Developing A Holistic Approach

In

Business Consulting For Small Businesses:

The Case of Asadi Business Consulting, Inc.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the

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for the degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

by

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Abstract

Although, due to the increased rate of failures among small businesses, having a business consultant sounds a necessity, my small business consulting firm (Asadi Business Consulting, Inc.) is struggling to find clients. To improve my firm publicity, I had engaged in many activities over the last seven years, such as social media marketing, writing articles, creating short business training videos, and presenting at various informative events. I had also adopted different business consulting models, such as packaging my services in diverse ways to be more understandable for small-business owners. These activities, however, had brought me more credibility and reputation than financial benefits. People had been reading my articles and thanking me for the informative content but had been hesitating to pay for my consulting services. In this regard, developing a new approach in business consulting services for small businesses is necessary to make my business more profitable than before.

Accordingly, to conduct my DBA thesis, I did action research on developing a holistic approach to achieving three main objectives as the following:

1) To learn about the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting services, especially my consulting firm.
2) To learn which type of knowledge and services as a business consultant, I can provide for small business owners and managers, so they consider it valuable and want to pay for it.
3) To develop a profitable business consultancy framework encompassing the modes of learning, forms of knowledge, and media for knowledge exchange valued by clients.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) say that learning through action is one of the central columns of action research. French (2009) also emphasizes having a holistic approach through strategic thinking to reflect on various aspects of a problem such as internal and external forces, current and desired situations, and required actions.

Accordingly, this research includes different actions research cycles to gain first, a shared understanding of the nature of the relationship between my consulting firm and small business companies as my potential clients; second, institutionalizing a range of systems, structures, strategies and routines into my business practice; and third, studying new knowledge learning and transfer in some small business companies to determine how they utilized their new relationship with my consulting firm. In this regard, through different research cycles, I used a qualitative research method and interviewed a total of eighteen small business owners from different industries in the Los Angeles area.

By finishing this study, I learned the main barriers in applying business consulting in small companies and how to face them. I also gained new knowledge regarding the factors which encourage small business owners to hire my consulting services. In this regard, I learned that it is rarely possible to have all the required elements to perform successful business consulting services; therefore, it is my role as a business consultant to determine how to achieve the desired results out of imperfect conditions.

The results of this study should not only enable me to improve my business consulting firm by developing a new comprehensive approach, but also be helpful for other professional service

providers, especially management consultants in learning more about the obstacles of having a successful business and how to overcome them.

Acknowledgments

I am so thankful for the support that I have received throughout the journey of completing my DBA degree, especially this thesis. Any project cannot be completed without the help and guidance from several people. In writing this thesis, I, too, have received much guidance and help, which I gratefully acknowledge. Here are some people I wish to thank by name.

Dr. Terry Nolan, my supervisor professor, for his constant support in giving guidance, answering my questions and referring valuable resources.

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I also want to thank all my professors and classmates at the University of Liverpool who have been such a great inspiration and who helped me think clearly and logically and supported me to complete my degree.

Thank you all!

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Declaration of Own Work

I, Ali Asadi, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Business Administration at the University of Liverpool, is wholly my work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Ali Asadi

March 2021

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

This thesis includes various sections based on the standards of DBA thesis by the University of Liverpool. In the first chapter, I discuss the background, the problem, and the purpose of the study, and my role as a scholar-practitioner in conducting this research. Throughout the second chapter, I review related articles regarding the study topic. The third chapter includes the methods and methodology that I chose to conduct this research. The fourth chapter consists of data gathering and analysis, and in the fifth chapter, I discuss my findings. Finally, the sixth chapter contains evaluations and conclusions based on this research.

1.1 Background

Small businesses have a key role in the United States economy, which includes 99.9% of U.S. businesses and 47.8% of nationwide employees. The rate of success among small enterprises, however, is too low, especially in large cities, such as Los Angeles. Based on statistics from the Small Business Administration (SBA), which is a U.S. government agency, a third of new small companies could survive perhaps only ten years. That problem provides a terrific opportunity for management consulting firms that could be so effective in helping small companies in different areas, such as marketing, human resources, and business operations. My small business consulting firm (Asadi Business Consulting), however, is struggling to get business consulting clients. In this regard, I should indicate that Asadi Business Consulting is a small consulting firm in which the business consultant's image and capabilities have a crucial role in the success or failure of the business. This situation is very similar to a small medical office in which the physician's credibility, publicity, and treatment approaches are so important in attracting more patients. Asadi Business Consulting is located in Los Angeles; therefore, the main focus of this study is on applying business consulting services in small companies in the United States, especially in the Los Angeles area.

According to Los Angeles County's governmental website (www.lacounty.gov), there are more than 244,000 small businesses in this area. The number of minority- and women-owned businesses in Los Angeles County is the highest in the United States, and the top growing industry is healthcare and social assistant. The Los Angeles area has a population of 9.3 million, including 140 cultures and as many as 224 languages.

Here are also the core definitions during this study:

Small business: The Office of Advocacy, which is the voice and representative of small businesses in the United States government, classifies businesses based on size and expresses companies with less than 500 employees as small enterprises (Small business profile, 2017).

Business consultant: A professional who can help small companies in defining goals, making decisions, implementing changes, and solving problems (Boris.K et al., 2014; and Blair and Marcum, 2015).

Learning system: A set of procedures to create learning opportunities for organizational members, develop a culture of knowledge sharing, and encourage collaborative learning among team members (Jyothibabu et al., 2010).

1.2 The Problem and The Purpose of This Study

As mentioned earlier, the main issue in my consulting firm is the lack of having enough business consulting clients. In this regard, the purpose of my thesis is to develop a rigorous and theory-based problem-solving method to help address this problem, which so far appears lacking in the literature. In this regard, Kush (2015) talks about the importance of having a problem statement that is clear and accurate by considering the current situation, the desired situation, and the proposed actions.

Ramsey (2014) also states that scholar-practitioners may find different qualities and matters in an issue based on the way they focus and pay attention to related factors, stating: three domains of attention are identified: “an engagement with ideas, a practice of inquiry, and navigation of relations” (Ramsey, 2014, P.6). Regarding my thesis, I engaged with the issue and the practice of inquiry as an insider-researcher. I also decided to have a focus on the relationships between small business owners' mindsets regarding business consulting services, their learning styles, and their business issues to determine how they react to my business consulting services and the knowledge I customize for them. That's why the problem statement of my thesis is: ***How to develop a profitable business consultancy framework encompassing the modes of learning, forms of knowledge, and media for knowledge exchange valued by business consulting clients.***

I outline here the issues that are most pressing and personal to me as a self-employed business consultant, as follows:

1) What are the potential barriers to hiring my consulting services, and how can I overcome them?

2) What do small business owners consider as the value in an outside advisor?

3) How can I, as a business consultant, create and transfer value to small business owners?

These three issues led me to seek a deeper understanding of my client market, and thus enable me to make changes in what I offer and how I offer it. The thesis oscillates between my own thoughts, beliefs, and actions and those of various 'others.' “An attentional scholarship of practice foregrounds the practice of inquiry, not so much as an academic research method but more as an ongoing, skeptical, and evaluative testing of actions taken or considered” (Ramsey, 2014, P.18). In this regard, I initially started from a personal perspective, based on my unconscious belief that it was solely up to me to match the clients' needs. This belief system led to a situation where I was often trying to offer knowledge that was outside my scope or to offer it explicitly when tacit knowledge was needed or visa-versa. In other cases, I thought that by offering more and more functional knowledge in, for example, marketing or human resources, that I could fill clients' needs gap. This ego-centric approach would have meant I would be faced with indefinite challenges to my abilities and my self-efficacy; it was, therefore, unsustainable. It was, in any case, commercially unsuccessful.

As my thesis develops, the first oscillation occurs, where I discovered that a client's needs are far more complex than I imagined and are very personalized to him or her or; in other words, I needed to understand the world from the client's perspective, not my own. This meant that I had to understand the client as a functioning human being who happened to be running a business, rather than simply as an 'owner/manager' (or some other such nomenclature). In theoretical terms, the Resource-Based View (RBV) Barney (2000) seemed to be most relevant. Barney (2000) states that there is a direct relationship between a firm's resources and competitive advantages if resources are valuable, not accessible, and imitable easily by potential customers and competitors, and not able to be replaced easily by other resources.

In terms of a small business, such 'resources' are frequently vested in just one individual (the owner/manager). Even in cases where there is a number of employees, it is up to that individual to be an effective communicator, manager, and motivator if they are to get the best out of their people. Such resources, or lack of, are hidden within the individual's psyche and can best be identified by the consultant observing them in action rather than merely asking them questions.

Bell et al., (2011) state that specific learning through inquiry-learning method includes 1) asking questions, 2) collecting data and evidence to answer the questions, 3) analyzing and interpreting the collected data, 4) connecting the findings to the current sources of knowledge and 5) creating justifications for the findings. I discovered that Bell's linear method did not account for the complexities involved when interacting with individuals, for prolonged periods of time, throughout the AR cycles.

From another perspective, Chrisman and McMullan (2004, 2005) argue that based on the theory of "outsider assistance as a knowledge resource," an outside advisor could be a great source of both tacit and explicit valuable knowledge for small business owners by developing the following conditions:

- Being experienced and knowledgeable.
- Filling a gap between what the small business owner knows and what he needs to know.
- Transferring knowledge at the right stage of business development. The knowledge transferred in the early life of a business is easier to be implemented.
- Customizing Knowledge and transfer method for each small business owner.

Another frequently used theory is Organizational Sponsorship: "Organizational sponsorship mediates the relationship between new organizations and their environments by creating a resource-munificent context intended to increase survival rates among those new organizations." (Amezcua et al., 2013, P.1628). In this regard, Breivik-Meyer et al. (2019) argue that organizational sponsorship could be done by the government and/or universities to increase the rate of success among new small companies through tax subsidization, creating business incubators, and so on. This approach is more applicable for startups – which I do not deal with and conducted mostly by large government-funded organizations or universities and hence is it is not relevant to my thesis, which analyzes more established firms that may need new knowledge that could be transferred by a business consultant.

Research Questions

Accordingly, I decided to use both "the Resource-Based View (RBV)" Barney (2000) and the theory of "outsider assistance as a knowledge resource" Chrisman and McMullan (2004, 2005) as my main approaches to answering the following research questions:

1) What are the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting services, especially my consulting firm? Small business owners are my main clients; therefore, learning about their perspectives may help me a lot in removing potential barriers in hiring my services.
2) Which types of knowledge and services as a business consultant can I provide for small business owners and managers, so they consider it valuable and want to pay for it? By learning about what small business owners consider as value, I will be able to customize my consulting

services in a way that can create win-win situations for both small business owners as clients and myself as the business consultant.

3) How can I develop a profitable business consultancy framework encompassing the modes of learning, forms of knowledge, and media for knowledge exchange valued by clients? By creating a new approach, I will be able to have a more organized system in dealing with small business owners from the first meeting to finishing the projects. This way, getting more clients, delivering successful consulting projects, and making more profit will be more achievable.

Regarding the scope of this study, I interviewed a total of 18 small business owners in the Los Angeles area, which is the main practice location of my firm. Those small business owners were chosen from established companies in different industries such as healthcare, restaurant, transportation, engineering, retail, and professional services. The primary purpose of selecting participants was to find businesses from different industries in which business owners have a circuital role in accepting and embedding new knowledge in their companies. This research project includes various components of literature review, data gathering, and analysis, finding and discussions, and conclusion, which took almost two years. In this regard, I also reviewed both scholarly and practical researches regarding small business characteristics such as organizational learning and the role of small business owners in it; business consulting in small companies, effectiveness and challenges; various learning styles, and developing learning systems in small companies. However, they are many topics which were not addressed in this study as the following:

- How to market business consulting services to get more clients from small businesses.
- The role of small business owners' leadership styles, decision making approach and culture in hiring and working with outside advisors.
- The impact of small business owners' personality types in accepting and learning new knowledge and working with business consultants.
- The effect of small businesses' financial resources in hiring business consulting services.

This study also excluded startup companies and companies in which decisions are made by the board of directors, not business owners.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) say that learning through action is one of the central columns of action research. French (2009) also emphasizes having a holistic approach through strategic thinking to reflect on various aspects of a problem such as internal and external forces, current and desired situations, and required actions. That's why I chose action research to conduct this study to consider different aspects of my workplace problem, find effective solutions, and gain new actionable knowledge as a scholar-practitioner.

Accordingly, this research includes different actions research cycles to gain first, a shared understanding of the nature of the relationship between my consulting firm and small business companies as my potential clients; second, institutionalizing a range of systems, structures, strategies, and routines into my business practice; and third, studying new knowledge learning and transfer in some small business companies to determine how they utilized their new relationship with my consulting firm. My action research led to one final 'oscillation' where the first and second person foci merged to become a shared project between clients and consultants. This is explained in detail later and forms a significant outcome from this thesis.

The results of this study should not only enable me to improve my business consulting firm by developing a new comprehensive approach but also be helpful for other professional service providers, especially management consultants, in learning more about the obstacles of having a successful business and how to overcome them.

1.3 My Role in The Research

One of the main reasons why I chose this topic for my DBA thesis is the full autonomy and responsibility that I have to conduct this research project successfully. As the founder of Asadi Business Consulting, Inc., a management consulting firm based in Los Angeles, California, I specialize in helping businesses and organizations achieve success in today's highly competitive business environment. My professional experience encompasses business management, strategic planning, marketing and advertising, revenue growth, human resource management, and cost reduction. I have had the opportunity to work on many projects for several businesses and industries as a business manager and consultant.

Regarding my role in this study, since I own Asadi Business Consulting, Inc., and work as a business consultant, my role was an insider-researcher. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) state that two main factors that make an insider action researcher successful are: 1) developing new knowledge by improving the current knowledge, 2) managing both working position and research position effectively. In this regard, as stated by Coghlan (2007), I also had some challenges as an insider-researchers such as 1) role duality, which is my role as the business owner, and the researcher. In this regard, persuading small owners that participating in this study and sharing their information were not be used to sell them any services could be one of my challenges. 2) having my pre-existing assumptions about business consulting in small companies.

Accordingly, to face these challenges, during this study, I talked to participants regarding the purpose of this study and shared with them all the required information. I also followed all ethical rules, saved all the gathered data in secured formats and places. I also reflected on my findings and tried to remove my pre-assumptions regarding my professional services. Since I started my profession as a business consultant, I faced many challenges, especially in dealing with different small business owners. Before this study, I was frustrated about working with small business owners due to their resource limitations and the lack of knowledge about business consulting services. These pre-existing assumptions and knowledge could have impacted my research. During this study, however, I learned a lot about small enterprises as my potential clients and how, as a business consultant, I can help them to be more successful. I also discovered how to overcome potential barriers not only in solving my professional challenges but also in changing my business consulting approaches to gain more income.

Kumar (2013) states that some of the requirements of having a successful insider action research project are; the relationship among participants, the credibility of the researcher; and following ethical rules. Following my expertise and experience in the above areas, research on developing a holistic approach for my consulting firm is a great topic for my DBA thesis.

1.4 Chapters Summary

This thesis includes various chapters based on the standards of the DBA thesis by the University of Liverpool, including introduction, literature review, methodology and methods, data gathering and analysis, findings and discussions and evaluation, and conclusion. The following is a summary of my journey through this study.

In the first chapter (introduction), I discuss the background, the problem, and the purpose of the study, and my role as a scholar-practitioner in conducting this research. Although due to the increased rate of failures among small businesses, having a business consultant sounds a necessity, my small business consulting firm (Asadi Business Consulting, Inc.) is struggling to find clients. That's why the purpose of this study is to learn about the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting services and what they consider as value and consequently developing a holistic approach for my consulting firm in facing different small business owners. As an insider researcher, I had many personal and professional interests in conducting this project, such as reducing my frustration in dealing with small companies, solving small businesses 'issues, finding solid materials for my new book, improving my business consulting firm, and making more profit. In this regard, I also discuss my challenges, such as role-duality and ignoring my pre-existing assumptions as a business consultant.

In the second chapter (literature review), I review articles regarding the main topics of this study, which are small businesses, business consulting in small companies, knowledge creation, and developing learning systems.

In the third chapter (methodology and methods), I discuss and compare different research approaches and justify choosing a specific paradigm and, consequently, a research methodology and a method for this study. In this regard, I discuss various components of the research paradigms, which include ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods.

In the fourth chapter (data gathering and analysis), I talk about various action research cycles that I went through, which include different stages of construction (data gathering and analysis); planning (customizing my consulting approach and my firm learning system); taking action (providing my solutions to small business owners as participants), and evaluation (evaluating my actions and make corrections).

In the fifth chapter (finding and discussions), as a scholar-practitioner, I discuss my findings, which helped me answer my research questions during this study. In this regard, I found that there are three main elements that have a direct impact on a business consulting project; 1) the small business owner: the small business owner's learning styles, objectives, and perception of value 2) the problem: the required knowledge to solve the small business's issues 3) the consultant: the consultant's knowledge, approaches, and perceptions regarding the value of the project. Accordingly, I developed a holistic approach that considers all these main elements in dealing with different small business owners. In my opinion, this holistic approach is an actionable knowledge that could be used by other small business consulting firms or professional service providers who deal with small business owners.
Finally, in the sixth chapter, I evaluate my research in terms of these points: 1) how well my research meets the stated goals of my project i.e., what worked and what is lacking. 2) the actionability of my findings, given what I now know about their reception by my clients. 3) what elements of the Action Research project challenged me to approach problems differently (reflexivity) and when they occurred; 4) How has this changed my approach to the solution of problems.

The following is the approximate Gantt chart for my DBA thesis:

Activities	Quarter.2 (2018)	Quarter.3 (2018)	Quarter.4 (2018)	Quarter.1 (2019)	Quarter.2 (2019)	Quarter.3 (2019)	Quarter.4 (2019)	Quarter.1 (2020)	Quarter.3 (2020)	Quarter.4 (2020)
Ethic Approval										
Literature Review										
Methods and methodologies										
Data gathering										
Discussion & Conclusion										
Revisions										

Table 1.1: The Gantt Chart of This Study

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As stated earlier, the main challenge for Asadi Business Consulting firm is the lack of having paying clients. From the literature, I found two dominant approaches to address this issue through other studies, which are: 1) Organizational sponsorship, which is gaining competitive advantages, and solving organizational issues through external resources such as governmental institutions and universities. This approach is more compatible with startup companies to get funded or using business incubators provided by universities. (Amezcua et al., (2013); Breivik-Meyer et al., (2019)); 2) The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory which focuses on developing internal resources which are valuable, not accessible, and imitable easily by potential customers and competitors, and not able to be replaced easily by other resources as the main sources of competitive advantages. (Barney, 2000)

Regarding my consulting firm, I consider my main resources to be my managerial skills, through both academic and practical experiences, and also my knowledge regarding my potential clients. Second, both my firm and my clients are established companies that require new knowledge and skills as resources to improve competitive advantages. In this regard, Barney's RBV theory (2000) asks the following questions:

- How can consulting services be made more valuable in the eyes of potential clients (small business owners)?

  To answer the above questions, I needed to learn about the perspectives of small business owners regarding business consulting services and the value which might be delivered by a business consultant.

- How can a consultant customize his knowledge in a way which is not imitable and replaceable easily by potential customers and competitors?

  To answer this question, I needed to find out each small business owner's required knowledge and the way he preferred to learn, so I can adjust my knowledge and consulting approaches to be compatible with each clients' needs and preferred method of learning.

Accordingly, this study is about developing a systematic approach to learning to aid my understanding of the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting services and to assist them in their learning. I, therefore, began by reviewing articles regarding small businesses, professional service firms, and developing organizational learning systems. To access reliable data, I used the University of Liverpool online library platform (using the English language), which included the most updated databases such as Business Source Complete, JSTOR Journals, Emerald Insight, Scopus®, Science Citation Index, and much more in my focused topics.

The keywords that I chose to research including but not limited to small business characteristics, professional service firms' characteristics, business consulting in small enterprises, learning theories and knowledge creation methods, different learning style theories, organizational learning in small companies, and the factors which affect them and so on. These keywords are chosen based on 1) the research title, 2) the research questions, and 3) action research as the methodology of this study. In this regard, I examined general management, business consulting, small business, individual, and organizational learning disciplines and found both academic and practitioner articles. Although I found a lot of useful materials regarding the above topics, however, I faced some difficulties in finding articles regarding implementing business consulting services in small companies through using learning theories and styles, which is the core of my DBA thesis.

Regarding the structure, the first section of this literature review is about small businesses and their characteristics, which include size, structure, management, and learning methods. Through the second part, I discuss professional service provider firms and their characteristics, value creation procedures; and business consulting in small companies. Finally, in the third section, I talk about organizational learning in small businesses and business consulting firms and also how to develop an organizational learning system which might be applied in both small companies and professional service firms.

2.2 Small Businesses

There is no standard definition for small businesses; therefore, different geographical areas, organizations, and researchers may use various scales to categorize businesses. The Office of Advocacy, which is the voice and representative of small businesses in the United States government, classifies businesses based on size and expresses companies with less than 500 employees as small enterprises (Small business profile, 2017). However, the European Commission classifies Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as enterprises with less than 250 employees and an annual turnover of no more than £50 million (Peel, 2008). From the opposite view, Eyal-Cohen (2013) argues that employee number is not a proper index to define small enterprises. Due to adopting new technologies and outsourcing, many multimillionaire companies might still be considered small if the number of employees scales them; that's why taxable income might be a better criterion to categorize companies (Eyal-Cohen, 2013).In my opinion, the business classification must be compatible with the specific objectives and purposes of the study. In this regard, to get the most accurate data for this action research, Since Asadi Business Consulting is a small consulting firm, the target companies, and potential clients should also be of compatible and realistic size, i.e., not too large or diverse. I am therefore going to consider small businesses in which the individual business owners are the main influencers and decision-makers.

In the following sections, I discuss the main characteristics of small businesses and factors which affect organizational learning in these companies.

2.2.1 Small Business Characteristics

Small businesses have many characteristics that differentiate them from large corporations. Peel (2008) states that small businesses have unique characteristics in various aspects; that's why the way experts analyze, approach, and solve small businesses' issues is completely different from large companies. Popescu et al., (2009) indicate that in small companies, the organizational structure is less hierarchical, which may create better communication among employees at various levels. Łobacz et al., (2015), Massaro et al., (2015), and Zieba et al., (2015) state that centralized management, flexible structure, and informal communication, besides lack of having enough resources, are the main characteristics of small enterprises. Regarding human resource-management, multi-tasking is one of the features that differentiates working in small companies and large corporations. While in large corporations, responsibilities are usually filled by specialized employees, in small companies, business owners and employees may move in various positions and take different responsibilities, which creates more flexible business structures and procedures. Regarding change management, Popescu et al., (2012) state that while in large corporations, change management is a long-term plan and procedure, in most small enterprises, change is initiated based on immediate needs. Udrescu (2012) also states that while in large corporations, change is a delayed process, in small companies, an effective change is a rapid response to external changes, which may bring competitive advantages. As a scholar-practitioner, I don't agree with Udrescu (2012) regarding the rapid change process in small companies. In my opinion, since in most small businesses, owners are the main change initiators, their attitude and personal objectives have a direct impact on organizational changes, which could be a rapid or a delayed process. That shows the importance of the role of small business owners in the success or failure of their companies. This is supported by Berglas (2002) and Peel (2008), who emphasize the role of small business owners in accepting organizational changes, learning new knowledge, decision making, and, consequently, the success or failure of their companies. Brouthers et al. (1998) also argue that small business owners' personalities and characteristics play key roles in adopting a specific culture, management rules, and decision-making processes.

In regard to learning, by referring to Penrose (1959), Coetzer et al., (2017) argue that small enterprises are not scaled-down versions of large companies, so there are fundamental differences between small companies and large corporations in many areas such as "learning processes" (Coetzer et al., 2017, P.112). Matlay (2000) also argues that while in small companies, the emphasis is on individual learning by business owners; in large corporations, the emphasis is on collective learning; that's why this type of knowledge is usually documented in large corporations. Informal learning and the lack of having formal communication and feedback structure are some of the main characteristics of small businesses (Coetzer et al., 2017). Zieba et al., (2015) and Paige (2002) also argue that learning in small companies is mostly just in time, by trial and error, and has a short-term approach. However, as a scholar-practitioner, from my direct observations, due to lots of online resources, the new generation of small business owners try to search through the Internet for new knowledge than learning by trial and error.

Scuotto et al., (2016) support this and state that new knowledge and innovations are the main elements of success in a competitive business environment; however, the prerequisites of learning and welcoming outside knowledge is the quality and quantity of the current knowledge and learning mechanism in small companies. In this regard, Atherton (2003) argues that Learning through practice, which is mainly based on responding to internal and external uncertainties, is one of the main characteristics of knowledge creation in small companies. As a scholar-practitioner, in my opinion, not only the lack of new knowledge is one of the obstacles for small businesses' success, but also the lack of having time and guidance for implementing the new knowledge is one of the main issues in small enterprises. From the above, it appears that the term 'learning' largely describes experiential learning; in any case, the term is used rather loosely, thus conflating individual, group learning: areas covered later in this chapter.

Researchers from both scholarly and practical views have various definitions and approaches regarding small business success. Stoll and Brookshire (2012) emphasize the subjective analysis of success and, by referring to Maslow's theory, argue that business owners may have various needs and, consequently, definitions of success. "Through this knowledge that not all SMEs consider success in the same fashion, SME owners can be aware of the different levels of needs for success and achieve a deeper understanding of not only their organization but also of their competitors in the marketplace" (Stoll and Brookshire, 2012, P.160). This is supported by Gorgievski et al., (2011), who argue that small business owners choose success criteria based on their values and objectives. In my opinion, there is no exact definition for small business success. As a business consultant, I have seen many small business owners who had different definitions for success, such as having peace of mind, becoming a millionaire, having a smooth business operation, expanding their companies to other locations, and so on.

