewee may have omitted and to go more in depth in some aspects discussed during the interview

Professional Services providers

The researcher reminded the interviewee of the purpose of the study and of the specific interview that is to determine their opinion on buyers' requirements of professional services in Mauritius and how professional services should be marketed.

Key Question 1

What do buyers look for when assessing which service provider to use?

Key Question 2

How important are each of these criteria for the buyers?

Key Question 3

How can these criteria be addressed by a service provider?

What in your opinion has been determinant in winning your last professional services contracts?

What are the competitive advantages of the organisation for which you are working?

Could you elaborate on what is the value proposition of your organisation?

What criteria do buyers of professional services use to evaluate providers?

How does this influence your marketing?

Supplementary questions:

What do you believe is the role of Customer Relationship Management?

Can you describe your recruitment (of whom?) process?

Is the brand of the organisation an important parameter? Is it critical in determining success?

Would you say the items you described are specific to the Mauritian market?

Which one would be specific to Mauritius?

Any other questions that would be raised from the interview itself?

Any items that might have been missed?

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APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTORY LETTER/EMAIL

Name Surname

Position

Company

Address 1

Address 2

City

Date/Month/Year

Dear Sir,

MBA Research Report – Request for interview

I am a student of the WITS Business School in Johannesburg, South Africa, currently completing my MBA. For the purpose of completion of this curriculum, we are required to perform a research study.

The subject of the research I am conducting is “Buyer requirements and supplier marketing mix for professional services in Mauritius”.

The aim of the study is to determine the different elements included in the marketing of professional services in Mauritius and contribute to the improvement on the way these services are promoted.

The study has been limited to the management consulting organisations.

As a buyer of professional services, your opinion on the aspects looked for when selecting a management consulting organisation is of prime interest for this study.

I would therefore be grateful if I can interview you next week at a time convenient to you. The interview should not last more than one (1) hour and will focus on the subject above.

I shall contact you by phone to provide some more information on the topic, aim of the study, the interview process and if you confirm your wish to be interviewed, I shall send you the main interview questions for preparation.

Should you be interested, as a participant to this study, you will be entitled to receive an abstract and the main findings of the research report once completed and validated by the WITS Business School's.

I remain at your disposal for any information you may need.

I thank you beforehand for your time and assistance

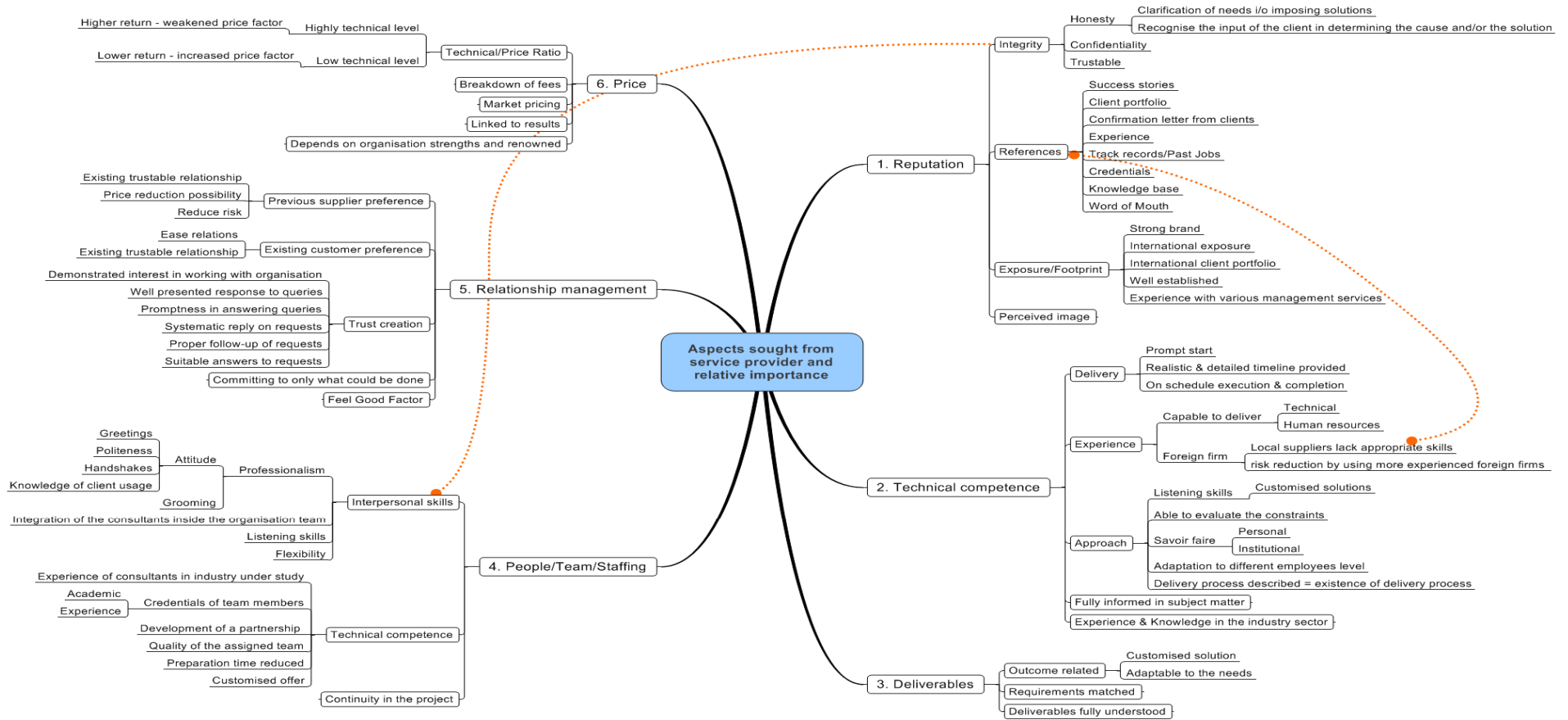
Yours faithfully,

Daniel Grant

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APPENDIX C: BUYERS' MIND MAP



APPENDIX D: PROVIDERS' MIND MAP