To sum up, not only small businesses are completely different from large corporations, but also the role of business owners are more crucial in small enterprises. That shows the importance of learning and analyzing small business owners' mindsets before approaching them as professional service provider firm. My observations, together with the literature, support my research objectives towards garnering a mutual understanding of both parties in the business – consultant relationship.

2.3 Professional Service Provider Firms

Business consulting services like law offices or accounting services are considered as professional service firms in which service providers transfer their knowledge and experience to clients for a fee. Corbin et al., (2001) argue that two of the main differences between services and products are: 1) services cannot be measured or tested before usage 2) personal interaction between service providers and clients has a great impact on customer satisfaction. Sonmez and Moorhouse (2010) also discuss two types of services, which are professional and general, and indicate that a professional service provider customizes his knowledge, which is based on education and experience, to deliver value to his clients. Manzonia and Volkerb (2014) also state that although professional service provider firms may perform in different industries, they have a common characteristic, which is providing customized knowledge as an intangible service.

2.4 Business Consulting in Small Businesses

As mentioned earlier, the differences between small businesses and large corporations make implementing business consulting completely different in these two types of companies. In this regard, I should indicate that the differences mentioned earlier are applicable in describing the differences between small and large professional service firms as well. As an example, Asadi Business Consulting is a small consulting firm in which the business consultant's image and capabilities have a crucial role in the success or failure of the business. This situation is very similar to a small medical office in which the physician's credibility, publicity, and treatment approaches are so important in attracting more patients.

From another aspect, Adams et al., (2015) state that since business owners have a crucial role in all aspects of small businesses, especially goal setting and planning, applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs would be a helpful approach in analyzing business owners' motivations and actions. Accordingly, Adams et al., (2015) developed a five levels model call the small business development model, which compares small businesses' needs with Maslow's hierarchy of needs for human being as the following:

Level / Model	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Small Business Development
First	Physical Needs: shelter, food, water	Survival Focus: In this stage, managers do daily activities to solve business issues to survive; therefore, they have no time for planning and improvement.
Second	Safety Needs: safety and security	Routine Focus: In this stage, managers work on developing routines and business procedures.
Third	Love (Social) Needs: affection and joining communities.	Improvement Focus: In this stage, managers work on improving business performance. This stage may include activities such as quality management and cost reduction.
Fourth	Esteem Needs: Success and achievement feelings	Competitive Focus: In this stage, managers work on developing competitive advantages to get more market share than their competitors.
Fifth	Self-Actualization: Reaching to potentials	Leader Focus: In this stage, small businesses try to be industry leaders.

Table 2.1: Small Businesses' Needs Model. Adapted from Adams et al., (2015, P.33)

The above article brought new insight to me as a scholar-practitioner, not only in discovering my business needs and development but also in applying business consulting in small companies. In this regard, learning about the current needs and priorities of small business owners is essential in persuading them to hire outside advisors like business consultants. But what are the advantages of hiring business consulting services?

There are various opinions regarding the benefits of applying business consulting services in small companies. Reeb (1993); Boris.K et al., (2014); Nahavandi and Chesteen (1988); and Blair and Marcum (2015) state that business consultants can help small companies in defining goals, making decisions, implementing changes, and solving problems. Chrisman and McMullan (2004, 2005) state that based on the theory of "outsider assistance as a knowledge resource," an outside advisor could be a great source of both tacit and explicit valuable knowledge for small business owners. Koryak et al., (2015) say that intellectual and financial capitals are both causes and effects of organizational growth. Mole (2016) also argues that business advice may provide two types of benefits for small companies 1) subjective benefits by increasing self-confidence and psychological benefits; 2) economic benefits by increasing profitability.

From a different perspective, Peel (2008) indicates that there is no substantial evidence and connection between applying business consulting and small business success; that's why small business owners may not want to spend their resources on business consulting. This is supported by Manzonia and Volkerb (2014), who argue that the value of a professional service might be unknown even after delivering it. In this regard, Sonmez and Moorhouse (2010) talk about the main characteristics of professional services, which could also be considered as some of the barriers in hiring business consulting services as the following:

1) There is no standard to measure the quality of a professional service.
2) It is difficult to test a service before purchasing it.
3) The return policy is usually meaningless in professional services.

Mole (2016) also discusses four main causes of not seeking advice by small business owners as 1) lack of having knowledge regarding the costs and benefits of available advisors. 2) doubting the value of advice and not taking risk. 3) previous negative experiences and 4) lack of having a trustworthy relationship with the advisor. As a business consultant, I have seen many small business owners who believe that business consulting is a risky, expensive, time-consuming service that should be used only in large corporations. This is supported by Gray.D et al., (2011), who argue that the lack of knowledge about business consulting and its effectiveness is one of the barriers of hiring business consultants by small business owners.

From another perspective, Kenman (1996) indicates that sometimes organizational politics and power issues are the main obstacles to accepting professional services. From my own experience as a business consultant, I have seen that in many small businesses in which managers are against hiring outside advisors due to job security issues, that's why learning about small businesses' culture, politics, and working relationships are necessary before offering new professional services. In this regard, Vos et al., (2016) discuss that in professional service firms, the organizational value is completely subjective and depends on the mindset and perception of beneficiaries. In this regard, Howden and Pressey (2008) state that recently, value creation has been shifted from transactional to relational by service provider firms; therefore, service firms must understand and create value from the viewpoint of clients. Barreto and Martins (2017) also argue that value creation processes in professional service firms should be flexible and responsive to able to deliver customized solutions for different types of clients. This is supported by Mole (2016) who talks about the four main factors which have a crucial role in seeking advice by small business owners/managers as 1) management characteristic such as having higher education 2) management objective such as trying to grow the business 3) management attitudes such as having anxiety and lack of confidence and 4) the industry and the location of the business." These four factors might help us to understand the request for advice, but the underlying reasons or drivers of change that started the process are not as well-known as they might be" (Mole, 2016, P.30).

Accordingly, to conduct this study, small business owners' perspectives and their experiences in dealing with business consultants can help me find the potential motivational factors or barriers to hiring my consulting services.

In this regard, as McKenna (2006) argues, although business advice might be helpful, implementing business consulting in small companies is not an easy job. Spatig (2013) states that one of the main obstacles in implementing business consulting services in small enterprises is business consultants' approaches. While small companies are different in various aspects such as structure, decision-making procedure, and communication method with large corporations, many business consultants use the same approaches which they may use in large corporations in facing small companies. This approach not only does not solve small businesses' issues but also creates a negative effect on the mindsets of small business owners regarding hiring outside advisors. In this regard, Nolan and Varey (2003) talk about the importance of developing 'contextual compatibility' in which outside advisors can deliver their advice in a more understandable and reliable form for small business owners.

From a similar perspective, Chrisman and McMullan (2004, 2005) state that an outside advisor might be helpful for a small business if he is experienced, knowledgeable and also able to transfer the required knowledge in a timely and customized format. Mole (2016) also states that there are three factors which impact taking action by small business owners upon receiving advice as 1) experienced/knowledgeable advisor 2) the difficulty of task 3) the level of confidence by the small business owner. Seiders e al., (2014) also argue that the success of a professional service provider depends on the willingness and capabilities of clients to get involved and follow professional advice. As a business consultant, in my opinion, that is one of the main challenges that business consultants face. I have seen in many cases that although business consultants identified business problems and suggested suitable solutions, there was no effective improvement due to the lack of actions by business owners. To solve this issue, Seiders et al., (2014) suggest increasing the frequency of consulting sessions and explaining the negative results if clients do not assign any resources or take any actions. As a scholar-practitioner, I don't entirely agree with Seiders et al., (2014) in this regard as I consider there to be further factors at play in bringing about behavioral changes in business owners. Again, this topic is pursued in greater depth later in this chapter.

From a similar point of view, Ng et al., (2016) recommend that there is no specific style in dealing with different clients; therefore, to get better results, professional service providers should wear different hats and select various positions such as mentor, coach, consultant, validator, and partner in dealing with clients. This is supported by Holschbach and Hofmann (2010), who indicate that interactions between professional service providers and clients have a direct impact on the results and the quality of knowledge-based services. In this regard, as a scholar-practitioner, I agree with Parasuraman et al., (1988), who state that the quality of professional services could be measured by identifying the differences between the clients' expectations and services delivered by professional service providers. Brown and Swartz (1989) also argue that one of the main challenges in measuring the quality of service is an existing gap between clients' and providers' perspectives of high-quality service. From my perspective, this notion of understanding the 'gap' between expectations and delivery has highlighted a gap in my own approach to consultancy and will serve to shape my research around discovering the constituent elements that make up this 'gap' and how I can apply them in practice.

To sum up, although business consultants might be effective and helpful in many aspects of small companies, educating small business owners regarding the benefits of consulting services and choosing the best approaches to solve small enterprises' issues are the main challenges of small business consulting firms such as Asadi Business Consulting.

Accordingly, to conduct this study, learning about small business owners' objectives based on their businesses' issues or new development plans can help me find what small business owners consider as the value in business consulting services. In this regard, developing an organizational learning system might be so effective in helping me find out not only about both the motivational factors and barriers in hiring my services but also in creating value for small business owners. In the next section, I review organizational learning, knowledge creation, and developing organizational learning systems in more detail.

2.5 Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is the process of creating and sharing knowledge in an organization to gain a competitive advantage or make effective changes (Park and Kim, 2018). In this section, I talk about different types of knowledge and how they might be created and shared; learning theories, learning styles, and the factors which may affect developing learning systems in small companies.

2.5.1 Knowledge Creation and Learning

Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011) state that knowledge is the foundation of organizational learning; therefore, it is necessary to study various aspects of knowledge and knowledge creation (I discuss organizational learning and knowledge creation in small businesses later in section 2.5.3). Landry (1995) also talks about the importance of knowledge production in problem-solving and states that there are three different views regarding the origin of knowledge:

1) The objectivist view in which knowledge is gained through experience on the object; therefore, the subject's interpretation has no impact on knowledge production.
2) The subjectivist view in which the subject's mind and interpretation have a primary role in problem definition and knowledge creation.
3) The constructivist view which is a combination of both subjectivist and objectivist views. In this approach, knowledge creation by taking action is the central element.

In this regard, by referring to Davenport, De Long, and Beers (1998), the definition of knowledge is: "Information combined with experience, context, interpretation, and reflection: it is a high-value form of information that is ready to apply to decisions and actions." (Nolan and Varey, 2003, P.296). From another perspective, Pedler (2008) argues that knowledge is the sum of what it is already known and what will be gained by asking questions. However, Smith (1997) states that researchers should also question what they already know; therefore, asking questions and challenging the current knowledge is necessary for various stages of learning and knowledge creation.

Regarding this study, as a scholar-practitioner, I used the constructivist view, which combines observing small business owners' reactions regarding my consulting services and also my interpretations of the collected data to define the new knowledge. In this regard, asking insightful questions through interviews is an effective approach in absorbing and analyzing information. In this regard, Gold and Holman (2002) also talk about the importance of critical thinking in knowledge creation and state that analyzing different arguments, questioning current assumptions, and learning from other organizational members are the main parts of critical thinking. Vos and Graafe (2004) talk about the importance of metacognition by which we analyze our current knowledge and understandings regarding specific issues. This is supported by Haynie et al., (2012), who state that people with high metacognitive capability are more successful in problem-solving. In this regard, Fogarty (1994) states that metacognition ability has three main sections:

- Understanding of the current knowledge and what should be learned
- Analyzing thoughts and actions
- Evaluating the new knowledge results and actions

Sugiharto et al., (2018) also state that metacognition is analyzing our thoughts and talk about three types of knowledge based on metacognition, which are:

1) Declarative knowledge: which is the knowledge about what a person knows and what affects the learning process.

2) Procedural knowledge: which is the knowledge about methods which help a person achieve his learning objectives.
3) Conditional knowledge: which is the knowledge of external conditions and how to face them.

From another perspective, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) state that there are different types of knowledge 1) explicit knowledge, which is more structured, objective and can be easily transferred and migrated like academic knowledge, 2) tacit knowledge, which is subjective, personal and cannot be migrated easily. In this regard, Maruta (2014) also argues that explicit knowledge might be transferred through direct methods like books and articles, while tacit knowledge might be transferred through indirect approaches like observing and storytelling. In this regard, Polanyi (1967) states that human interpretation is the central column of tacit knowledge; therefore, sense-making and sense-giving are two primary approaches in developing tacit knowledge. "The manifest parallelism of this conception to the heuristics of science and technology is clear. To apply it more closely, we may note that pure science discovering meaning in Nature is a pursuit of sense-reading, while technical invention which makes things into instruments for a set purpose is a sense-giving" (Polanyi, 1967, P.324).

In this regard, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) create a model called SECI, which describes converting different types of knowledge to each other through various procedures as the following:

Socialization: Tacit to tacit knowledge is transferred through social interactions such as meetings and also the observation

Externalization: Although transferring tacit to explicit knowledge is not easy and debatable, it can be done by creating documents and manuals. Using metaphors might be so helpful in this process.

Combination: Explicit to explicit knowledge transfer is the simplest process in which different explicit knowledge might be combined to develop new knowledge. Using computer programs to categorize, sort, and analyze different data is so helpful in this process.

Internalization: Explicit to tacit knowledge transfer occurs when a person takes action based on his explicit knowledge and gains a new tacit knowledge based on the experience and reflection on the results of his actions.

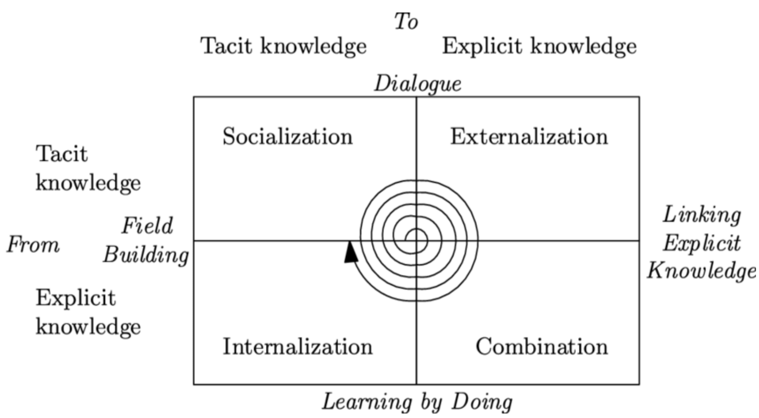

Figure 2.1: The SECI Model and Knowledge Conversion

Source: Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)

Regarding this study, learning about small business owners' required type of knowledge in terms of tacit or explicit may help me in customizing the knowledge as the value and transfer it to each small business owner accordingly. As an example, if a business owner requires tacit knowledge and the source of knowledge is my experience in that specific matter, based on Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), I should use in-person interactions to transfer the knowledge. However, Nonaka's and Takeuchi's SECI model has some limitations such as 1) individuals may not know and express their required type of knowledge precisely 2) individuals' preferences in their required and receiving different types of knowledge may change based on the topic, urgency and availability of the knowledge. 3) the collective knowledge creation by team members is not considered in this model (Bereiter, 2002).

From another view, Cheng (2016) talk about Variation Theory, which indicates that individuals see and interpret the same event differently; therefore, they may have different experiences and gain different knowledge from the same phenomena. Ruiz-Mercader et al., (2006) also argue that while knowledge creation in large companies might be in three levels of individual, group, and organization, in small companies, knowledge creation is more at individual and organizational levels. That shows the importance of studying individual learning as the smallest unit of learning in an organization; however, as Wilson et al., (2007) argue, if individuals do not share their knowledge with other organizational members, their knowledge will not support group or organizational learning. In this regard, Ruiz-Mercader et al., (2006) state that organizational culture, employees' commitment to learning, and the learning process have crucial roles in knowledge creation and sharing in small enterprises.

2.5.2 Organizational Knowledge

Brown and Duguid (1998) state that while most people think of knowledge as an individual property, a great portion of knowledge is created by cooperation and collaboration among individuals in groups and communities. "The organizational knowledge that constitutes core competency is more than "know-what" explicit knowledge may be shared by several. A core competency requires the more elusive "know-how"- the particular ability to put know-what into practice" (Brown and Duguid, 1998, P.91). Argote et al., (2001) also state that group learning happens when individuals in a group share their knowledge and learn from each other. From another perspective, Sole and Edmondson (2002) argue that group learning occurs when a group of people take action and reflect on their results for future actions. Finally, organizational learning is the process of creating and transferring knowledge inside an organization. In this regard, Robinson (2001) states that organizational learning is an internal process by which organizations gain knowledge to solve their problems. Robinson (2001) indicates that organizational learning and knowledge creation are usually studied in two aspects 1) how organizations absorb and implement new knowledge, 2) how organizational learning can help companies achieve their objectives.

Regarding this study, developing organizational learning and knowledge creation for my consulting firm may help me learn better about small business owners as my potential clients and how to serve them as a business consultant. It also helps me in developing an effective framework for my consulting firm, which leads to a successful and profitable business consulting firm. In this regard, Allameh and Moghaddami (2010) argue that organizational learning is the process of creating, applying, and transferring knowledge in an organization. Allameh and Moghaddami (2010) also argue that based on Pawlowsky's model, organizational learning has the following stages:

1) Collecting information and creating new knowledge
2) Exchanging new knowledge through interactions of organizational members

3) Adjusting new knowledge by comparing it with prior knowledge and organizational situations
4) Applying new knowledge to make organizational improvements.

Regarding this study, organizational learning is studied in two different perspectives 1) the business consultation firm 2) small businesses. Regarding the business consulting firm, collecting information from participants, and creating new knowledge for my firm, adjusting new knowledge by comparing it with my former experience and existing literature on this topic, and testing the new knowledge by taking actions are crucial steps in creating organizational learning for my consulting firm. Regarding small businesses, getting new knowledge by small business owners through interactions with the business consultant (myself), adjusting it based on their experiences and their companies' situations, and applying the new knowledge to improve their issues are essential steps in creating organizational learning for small businesses. In this regard, Coetzer et al., (2017) argue that there are two types of organizational learning approaches; formal and informal. While formal learning has specific frameworks, taught by instructors and award qualifications, informal learning is self-directed by learners, and it may happen while taking actions and through interactions among coworkers (Coetzer et al., 2017). Wilson and Hartung (2015) also state that through informal learning, learners define goals and choose the learning process and evaluation criteria. Wilson and Hartung (2015) also talk about different types of informal organizational learning as the following:

1. Informational: which is learning about a definition, specific topic or concept
2. Conceptual: which is learning about different aspects of a topic and their connections
3. Operational: which is learning about specific procedures or actions
4. Reflective: which is deep thinking and challenging current assumptions and beliefs
5. Social learning: which is learning about various aspects of participation in a group and group learning

From another perspective, Kululanga et al., (2001) based on Argyris (1976), state that there are two types of organizational learning, which are single-loop and double-loop learning. While single-loop learning is more tactical, operational, and in the lower organizational level, double-loop learning is more strategic, conceptual, and at a higher managerial level (Kululanga et al., 2001). In this regard, Matlay (2000) states that most small businesses adapt single-loop learning approaches in which learning usually involves experiential learning while facing daily business challenges; therefore, it happens in companies with repeated processes. However, double-loop learning is deeper and considers changes in organizational rules and procedures. Gelderen et al., (2005) also state that while during single-loop learning, small businesses try to fix their current issues without changing rules; in double-loop learning, small businesses search for new sources of knowledge to make deeper changes. In this regard, Georges et al., (1999) argue that while double-loop learning is about changing organizational rules and policies, triple-loop learning is about organizational structural and fundamental changes. Petrovic (2012) also talks about triple-loop learning as one of the best methods in critical thinking and problem-solving.

"The triple loop learning process is focused on simultaneous and creative research into the three important issues concerning: a) a design of the organization's management problem domain - How?, b) a debate between the participants in the problem situation about the ends and means of their achieving - What?, and c) a power relationship within the organization's problem situation, and a legitimacy of the proposed solutions for the problems - Why?" (Petrovic ,2012, p.73).

From another perspective, while Kolb and Kolb (2005) talk about the importance of individual learning style and its effect on group and organizational learning; Higgins et al., (2013) argue that learning is a social practice; therefore, knowledge is not just within individuals. "learning stems from the participation of individuals in complex social activities, by recognizing that power relations can directly mediate the interpretative ideologies within social interactions" (Higgins et al., 2013, P. 470). I do agree with Higgins et al., (2013) since, as a business consultant, I have seen how small business owners learn and create new knowledge through practice and social interactions. In this regard, Hanaki and Owan (2013) state that there are two types of successful learning organizations 1) organizations that encourage individual learning and build strength based on individuals' knowledge, 2) organizations that develop learning through social interactions among employees. As a scholar-practitioner, from my own experience, both approaches are needed to have a successful learning system. As an example, since small business owners play an essential role in learning development in their companies, their learning styles affect other learning entities. However, implementing and transferring knowledge inside a small business requires interactions and group learning among employees; therefore, all units of learning are important in creating new knowledge inside an organization. Accordingly, I am going to discuss organizational learning in small companies and its elements in more detail.

2.5.3 Organizational Learning in Small Companies

Gelderen et al., (2004) argue that two main factors that affect learning in small companies are 1) learning the behavior of organizational members, which includes personal characteristics and learning styles, and 2) learning environment, which is affected by organizational culture, structure, and procedures. In this regard, Atherton (2003) states that there is no uniform type of knowledge in small companies; however, in my opinion, since small business owners are the primary decision-makers and play a crucial role in knowledge development and implementation, knowledge is more subjective, experiential and informal. This is supported by Nolan and Varey (2003), who state that small business owners usually face problems in implementing formal training and general information, which are not customizable and applicable to their specific business needs. Wee and Chua (2013) also argue that in small companies, knowledge sharing happens through cross-functionality and overlapping roles; however, business owners are creators and facilitators of the knowledge management process. "The enablers of knowledge creation process rested largely on the owner's innovativeness, creativity, and ability to acquire knowledge of the industry" (Wee and Chua, 2013, P.958).

As a business consultant, in my experience, the openness of small business owners to new knowledge is one of the primary elements in organizational learning and knowledge management in small companies. That's why learning about small business owners' perspectives regarding outside advisors, business consulting services in this study may help me a lot in finding learning barriers and motivations by small business owners. However, as Formica (2005) states, even if a small business owner is open to new knowledge, many factors impede transferring the knowledge internally, such as the inability to identify the required knowledge, generational and cultural gaps, and lack of enough motivation and incentives among organizational members. That's why studying how small business owners transfer and implement new knowledge inside their organizations is also important to have successful business consulting projects.

From my own experience as a business consultant, I have seen young entrepreneurs who are more knowledgeable than old business owners believe in more formal learning, using technology and new sources of knowledge. In this regard, Barrett (2006) argues that mentoring, which is occurred through the interaction of two people sharing tacit knowledge, is one of the most effective business training approaches to address the lack of having enough resources by small companies.

From another perspective, Paige (2002) states that based on the characteristics of small companies, on-the job-learning might be another proper approach in promoting and facilitating learning in small companies. In this regard, Wee and Chua (2013) state that trust, mutual respect, and role awareness facilitate knowledge sharing and learning in small companies." Knowledge sharing process is enabled by the awareness of roles, mutual respect and the level of trust among employees within the SME while knowledge reuse is fostered by close proximity of employees and the willingness and openness of the owner to impart his knowledge"(Wee and Chua, 2013, P.958).

2.5.4 Knowledge Creation in Professional Service Firms

Skjølsvik (2017) state that there are four elements which affect the relationship between a professional service firm and its clients: 1) accessibility of services 2) customization of services 3) interaction and cooperation between clients and the service provider and 4) knowledge at the company level. Lowendahal et al., (2001) state that there is a direct relationship between knowledge development and value creation in professional service firms. Lowendahal et al., (2001) also indicate that there are two types of knowledge in an organization; individual knowledge, which is skills and experience gained by individual members of an organization, and collective knowledge, which is the combination of individual knowledge, values, and norms shared among organizational members.

In my opinion, as a business consultant, not only professional service providers should know their clients, but also, they should educate their clients about their services and working procedures to be more successful in value creation for them. This is supported by Schertzer et al., (2012), who argue that relationships between professional service firms and their clients have a solid effect on the co-creation of value by them. Howden and Pressey (2008) also indicate that information symmetry between service providers and clients has a robust effect on developing trustworthy relationships between them. In this regard, Barreto and Martins (2017) emphasize customer participation during value creation procedures by professional service providers. From a similar perspective, Skjølsvik (2017) states that the main section of the value creation process is solving clients' problems; therefore, learning about clients' businesses must be the priority of professional service providers. This is supported by Lowendahal et al., (2001), who state that since the main resource of professional service provider firms is knowledge, deciding on when, where, and how to deliver it, is so important in creating value for their clients. In this regard, Pedler (2008) argues that knowledge is the combination of what an expert already knows, which could be attained through education and experience, and what he gains by asking insightful questions through researches. Grint (2005) also states that in the real world, most problems are wicked in which the level of uncertainty is high; therefore, as Marquardt (2007) argues, asking effective questions can help experts in defining problems precisely and offering effective solutions.

In my opinion, being a good listener and asking insightful questions are the main skills required to be a successful professional service provider. As a business consultant, I have seen in many cases that professional services providers offer solutions without having a clear idea of their clients' issues, which could lead to losing a lot of resources and having unhappy clients at the end. That's why developing a learning system to learn more potential clients and their needs is one of the main requirements of having a solid professional service firm. In this regard, Vos et al., (2016) talk about exchange value, which is the price that clients pay professional service firms for the created value. Vos et al., (2016) also argue that not only professional service firms need value creation to have satisfied clients, but also, they need value capture to stay in business. Value capture for professional service firms may include service fees, reputation, work-life balance, and knowledge development (Vos et al., 2016). In my opinion, learning about clients' objectives and value system is so important in capturing value for professional service firms. In this regard, Forstenlechner et al., (2008) argue that clients' perspectives regarding the value created by service firms have a direct impact on service firms' income. This is supported by Vos et al., (2016), who suggest effective communications between professional service providers and their clients to come up with common understandings regarding the value created and captured by service providers. In this regard, Skjølsvik (2017) states that co-creating of contextual knowledge will help both professional service provider firms and clients to have common perspectives regarding the value provided by professional service firms and its worth. This is supported by Chenge and Krumwiede (2017) and Olearnik (2013), who argues that promoting knowledge-based services should be based on clients' value management processes by learning about 1) what clients consider as value 2) how to create that value for clients 3) how to communicate the proposed value to clients 4) how to deliver value.

Accordingly, developing a learning system in professional service firms not only helps service providers to satisfy their clients but also gain income and reputation, and other required values to have successful businesses. In this regard, as a scholar-practitioner, I should indicate that developing an organizational learning system is also helpful for small businesses in gaining and distributing new knowledge among their members.

2.5.5 Developing an Organizational Learning System

As a scholar-practitioner, my purposes of researching this topic are 1) how to develop an organizational learning system for my consulting firm to learn about small business owners' learning styles, their required knowledge, and how to transfer the required knowledge to them 2) how to help small business owners in transferring the new knowledge inside their organizations.

Park and Kim (2018) argue that the organizational learning system is the main requirement of developing competitive advantages. Crossan et al., (1999) state that developing an effective learning system is the foundation of the strategic renewal of any organization. Edward (2016) argues that the organizational learning system is the main requirement of business development and improvement. Assalim and Almeida (2013) state that not only organizational learning is important in improving operational procedures inside an organization, but it also has a significant impact on relationships among different stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, contractors, insurance companies, and so on.

From another perspective, Swart and Kinnie (2010) discuss that there is a direct connection between organizational learning and knowledge asset and human resource procedures, especially in professional service firms in which employees' knowledge plays a crucial role in the success or failure of the companies. In this regard, Matlay (2000) states that organizational learning systems in small companies should align individual, group, and organizational knowledge and values to develop competitive advantages. Jyothibabu et al., (2010) also state that an effective organizational learning system should have the following features:

1) Create continuous learning opportunities for all organizational members.

2) Develop a culture of sharing and learning among employees.

3) Encourage collective and collaborative learning among team members.

Gelderen et al., (2005) state that one of the main challenges of small business owners is to take actions based on the current knowledge or acquire new knowledge. Gelderen et al., (2005) have more emphasis on the outcome of learning and state that a learning system should identify what business owners need to learn rather than what they want to learn. From a broader perspective, Tayagi et al., (2015) discuss that an effective learning system should have these characteristics 1) considering proper timing in developing a new knowledge 2) reducing the gap between what is already known what must be known 3) facilitating decision-making processes 4) embedding new knowledge with organizational structure and culture. In this regard, one of the most popular learning system frameworks is designed by Crossan et al., (1999), which includes the following four stages:

Intuiting: Recognizing patterns at the individual level through personal experience.

Interpreting: Explaining and translate

ng intuition into words and communicating with other group members.

Integrating: Developing a shared understanding of the same phenomena among group members and taking actions based on common awareness.

Institutionalizing: Embedding actions at the organizational level and developing routine procedures.

In regard to small companies, Nolan and Varey (2003) state that learning about small business owners' mindset should consider three main elements:

1) Information that business owners find valuable.
2) Preferred approaches to sending and receiving knowledge and information by small business owners.
3) How to develop trust during the knowledge transference process.

Different Individuals may have different learning outcomes due to their strengths, weaknesses, learning methods, interests, motivations, and learning experiences (Tezciz and Ataseven, 2016). Loo (2002) also talks about the importance of learning style in achieving various learning objectives. Learning style is an individual's constant approach in absorbing, processing, and transferring information, and it is highly affected by the learner's characteristics. In this regard, Kolb's learning style is one of the best approaches to learn about different individuals' learning style preferences (Loo, 2002). Kolb's learning style includes the following styles:

1) Divergers
2) Assimilators
3) Convergers:
4) Accommodators

"*Learners are most successfully learning through concrete experiences and reflective observation for the Divergers, through reflective observation and abstract conceptualization for the Assimilators, through abstract conceptualization and active experiments for the Convergers, and through concrete experiences and active experimentation for the Accommodators*" (Sudria et al., 2018, P.90).

Turesky and Gallagher (2011) also develop the following table based on Kolb's (2005) learning styles.

ACCOMMODATORS	DIVERGERS
Getting things done Initiating tasks Getting personally involved Willing to take risks Strong sense of urgency Needs patience Speed vs. input	Creative Involve others in their process Try to view concrete solutions from different perspectives Do something new just for the sake of it People oriented Can miss the point Difficulty actually making decisions Focus vs. more ideas
CONVERGERS	**ASSIMILATORS**
Makes decisions from alternatives available Move towards decisions very fast Finds practical uses for theories May shut out information that does not fit the solution they develop May not involve others with different views Technical vs. people	Organising and integrating information Planners Creating models Developing theories Slow to make decisions Data vs. people

Table 2.2: Adapted from Kolb: Learning Styles Inventory (2005)

Manolis et al., (2012) also state that Kolb's learning model is based on the following premises:

1) Learning should be considered as a process, not a result.
2) Learning is a continuous, not a temporary process.
3) Learning is a comprehensive approach.
4) Learning is the result of interactions between individuals and their environment.
5) Learning is necessary to develop new knowledge.

Honey and Mumford (1982) also created a learning style model based on Kolb's model and has a lot of similarities with Kolb's in which activist=accommodator; reflector= diverger; theorist= assimilator; and pragmatist= converger.

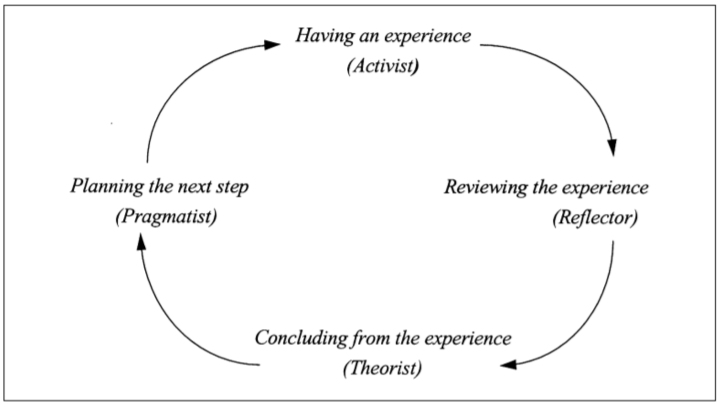

Figure 2.2: Honey & Mumford's Model

Source: Swailes and Senior (1999)

Kolb's (1984) theory has its limitations as well. Miettinen (2000) argues through Kolb's theory, learning and reflection occur individually, and it ignores collective learning and reflections among individuals. As an example, how can an assimilator and a pragmatist learn and create knowledge together?

From another perspective, Fleming's (2001) talks about different learning styles, which are mostly based on sensory behaviors and include visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic. As a business consultant, determining the learning channels of my clients is extremely important since it helps me develop better communications and provide more effective solutions. In this regard, simplicity and feasibility are two main characteristics of the VARK model, which make it so popular among many educators and researchers (Leite et al.,2010).

Fleming's model is very popular and from some aspects is similar to the processing continuum of Kolb's model regarding the way a person gains new experience; however, it does not talk about transforming the experience. That's why Kolb's learning style is more comprehensive than Fleming's (2001). Willingham et al., (2015) also argue that there is no scientific support for learning style theory like Fleming's (2001). People's preferences may vary in various situations and different topics; therefore, if a person is a visual learner in a topic, he might be an auditory learner in another topic (Willingham et al., 2015).

As a scholar-practitioner, in my opinion, to get better results, educators should use different learning theories and combine the results to find out the best method to approach the learners. In this regard, using both Fleming's (2001) and Kolb's (1984) theories might be an effective approach to learn about the preferences of small business owners. However, both these theories have some limitations, such as changing learning preferences by individuals in different topics, situations, and time periods.

From another perspective, Nolan (2003) categories small business owners' learning styles into six types of expertise as the following:

1. Technical expert: Who prefers learning codified knowledge (expert meta language/ manual). A computer programmer is an example of this type of expert.
2. Artist expert: Who prefers learning uncodified knowledge (sensory). A web designer is an example of this type of expert.
3. Professional expert: Who prefers learning codified knowledge (expert meta language/ financial statements). An accountant is an example of this type of expert.
4. Process expert: who prefers learning codified knowledge (non-expert language/ contractual terms). A manufacturer is an example of this type of expert.
5. Artisan expert: who has both characteristics of technical and process experts and prefers learning codified knowledge (non-expert language); and uncodified knowledge (functionality). A plumber is an example of this type of expert.
6. Network expert: who prefers learning codified knowledge (non-expert language/ task-oriented problem solving). A consultant is an example of this type of expert.

From another perspective, Jyothibabu et al., (2010) argue that to measure an organizational learning system, three elements need to be evaluated 1) organizational capability to learn and factors which affect it, which may include leadership, structure, and learning procedures 2) the impact of learning on different levels of individual, group and organization 3) the impact of learning on organizational performance. From a similar perspective, Yeo and Mayadas (2010) state there must be a holistic approach in both individual and organizational levels to measure the effectiveness of learning in an organization. In this regard, by referring to Kirkpatrick's model (1996), there are various criteria to assess the effectiveness of a learning system, which are so helpful in a part of my study, which is researching how small businesses' learning systems work in facing my business consulting services. In this regard, the areas that are studied are:

1) Reaction: What were the reactions of small business owners to the new knowledge regarding my consulting services?
2) Learning: Did they learn what they were taught regarding my services?
3) Behavior: Did they implement what they were taught?

4) Results: What were the results?

Accordingly, by reviewing former researches, I decided to search for the following variables/terms during this study:

1) Small business owners' perspectives regarding business consulting services. This way, I can learn what each small business owner considers as the value in business consulting services, so I can customize my approaches accordingly. (Vos et al., (2016); Howden and Pressey (2008); Barreto and Martins (2017); Chrisman and McMullan (2004, 2005)). I can also find the causes of hiring or not hiring business consulting services by small business owners. (Mole (2016); Gray.D et al., (2011); Kenman (1996)).

2) Small business owners' required knowledge in terms of tacit, explicit (Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995); and also preferred way to learn the new knowledge for each small business owner. (Fleming's (2001); Kolb's (1984)). This way, I can customize my knowledge in a more receivable and understandable by each small business owner (Lowendahal et al., (2001); Chenge and Krumwiede (2017); Olearnik (2013)).

In this regard, it is necessary to state that most theories mentioned above are normative, which might work in the educational industry, not in business consulting projects in which there are a lot of hidden and unknown elements before taking action. That's why a clear understanding of where to apply theories and their limitations is essential. During this study, I needed to find 1) what small business owners wanted and 2) what I could deliver to them as a business consultant actions; therefore, the use of learning theories worked as filtering devices to fulfill these objectives. However, there were many hidden elements that couldn't be found before taking action. That showed the limitations of these theories during this study.

The following figure shows an overview of knowledge creation and movement during this study:

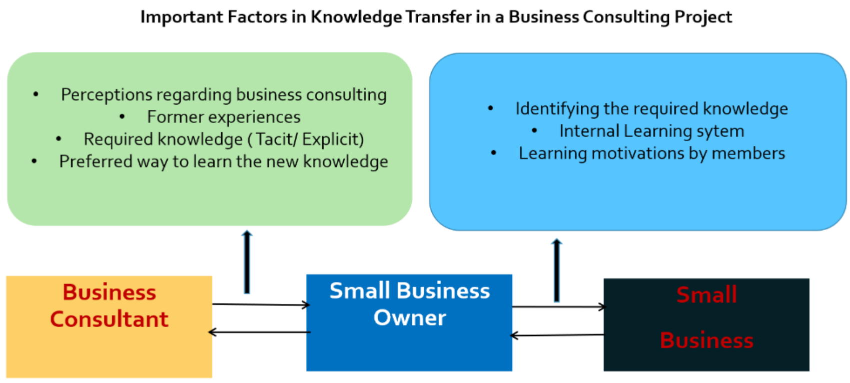

Figure 2.3: An Overview of knowledge creation and transfer during this study.

2.6 Chapter Summary

In this literature review, I researched and studied different articles and resources about small businesses, professional service firms, primarily business consulting services, and developing organizational learning systems. Since the objective of this study is to develop a holistic approach in my consulting firm, my research strategy was to find out the main characteristics of small companies (clients in my case); characteristics of business consulting services (knowledge providers); and the factors which facilitate transferring knowledge between business consulting firms such as Asadi Business Consulting and small business enterprises. Although I could find a lot of useful materials regarding the above individual topics, there were not any resources regarding applying business consulting by developing a holistic approach to learn about small business owners, their businesses' issues and considering the role of the business consultant in facing them which is the core of my study.

The other matter was applying knowledge of small businesses developed from European or other geographical areas' perspectives in my study, which is conducted in the United States. In this regard, since Asadi Business Consulting is practicing mostly in the Los Angeles area in which business owners and employees have various backgrounds, there will not be any dominant national culture; therefore, I used materials that could be used in different nations.

The first step to conduct this literature review was defining and exploring small business companies and their features. The main trend in the most researched article was emphasizing that small companies are not small versions of large corporations; therefore, they need to be studied differently. Learning about professional service firms' characteristics and their challenges were other areas that brought me new insights. As an example, the model by Adams et al., (2015), which is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, was so intriguing in learning about not only my potential clients' needs but also my own firm's requirements and challenges. The next section of this literature review was organizational learning in which I studied knowledge creation and organizational learning in both small companies and business consulting firms. In this regard, researchers indicate that while organizational learning in large corporations occurs through formal training, in small companies, learning is more informal and individual; that's why the role of business owners is so crucial in different aspects of small companies, such as gaining new knowledge, and organizational changes. In this regard, there were some key debates and questions that came up to my mind in the various sections, such as 1) which learning theory should I use in this study? 2) which factors affect organizational learning systems in small enterprises? 3) are learning style theories such as Kolb's or Fleming's solid?

Accordingly, I decided to develop an action research plan which not only combines various learning style frameworks; but also considers the required types of knowledge by small business owners and how to transfer it by my consulting firm. As a scholar-practitioner, learning about various learning styles of small business owners may assist me in determining how to customize my business consulting procedures to transfer new knowledge to small business owners. That's why, during the different stages of this project, I studied the learning styles of some small business owners to find out 1) how they react to new knowledge, 2) how they absorb, process, and transfer whatever they learn regarding my business consulting services, and 3) how they create and implement new knowledge.

Accordingly, the research questions of this study are the following:

1) What are the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting services, especially my consulting firm? Small business owners are my main clients; therefore, learning about their perspectives may help me a lot in removing potential barriers in hiring my services.

2) Which types of knowledge and services as a business consultant can I provide for small business owners and managers, so they consider it valuable and want to pay for it? By learning about what small business owners consider as value, I will be able to customize my consulting services in a way that can create win-win situations for both small business owners as clients and myself as the business consultant.
3) How can I develop a profitable business consultancy framework encompassing the modes of learning, forms of knowledge, and media for knowledge exchange valued by clients? By creating a new approach, I will be able to have a more organized system in dealing with small business owners from the first meeting to finishing the projects. This way, getting more clients, delivering successful consulting projects, and making more profit will be more achievable.

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology and methods that I chose to answer my research questions.

3. Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned earlier, Asadi Business Consulting was suffering from the lack of having enough clients among small businesses. In this regard, the problem statement of my thesis is ***How to develop a profitable business consultancy framework encompassing the modes of learning, forms of knowledge, and media for knowledge exchange valued by business consulting clients.*** Asadi Business Consulting, Inc. is a small consulting firm in Los Angeles area, so its main clients are small businesses in the Los Angeles area in which the main decision-makers and new knowledge gatekeepers are business owners. In this regard, the main objective of this study is to find answers for my main research questions as 1) what are the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting services, especially my consulting firm? 2) which type of knowledge and services as a business consultant, can I provide for small business owners and managers, so they consider it valuable and want to pay for it? 3) how can I develop a more successful business consultancy framework?

Research Rationale:

My rationale for this research was based upon Ramsey's (2014) criteria for a scholar-practitioner embarking upon a qualitative research: "…scholar-practitioners may find different qualities and matters in an issue based on the way they focus and pay attention to related factors: three domains of attention are identified: an engagement with ideas, a practice of inquiry, and a navigation of relations" (p.18). The rationale, as presented in detail in Chapter.1, section 1.2, evolved over time, following interactions with participants and the literature in an iterative fashion. In brief, I began with the idea that the issue could be solved mainly through action on my part: that it was me that needed to change my practices, rather than my clients. If this was an egocentric attitude, it was because I based it upon my prior understanding of the consultant's role as being the provider of information, learning, and knowledge within his relationship with the clients. Later, by means of the AR process, this understanding changed considerably when I came to realize that the relationship was far more complex than that.

The AR process introduced me to the practice of reflection, and it was only by reflecting on previous actions – their outcomes and the pre-suppositions which framed those actions – that I was able to -re-visit issues from different perspectives and, by so doing, begin to map the relationships between concepts, theories, behaviors, and cognitions (mine and the clients') and so reach a new understanding of the depth and breadth of interactions between a consultant and client.

Accordingly, as a scholar-practitioner, I needed to find specific variables/terms in three segments as the following:

1) The business consultant: Reviewing my learning styles, assumptions and experiences before facing small business owners (participants in this study). This helped me learn about my personal biases, assumptions and preferred way of learning in this study.

Sugiharto et al., (2018) also state that metacognition is analyzing our thoughts and talk about three types of knowledge based on metacognition which are:

1) Declarative knowledge: which is the knowledge about what a person knows and what affects the learning process.
2) Procedural knowledge: which is the knowledge about methods which help a person achieve his learning objectives.

3) Conditional knowledge: which is the knowledge of external conditions and how to face them.

2) Before transferring knowledge to small business owners:

Here as a scholar-practitioner, I needed to find about small business owners' perspectives regarding business consulting services, their required knowledge, and the way they preferred to learn the new knowledge.

3) After transferring the new knowledge to small business owners: This would help me learn about the following important factors.

- The causes of taking or not taking actions by small business owners.
- The results of taking actions.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss various research philosophies and their components (ontology, epistemology). In the second section, I talk about various methodologies and why I chose Action Research as the methodology for this study. In the third section, I discuss various research methods and why I chose the qualitative method through in-person interviews to collect and analyze my data. Finally, in the fourth section, I elaborate on my Action Research plan in detail, including different Action Research stages. The following figure shows my step-by-step approaches in through the research design of my study.

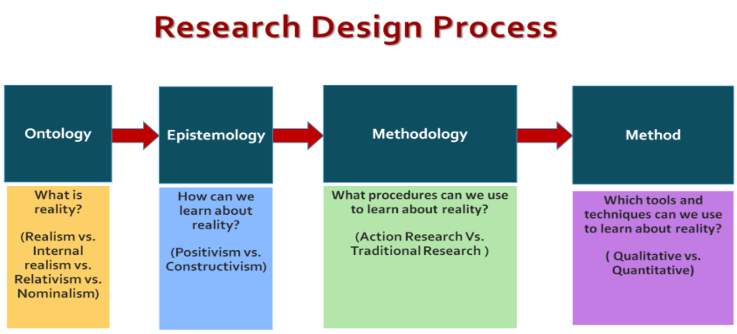

Figure 3.1: My Research Design Process

The following were also some of the former studies which gave me some ideas in choosing my research design:

Author	Date	Research title/question	Theoretical Position	Research Design	Findings	Implication for thesis
Dave Peel	2008	What Factors Affect Coaching and Mentoring in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises.	Constructivism	Mixed methodology case study approach. 10 SMEs from different industries	The role of small business owners in informal learning and business success	Understanding of the impact of the SME specific coaching and mentoring enablers and barriers
David E. Graya , Yuksel Ekincib and Harshita Goregaokara	2011	Coaching SME managers: business development or personal therapy?	Critical realism	16 for qualitative in person interviews	The key to supporting SME managers is to 'join them in their world and to tap	The role of psychology and emotional support in hiring and working with business consultants.
Janet C.N. Wee and Alton Y.K. Chua	2013	What factors affect KM process in SMEs.	Constructivism	The study adopted a case study approach involving 21 participants.	the importance of the owners' knowledge and leadership, the flexibility	business owners are creators and facilitators of the knowledge management process.
Katarzyna Łobacz et., al	2015	How do small innovative firms utilize business advice?	Constructivism	Case study. / qualitative approach. 4 case studies	The importance of business advice in success of SMEs	Small business characteristics

Table 3.1: Some of the former studies which gave me ideas in choosing my research design.

In the following sections, I discuss my research design process in more detail.

3.1 Research Paradigm

Johnson and Duberley (2000) argue that the way we ask questions, the way we find answers to our questions, and finally, the way we analyze the results of our studies all depend on our epistemological approach. From another view, Cunliffe (2011) states that based on Burrell and Morgan's (1979) model "researchers need to figure out their assumptions about the nature of social reality and what it means to be human (ontology) and the nature and purpose of knowledge (epistemology) before deciding which research methods might be appropriate" (Cunliffe, 2011, P.649). Morgan (1980) states that selecting a paradigm, which is a philosophical view about reality, is an essential part of any study. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) also say that paradigm is a theoretical framework of research; therefore, choosing the right research paradigm is the foundation of a rigorous and relevant study. This is supported by Scotland (2012), who argues that a paradigm includes various related parts, including ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods.

The following table summarizes various components of a paradigm based on Scotland (2012).

Ontology	What is reality?
Epistemology	How can we learn about reality?
Methodology	What procedures can we use to learn about reality?
Method	Which tools and techniques can we use to learn about reality?

Table 3.2: Various components of a paradigm based on Scotland (2012)

Scotland (2012) also states that different paradigms are based on various assumptions; therefore, they may need different methodologies and methods to acquire knowledge. In this regard, Easterby Smith et al. (2012) state that there are four types of ontology as follows:

1. Realism: There is a single reality.
2. Internal realism: There is a reality which is uncertain.
3. Relativism: There are many realities.
4. Nominalism: There is no reality.

Table 3.3 Below outlines these points in more detail:

Ontologies	**Realism**	**Internal Realism**	**Relativism**	**Nominalism**
Epistemology / **Methodology**	**Strong Positivism**	**Positivism**	**Constructivism**	**Strong Constructivism**
Aims	Discovery	Exposure	Convergence	Invention
Starting points	Hypotheses	Propositions	Questions	Critique
Designs	Experiment	Large surveys; multi-cases	Cases and surveys	Engagement and reflexivity
Data types	Numbers and facts	Number and words	Words and numbers	Discourse and experience
Analysis/ interpretation	Verification/ Falsification	Correlation and regression	Triangulation and comparison	Sense-making; understanding
Outcomes	Confirmation of theories	Theory testing and generation	Theory generation	New insights and action

Table 3.3: Methodological implication of different epistemologies

Source: (Easterby Smith et al., 2012; p. 25)

Given the many realities 'owned' by individual participants, there is no single reality regarding the mindsets of small business owners and applying business consulting in small enterprises. Small business owners may have positive or negative or no idea regarding business consulting services due to their knowledge and experiences. The business consultant may also have different experiences and choose different approaches in dealing with small business owners, which may affect the result of business consulting projects. The interactions of all these variables may create unlimited realities in applying business consulting in small companies, which leads me to adopt the Relativism ontology.

A Constructivist epistemology is based on either relativism or nominalism ontologies, and states that reality is subjective, and since individuals create it, it might be different for various people. This approach uses qualitative methods such as open-end interviews and questionnaires to collect and analyze data to learn about various perspectives regarding the same phenomena (Scotland, 2012). Easterby Smith et al. (2012) argue that while in positivism, concepts are pre-defined to be able to get measured quantitatively; through interpretivism, various stakeholders might involve in developing perspectives. Johnson and Duberley (2000) also argue that the primary belief in the interpretive theory is that humans are not passive receivers of information; therefore, the role of researchers in receiving and processing information is so crucial. In this regard, there are no true or false statements regarding different phenomena, since they depend on the view of the observer. Rodela et al. (2012) also discuss that based on the interpretive approach, the reality is socially constructed; therefore, the role of the researcher is to find various interpretations regarding a specific phenomenon.

Table 3.4 below compares the two main epistemologies approaches

	Positivism	Social Constructionism
Researcher	Independent	Is part of what is observed
Explanation	Should demonstrate causality	Aim to increase understanding of the situation
Research Through	Hypothesis and Deduction	Gathering rich data and Induction, sense-making
Concepts	Should be operationalised to allow measurement	Should derive from the stakeholders (or include their perspective)
Units of Analysis	Should be reduced to simple terms	Should include the complexity of the while situation
Generalisation Through	Statistical Probability	Theoretical Abstraction
Sampling Approach	Random selection of large sample	Selection of cases for specific reasons

Table 3.4: Contrasting implications of positivism and social constructionism

Source: Easterby Smith et al., 2012; p. 24

I chose social constructivism as my epistemological approach because 1) as an insider researcher and business consultant, I am part of the study not independent from it. 2) the purpose of this study is to understand the situation rather than developing a cause-and-effect analysis. 3) the research is conducted through data gathering and interpretation of data by the researcher (myself) rather than testing different hypotheses. 4) small business owners may have different perspectives regarding business consulting services; therefore, there is no single reality regarding applying business consulting services in small enterprises. That shows that reality is subjective rather than objective. 5) the interactions among small business owners and business consultants have a crucial role in forming different realities. That shows that reality is socially constructed in this study.

3.2 Action Research

Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) argue that Action Research methodology is used to challenge the current situation of organizations and develop new knowledge that not only could be added to the current academic knowledge but also can be used to solve real-world problems. In this regard, Coghlan (2016) states that practical knowledge which is learning through thoughtful actions is the central column of Action Research and has the following characteristics:

1) It focuses on improving human life and can be used to solve real-world issues.

2) It is socially developed through interactions and learning from others.

3) It is unique in every situation, so that it may differ from place to place.

4) It is ethical since the consequences of actions must be analyzed to be compatible with moral values.

Action Research is the methodological approach used for this study. Action Research is one of the best methodologies which fits the constructivism paradigm (Easterby Smith et al. , 2012). Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) also argue that Action Research methodology is used to create new knowledge, make organizational changes, and solve real-world issues. In this regard,

1) This research is based on interactions between small business owners and the business consultant as an insider-researcher. So, as an insider researcher, I was part of the study and not just an observer.

2) The aim of the research is developing a holistic business consulting approach (a new way of doing things).

3)The starting points of this study is to ask questions to learn about small business owners' learning styles and to determine how to transfer the new knowledge to small business owners which they find valuable.

4) The analysis and interpretations of this study are through sense-making and understanding.

5) The outcome of this study is getting new insights and taking actions.

"Action Research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge, drawing on diverse forms of knowing: not just empirical and rational ways of knowing, including the experiential and tacit, the presentational and aesthetic, the relational and dialogical, the propositional, and the practical" (Coghlan, 2016, P.88).

Brydon-Miller et al., (2003) also state that Action Research is a democratic, participatory process among organizational members who take actions and reflect on the results to solve an organizational problem.

"Action Research challenges the claims of a positivistic view of knowledge which holds that in order to be credible, research must remain objective and value-free. Instead, we embrace the notion of knowledge as socially constructed and, recognizing that all research is embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction, we commit ourselves to a form of research which challenges unjust and undemocratic economic, social and political systems and practices" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p.11).

This is supported by Coghlan (2016), who argues that in the Action Research, knowledge is created by interactions, collaborations, and reflection in different stages of Action Research. Greenwood and Levin (2007) also discuss that learning by taking actions through critical thinking are the essential parts of Action Research; that's why Action Research is one of the best approaches in solving organizational issues. In this regard, Landry (1995) argues that while traditional research methodologies are subjectivism or positivism, Action Research methodology is constructivist. Greenwood and Levin (2007) also compare Action Research and traditional research in three main aspects of techniques, work forms, and research strategies which I converted to the table below:

	Techniques	Work forms	Research strategies
Action Research	The researcher is not separate from the study.	The researcher and participants are both involved in various aspects of the study	Both the researcher and participants reflect on their thoughts and the research procedure to create a rigorous and relevant study
Traditional Research	Separation exists between the researcher and the research. The researcher studies the events as an outside observer.	The researcher has full authority in defining and designing the research while other stakeholders do not involve in data gathering, interpretation and presenting the results	The researcher reflects on the research process to collect and analyze data effectively and efficiently

Table 3.5: Comparing traditional and Action Research methods based on Greenwood and Levin (2007)

In this regard, Cramer et al. (2015); and Coghlan and Brannick (2014) state that Action Research includes the following stages which create the Action Research cycle and might be repeated many times during a research project:

1) Constructing: This includes collaborative interactions among organizational members or a researcher and participants to define the problem or research objectives precisely.
2) Planning actions: This defines plans and actions that need to be taken to target the issue.
3) Taking actions: This consists of taking actions to solve the issue.
4) Evaluating actions: This includes reflecting on the results and determining if the results are compatible with the construction and planning stages and, consequently, the objectives of the study.

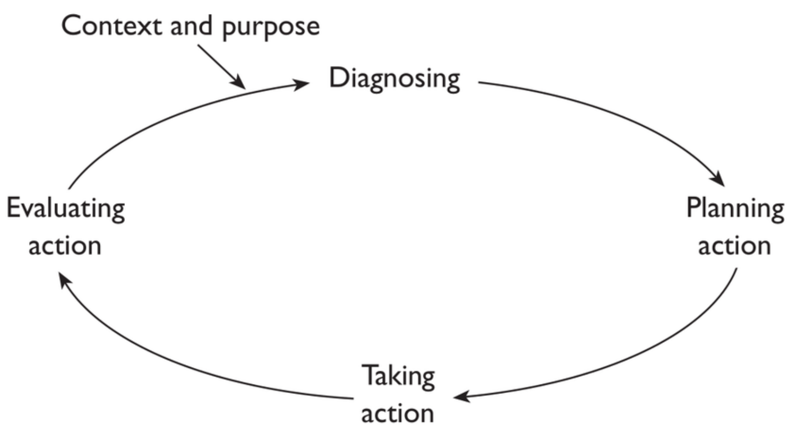

Figure 3.2: The Action Research Cycle.

Source: Coghlan and Brannick (2014). P.9

From another perspective, Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) argue that the quality of an Action Research project depends on not only planning, and implementation of the project, but also the effectiveness of the results of the project in solving organizational issues. Marshall and Reason (2007) talk about the importance of reflection, and state that two main elements make a quality Action Research project 1) reflecting by asking insightful questions 2) involving participants as co-researchers in various aspects of Action Research. They suggest the following considerations to have a quality Action Research project:

1) Engaging with different stakeholders to define and design the objectives of the study and the plans.
2) Exploring various organizational powers that may affect the research outcomes.
3) Developing various sources of learning, such as observational, emotional, behavioral.
4) Presenting evidence and findings through different presentational tools and formats.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) state that human interactions and taking actions are the main columns of any organization; therefore, Action Research is an effective approach in learning about various organizational procedures and problem-solving. Chandler and Torbert (2003) also state that most social science studies try to find relationships among different variables to learn about events or phenomena which occurred in the past; while Action Research not only tries to understand and analyze past events; but also, ongoing phenomena and events in which human interactions play a crucial role. To help understand past and current events, Action Research considers three different voices:

First-person: This is the ability of Action Researchers to assess their internal factors such as beliefs, values, ways of thinking, and external factors that affect them during Action Research projects. In this regard, journaling is one of the best methods to improve first-person skills by Action Researchers. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) state that Journal-keeping has the following benefits:

1. Keeping information about events, dates, and people involved in the Action Research project. This information is so helpful in writing the final report.
2. Developing a self-appraising system by which researchers can evaluate their experiences, feelings, thoughts, and judgments.
3. Helping analyze collected data in different levels of Action Research projects.

As a scholar-practitioner, I analyzed my thoughts and reflected on my actions during various stages of action learning. Journaling was one of the best approaches that I used to analyze my thoughts and actions.

Second-person: This is about building relationships with other players involved in collaborative and cooperative actions to achieve a common purpose. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) argue that during Action Research projects, conversations are dialectic: to learn from each other, build trust, and develop shared understanding.

Second person inquiry was the center of data gathering during this study in which I talked to different small business owners to learn about their learning styles, their opinions regarding business consulting services, their required knowledge, and so on. In this regard, the in-person interview was the approach that I adopted in collecting qualitative data.

Third-person: which is about creating organizations and communities of people who may not have direct interactions. This voice is similar to many traditional types of research and studies.

I used the third-person voice when reviewing the various literatures and when developing actionable knowledge that could be used by other professional service provider firms, especially business consultants.

Reflecting and critical thinking in all stages of action learning are essential parts of action learning. Argyris (1977) argues that learning is not just problem solving; therefore, learning about our thoughts and how we approach a problem is also very important. This is supported by Coghlan (2008), who states that our value system, assumptions, ways of thinking, and attitudes have a direct impact on our Action Research projects. "Understanding my knowing process as a series of operations of experience, understanding, and judgment provides a structure for me in enacting Action Research" (Coghlan, 2008, p.355). In this regard, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) suggest the learning cycle of experiencing, understanding, judgment, and deciding as the main learning steps through each stage of Action Research cycles.

Experiencing: is the results of internal and external forces interactions and includes whatever the Action Researcher sees, feels, remembers, and imagines through empirical consciousness in different steps of the Action Research project.

Understanding: is the result of finding answers for questions and may include new insights, learning about different patterns, concepts, and connections through intellectual consciousness in different steps of the Action Research project.

Judgment: Which is connecting data to the evidence to verify the accuracy of the understanding. A Judgment might be conditional, conflicting, or provisional.

Deciding: Which is making decisions and taking actions based on the judgment.

Honey and Mumford (1986) also created a learning style model based on Kolb's model and has a lot of similarities with Kolb's in which activist=accommodator; reflector= diverger; theorist= assimilator; and pragmatist= converger. (See Appendix .4)

Accordingly, I decided to use Honey & Mumford's Model, which is based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle to reflect on my experiences during this study:

1. This study is an Action Research project in which learning through action is the main foundation. Kolb's (1984) learning theory is also based on experiential learning in which knowledge is created through the transforming experience (Manolis et al., 2012).
2. This study is about individual learning, including myself as a business consultant and small business owners as clients. Based on Kolb's (1984) learning theory, individuals have different learning styles; therefore, the way they experience and reflect on the same phenomena is different (Manolis et al., 2012). In this regard, learning about my own and small business owners' learning styles would help me a lot in choosing better business consulting approaches. This is supported by Turesky and Gallagher (2011), who argue that coaching is much more effective if a coach knows his learning style and its characteristics while dealing with people with other learning styles.

3.2.1 Action Research, Organizational Politics, and Ethics

One of the main elements which has a direct impact on the results of Action Research projects is organizational politics and the role of Action Researchers. Easterby Smith et al., (2012) state that power relationships between the researcher and participants have a direct effect on various aspect of research such as; what type of information needs to be gathered; where; when; and by whom; how they are going to use the collected data and the final results. Regarding this study, small business owners as participants had the power to choose the time and locations of interviews and also the type of information they wanted to share. As a scholar-practitioner, I had the power to explain the purpose of this study and ensuring small business owners regarding ethical matters such as confidentiality. I also had power in directing conversations in a way that is useful for the objectives of this study, such as providing learning style questionnaires, asking questions regarding businesses' issues, and small business owners' perceptions regarding business consulting services. In this regard, Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) argue that organizational power and politics play a crucial role in the success or failure of Action Research projects especially when an Action Researcher conducts the study inside his organization; that's why, the role of the insider Action Researcher in creating interest among participants, and assigning time and financial resources is very important. In this regard, Coghlan (2007) states that an insider Action Researcher may face the following challenges

1) Wrong judgment and personal biases due to having prior knowledge about the study. During this study, I faced small business owners who had negative perceptions regarding business consulting services. That's probably why they did not continue their participation through different Action Research cycles. As a business consultant, I also had some biases regarding working with small business owners, such as assuming that most small business owners only search for free information and services. However, by the end of this study, I gained new insights and learned how to have a holistic approach and ignore pre-existing assumptions.

2) Separating organizational and research roles. One of my challenges during this study was discussing with small business owners that the purpose of this study is not gaining information to sell any services in the future. In this regard, I explained clearly to the participants that all my advice and consulting were free, and none of their information used to sell them any services.

3) Managing organizational politics and power issues. Managing power issues such as setting the time and the locations of interviews was one of my challenges during this study. While as a business consultant, I used to have the same power as small business owners to select a mutually agreed time and location for our meetings; during this study, small business owners had this power. As mentioned earlier, most small business owners are so busy with their companies' operational matters. Accordingly, I had to wait a long time and drove long distances to small business owners' locations to be able to interview them.

Holian and Coghlan (2012) argue that the 'role duality' which I, as a research -practitioner could expect to experience, may create ethical issues and organizational conflicts during Action Research projects. Therefore, Action Researchers should consider organizational culture, structure, and values in data gathering, interpretation, and creating the final report. Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) also suggest the following actions and behaviors by Action Researchers to develop more successful insider Action Research projects:

1. Finding issues that are important for organizations and their members.
2. Developing trustworthy and collaborative relationships with participants.

3. Considering organizational rules and ethics in using inside information.
4. Assessing all risks of conducting Action Research projects and showing commitment to the organization.

3.2.2 Qualitative Method

As mentioned earlier, different research paradigms lead to different research methodologies and methods. In this regard, Cunliffe (2011) argues that while objectivist paradigms use quantitative methods of inquiry, subjectivist paradigms adopt qualitative methods. Roberts (2014) also argues that while the quantitative approach focuses on cause-and-effect relationships and empirical studies, the qualitative method focuses on the causal mechanism through subjective interpretations. From another perspective, Creswell (2007) states that qualitative method should be used in the following situations:

1. When relationships among different variables are not easily identified; therefore, silent voices and hidden factors need to be explored. In this study, there are many hidden factors that may affect the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting and their willingness to hire my services, such as their personal objectives, their behavioral factors, and their business issues.
2. When the issue is complex and should be understood through dialectical approaches among different players. Learning about small business owners' beliefs and the required knowledge is not something that could be identified easily by quantitative surveys. That's why dialectical approaches, such as in-person interviews, are more helpful in this regard.
3. When researchers try to understand procedures and trends which are not identified through quantitative methods. As mentioned earlier, as a scholar-practitioner, one of my main objectives of this study is to develop a new approach for my business consulting firm, which cannot be identified through quantitative methods.

Accordingly, I decided to use a qualitative method for data gathering and analysis. In this regard, Creswell (2007) talks about five types of qualitative inquiry as to the following:

Narrative: which is about learning and understanding the experiences and lives of individuals. The focus of researchers in this inquiry is individual experiences and consequences.

Phenomenology: This is about discovering a reality by finding the shared feeling and understanding of different individuals who face the same phenomena.

Ground theory: This is about developing a theory based on the perspectives of participants regarding an action or a process. This approach tries to find explanations behind occurring specific events or phenomena.

Ethnography: This is learning about shared values and beliefs in a group. Through ethnography inquiry, researchers may immerse themselves in the environment to learn about the culture and perspectives of individuals in a group.

Case study: This is a detailed analysis of an event or phenomenon. Through case study inquiry, researchers may use different sources of data such as interviews, reports, observation, and documents to collect data.

As mentioned earlier, the objectives of this study were learning about small business owners' learning styles, their mindsets regarding business consulting services, and consequently developing a new business consulting approach. In this regard, finding a shared feeling that small business owners have regarding business consulting services, especially my services, would help me optimize my approaches in facing small business owners as my clients. As a scholar-practitioner, my interpretations have a crucial role in analyzing the gathered data and come up with findings. Accordingly, I decided to use the phenomenology approach.

In this regard, Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) state that the phenomenology approach to data gathering and analysis includes the following steps:

1) Collecting qualitative data through in-depth interviews
2) Breaking data to statements (units of meaning) that show opinions and experiences of participants regarding the phenomena (business consulting in this study), their learning styles, and their required knowledge.
3) Organizing the statements and the collected information.
4) Summarizing the experiences of participants. In this study, I tried to determine how small business owners with different learning styles, required knowledge, and perceptions experienced the same phenomena, which was my business consulting service.

In this regard, I decided to use in-person interviews as my method of qualitative data collection due to 1) in-depth interviews is one of the best approaches in learning about participants' opinions and perspectives (Easterby Smith et al., 2012), 2) as a scholar-practitioner, during in-person interviews, I was able to explain more about this study, interact with participants and answer their questions 3) gaining trust, especially affective trust, was easier when I met participants in person. 4) following ethical rules, such confidentiality was easier through in-person interviews than sending online questionnaires. 5) through in-person interviews, I was able to detect hidden factors such as pauses while answering questions or facial mimics of the participants when they shared their opinions regarding business consulting services. This was not possible through phone interviews or online questionnaires.

Creswell (2007) states that there are different sampling sizes in phenomenology researches, such as up to 325, 3 to 10, or 10. Creswell (2007) also discusses that maximum variation purposive sampling is one of the best approaches in gathering data from various individual participants based on specific criteria. Accordingly, to get more accurate data regarding small companies in general, not a specific industry, I interviewed a total of eighteen small business owners from different industries such as healthcare, transportation, professional services, retail, construction, manufacturing, and food industry through various stages of this study.

Since my firm is in the Los Angeles area, I selected eighteen small businesses as participants from this area. All interviews were conducted in person and recorded through the Voice Recorder application of my iPhone. Before conducting interviews, I explained my thesis and asked small business owners to read the participant's information sheet and signed the consent form (See Appendices 1,2). I talk more about data gathering and analysis in chapter.4 of this study.

3.2.3 My Action Research Plan

Crossan et al., (1999) argue that organizational learning is a multi-level process that might create tension between what we already know, and we should learn. "The four levels of organizational learning are linked by social and psychological processes: intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing" (Crossan et al., 1999, P.523). Regarding Asadi Business Consulting's case, I decided to create an organizational learning system through different stages of my Action Research project to combine what I knew with what I did not know regarding applying business consulting in small companies.

Accordingly, during the first stage, I used different tests to learn about the learning styles of small business owners based on Honey and Mumford's (1986) and also Fleming's (2001). I also decided to adopt the first three of Crossan's phases of Intuiting, Interpreting and Integrating to uncover subconscious attitudes and feelings of small business owners regarding business consulting services to develop integrated thoughts and turn them into coherent, collective actions. In this regard, the second stage was conceptualizing and framing what I have learned during the stage one in regard to different small business owners' learning styles and how to approach them about business consulting services. The third stage was implementing changes to my consulting approaches and transferring the new knowledge to small business owners. This stage included the fourth phase of Crossan's model, which was institutionalizing what I had learned during the first stages in my consulting firm, which included customizing my business consulting procedures and approaches based on the required knowledge and different learning styles by small business owners. This included the steps that I would take from facing a potential client in proposing solutions as a business consultant. Finally, during the fourth stage, I evaluated my actions by interviewing small business owners to determine how they responded to the new knowledge and my new business consulting approaches. This stage included analyzing learning systems in some small companies using Kolb's learning theory. The following table shows my actions research plan:

Figure 3.4: My Action Research plan

The followings are the four stages of my main Action Research cycles:

3.2.3.1 Action Research Cycle One: Construction

This cycle includes two preliminary Action Research cycles that are discussed in detail in Chapter 4. My main objectives in this stage were to learn about small business owners' learning styles and gaining a shared understanding of the nature of the relationship between my consulting firm and small business owners. According to Crossan et al., (1999), through the organizational learning process, the first step is pattern recognition and development of insights regarding business consulting in small enterprises based on the information that was collected in this stage. The following are my steps in the construction stage:

Step 1) Learning about small business owners’ perceptions regarding business consulting services and small business owners’ preferred learning styles (Kolb’s, VARK, Nolan’s).

Step 2) Learning about small business owners’ required type of knowledge in terms of tacit, explicit, or combination.

Step 3) Determining my area of knowledge which can provide value for small business owners in terms of tacit, explicit, or combination.

I interviewed small business owners by which I learned about their learning styles, their mindsets regarding business consulting, and their required knowledge. By combining Honey and Mumford's (1984) 'Learning Style' questionnaire, Fleming's (2001) theories and Nolan's (2003) 'SME Characteristics Framework' with semi-structured interviews I planned to ascertain the following:

Accordingly, I decided to find answers to the following questions:

1) What are small business owners’ perceptions regarding business consulting services?
2) Are they reflectors, theorists, activities, or pragmatists?
3) What are their learning preferences; visual, aural, read/write, or kinesthetic?
4) Which type of expert are they in terms of technical, artist, professional, process, artisan, and network?

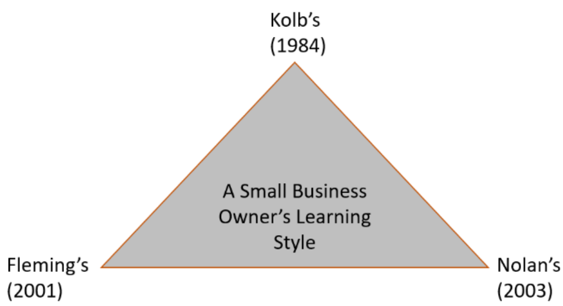

Figure 3.5: Learning style evaluations

5) Which areas of their organizations need to be improved?

6) Which type of knowledge do they need in terms of tacit, explicit, or combination?

Based on my first interview results, I decided that Nolan's (2003) 'SME Characteristics Framework' would be of no further use to this enquiry as it did not yield useful data. (see section 4.1.1.4 for rationale).

To analyze and interpret collected qualitative data, I used the phenomenology approach, as suggested by Creswell (2013) by taking the following steps:

1) Listening to recorded interviews or reading transcripts many times to familiarize myself with the data.

2) Reflecting on the gathered data.

3) Making a list of the main points by small business owners regarding their opinions and experience of business consulting services, their required knowledge, and also their learning styles.

4) Presenting the results in the tables.

The following is a template for my research journal during the construction stage:

Participant's business: **Date:** **Number of Employees:** **Business owner's Learning styles:** • **Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's test result:** • **VARK test result:** **Interview Data:** **Type of required knowledge:** **The general perspective of the business owner regarding business consulting:** **The first impression of business consulting:** **My reflection:**

The table below is a sample to show how I decided to present my findings after the construction stage.

The Business	Honey & Mumford's	VARK	Nolan's	Business Issue	Required Knowledge	Preferred Knowledge Transfer Method
Internal medicine	Pragmatist	Auditory	Network	Employee management	Tacit	Tacit
Chiropractor	Reflector	Visual	Professional	Marketing	Tacit/Explicit	Explicit
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Table 3.7: A sample presenting table to show my findings

The table below is also a sample to show the participants' perceptions regarding business consulting services.

Participant	Perception regarding business consulting
The internal medicine	"An informal advisor."
The chiropractor	"Adding more stress."
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Table 3.8: A sample presenting table to show my findings

Accordingly, I tabulated all my findings in this stage (see Table 4.4), which led me to design different knowledge transfer approaches for participants. This conquers with figure 3.2, as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). I explain this stage in more detail in chapter.4.

3.2.3.2 Action Research Cycle Two: Planning

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) argue for an holistic approach to organizational change as through Action Research, especially for doctorate projects. I therefore decided to conceptualize the information that I collected in the construction stage to determine which changes I need to make in my consulting firm using the following steps:

Step 4) Determining how to transfer my knowledge to the small business owners (Tacit-tacit, tacit-explicit, explicit-tacit, explicit-explicit)

Step 5) Determining how to create value for small business owners based on their learning styles and their issues. My goal is to move away from packaged consultative approaches towards an individualized system that will benefit both my clients and my business.

The table below is a sample to show how I decided to approach the planning stage of my Action Research.

The Business	My approaches based on my findings during the construction stage
Internal medicine	Providing business tips through discussions in the face-to-face meetings. Using storytelling and presenting role model companies.
Chiropractor	Creating customized videos so the business owner can watch at his own pace.
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Table 3.9: A sample presenting table to show my plans

Accordingly, I tabulated all my plans for different small business owners (Table. 4.6). This concurs with figure 3.2, as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). I explain this stage in more detail in chapter.4.

3.2.3.3 Action Research Cycle Three: Taking Actions

In this stage, based upon the data and information gained in the previous stages, I 'institutionalized' a range of systems, structures, strategies, and routines into my business practice in accordance with Crossan et al., (1999) who advocated that by having an effective learning system, business owners can learn from their mistakes to improve business procedures and avoid future problems. In this regard, I decided to change my business consulting procedures, which included how I construct, impart, share, and communicate explicit and implicit knowledge with small business owners based on their learning styles. I then set about transferring information to clients based upon their preferred knowledge types, as indicated in the questionnaire.

Step 6) Applying changes to my consulting procedures and presenting my advice to participants.

1. Creating consulting approaches for different learning styles and required knowledge. This may include creating and collecting educational tools and training materials.
2. Transferring the new knowledge to small business owners.
3. Creating a new business consulting procedure.

Accordingly, I summarized all my actions in this stage (See section. 4.3). This concurs with Figure 3.2, as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). I explain this stage in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.2.3.4 Action Research Cycle Four: Evaluating Actions

During the fourth stage, I evaluated how the clients reacted to a more individualized form of learning which suited their personal learning styles. Accordingly, this stage served to verify (or not) the actions I had institutionalized in the third stage and would form a framework for consultancy practice generally.

During this stage, I reviewed how my relationships with the small business owners were developing. Crossan et al., (1999) restate an interesting quote from Weick (1979), who argues, "people are more likely to see something when they believe it rather than believe it when they see it" (Crossan et al., 1999, P.528).

Step 7) Evaluating my actions by studying if participants use the new knowledge and how they implemented it. In this regard, the main question was: How did small businesses adapt new knowledge and benefit from my new business consulting procedures and actions? As an example, how could a small business owner and I co-develop new and actionable knowledge to improve his business, e.g., increasing market share?

Accordingly, I summarized the results of this stage (See section. 4.4). This concurs with figure 3.2, as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). I explain this stage in more detail in chapter.4.

I need to mention at this point, that to complete this study I went through different Action Research cycles. As it is shown, I also went through some preliminary and complementary cycles to complete my data gathering and analysis based on my research requirements that I explain more in detail in chapter.4. The following figure summarizes different Action Research cycles through this study:

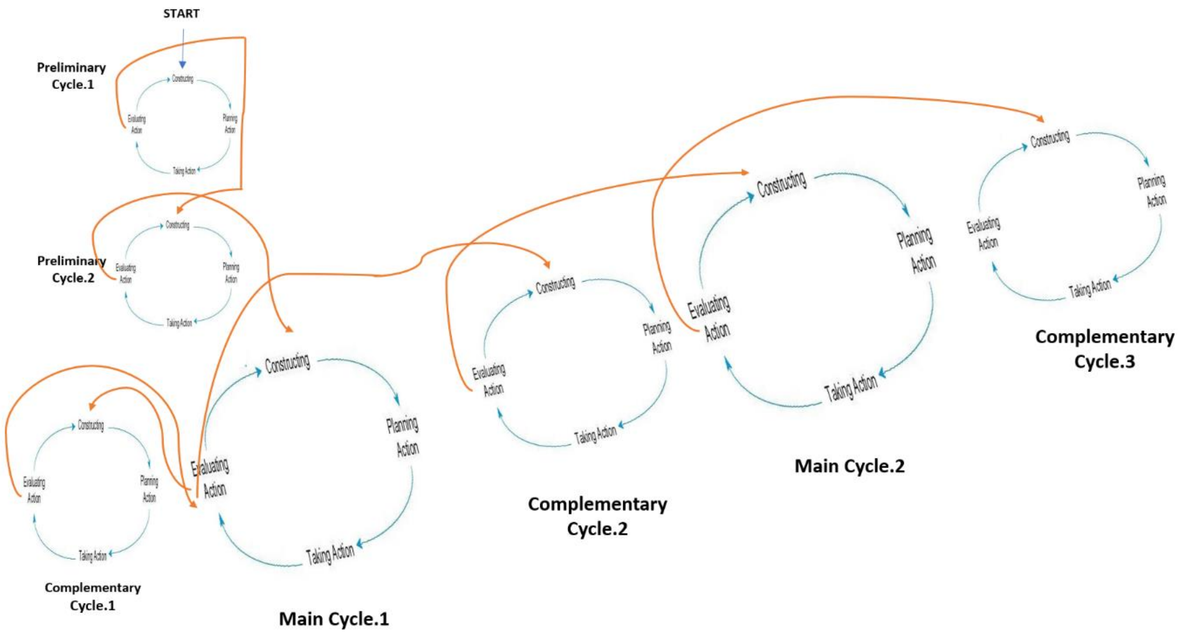

Figure 3.6: The summary of Action Research cycles during this study.

3.3 Validity and Reliability of This Study:

Noble and Smith (2015) discuss different strategies that qualitative researchers can implement to ensure the quality and validity of their studies as the following:

1) Considering personal biases which may affect findings: during this study, I became aware of my personal biases to prevent their impacts on the validity of my study. As an example, although at the beginning, I had personal biases that I was the only knowledge provider, during of this study, when the result of my actions did not match with my expectations (confirmation biases), I noticed that as a business consultant, I was both the provider and receiver of the knowledge. I also learned that my personal biases regarding small business owners' expectations to get only free information was wrong. That helped me a lot in providing more reliable interpretations and outcomes. (see sections 4.5.4, and 6.1)

2) Respondent validation by confirming the collected responses with participants: during this study, I confirmed the results of learning styles tests such as VARK and Honey and Mumford's, and also the required knowledge with participants especially when I found discrepancies between the test results and their responses during in person interviews (see section 4.1.2.1). I also observed and compared participants' actions with what they responded during interviews to appraise the reliability of data which was through questionnaires and in person interviews. (see section 4.3)

3) Careful record keeping to ensure the consistency and transparency of collected data: during this study, I collected and recorded all data in a secured format. I also kept writing my research journal in different stages of my Action Research. (see section 3.2.2 and appendices)

4) Considering different perspectives in facing issues: during this study, I considered various interpretations and perspectives through evaluating my actions and reflective pauses. (see reflective pauses in chapters 4 and 5).

5) Showing clarity in different stages of data collection, analysis and interpretations: I fulfilled this by having a precise Action Research plan and articulating different cycles and stages of my Action Research plan. (see section 3.2.3 and chapter.4)

6) Engaging with other researchers, and review various opinions: during this study not only, I was in constant interaction with my supervisor professor but also, I reviewed and confirmed my findings with different former literature and studies. As an example, confirming the role of behavioral factors in business consulting, and variables which may have negative impacts on hiring my services and how to face them. (Table 5:3, and sections 4.5.4 and 6.1)

3.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed and compared different research approaches to the research inquiry, and justified choosing a specific paradigm and, consequently, a research methodology and a method for this study. I discussed various components of the research paradigms, which include ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods concluding that there is no single reality regarding applying business consulting services in small enterprises, and the interpretation of the subject has a crucial role in defining reality. That shows that reality is subjective rather than objective. Accordingly, the ontology is relativism; and the research paradigm is interpretive (Burrell and Morgan's, 1979). Rodela et al. (2012) discuss that based on the interpretive approach, the reality is socially constructed; therefore, the role of the researcher is to find various interpretations regarding a specific phenomenon through in-person interviews to collect the required data. Accordingly, I decided to choose constructivism as my research epistemology.

Regarding the methods used, I had to consider different matters such as, 1) the research is based on interactions between small business owners and the business consultant as an insider-researcher 2) the analysis and interpretations of this study is through sense-making and understanding and 3) the purpose of this study is getting new insights and taking actions. Accordingly, I decided to use Action Research to incorporate Crossan et al., (1999) '4Is' (intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing) with my four Action Research stages of Construction, Planning, Taking actions, and Evaluation.

For data gathering and analysis, I used the phenomenological approach of qualitative method and in-depth interviews.

In terms of what Ramey (2014) calls the 'inquiry focus', the design my AR, incorporating seven steps within four stages – was designed with plausibility of method in mind. From the outset, my supervisor advised me not to assume that my business's problems would be solved by simple solutions, but that a good deal of 'double-loop' learning would be required along the way. That was my first introduction to Argyris's theory, and I quickly realized that for some years I had been trying to improve the business by a series of linear, incremental steps – 'add-ons', via a single-loop process.

The early stages of my AR, which concentrated upon building a 'learning system', was, as it turned out, a first, experimental step, but one that I thought may yield the 'solution'. It was through further literature search that I began to understand the intricacies of a 'system': its feedback loops, unintended outcomes and so on. It was remarkable how closely the AR method mimicked some of the system-effects that I was studying, including feedback loops, reflection, learning and adaptation.

By recording first-hand data in the forms of narrative, but also of my observations concerning participants' attitudes and behaviors, I was able to gradually move from one stage to the next, sometimes via loops-back to a previous stage. In this way my research would evolve, in a systemic fashion and in a way that was faithful to AR traditions. Indeed, it has been difficult for me to knit this process together, in words that clearly portray its sequences and iterations, and I trust that readers will allow me stylistic leeway in this regard.

The complexities outlined above, are reflected in the 'actionable knowledge' at the end of this work. Rather than a series of bullet points or the 'seven steps to success' style popular in management websites and airport literatures, my actionable knowledge may prove more difficult to digest, embedded as it is, in the research methods and processes of this thesis. I do not consider this as a weakness, but rather, I feel it demonstrates the robust nature of this research. The actionable knowledge may not easily transfer to other businesses, as some aspects are specific to my situation, although generic knowledge is also included.

Given the systemic and at times complex nature of my work and its findings therefore, it would be counter-intuitive for me to offer easy solutions. Thus, readers must also be prepared to engage in the research processes and its accompanying literature if they are to gain benefit from it. They must additionally be prepared to venture into unknown (to them) territories to find solutions which fit their particular circumstances.

In the next chapter, I discuss data gathering and analysis in more detail.

4. Data Gathering and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the methods and methodology section (figure 3.4. Action Research Plan), my thesis includes various action research cycles, which consist of different stages of construction (goal setting, data gathering, and analysis); planning (planning to customize my consulting approach and my firm learning system); taking action (making changes to my approach and providing my solutions to small business owners as participants), and evaluation (evaluating my actions and make corrections). However, due to the type of required information, each stage of action research may include some preliminary or complementary action research cycles, which also include construction, planning, taking actions, and evaluating actions. In this regard, before each stage, I showed my position in the whole research with a figure.

The following figure shows where I was in my action research journey with a red square:

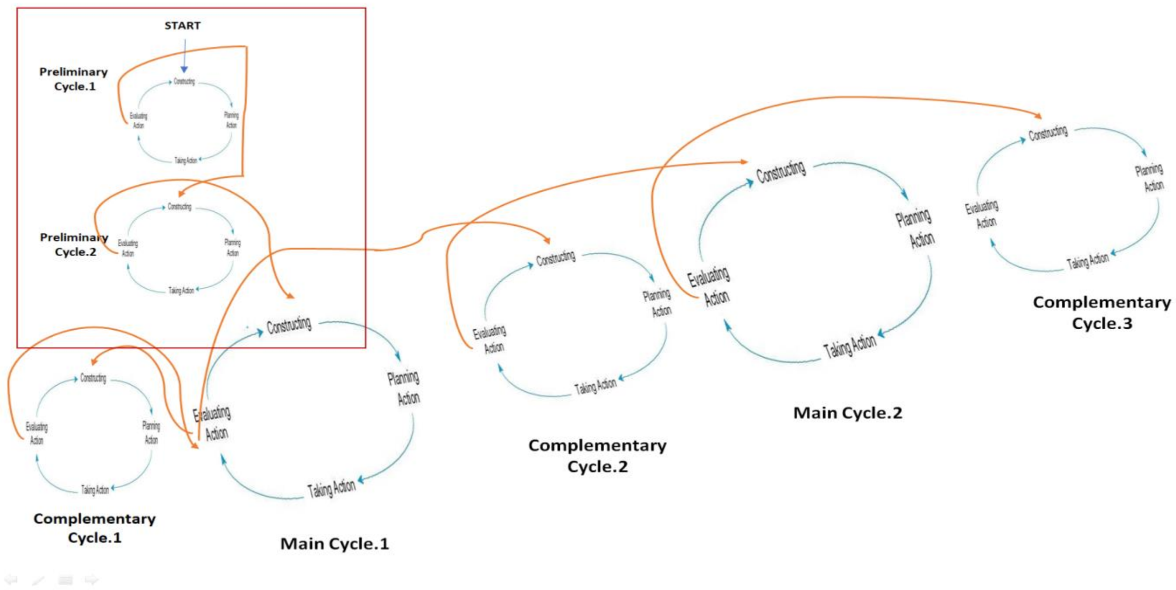

Figure 4.1: Where I was in my action research journey

4.1 Main Action Research Cycle One: Construction

Construction is the first stage of the action research cycle. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) state that during the construction stage, different stakeholders may communicate to learn more about various aspects of organizational issues. Maestrini et al., (2016) also argue that construction may include the main steps of planning, data gathering, organizing, analysis, and reflection. Regarding this research, as shown in figure 3.4 (my Action Research plan), the purpose of this stage includes three steps to collect and analyze data regarding participants' perceptions regarding business consulting services, learning styles, business issues, and the required knowledge so I can customize my business consulting approaches for each participant accordingly.

Step 1) Learning about small business owners' perceptions regarding business consulting services and small business owners' preferred learning styles (Kolb's, VARK, Nolan's).

Step 2) Learning about small business owners' required type of knowledge in terms of tacit, explicit, or combination.

Step 3) Determining my area of knowledge which can provide value for small business owners in terms of tacit, explicit, or combination.

This stage includes two preliminary action research cycles that I explain below.

4.1.1 Preliminary Action Research Cycle One

4.1.1.1 Preliminary Action Research Cycle One: Construction

As shown in figure 4.1, this action research cycle works as a preparation for the construction stage of the action research cycle one. As mentioned in the methods and methodology section, the main objective of this step is to learn about small business owners' learning styles, their mindsets regarding business consulting services, and also, the areas of their businesses that may need improvement.

4.1.1.2 Preliminary Action Research Cycle One: Planning

I decided to interview eleven small business owners in different industries to gain a broad perspective in my study. To learn about the learning styles of small business owners, I decided to use three different methods of Honey and Mumford's, which is based on Kolb's, VARK, and Nolan's. Appendixes 4, 5 show the questionnaires that I used to get information regarding small business owners' learning styles. I also planned to have in-person recorded interviews with small business owners to learn about their mindsets regarding business consulting services and their business needs (See appendix.3).

The following is a sample form that I created for my research journal:

Date: The date of the interview

The Business: The type of business such as medical office, limousine company, an engineering firm, and so on.

Number of Employees: The number of full-time and part-time employees who work for this business.

Business owner 's Learning styles: Through different approaches of Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's; VARK; and Nolan's

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Activist=Accommodator; Reflector= Diverger; Theorist= Assimilator; and Pragmatist= Converger

VARK: Visual, Auditory; Read/Write; Kinesthetic.

Nolan's: The Technical Expert; The Artist Expert; The Professional Expert; The Process Expert; The Artisan Expert; The Network Expert

Interview data: Here, I interpret and paraphrase the participant's interview data.

Type of required knowledge: In terms of tacit or explicit. As an example, business owners may prefer to learn from someone who has experience through face-to-face meetings. That explains that the business owners require tacit knowledge, which should be transferred tacitly.

General perspective regarding business consulting: What does the business owner know about business consulting services? Had he hired a business consultant before? And what was his experience?

First impression about business consulting: What is the first word which comes up to the business owner's mind by hearing business consulting?

My reflection: My findings and new insights regarding the business owner's learning styles and contradictions in his comments and test results. How should I approach this business owner?

4.1.1.3 Preliminary Action Research Cycle One: Taking Action (Data gathering)

For the first round of data gathering, I interviewed eleven small business owners and kept writing my journal, which includes different sections as the following:

The following is part of my field research journal during this phase of data gathering (Appendix.6 is my complete research journal for this phase of data gathering.)

Field Research Journal:

My learning Styles as the Business Consultant

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very strong (Reflector), Moderate (Theorist- Pragmatist- Activist)

Activist=Accommodator; Reflector= Diverger; Theorist= Assimilator; and Pragmatist= Converger

VARK: 1) Read/Write 2) Auditory 3) Kinesthetic 4) Visual

Nolan's: Network Expert

Small Business Owners as Participants:

1) The Internal medicine physician
Date: 1/28/19

Number of Employees:10

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Moderate (Theorist- Pragmatist- Activist), Low (Reflector)

This participant is more pragmatist than other types of learners. Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986); pragmatist learners have the following characteristics:

1. They are looking for short-cuts and tips
2. They learn from role models
3. They learn when there is a clear link between theory and practice

VARK: Very close rating in all but a little more Auditory. Based on Fleming's (2001), auditory learners prefer to learn through listening to audio materials or discussions.

Nolan's: Both Professional and Network experts. In my opinion, he is more of a network expert than a professional expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the network expert learns through face to face meetings and storytelling.

Interview Data: Today, I interviewed an internal medicine doctor. He was knowledgeable and believed in his management styles. He considers himself a hybrid, which has both medical and business expertise; that's why he prefers to solve the problems by himself first. Regarding his business, he mentioned that he needs to improve customer service and communications among staff.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit knowledge. He prefers to have face to face meeting with someone who has a lot of experience to solve his business issues. He wants the knowledge to be transferred tacitly.

General perspective regarding business consulting:

He hired a consultant who had expertise in the medical field for a very short period when he was going to establish his company. He thinks that business consultants can have an objective view of his business by which they review the business and recommends ways to improve it. In general, he does not think business consultants are helpful unless they have experience in his particular line of business. He also does not like the cookie-cutter approaches in which consultants use the same templates for different businesses. He also afraid if someone misrepresents his/her expertise. What motivates him to hire a business consultant in the field of business he has not been involved in before, like cosmetics. If he wants to hire a consultant, he prefers initially to have face to face meetings to define the parameters of their relationship and then go from there.

First impression about business consulting: "An informal advisor."

My reflection: I noticed some discrepancies in this business owner's comments. While he was trying to be positive regarding business consulting services and indicated that he needed help, he mentioned that he believed more in himself than hiring an outside advisor. Regarding his learning styles, there was compatibility in all three tests, which shows that he prefers practical business tips through face-to-face meetings. It was also interesting that he does not like general solutions, and he wants customized business solutions based on his company's situation. In the beginning, he states that he needs to get helped in customer service and employee management, but when I asked him what about marketing and cost management, he mentioned that it would be great if someone can help him have a more profitable business. That shows some small business owners do not know their business needs, although they say that no one knows about their companies better than them. In this regard, having a business analysis to find out the gaps between what they know and what they need to improve in their businesses sounds necessary. Accordingly, the goal of business consultants should be filling in those gaps. For the rest of the participants, please see appendix.6.

Table 4.1 below provides a summary of my findings for various businesses during the first phase of data gathering:

The Business	Honey & Mumford's	VARK	Nolan's	Business Issue	Required Knowledge	Preferred Knowledge Transfer Method	Perceptions Regarding Business Consulting
Internal medicine	Pragmatist	Auditory	Network	Employee management	Tacit	Tacit	"An informal advisor"
Chiropractor	Reflector	Visual	Professional	Marketing	Tacit/Explicit	Explicit	"Adding more stress"
Engineering firm	Theorist	Read/Write	Technical	Marketing	Tacit/ Explicit	Tacit	"Adding benefits"
Accounting services	Reflector	Read/Write	Technical	Succession Planning	Tacit/Explicit	Explicit	"Adding value"
Real estate company	Reflector	Read/Write	Network	Marketing	Tacit	Tacit	"Providing experience"
Limousine services	Reflector	Auditory	Artist	Marketing	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit/Explicit	"Providing help"
Restaurant	Pragmatist	Auditory	Artist	Online Customer service	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit	"Someone who identifies business problems."
Manufacturer	Theorist	Auditory	Process	Marketing	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit	"More knowledge"
Painting contractor	Theorist	Read/Write	Artisan	Marketing	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit	"Improving my company"
Financial services	Activist	Kinesthetic	Professional	Customer communication	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit	"Time and financial resource consuming"
Dry Cleaner	Reflector	Auditory	Network	Marketing	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit	"Return on investment"

Table 4.1 summary of my findings from various businesses

4.1.1.4 Preliminary Action Research Cycle One: Evaluating My Actions

By the end of this stage as it was shown in table 4.1, I was able to collect the required data which was 1) small business owners' required knowledge (business issue); 2) how they preferred to learn new knowledge to solve their businesses' issues (Honey & Mumford's, VARK, Nolan's, preferred knowledge transfer method); and 3) their expectations from the business consultant (perceptions regarding business consulting services) according to my Action Research plan (Figure 3:4). However, there were some limitations and questions regarding the validity of data such as:

1) Did small business owners really know their business issues and the required knowledge?

2) Did they answer questions genuinely?

During this phase, it became clear that most small business owners believe that they know their businesses better than anyone else; therefore, they also believe they are the only people who know how to find and solve their business problems (Berglas, 2002; Peel 2008; and Seiders e al., 2014, Gray.D et al., 2011). The following are quotes from some of the small business owners as participants in this study.

"I consider myself a hybrid, both a businessman and a physician, so I know how to come up with practical solutions for my business. Since I dealt with my business for so many years, I know it better than anyone from outside." The internal medicine physician

"I believe what advisors say might sound great but in reality, not easy to implement." The chiropractor

"My business is very complicated the way it set up. I think it is difficult for an outside advisor to find what my clients really want." The financial advisor

"I have never thought about business consulting services since my business was doing good." The structure engineering firm owner

I have also found some contradictions between some small business owners' learning style tests and what they said in our in-person interviews. The other important finding was regarding small business owners' current knowledge. Most small business owners have knowledge about the technical aspects of their jobs than their business and management areas (Gottfridsson, 2014).

I also noticed that small business owners believe that their required knowledge is operational (Wilson and Hartung, 2015), which is learning about specific procedures or actions such as how to get more customers, how to have better customer service, and so on. However, based on Kululanga et al., (2001), most participants also required 'blocked' organizational learning in which they know the importance of changing behavior but unable to make behavior changes and take actions due to various reasons such as lack of enough skills, time, and financial resources. In this regard, most small business owners believe that their businesses are very special; therefore, they prefer to get advice from someone who has a lot of experience in their industries. Finally, most small business owners prefer to have face to face meetings (tacitly) to learn new knowledge (Zieba et al., 2015; Nolan and Varey 2003). The following are quotes from some of the small business owners as participants in this study.

"I prefer somebody who has done it and has some experience and talking to me. In general, I don't think, business consultants are very effective because sometimes they use cookie cutter approach." The internal medicine physician

"We would like to have an outside advisor who has a lot of experience in real estate sale to direct us. We would like to see the history of business consultants work to see what is the rate of their success. After hiring a consultant, we would like to get all the information face to face." The real estate company owner

"He needs to be someone who knows our geographical area which is very unique and of course the business. Learning through face to face would be the best" The restaurant owner.

Regarding Nolan's (2003) typology of small Business owners, although this categorization is helpful in many areas and could be used as a reference, based on my first interview results, it will not be very helpful in this study due to the following reasons:

1. Nolan's (2003) talks about specific professions, which makes some participants select the category just because of the indication that this category is usually for this specific profession. As an example, Nolan's (2003) states that the professional experts are accountants and lawyers, so as soon as an accountant reads the text, he may say that he is a professional expert while he is not.
2. Nolan's (2003) discusses learning specific knowledge for particular types of expertise, not business management, which might be similar in many industries. As an example, Nolan's (2003) states that professional experts prefer to learn from their colleagues as lawyers who prefer to learn new laws from their collages or through the lawyers' community. This premise might not be true regarding business management knowledge, which could be applied in different industries and professions.
3. Nolan's (2003) talks about how different experts transfer their specialties to their clients, as an example, how a lawyer explains laws to his clients. This matter is not what we are studying in this action research project.

4.1.2 Preliminary Action Research Cycle Two

4.1.2.1 Preliminary Action Research Cycle Two: Construction

As shown in figure 4.1, this action research cycle also worked as a preparation for the construction stage of the main action research cycle one. Based on my reflection during the last action research cycle, I noticed that I should only use Honey and Mumford's and VARK to learn about small business owners learning styles. I also noticed that there are some discrepancies between small business owners' learning styles tests and what they mentioned during interviews. That is why I needed to interview them again to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. I also noticed that I should have interviewed more participants from different industries to get better knowledge regarding small businesses in the Los Angeles area.

4.1.2.2 Preliminary Action Research Cycle Two: Planning

I decided to use only Honey and Mumford's and VARK for the second phase of interviews. In this regard, this action research cycle included interviewing small business owners, whom I interviewed in the first round, together with three new participants.

1) For the small business owners that I interviewed in the first round:

- I planned to confirm their learning styles and preferences, especially for those who showed discrepancies in their test results and interviews.
- I decided to go deeper into discovering their businesses' needs by asking the following questions:
    - What do you think about the causes of your business problem?
    - What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?
    - How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?
    - What do you think of a potential solution for your business?

2) For the new small business owners: I was repeating the preliminary action research cycle one with these participants with the following changes:

- I decided to use only Honey and Mumford's and VARK.
- I planned to clarify discrepancies and also to get deeper into the businesses' problems during our first interview.

The following are also my plans for different small business owners that I decided to discuss with them during the second interview:

The Business	My approaches based on my findings during the first phase of data gathering and analysis
Internal medicine	Providing business tips through discussions in face-to-face meetings. Using storytelling and presenting role model companies.
Chiropractor	Creating customized videos so the business owner can watch at his own pace.
Engineering firm	Having face to face meetings and also clarifying some discrepancies in his test results and his required knowledge. As an example, discussing transferring knowledge as handouts, so the business owner can study and digest the materials more after our meetings.
Accounting services	Providing a customized manual so that the business owner can study at his own pace.
Real estate company	Having face to face meetings and using storytelling to transfer knowledge and clarifying some discrepancies in his tests results and his required knowledge. As an example, discussing transferring knowledge as handouts, so the business owner can study and digest the materials more after our meetings.
Limousine services	Providing business tips through discussions in face-to-face meetings. Showing samples, and clarifying some discrepancies in his tests results and his required knowledge. As an example, discussing transferring knowledge as audio or videos so he can understand more the materials after our meetings.
Restaurant	Providing business tips and short-cuts through face-to-face meetings. Showing examples.
Manufacturer	Having face to face meetings and also helping the business owner to learn by doing
Painting contractor	Having face to face meetings and clarifying some discrepancies in his tests results and his required knowledge. As an example, discussing transferring knowledge as handouts, so the business owner can study and digest the materials more after our meetings.
Financial services	Having face to face meetings and also helping the business owner to learn by doing. Clarifying some discrepancies in his tests results and his required knowledge. As an example, discussing transferring knowledge as handouts, so the business owner can study and digest the materials more after our meetings.
Dry Cleaner	Having face to face meetings and using storytelling during our discussions. Clarifying some discrepancies in his tests results and his required knowledge. As an example, discussing transferring knowledge as audio so he can understand more the materials after our meetings.

Table 4.2 summary of my approaches to various businesses

The various learning styles based on the VARK tool were explored to help determine which of the following learning tools was more suitable for each small business owner:

Visual	Auditory	Read/ Write	Kinesthetic
Different colors	Discussions	lists	Practical exercises
Graphs/ Flowcharts	Stories	Notes/ Texts	Roleplaying
Diagrams	Chat	Books	Real-world examples
Maps/ Plans	Recording	Manuals	Trial and error
Videos	Listening to training materials	Handouts	
Slides			

Table 4.3 Different learning tools based on Fleming's (2001)

The data in the two tables above indicated that I had a lot of work to do in delivering bespoke types of knowledge. That made me feel that my former approach (before this study) to use the same template for all my clients was wrong. It also showed that small business consulting is probably much harder and more challenging than consulting to large corporations due to the number of required customizations.

4.1.2.3 Preliminary Action Research Cycle Two: Taking Action (Data Gathering)

The following is my research journal during this round of data gathering (Appendix.7 is my complete research journal for this phase of data gathering.)

The previous participants:

1) The Internal Medicine Physician
Date: 4/22/19

Interview data: Today, I met again the internal medicine physician I interviewed during the first interview round to get deeper into his business issues. In this regard, we confirmed that his main business issues are decreasing the rate of customer satisfaction and also employee management. He mentioned that due to the low insurance rate payment to medical service providers, they need to get as many as patients they can, which causes increasing waiting time and decreasing the amount of time that they spend with patients. He also talked about the challenges that he has in managing employees, such as performance review, giving bonuses, and so on. During our conversation, he also stated that since he has other businesses, and there are more profitable, he prefers to spend more time on those businesses.

Regarding his business issues, we talked about having an employee training manual, which includes different rules and regulations of his business. In this regard, he said that they already have a manual that is outdated and needs an update. He also mentioned that they used to have a high employee turnover, which is much lower now due to hiring better employees.

The following are his answers to my questions:

1) **What do you think about the causes of your business problem?**

Lack of having an effective human resource management system, lowering payments by insurance companies which put more pressure on medical service providers.

2) **What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?**

Customer dissatisfaction, employee dissatisfaction, and turnover, lowering income

3) **How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?**

Increasing the rate of customer satisfaction, lowering employee turnover

4) **What do you think of my potential solution for your business?**

Training employees

My reflection:

Due to having other profitable companies and lack of having motivation as the business owner mentioned, he does not take this business seriously. However, he is welcoming new ideas to improve his business, especially regarding the human resource management area. Having an effective human resource management system, which includes hiring, training, and retaining effective employees, is very helpful in solving these business issues.

New participants:

1) The Flower Shop

Date: 3/29/19

Number of Employees: 4

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very Strong (Reflector), Strong (Activist), Low (Theorist- Pragmatist)

VARK: Auditory

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a flower shop co-partner. He has a partnership with one of his relatives to provide flowers to their three main clienteles. He was enthusiastic about improving the business and getting more clients; however, he mentioned that his partner is happy with the current business situation and does not want any improvement. He states that his partner's patents were the founders of the business, and now he is the main owner. Regarding business problems, he mentioned that the main business issue is his partner's mindset and complacency, which creates decision-making conflicts. He stated that his partner says that if they get more clients, they may not be able to fulfill deadlines and so on.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit/Explicit knowledge. He prefers the knowledge to be transferred tacitly through face-to-face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting:

He has never thought about or hired a business consultant before. He does not know what a business consultant does; however, he mentioned that he might need someone to guide the business in the future. He states that his main challenge in hiring an outside advisor is his partner; that's why he wants the business consultant to talk to his partner to persuade him to make effective changes.

First impression about business consulting: "Good advice"

My reflection:

This business is a kind of partnership between two partners without even having a partnership agreement. In this regard, it seems that the other partner has more power in decision-making than the partner whom I interviewed. During the interview, I noticed some discrepancies in this partner's test results and comments. His test results showed that he is a very strong reflector who prefers to learn by listening, while during the interview, he mentioned that he prefers to learn by watching and doing. In this regard, when I explained those discrepancies, he said that he is a great listener and prefers to digest the knowledge before implementing; that confirmed the test results. In my opinion, I should approach his partner as the main decision-maker if I want to transfer any knowledge to this business; that's why I asked him to make some arrangements to meet his partner.

As shown in my research journal (see appendix.7), some participants did not reply (without mentioning why) to my request for the last phase of data gathering. That's why I discussed with only ten small business owners who participated in this phase.

Table 4.4 below provides a summary of my findings for various businesses during this phase of data gathering:

The Business	Honey & Mumford's	VARK	Business Issue	Required Knowledge	Preferred Knowledge Transfer Method	Perceptions Regarding Business Consulting
Internal medicine	Pragmatist	Auditory	Employee management	Tacit	Tacit	"An informal advisor"
Chiropractor	Reflector	Visual	Marketing	Tacit/Explicit	Explicit	"Adding more stress"
Engineering firm	Theorist	Read/Write	Marketing	Tacit/ Explicit	Tacit	"Adding benefits"
Accounting services	Reflector	Read/Write	Succession Planning	Tacit/Explicit	Explicit	"Adding value"
Real estate company	Reflector	Read/Write	Marketing	Tacit	Tacit	"Providing experience"
Limousine services	Reflector	Auditory	Marketing	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit/Explicit	"Providing help"
Physical Therapy	Reflector	Read/Write	Management system	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit	"Cost"
Hairstylist	Reflector	Kinesthetic	Customer service	Tacit	Tacit	"Learning"
Fitness club	Pragmatist	Kinesthetic	Marketing	Tacit	Tacit	"Better idea"
Flower shop	Reflector	Auditory	Partnership	Tacit/Explicit	Tacit	"Good advice"

Table 4.4: Summary of my findings for various businesses during this phase of data gathering

4.1.2.4 Preliminary Action Research Cycle Two: Evaluating My Actions

During this phase, I found that to provide feasible and accurate consulting services, I need to do more research based on small business owners' business issues and learning styles. In this regard, some small business owners did not reply to participate more in this study. In my opinion, that could be due to getting bored by lengthy questionnaires such as Honey and Mumford’s learning style test (80 questions) during the first phase of data gathering, lack of having time, or interests or even not preferring to share their business issues with an outsider.

Accordingly, based on small business owners’ required knowledge, willingness to participate, and my research compatibility, I concentrated on the eight small businesses which had replied at the planning stage of my action research. During the next stage, I decided to conduct more research on how to customize my business consulting services to solve those small businesses’ issues. The following is a summary of my thoughts regarding the required research and approaches for the next stage of my action research project.

The Business	Predominant Business Issues	The required research and approaches based on my findings during this stage
Internal medicine	Better customer service. Employee management	Determine which has priority – better employee training or improvements to business operations to improve customer satisfaction? Provide advice through face-to-face meetings as per his preferred way of learning (Table 4:4).
Chiropractor	Getting more patients	Determine how to promote this chiropractor business. Creating customized videos so the business owner can watch at his own pace as per his preferred way of learning (Table 4:4).
Engineering firm	Getting more clients	Determine how to get more clients and also task delegation to make the business more successful without adding more pressure on the business owner. Having face to face meetings and also developing some educational materials as lists so the business owner can digest the knowledge after our meetings per his preferred way of learning (Table 4:4).
Accounting services	Developing a succession plan	Determine how to create an effective succession planning. Developing some educational materials as lists so the business owner can study at his own pace per his preferred way of learning (Table 4:4).
Real estate company	Getting more customers	Determine new tools and techniques of marketing in the real estate industry. Having face to face meetings and also developing some educational materials as lists so the business owner can digest the knowledge after our meetings per his preferred way of learning (Table 4:4).

Limousine services	Getting more customers	Determine how to get more clients for a limousine company. Providing business tips through discussions in face-to-face meetings and making some audio files so the business owner can digest the materials after our meetings per his preferred way of learning (Table 4:4).
Physical Therapy	Setting up a management system	Determine how to develop a management system for a physical therapy office. Having face to face meetings and also developing some educational materials as lists so the business owner can digest the knowledge after our meetings per his preferred way of learning (Table 4:4).
Fitness Club	Getting more clients	Determine how to get more clients for a fitness club. Having face to face meetings and also helping the business owner to learn by doing per his preferred way of learning (Table 4:4).

Table 4.5: Summary of my thoughts regarding the required research and approaches for the next stage of my action research project.

The following figure shows where I reached in my action research journey with a red square:

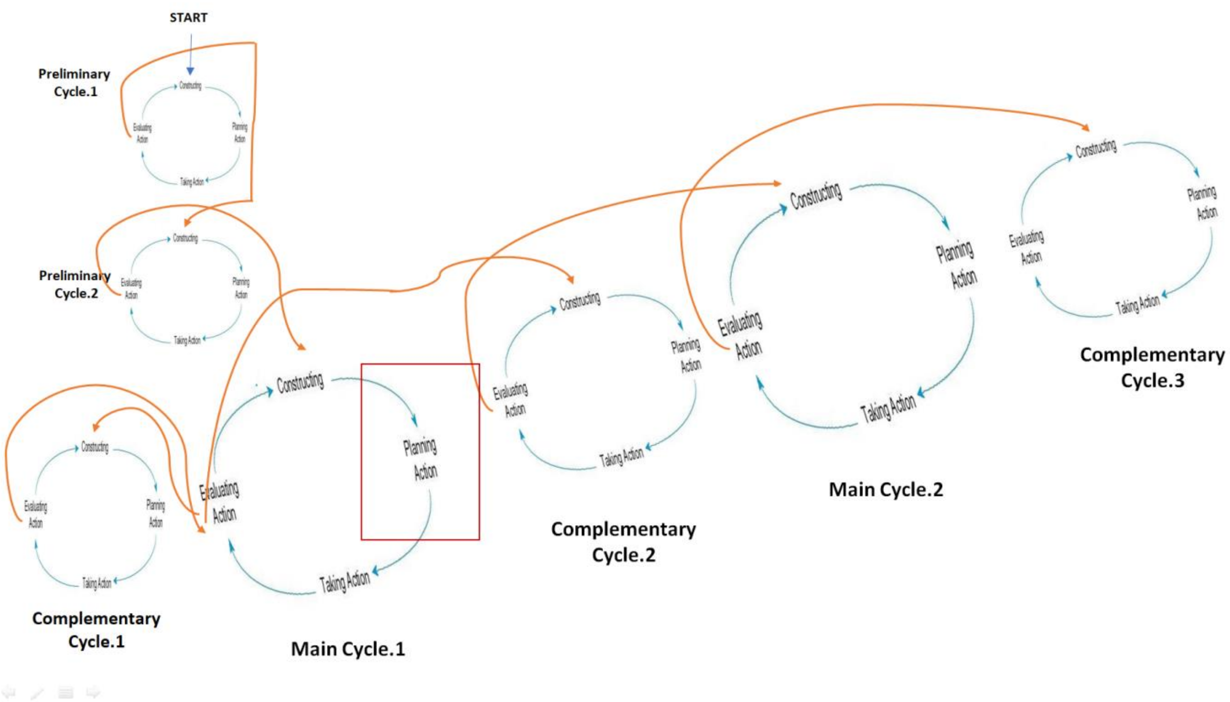

Figure 4.2: Where I reached in my action research journey

4.2 Main Action Research Cycle One: Planning

Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) state that the action planning stage has a direct impact on the quality of an action research project. Creswell (2005) discusses that the main objective of the action planning stage is to develop a specific approach to solve an organizational problem. In this regard, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) argue that the planning stage of the action research must be based on the construction stage and consistent with the context and the purpose of the research project. Regarding this project, during the construction phases, I collected data regarding small business owners' learning styles and their business issues. In this regard, based on my Action Research plan (Figure:3.4) the planning stage includes the following steps:

Step 4) Determining how to transfer my knowledge to the small business owners (Tacit-tacit, tacit-explicit, explicit-tacit, explicit-explicit)

Step 5) Determining how to create value for small business owners based on their learning styles and their issues. My goal is to move away from packaged consultative approaches towards an individualized system that will benefit both my clients and my business.

Accordingly, I decided to prepare my consulting packages for eight small business owners whom I interviewed during the construction stage as the following:

The Business	My plans based on my findings during the construction stage
Internal medicine	Advising the business owner on 'best practice' approaches to developing employee handbooks. Providing sample handbooks and an online resource with which he can create an effective employee handbook easily based on his business, geographical area, and other important factors.
Chiropractor	Creating educational videos for the business owner regarding effective marketing tools and techniques, which may bring him more patients. Referring to the business owner, a couple of video experts who can set up a small video recording studio in his office.
Engineering firm	Advising the business owner on the importance of having a knowledge management system and how to set it up. Creating some lists, including the main steps in creating a knowledge management system so that he can digest the knowledge after our meetings. Discussing referral marketing and how to create an effective referral marketing system.
Accounting services	Creating educational tips regarding succession planning for his office so he can study at his own pace.
Real estate company	Advising the business owner and the marketing manager in developing educational seminars for real estate investors and home buyers. Discussing new marketing tools and techniques in the real estate industry, such as referral marketing and social media marketing. Creating educational tips regarding all the mentioned topics as bullet points so that they can digest and reflect on the new knowledge after our meetings.
Limousine services	Discussing the new marketing tools by which the business owner may get more clients through social networks. Advising the business owner on developing a referral marketing system by which he can get more clients through related businesses such as tour agencies, realtors, and restaurants. Recording some educational audio files so the business owner can listen and digest the new knowledge after our meetings.
Physical Therapy	Advising the business owner on creating a management system and using a mobile app by which he can manage his staff, their tasks, and monitor their performance effectively. Creating educational materials as lists, including the main steps in creating a management system so that the business owner can digest and reflect on the new knowledge after our meetings. Providing sample handbooks and an online resource with which he can create an effective employee handbook easily based on his business, geographical area, and other important factors.
Fitness Club	Showing the business owner how to be more successful through social media marketing. Discussing new methods of fitness training, such as virtual coaching. Advising on referral marketing to get more clients through collaboration with related businesses such as chiropractors and nutritionists.

Table 4.6: Summary of my consulting plans for eight small business owners whom I interviewed during the construction stage

The following figure shows where I reached in my action research journey with a red square:

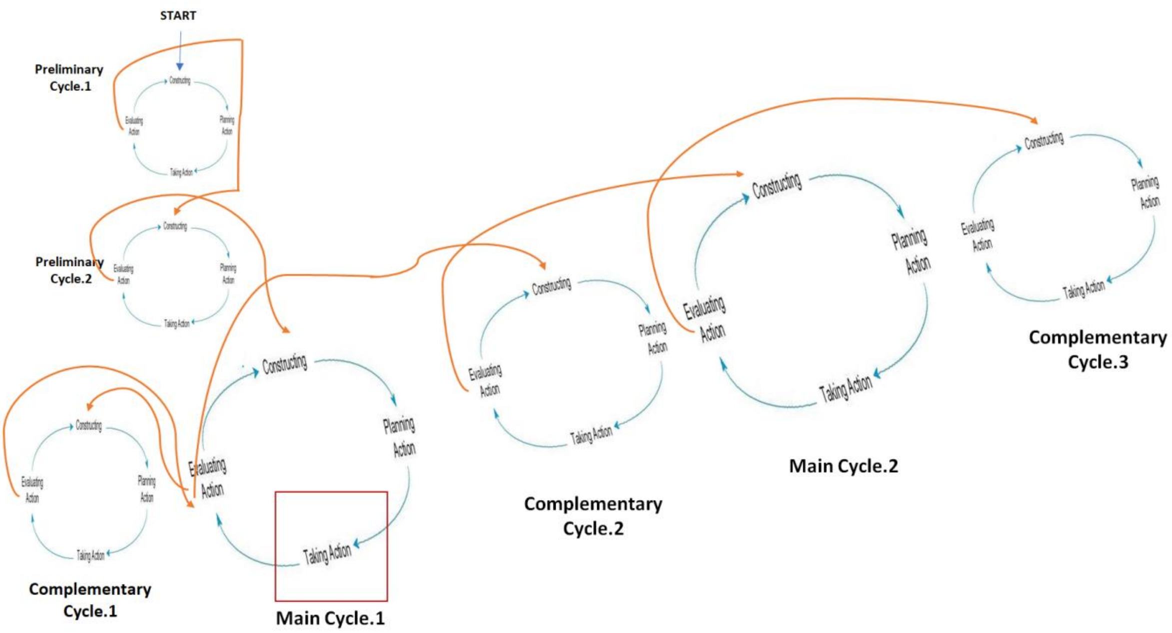

Figure 4.3: Where I reached in my action research journey

4.3 Main Action Research Cycle One: Taking Actions (Knowledge Transfer)

Based on my Action Research plan (figure 3:4) this stage includes the following step:

Step 6) Applying changes to my consulting procedures and presenting my advice to participants.

4. Creating consulting approaches for different learning styles and required knowledge. This may include creating and collecting educational tools and training materials.
5. Transferring the new knowledge to small business owners.
6. Creating new business consulting procedures.

Accordingly, during this stage, I applied changes to my consulting firm and transferred my knowledge to eight small business owners based on their required knowledge and their learning styles. For each business owner, I discussed two matters:

1) My advice included business tips, informative websites, and online resources. This is the knowledge transfer between me as the scholar-practitioner and small business owners as the main knowledge gatekeeper in small enterprises (Outsios and Kittler (2017); and Faber et al., (2012)).

2) In addition, I had to take the research a step further by determining how small business owners use new knowledge and transfer it into their companies. Therefore, I also discussed with them the factors affecting organizational learning in their small enterprises as follows, 1) encouraging learning and innovation in different parts of a business (Formica (2005); Laforet (2015); and Szymańska (2016)). 2) encouraging knowledge sharing among employees (Wee and Chua, 2013). 3) encouraging both individual and social learning (Hanaki and Owan, 2013). 4) applying double-loop learning or triple loop learning (Kululanga et al., (2001); Gelderen et al., (2005); and Petrovic (2012)).

The following is an extract from my research journal during this stage (Appendix.8 is my complete research journal for this stage.)

The Internal Medicine Office

Date: 7/12/19

Interview data: Today, I spoke on the phone with the internal medicine physician who was too busy to meet, gave him my advice on how to develop effective organizational policy. I have also emailed him a link by which he can update his business policy easily based on the latest rules and regulations by the government. He appreciated my time and mentioned that there is a company that can do all the HR stuff for them, and he is going to send my materials to them. He also states that he is going to lower his activities in his medical practice.

My Reflection:

Although he thanked me for my time and research, he seemed not interested to take any actions. He mentioned that there is a company that does all HR requirements for them, so how have they not updated their employee handbook for many years?

I felt bewilderment and came up with different questions such as 1) had he kept his real intentions back from me when I spoke to him previously? did I ask him the right questions? 3) did he just participate in this study to do me a favor?

The following are the summary of my reflections on various business owners (Appendix.8 is my complete research journal for this stage.)

The Business	My Reflection on Knowledge Transferring Sessions
Internal medicine	Although he thanked me for my time and research, he seemed not interested to take any actions. He mentioned that there is a company that does all HR requirements for them, so how have they not updated their employee handbook for many years? I felt bewilderment and came up with different questions such as 1) had he kept his real intentions back from me when I spoke to him previously? did I ask him the right questions? 3) did he just participate in this study to do me a favor?
Chiropractor	He mentioned that he did not have time to implement any advice. He is too busy to implement my ideas. He already told me about that during the first interview, so I felt that he was honest at the beginning.
Engineering firm	I really enjoyed my meeting with the business owners and his team. I felt effective and positive. They shared their opinions about my ideas and how they can implement it. They are willing to improve the company. I am going to contact them soon to see how they use new knowledge.
Accounting services	Our meeting was successful. He listened to me, shared his opinion and liked my advice. I felt effective and positive. I am going to contact him in three weeks to see the progress. Same as above
Real estate company	It was a very satisfying meeting. We talked about different marketing approaches and the marketing manager was impressed by some of my ideas. I think we should stick to one great idea instead of approaching various ideas at the same time. We are going to be in touch before proposing my idea to the business owner and other board members.

Limousine services	Our meeting was so effective and productive. We spent almost two hours to talk about the current challenges and new ways to get more clients. The business owner was so positive and is going to use the new knowledge. I am going to contact him in less than two weeks to see how he has been using the new knowledge.
Dry Cleaner	It was a highly effective meeting. I was able to transfer the knowledge and they received and liked my recommendations. I felt effective and positive. I am sure; they will implement some of my ideas. I will contact them in two weeks to see their progress.
The Physical Therapy Office	He is not interested to participate anymore. I contacted him at least three times and he did not respond. It surprised me since he showed a lot interest during the first interview. I felt bewilderment and came up with different questions such as 1) had he kept his real intentions back from me when I spoke to him previously? 2) did he just participate in this study to do me a favor?

Table 4:7 Summary of my Reflections

Reflective pause: Although some small business owners showed interest at the beginning, they stopped participating after they received my free advice. This was the point at which I really understood that some of small business owners might have showed fake interests or just wanted to contribute a little at the beginning but not deeply and profoundly. From another perspective, they might have thought that I was not a solid business consultant to be able to help them or that 'free' advice could not be of much real value to them, or maybe I had asked the wrong questions and was rushing towards the root problem too quickly. These are all matters that came up to mind at this point.

4.3.1 Developing a Learning System for My Consulting Firm

Since one of the objectives of this study was developing a learning system for my consulting firm, here, I decided to create the first draft of a step-by-step approach based on the findings during the construction and planning stage. This action constituted a 'step back', or iterative loop, as shown in Fig.4.5 (below), where I revert to the previous 'Complementary cycle 1' in the AR process. The various steps taken in developing the learning system are illustrated in the flow chart (Fig. 4.4, below) and are described in further detail here:

Step.1) Using semi-structured interviews, together with Honey & Mumford's and VARK to gather data about the business owner's learning styles.

Step.2) Following analysis of data from the step.1, conduct a further round of semi-structured interviews to investigate discrepancies in findings.

Step.3) Interviewing small business owners over the phone or in-person to understand their required knowledge (Tacit/ Explicit)

Step.4) Reflecting on the source of the Knowledge which can solve small businesses' issues (Tacit/ Explicit)

Step.5) Preparing my business consulting advice and recommendations based on small business owners' learning styles, their required knowledge, and the source of knowledge that can solve their business problems.

Step.6) Attempting knowledge transfer. This step includes two independent sections:

6.1) Transferring the knowledge to small business owners based on their learning styles and their required knowledge.

6.2) Discussing and reviewing the main factors which improve organizational learning in small businesses. Tayagi et al., (2015) discuss that an effective organizational learning procedure should reduce the gap between what is already known what must be known; and embed the new knowledge in the organization. Kululanga et al., (2001); Matlay (2000); Gelderen et al., (2005); Georges et al., (1999) ; and Petrovic (2012) talk about the importance of double-loop and triple-loop learning in organizations and state that double-loop and triple-loop learning are deeper and consider bigger changes in organizational rules and procedures than single-loop learning. Yeo and Mayadas (2010) state there must be a holistic approach in both individual and organizational levels to measure the effectiveness of learning in an organization.

Step.7) Inquiring whether the business owner uses the transferred knowledge. If Yes, go to the step.8; if No, go to the step.3 to review the required knowledge by the business owner.

Step.8) Inquiring whether the business owner shares the knowledge with related people and take actions effectively. If Yes, go to the step.9; if No, go to the step.6 to review organizational learning in the small business.

Step.9) Inquiring whether the business owners involve others in using the knowledge. If Yes, go to the step.10; if No, go to the step.6 to review and improve organizational learning in the small business.

Step.11) Inquiring whether the knowledge is beneficial for the small business. If Yes, go to the step.12; if No, go to the step.6 to review and improve organizational learning in the small business.

Step.12) Inquiring whether the knowledge is embedded in the company. If Yes, go to step 13; if No, go to step.6 to review and improve organizational learning in the small business.

Step.13) Inquiring whether double-loop or triple-loop learning is applied in the company. If Yes, go to the step the END; if No, go to the step.6 to review and improve organizational learning in the small business.

The following is the flow chart of the organizational learning system for my consulting firm, which shows the steps mentioned above. This system is a processual tool to guide me in the development of individualized learning packages according to this study participants' and my future clients' and needs.

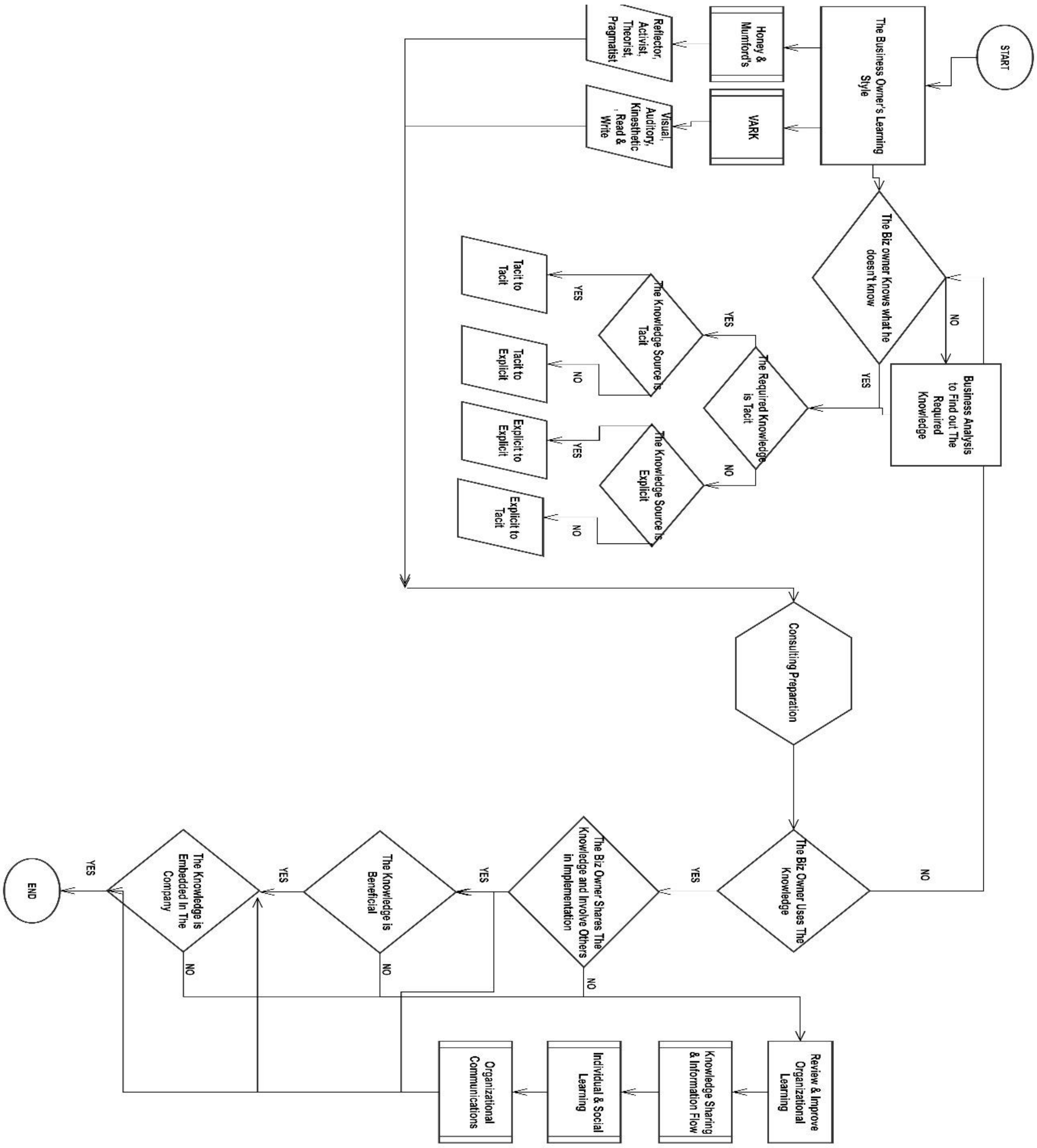

Figure 4.4: The flow chart of the organizational learning system for my consulting firm

The following figure shows where I reached in my action research journey with a red square:

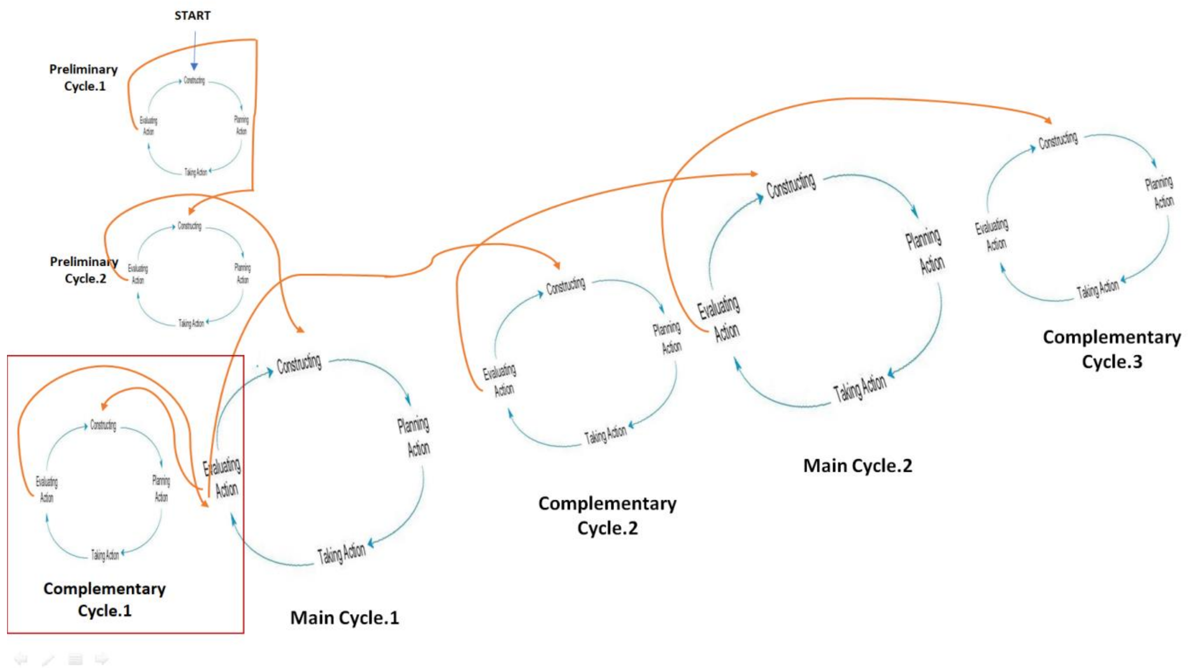

Figure 4.5: Where I reached in my action research journey

4.4 Main Action Research Cycle One: Evaluating My Actions

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) state that through evaluating actions, four main areas need to be studied 1) if the construction phase was conducted correctly, 2) if the actions matched with the planning and construction phases, 3) if the action was conducted properly, and 4) if there is any new input for the next action research cycle. In this regard, based on my Action Research plan (Figure 3:4) this stage includes the flowing step:

Step 7) Evaluating my actions by studying if participants use the new knowledge and how they implemented it.

This stage is a complementary action research cycle that includes construction, planning, taking action, and evaluating my actions.

4.4.1 Complementary Action Research Cycle One

4.4.1.1 Complementary Action Research Cycle One: Construction

The main purpose of this stage is to determine how small business owners used the new knowledge that I transferred to them based on their learning styles and their business issues.

4.4.1.2 Complementary Action Research Cycle One: Planning

In this stage, I started to contact small business owners almost two weeks after receiving the new knowledge to see what they did. In this regard, I decided to call them and write my research journal.

4.4.1.3 Complementary Action Research Cycle One: Taking Actions (Data Gathering)

The following are small business owners' responses in my journal:

1) The Limousine Service Provider:

Date: 7/6/19

He mentioned that he is still working on it. It was disappointing that after two weeks, he asked me about the audio reminder that I emailed him to review what we discussed during our meeting.

2) The Fitness Club:

Date: 7/6/19

He stated that he was out of town and had no time to do anything; however, he said that he is willing to take some actions. He opened one of my emails three weeks after I sent it to him.

3) The Accounting Services:

Date: 7/8/19

He has not taken any actions.

4) The Structural Engineering Firm:

Date: 7/10/19

He mentioned that he has been too busy even to open my emails.

5) The Dry Cleaner:

Date: 7/16/19

He mentioned that he has been working on my recommendations and will notify me soon.

6) The Real estate Company

Date: 7/17/19

They said that they have other priorities

7) The Internal Medicine Office:

Date: 7/24/19

He is going to email my materials to the HR company.

8) The Chiropractor:

Date: 7/29/19

He is planning to take action in the future, but not now.

Table 4.7 below provides a summary of my findings for various businesses during this stage:

The Business	Used My Advice	Findings
The Internal Medicine	Yes	He is going to email my materials to the HR company.
The Engineering firm	No	He mentioned that he has been too busy even to open my emails.
The Limousine services	No	He mentioned that he is still working on it. It was disappointing that after two weeks, he asked me about the audio reminder that I emailed him to review what we discussed during our meeting.
The Dry Cleaner	Yes	He mentioned that he has been working on my recommendations and will notify me soon.
The Chiropractor	No	He is planning to take action in the future, but not now.
The Real estate company	No	They said that they have other priorities.
The Fitness club	No	He said that he will take actions in the future
The Accounting services	No	He did not take any action.

Table 4.8: Summary of my findings for various businesses during this stage

4.4.1.4 Complementary Action Research Cycle One: Evaluating My Actions

The results were disappointing. Most small business owners had not implemented my advice.

Reflective pause: This was the point at which I really understood that providing business consulting advice while only considering learning styles and preferred methods of transferring knowledge does not necessarily lead to implementation and getting desired results. That also shows that what they said at the beginning as their perceptions regarding business consulting might have less effect on their actions later. Accordingly, I needed investigate the causes of small business owners' inactions. I decided to re-visit the literature covering reticence and inaction on the part of small business owners.

The following figure shows where I reached in my action research journey with a red square:

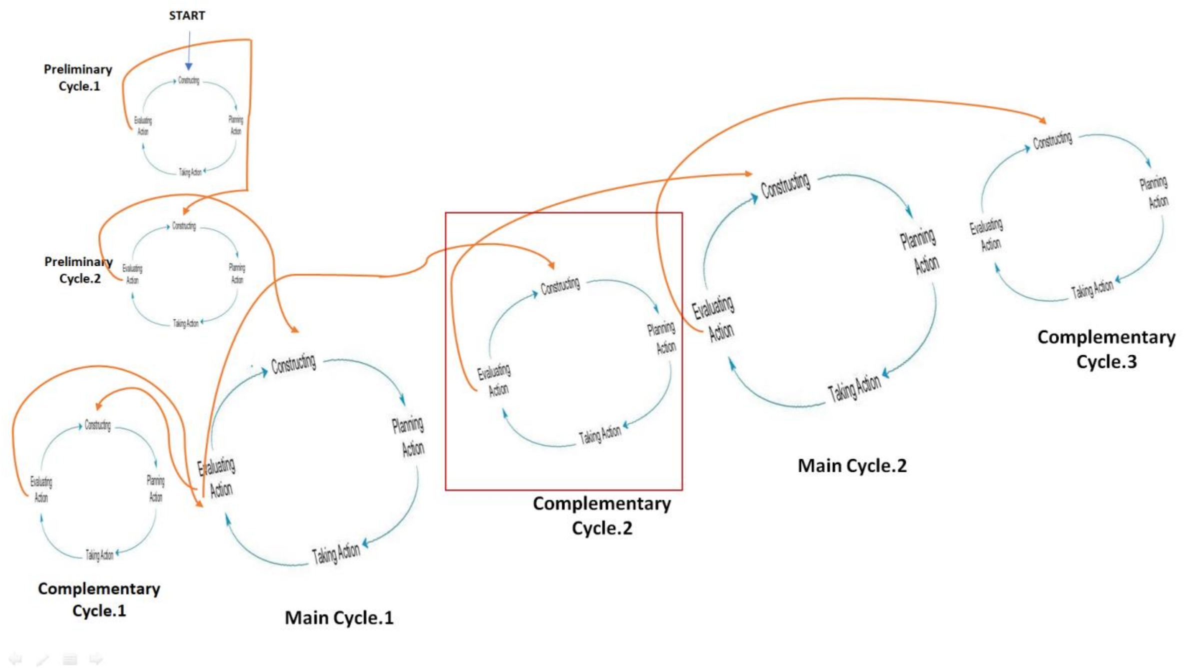

Figure 4.5: Where I reached in my action research journey

4.5 Complementary Action Research Cycle Two

4.5.1 Complementary Action Research Cycle Two: Construction

Since most small business owners did not implement the new knowledge that I transferred to them, I needed to find out the cause of it. That might have been due to my approaches or their personal or professional issues that I decided to find out in this stage.

4.5.2 Complementary Action Research Cycle Two: Planning

Based on revisiting the literatures in which I uncovered factors which impact taking action by small business owners including the format and time of consulting services (Chrisman and McMullan, 2004, 2005); a knowledgeable consultant which has s trustworthy relationship with small business owners, and the benefits of consulting advice (Mole, 2016); regular interactions with small business owners, and offering help to implement consulting advice (Holschbach and Hofmann, 2010) and findings through the action research cycle one, I decided to ask the participants a series of searching questions as follows:

Case.1) If you have implemented the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1) Did you use my advice? What was the feedback?
2) Did you share my advice with your staff?
3) Did you involve them in using it?
4) Was my advice beneficial in solving your business issues?
5) Did my advice become part of your business procedures?
6) Did my advice target one of the main issues in your business?

Case.2) If you have not used the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1) Do you need help with implementing my advice? If yes, in which part? When?
2) Do you have other priorities?
3) What action can you do today to progress that will take ten minutes of your time?
4) How can we make it happen together?
5) Do you think the format of my consulting advice should be changed?
6) Do you prefer to hold this project for now?
7) Do you need more time to digest and use new knowledge?
8) Do you have any other questions or concerns?

Accordingly, I decided to email the questionnaire to participants and also call them to make sure they would respond to my questionnaires.

4.5.3 Complementary Action Research Cycle Two: Taking Actions

In this stage, almost ten days after the last conversation, I contacted the business owners again and emailed them the above questionnaires. To get a better result, I also called and left a message for each business owner to make sure they would respond to my questionnaire.

The following are some quotes from participants and my reflections. (Appendix.9 is my complete research journal for this stage.)

Table 4.8 below provides a summary of my findings for various businesses during this phase of data gathering:

The Business	Used My Advice?	Findings and Reflections
The Internal Medicine	Yes	*"I have already talked to my management company to use the resources that you provided to develop an employee handbook."* Although he mentioned that, he did not sound very interested in improving his business. I think he just wanted to finish his participation in a very polite way. He also mentioned that he is planning not to work in this office anymore and focus on investment activities.
The Engineering firm	No	*" I did not even have time to open your email*." Although he really needed to do something for his business, he did not take any actions. I think I should begin my consulting approach by defining action plans and involving in implementing my advice instead of just leaving it to the business owners.
The Limousine services	Yes	*" I am still working on your advice."* Although the business owner implemented my advice with a lot of delays, I am glad that my advice was helpful. Regarding other business issues like marketing and advertising, I need to get involved in the implementation and set milestones instead of leaving them to the business owner if we want to go forward.
The Dry Cleaner	Yes	*" Your advice was helpful but we prefer to have someone who can help us in implementation as well."* I am glad that they used my advice and happy although I am

		still thinking of offering my help in implementation, and having an action plan while offering my advice will be much more effective than just transferring knowledge.
The Chiropractor	No	He did not respond. He was negative about business consulting from the beginning.
The Real estate company	No	" *We have other priorities for now.*" They showed a lot of interest at the beginning then stopped participating. That brought me some questions regarding the effectiveness of my solutions (See section 4.5.4).
The Fitness club	No	He did not respond. He showed a lot of interests at the beginning but stopped participating. That brought some questions to my mind regarding my consulting approach (See section 4.5.4).
The Accounting services	No	He did not respond. He was negative about business consulting from the beginning.

Table 4.9: Summary of my findings for various businesses during this phase of data gathering.

4.5.4 Complementary Action Research Cycle Two: Evaluating My Actions

Most small business owners did not respond to see the results of my advice and recommendations. That was disappointing to me that they did not want free advice, which may improve their companies.

Those issues brought in a couple of questions to my mind, such as, 1) did I implement my current approach in learning about small business owners' learning styles, their required knowledge, and transferring my advice correctly? did I properly explain small business owners the benefits of my advice? (single-loop learning, Kululanga et al., (2001)) 2) did I, as a scholar-practitioner, choose the right approach in identifying small business owners' required knowledge and transferring the new knowledge? Should I change my approach and consider other matters besides small business owners' learning styles and the type of required knowledge? (double-loop learning, Gelderen et al., (2005)) 3) Is there any value in business consulting in small companies as a career, or should I only target large corporations? (triple-loop learning, Georges et al., (1999))

I went back to the literature to find any previous research that might help explain my results and/or inform my future action. I did more research to find better approaches in dealing with small business owners as participants in this study, especially learning about the causes of not implementing my advice through the last action research cycle as explained below.

Casidya and Nyadzayob (2019) argue that relationship value and the quality of the relationship between small business owners and outside advisors have a great impact on their loyalty and willingness to pay. "Relationship value is defined as "the value generated from the relationship between two parties when we compare all benefits and sacrifices" (Casidya and Nyadzayob, 2019, P.32). In this regard, it is very crucial for professional service providers to learn what small business owners consider as value. Casidya and Nyadzayob (2019) state that being responsive having regular contacts, going beyond expectations, delivering customized services, and sharing know-how besides solid knowledge some of the main elements are which provide value for small business owners. Day et al., (2006) also emphasize the constant interactions between outside advisors and small business owners. From a similar view, Chaston and Baker (1998) discuss that business advisors who are seeking to create long term relationships with small business owners are not successful if they focus on offering advice. "There are a whole range of other variables influencing client attitudes such as contact regularity, behavior consistency, actively listening to the client and creating a relationship based on trust and commitment" (Chaston and Baker, 1998, P.253). From another perspective, Ardley et al., (2015) argue that trust, credibility, and relationship are three main requirements of successful engagement between outside advisors and small business owners.

I noticed that I needed to take the following actions to deliver the 'value' mentioned above.

1. Build trust by maintaining constant interaction with them. So, after delivering new knowledge, I should contact them once a week to see their progress; to find out what has worked and what has not worked so far
2. Offering help to implement the new knowledge rather than merely being the 'provider' of knowledge.
3. Proposing effective ways to implement advice and knowledge into the business.

During this stage, I also noticed that developing a trustworthy relationship with small business owners and being effective in solving their businesses' issues is much more satisfying for me than targeting many potential clients to see who accepts my advice.

Reflective pause: This was the point at which I really understood that I needed to change my business consulting approach. Accordingly, I decided to change my approach to consider other factors besides small business owners' learning styles and their companies' issues, such as the role of the business consultant and the type of problem that needs to be solved (double-loop learning).

I decided to change the title of my thesis from developing a learning system to ***Developing a Holistic approach in Business Consulting for Small Businesses***. This way, I can have a more comprehensive view of various aspects of business consulting in small enterprises not only to learn about small business owners and their companies, but also analyzing myself as the business consultant to make effective changes in different areas of my business such as dealing with potential clients, business analysis, problem-solving, knowledge creation, and transfer. This is how I developed as a scholar-practitioner during this research.

The following figure shows where I reached in my action research journey with a red square:

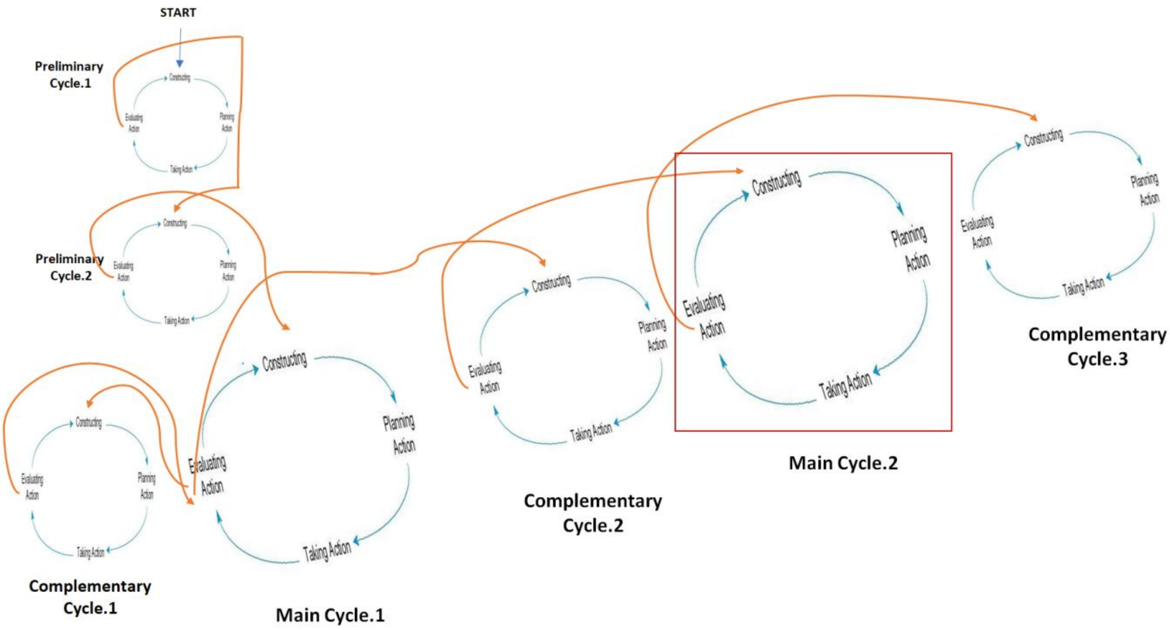

Figure 4.6: Where I reached in my action research journey

4.6 Main Action Research Cycle Two

Based on the results, my reflection, and learning in the last action research cycles, while communicating with former participants, I found new participants to see how I could implement my latest findings in section 4.5.4. I selected these participants through my presentation in one of the chambers of commerce in the Los Angeles area, in a friendly gathering and through referral. Here, I incorporated preliminary Action Research cycles 1 and 2 to this main research Action Research cycle.

In this section, I discussed the action learning cycle stages with three new participants though my research journal.

4.6.1 Main Action Research Cycle Two: Construction

Based on my Action Research plan (figure 3:4) this stage includes the following steps:

Step 1) Learning about small business owners' perceptions regarding business consulting services and small business owners' preferred learning styles (Kolb's, VARK).

Step 2) Learning about small business owners' required type of knowledge in terms of tacit, explicit, or combination.

Step 3) Determining my area of knowledge which can provide value for small business owners in terms of tacit, explicit, or combination.

The Home Health & Hospice Company

1) The Home Health and Hospice Agency
Date: 7/12/19

Number of Employees: 40

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very Strong (Theorist), Strong (Reflector), Moderate (Pragmatist-Activist)

Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), theorist learner has the following characteristics:

1. They prefer handouts or something they can study at their own pace.
2. They want to learn about the theory behind the actions
3. They prefer to analyze the situation and create their findings

VARK: Very close rating in Read and Write & Auditory. Based on Fleming's (2001), Based on Fleming's (2001); Read/Write learners prefer to learn through reading, and Auditory learners prefer to learn through listening to audio materials or discussions.

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a very successful owner of a home health and hospice agency. She was so excited about our meeting. She mentioned that she was looking for a good consultant and needed help to improve her business in two main areas of human resource management and marketing. She said that she is the only one who can make effective marketing activities, which lowers her potential to expand her business in various areas. She also has challenges in having a solid HR management system. She also mentioned that micro-management is one of the main issues of her management style. In this regard, I gave her some ideas on hiring and managing employees and ways to avoid micro-management. She also mentioned that she needs help in implementing new knowledge, as well.

1. What do you think about the causes of your business problem?
This business is relationship-based and extremely competitive. That's why having a marketing manager who is reliable while making great relationships with current and potential clients is so crucial. She also doesn't have enough human resource management knowledge. That's why some of her employees, who are her friends, take advantage of this situation.

2. What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?
Lack of having time to supervise the office since she is the only person who can do marketing. Having problems in dealing with employees. Lack of having a balanced life due to working pressure.

3. How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?
Getting new clients, having a less stressful working environment, having a more balanced life.

4. What do you think of my potential solution for your business?
Having an effective hiring and employee management, hiring a marketing manager, improve business procedures

Type of required knowledge: Tacit knowledge. She prefers face to face meeting with someone who has a lot of experience to solve her business issues. She wants the knowledge to be transferred both tacitly mainly through meetings or by the phone.

General perspective regarding business consulting:

She hired business consultants before, but unfortunately, they were not consistent with what they offered. That's why she could not see effective changes by hiring business consultants. Therefore, she had to go after consultants instead of consultants pushing her to make changes in her business. She believes a business consultant is effective if she can find the right person. That is her only challenge in dealing with a business consultant.

First impression about business consulting: “Consistency.”

My reflection: She was so energetic and positive regarding business consulting, especially my background and services. By more conversation, I noticed that she needs help in both business and personal areas such as time management decision making and so on. She prefers him as a part-time manager so I can help her in implementation as well. I am so optimistic about this business.

The Lawyer

Date: 7/30/19

Number of Employees: 2 part-time employees

Business owner ‘s Learning styles:

Kolb’s/Honey and Mumford’s: Moderate (Reflector- Activist); Low (Theorist, Pragmatist)

In my opinion, he is more reflector than other types of learners. Based on the Honey and Mumford’s (1986), reflector learners have the following characteristics:

1. They learn through watching videos or listening to speakers
2. They need to take time to understand and digest materials before implementing

They do not learn effectively when they are under pressure

VARK: Auditory. Based on Fleming’s (2001), auditory learners prefer to learn through listening to audio materials or discussions.

Interview data: Today, I interviewed an enthusiastic lawyer who has started his business recently. He introduced himself as a technology and intellectual property lawyer. His main business issues are lack of having enough clients. He is very active in different networking channels and knows many people. In this regard, I asked him to add business solutions to his type of specialties well since he mentioned that he is very knowledgeable in this field. I also asked him to change his website and other marketing materials in this regard. I gave him other tips regarding online marketing tools and techniques. I am going to access him to a complete online video training course called *How to Get More Customers* that I created.

1. What do you think about the causes of your business problem?

Being new in this business. The mindset of potential clients who expect to deal with large law corporations than a small law firm.

2. What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?

Lack of having enough income and consequently income

3. How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?
Getting new clients

What do you think of my potential solution for your business?

How to get more clients, especially clients who pay retainers so he can make sue about his income.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit knowledge. He prefers face to face meeting with someone who has a lot of experience to solve his business issues.

General perspective regarding business consulting:

He had hired a business coach before who taught him to improve his business procedures, such as scheduling and accounting software. Now, he needs someone who can help him with marketing. He is very positive about hiring a business coach/ consultant.

The first impression of business consulting: "Knowledge."

My reflection: It was a great meeting. After our meeting, he mentioned that he learned a lot in an hour. He is going to implement some of my advice as soon as possible. I will also provide him more materials very soon. I am positive about this participant.

The New Realtor

Date: 8/14/19

Number of Employees: None

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very strong (Reflector, Pragmatist, Activist); Strong (Theorist)

In my opinion, she is more reflector than other types of learners. Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), reflector learners have the following characteristics:

1. They learn through watching videos or listening to speakers
2. They need to take time to understand and digest materials before implementing
3. They do not learn effectively when they are under pressure

VARK: Kinesthetic. Based on Fleming's (2001), Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing.

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a very nice lady who was referred to me by the lawyer that I interviewed before. She was so enthusiastic and open to learning new knowledge. She mentioned that she wants to get more clients for her real-estate business. Based on my experience and new approach, I decided to give bite-sized advice, which is the design and spreading referral cards by which she can encourage people to refer her more clients.

1. What do you think about the causes of your business problem?
The lack of enough clients. A very competitive business

2. What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?
Lack of having enough clients and consequently income

3. How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?
Getting more clients

What do you think of my potential solution for your business?

How to get more clients, especially through new creative ways that other relators are not aware of.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit knowledge. She prefers to have face to face meeting with someone who has a lot of experience to solve her business issues.

General perspective regarding business consulting:

She was positive regarding business consulting and mentioned that a business coach/consultant could help you achieve your goal; however, it might be a luxury thing for many business owners. She had hired a business coach before which was helpful; however, she mentioned that although the coach had a real-estate specialty, he hadn't had customized his advice, and just gave the same recommendations to all real-estate companies.

The first impression of business consulting: "Guidance."

My reflection: It was a great meeting. She was so positive and even suggested to refer me to other people. I think my new approach by which I give bite-sized advice and help participants in implementation works. I am going to be in constant interactions with this business owner.

Table 4.9 below provides a summary of my findings for various businesses during construction stage:

The Business	Honey & Mumford's	VARK	Business Issue	Required Knowledge	Preferred Knowledge Transfer Method	Perception regarding business consulting
The Home Health & Hospice	Theorist	Read/write	Human resource management	Tacit	Tacit	"Consistency"
The Lawyer	Reflector	Auditory	Marketing	Tacit	Tacit	"Knowledge"
The New Realtor	Reflector	Kinesthetic	Marketing	Tacit	Tacit	"Guidance"

Table 4.10: Summary of my findings for various businesses during this construction stage

4.6.2 Main Action Research Cycle Two: Planning

The Home Health & Hospice Company

Today, I had another meeting with the business owner. She said that she needs my help with implementation as well. In this regard, we agreed that I work as a part-time managing director for her business. According to the above, I asked her to send me whatever information which can help me learn more about this business. I also searched for various resources regarding this type of business, various stakeholders, and so on. In this regard, I decided to help her in two main areas as the following:

Business:

1) Mapping out the current working procedures and improve them

2) Hiring a new human resource manager and an executive assistant

3) Hiring a new marketing manager

Professional Skills:

1) Time management

2) Decision making

3) Micro-management

4) and much more

The Lawyer

I decided to review his marketing tools, including social networks, website, and so on. I also planned to give him a video training marketing course in which I talk about how to get more customers.

The New Realtor

I decided to do more research on how to create referral cards for real-estate companies. She also planned to obtain information regarding the legal matters of it and let me know. I planned to give her access to my video training marketing course on how to get more customers.

Here I need to indicate that from these new participants, the Home Health & Hospice company was a larger business with 40 employees while the Lawyer and the New Realtor were solo business owners with no employees. The other matters were my experience in health industry and also the knowledge of the Home Health & Hospice business owner regarding her required soft skills like time management which created more areas of cooperation between us. In regard to the new Realtor as I will talk later, since I did not have experience in this industry, so I just tried to use platforms like to google to find the required knowledge for her which I found later that is not a satisfying approach for both myself as the consultant and the client.

Table 4.10 below provides a summary of my plans for various businesses based on my finding during the last construction stage:

The Business	My approaches based on my findings during the last construction stage
The Home Health & Hospice	Providing business and professional tips through discussions in face-to-face meetings. Helping the business owner in implementation.
The Lawyer	Reviewing the marketing tools and providing tips through face-to-face meetings. Giving access to my online marketing course so that the business owner can watch it at his own pace.
The New Realtor	Researching about the referral card topic and share my advice. Giving access to my online marketing course so that the business owner can watch it at her own pace.

Table 4.11: Summary of my consulting plans for three small business owners whom I interviewed during the last construction stage

4.6.3 Main Action Research Cycle Two: Taking Actions (Knowledge Transfer)

The Home Health & Hospice Company

Date: 8/10/19

I have already visited this office twice in which the business owner introduced me as the new managing director. I assigned tasks to her staff to send me their working procedures and job descriptions. I have already interviewed five candidates to hire a new human resource manager and executive assistant. I am in constant interactions with her and her team through phone, text messaging, and a task management mobile app.

The Lawyer

Date: 8/12/19

I talked to him about his business and various ways to improve it. I gave him access to my marketing course. I have also followed up with him a couple of times to review his progress.

The New Realtor

Date: 8/20/19

I sent her some samples of referral cards created by other real estate agencies. I also gave her access to my marketing course.

4.6.4 Main Action Research Cycle Two: Evaluating My Actions

The Lawyer

Date: 8/20/19

He has already made changes to his business services, website, and business card based on my advice. He has also referred me to other small business owners. I believe the following factors helped me to have a successful experience with this business owner:

- He is so enthusiastic about improving his business
- He is so positive regarding business consulting. He had hired a business coach before and was so happy about it.
- I gave him bite-size advice instead of a holistic solution, so it was easy for him to implement my advice.
- I have had regular follow up and interactions with him.

The New Realtor

Date: 8/22/19

She mentioned that it is not legal to pay a referral fee, especially if the property has a loan. She also mentioned that the samples that I sent were from other countries, not the United States. It seems my advice was not helpful. I am still waiting to see her feedback regarding my

The Home Health & Hospice Company

Date 8/27/19

Everything has been going well based on our plan so far. I work as a part-time managing director I which I have access to all company documents and software but accounting, which I don't need. I got along very well with the business owner and her staff, and they do their tasks very well. Although I am still working with the company and observing the business owner. I believe the following factors helped me to have a successful experience with this business owner:

- Getting involved in implementation. Although I provided a holistic approach to solve this business issue, I have been targeting the main issues first and don't target many issues at the same time. This way, no one gets frustrated, and everything goes well so far.
- An enthusiastic business owner who believes that she needs a management consultant/ coach next to her
- My experience especially regarding the healthcare industry
- Trustworthy relationship since the business owner and I have known each other for almost four years, and she knows my background very well.

> **Reflective pause:** This was the point at which I really understood that building trust , having constant interactions with small business owners and offering help to implement my advice are some important elements of having a successful business consulting project.

" Your advice was so helpful. I have already changed my website and business card. I will refer you to other business owners." The lawyer

" *I am glad we met so you could help me in managing my business."* The Home Health & Hospice company owner.

Table 4.11 below provides a summary of the evaluations of my actions in this action research cycle.

The Business	Used My Advice	Evaluating My Actions
The Home Health & Hospice	Yes	I helped her in implementing my advice. We have already fixed some issues. Helping her in implementing my advice was so effective in transferring the new knowledge. I talk about organizational learning in this company in more detail in the next section.

The Lawyer	Yes	He implemented my advice and improved his websites and other marketing tools. Having regular interactions and providing bite-sized advice were so helpful.
The New Realtor	No	My advice was not helpful for her. I did not have enough experience regarding the required knowledge, and the internet search was not helpful. I should not get involved when I do not have the knowledge.

Table 4.12: Summary of the evaluations of my actions in this action research cycle

Reflective pause: This was the point that I really understood that having enough experience in a specific industry like real estate is one of the main requirements to provide successful business consulting services in that specific industry. This point became clear when I realized that my advice to the New Realtor showed my lack of knowledge of the industry. However, I could have asked about other skills that she lacked such as time management, planning and so on. It seems that I took everything at face value.

4.6.5 Reviewing Organizational Learning in The Home Health & Hospice Company

I decided that, due to the excellent relationship I had formed with this company, it would provide a good scenario for me to go deeper with them into organizational learning. As I mentioned in section 4.3, as company's ability to transfer knowledge among its employees (thereby improving its effectiveness) also improves my relationship with businesses owner.

The main reasons to choose this company to review organizational learning are 1) the business owner's enthusiasm to learn new knowledge, 2) having enough employees to determine how the business owner transferred the new knowledge.

As mentioned before, there are four elements which have a positive effect to start and continue a successful business consulting project which are:

1) Having a trustworthy relationship between the consultant and the business owner.

2) Having time by the business owners.

3) Having financial resources.

4) Having a positive mindset regarding business consulting service.

Fortunately, the above elements existed in this business. One of the problematic issues here is that the owner does not have sufficient time to deal with 'non-urgent but important' matters (Covey 1981), so I undertook to instruct time and task management skills to the business owner and her team. Based on our agreement, I started working as the part-time managing director in which I not only advised the business owner, but I also helped her in assigning tasks to the staff and in implementing my advice.

This approach worked very well in applying new knowledge and solving business issues. The following is a summary of some of our sessions and my actions.

Introductory Sessions

Dates: 7/12/19 and 7/25/19

In these sessions, I started learning about the business owner's learning styles and business issues. I also asked her to email me her personal and professional objectives for the next five years. Stark and Purohit (2007) state that the business owner's objectives have a direct impact on business direction and performance.

Following Sessions

Dates: From 7/31/19 to 8/13/19

In these sessions, I visited the office and learned about employees and their responsibilities. I also went more in-depth into some of the business problems with the business owner.

As mentioned earlier in the literature review, there are different types of informal organizational learning, such as informational, conceptual, operational, reflective, and social (Wilson and Hartung, 2015). Kim (1993) also states that they are two types of required knowledge by organizations; 1) conceptual (Know-why), which is the knowledge about concepts, and why taking some actions 2) operational (Know-how), which is the knowledge about taking various actions and procedures. Regarding this company, the business owner needed both conceptual knowledge (why it is important to develop a business system before conducting more marketing); and operational knowledge (how to develop systems in various aspects of this business such as hiring, training employees, business operations, and so on).

I noticed some other issues as the following:

1) The business owner had some personal biases due to her previous experiences, which may affect her decisions, especially regarding hiring and managing employees. That is why she requires reflective learning to question her current assumptions and biases (Wilson and Hartung, 2015).

2) Besides business coaching, the business owner needed emotional support and personal coaching. Kuhn et al., (2017) discuss that emotional support has a crucial role in having successful business coaching, especially for businesswomen.

3) The professional organizational culture which could be expected in this industry did not exist in this company. Wee and Chua (2013) state that trust, mutual respect, and role awareness facilitate knowledge sharing and learning in small companies. Lange et al., (2000) also talk about the role of the small business owner in forming organizational culture. In this regard, I noticed that a lack of punctuality and professionalism from the business owner might affect her employees.

4) Lack of a solid organizational learning system. Kim (1993) argues that there are three types of incomplete organizational learning cycles which create an ineffective organizational learning system:

1) Situational learning: when the individual does not digest and organize the new knowledge; therefore, learning is temporary and does not have any long-term effect on both the individual and the organization.

2) Fragmented learning: when the individual learns, but due to a lack of knowledge sharing culture and system, the organization fails to benefit from the new knowledge.

3) Opportunistic learning: when organizational learning is based on specific individuals, not the whole company's values and working procedures.

Accordingly, I noticed the following learning issues in this small business:

- Some of the employees appeared not to be performing effectively, especially nurses who were dealing with patients. I noticed that there was no solid training program, and employees barely shared the knowledge with their colleagues (Both fragmented and situational learning).
- Confusion regarding responsibilities, such that people did not know who needed to take care of different issues when they popped up (lack of having a task management system).
- No crisis management system i.e. an example of situational learning in which the new knowledge is not codified to be used in similar cases.
- Over reliance on one employee who, although more knowledgeable than the others, was not trustworthy and professional created a negative among colleagues e. because but he was sometimes late in submitting his tasks, which made big problems for the company. The business owner told me that it was difficult to find a replacement for him. This case is a combination of situational, fragmented, and opportunistic learning.

My solutions and Actions

Date: From 8/13/19 to 11/1/19

To face the above matters, I started to take the following actions:

1) Developing an effective training program in which all employees learn about the business and its various sections

2) Creating working procedures in which the business owner and managers understand who is responsible for which sections of the processes. This way, we can find gaps in procedures, identify risks, and have backups if we lose any employee.

3) Coaching and training the business owner various managerial skills such as time management, punctuality, and task management. Due to the effect of the business owner on organizational culture, this approach has a very positive impact on employees' punctuality and professionalism.

4) Creating a deadline for one of the office directors to learn all the responsibilities and tasks of the unreliable employee. This way, we can replace him with the minimum side effect to the company.

5) Creating a sharing knowledge culture in which employees share what they learned during their weekly and monthly meetings.

Although there are still some minor issues by the time of writing my journal, the results were amazingly positive. We solved many issues in three months.

My Reflection

My knowledge in the health care industry and my trustworthy relationship with the business owner were some of the success factors of this consulting project. Since the business owner was a 'theorist' (Honey and Mumford) and 'read/write' (VARK), explaining my plans in detail before taking any action was helpful in persuading the business owner to take action. I also noticed that although the business owner indicated some business issues in our first meeting, as the business consultant, I had to do business analysis as well not only to verify the business owner's claims but also to find new issues that she might have ignored. Helping the business owner in implementing my advice and being in constant interactions with the business owner and her team were other important elements of being successful in this project.

These findings gave me some great insights to develop the second draft of my new business consulting approach.

4.7 Developing a New, 'Holistic' Approach for My Consulting Firm: The Second Draft

In this section, taking into account the results of failures and success so far, I now show the development of a new consulting approach based on shared values between myself as the scholar-practitioner and small business owners as potential clients. The plan below is a chronological approach that suits my business consulting firm; however, it may need changes in practice on each stage and step.

1. Before the first meeting

- Sending my business consulting catalog which describes my background and services to the business owner
- Sharing some of my informative videos with the business owner.

2. The first meeting with the business owner

Step.1) The business owner analysis: Acquiring the following information:

- The business owner's mindset regarding business consulting services
- The business owner's learning styles (Honey& Mumford's; VARK)

Step.2) The required knowledge: Acquiring the following information:

- The business owner's required knowledge (Tacit/ Explicit)
- The business situation and issues

Step.3) Informing the business owner

- Talking about my working procedures
- Sharing some basic knowledge regarding the business issue and how to solve it
- Setting up the next date and time for our meeting

2. The second meeting with the business owner

- Reviewing the basic of my plan to solve the business issue
- Going through my various consulting packages including the part-time CEO package in which I work as the part-time CEO and help the business owner and his team in implementing my advice, I know you are doing this, but you haven't explained the reasons why this approach will be beneficial.
- Signing the consulting agreement (I may not sign the business consulting agreement with participants of my thesis).

3. Business consulting preparation: Customizing my business consulting solution based on the information collected during the last meetings and my research.

4. The third meeting with the business owner and starting the project

- Providing an action plan to solve the issue. That might include various steps and milestones to solve the business issue.
- Transferring the new knowledge and providing bite-sized advice which is easy to be implemented. Your previous attempt to transfer knowledge was not very successful, so you must demonstrate/ explain what you have changed here and why.
- Installing the task management app on the business owner's cell phone to follow up for the required actions
- Offering help for implementation. This may change our consulting agreement if the business has not already asked for implementation help in our agreement.
- Setting up the time and date for the follow-up session

5. Regular interactions

- Following up with the business owner or his team during implementation
- Reviewing the progress and make corrections

6. The final meeting with the business owner

- Reviewing the results of taking actions by/with the business owner
- Reviewing organizational learning in the business
- Setting up other required plans and actions

The following figure shows the working procedures of my new consulting approach:

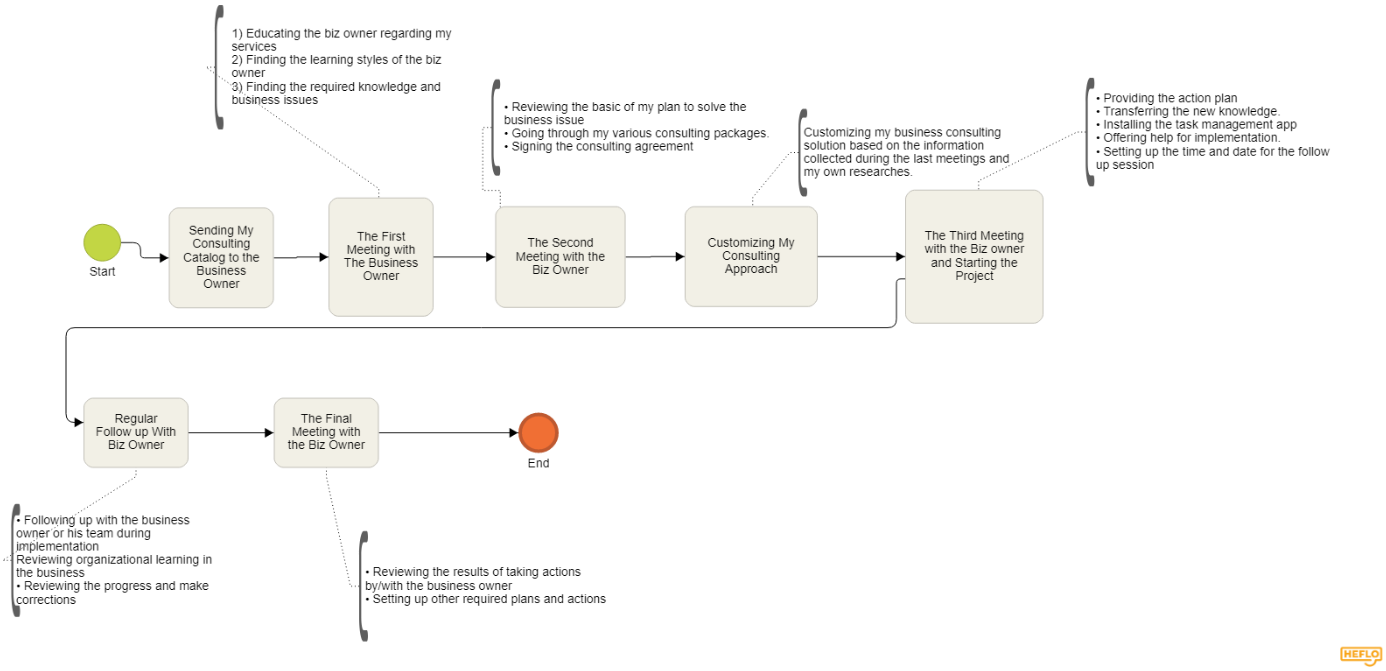

Figure 4.7: The working procedures of my new consulting approach

The following figure shows where I reached in my action research journey with a red square:

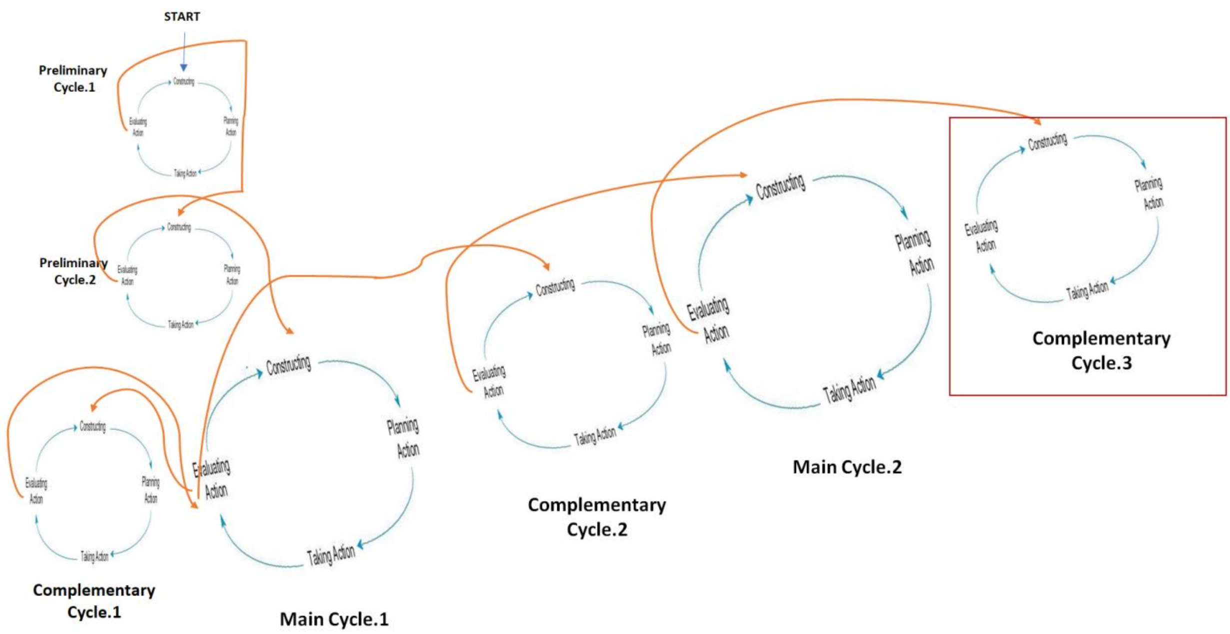

Figure 4.8: Where I reached in my action research journey

4.8 Complementary Action Research Cycle Three

4.8.1 Complementary Action Research Cycle Three: Construction

I decided to take another chance at contacting former participants who had stopped participating to see if I could provide bite-sized advice and also offering them help in implementing my advice.

4.8.2 Complementary Action Research Cycle Three: Planning

I decided to call and also send messages to three small business owners who stopped participating. I also planned to create bite-sized advice for them if they agreed to continue participating in this study.

4.8.3 Complementary Action Research Cycle Three: Taking Actions (Data Gathering)

Date:9/5/19

Today, I started calling and sending messages to some of the small business owners who stopped participating in my study. The following is the result of my follow up:

The Physical Therapy Office:

I left a message for the business owner for the fourth time, but he did not respond.

The Limousine Company:

I contacted the business owner to see if he has done anything regarding one of my bite-sized advice, which was creating a non-agreement with his drivers. He mentioned that he has already started but not finished it yet. This is the same answer he gave me last month to complete the one-page agreement that I have already sent him the template and similar ones. I sent him a message a week later to see if he needs help to implement one of my suggestions. He has not responded yet.

The Fitness Club:

He mentioned that he is in the divorce process and has no time now. I sent him a message a week later to see if he needs help to implement one of my suggestions. He has not responded yet.

Table 4.12 below provides a summary of my findings for various businesses during this action research cycle.

The Business	**Findings**
The Physical Therapy Office	He did not respond. He is not interested.
The Limousine services	Although he mentioned that he is still working on it, it is evident that he is not going to take any action.
The Fitness club	He mentioned that he has a lot of personal issues and can not do anything now.

Table 4.13: Summary of my findings for various businesses during this action research cycle.

4.8.4 Complementary Action Research Cycle Three: Evaluating My Actions

When I was reviewing different participants, especially those who did not respond anymore or did not use my knowledge, I came up with a new insight based on my own double-loop learning. Although those businesses needed my help, some of them were not still interested in implementing my advice.

Now, the main questions are: Do I only need to find 'perfect' clients? (See section 5.1) If yes, who is my perfect client? If no, how should I deal with imperfect clients? What other factors affect not only hiring my services but also having successful consulting projects? I discuss all these matters in the next chapter.

4.9 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I conducted data gathering and analysis through different action research cycles in almost eight months. In this regard, I used a qualitative method to collect data through interviews, together with Honey and Mumford's quantitative test. Accordingly, I selected eighteen small business owners from different industries whom I interviewed in different stages of this chapter. Most interviews were conducted in person, which I recorded with the voice recorder app of my iPhone. In my opinion, conducting in-person interviews was the best approach for data collecting in this research since, as a scholar-practitioner, I was able to make better connections, develop trustworthy relationships with participants and answer their questions if they had any. In this regard, I collected and saved all data in a separate safe and secure folder, both online and offline, for each small business owner. In this regard, I had some challenges, such as finding small business owners from different industries to have broader information and finding enough time that both I as a scholar-practitioner and small business owners as participants, could sit and talk. Most small business owners were so busy that I had to wait long or contacted them a couple of times to be able to reach them. However, with my persistence, I was able to collect the required data for this study.

At the end of this chapter, I was also able to determine the effectiveness of my research approach. In this regard, some of my procedures, such as asking small business owners to take long questionnaires (Honey and Mumford's 80 questions) and providing many solutions at one consulting session, were boring and time-consuming. That's why I should have chosen shorter and less time-consuming tests and methods in dealing with participants.

In this chapter, through different action research cycles, I tried to find answers for my various research questions regarding small business owners' learning styles, their mindsets regarding business consulting, and what they consider as the value which might be provided by a business consultant. In this regard, it was disappointing for me that some small business owners did not want or could not continue (probably due to lack of having time) this study to get my free business consulting advice. That is why I came up with a new approach in which I provided bite-sized advice, offered help to implement my advice, and had constant interactions with small business owners. This new approach was so effective, especially in facing the new participants. However, I still needed to review and organize my findings to answer some of the questions that came up to my mind at the end of this chapter, such as 1) do I need to look for perfect clients? Or who is a perfect client for my services? And so on.

In the next chapter, I discuss findings and discussions in more detail.

5. Findings and Discussions

5.1 Introduction

In this section, I discuss my findings, what my findings tell me about the situation I have endeavored to change, and what I have achieved regarding my research questions.

To recap, the main objective of my thesis was developing a system for my business consulting firm to answer the following questions:

1) What are the factors that affect small business owners' mindsets regarding business consulting services?
2) Which type of knowledge and services as a business consultant, do I have the capacity to provide for small business owners and managers, so they consider it valuable and want to pay for it?
3) How can I develop a profitable business consultancy framework encompassing the modes of learning, forms of knowledge, and media for knowledge exchange valued by clients?

Accordingly, in this chapter, I discuss the role of small business owners in hiring my services and implementing my advice. I also discuss small business owners' perceptions of value, the main barriers in hiring my services, and how I may face them. The factors which are important in having a successful consulting project are other topics that I talk about in this chapter. Finally, developing a holistic business consulting approach based on my findings is the last section of this chapter.

5.1 Small Business Owners and My Business Consulting Services

One of the main findings during this study was emphasizing the role of business owners not only in accepting or rejecting my services but also in implementing my advice. This is supported by Falkner and Hiebl (2015); Berglas (2002); Peel (2008); Brouthers et al. (1998); and Owens et al., (2011) who talk about the impact of personality, and personal characteristics of business owners on accepting new knowledge and applying changes. In this regard, the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting services are so crucial. As an example, two small business owners who had negative mindsets regarding business consulting services did not even continue to ask for free advice during this study (see sections 4.1, and 4.4).

"Business consultants add more stress to my work by recommendation that I cannot implement." The chiropractor

"Business consultants are financial and resource consuming." The financial advisor

From another aspect, through in-depth interviews and reviewing literature in related topics and reflections, I found that personal objectives may have a huge impact on the professional goals of small business owners and, consequently, their businesses. That's why learning about the personal goals of small business owners will be helpful for the business consultant in approaching and giving professional advice.

"I want to be able to spend more time on writing my book and giving activities." The home health and hospice company owner

"I need a more balanced life." The structural engineering firm owner

From a similar view, Stark and Purohit (2007) discuss that small business owners' goals and goal setting have a hand in hand relationship with their businesses' performance. In this regard, being proactive by which a small business owner is change-oriented and tries to shape the environment rather than get affected by it has a direct effect on the goal-setting by him. "There is a high correlation between proactive planning and goal-specificity. We assume that the goals set by the proactive manager are specific, as they are highly motivated to achieve these goals. A manager using proactive planning, therefore, becomes more active in taking actions" (Stark and Purohit, 2007, P.35). This is supported by Frese et al., (2016), who state that personal initiative has an important role in small business owners' achievements. Personal Initiative (PI) includes various characteristics such as being an innovative, proactive planner, effective communicator and having time management skills. "Innovativeness implies to be self-starting in implementing something new. Proactive goals and plans relate to future opportunities and problems. Time management is one aspect of proactive planning of time and coping with lack of time" (Frese et al., 2016. P.27).

From the findings during the last action research cycles, I discovered that some small business owners suffer from the lack of having effective time management and planning. That's why, although they found my advice helpful, they did not have time to review and implement it.

"I did not even have time to open your emails." The structural engineering firm owner

"I have a lot of personal issues and have no time for my business." The fitness club owner.

This is supported by Owens et al., (2011), who discuss the link between small business owners' skills and their companies' achievements. Accordingly, advising small business owners regarding time-management, planning, and effective decision-making should be an important part of my consulting approach. This is supported by McNamara (2016), who talks about time management as one of the main requirements of small businesses' success that might be get affected by many internal and external factors. "The way in which SBOMs manage their time is characterized by personalization, flexibility, integration, informality, and pragmatism. The influences that affect these behaviors include personal and environmental influences; together, they shape and influence the capacity of SBOMs to manage time effectively" (McNamara, 2016, P.2).

During this research, I realized that since most small business owners are busy with day-to-day business challenges, they do not have enough time to seek new knowledge, although the new knowledge might help their businesses dramatically. As an example, the head of an engineering company mentioned that although he needed the new knowledge to get more clients, he did not even have time to open my email in which I had summarized the key points of our meeting. The physical therapy owner also never replied after the first meeting due to the lack of time, although he had mentioned that he needed the new knowledge to organize his employees. This is supported by Adams et al., (2015) small business development model, which compares small businesses' needs with Maslow's hierarchy of needs for a human being (See section 2.4).

During my Action Research cycles, I noticed that although most small business owners required to improve their businesses they did not know how and had no time to implement my recommendations.

> **Reflective pause:** This was the point at which I really understood that that many small businesses are in survival mode in which owners-managers do daily activities to solve business issues to survive; therefore, they have no time for planning and improvement.

McNamara (2016), also by referring to Covey's (1994) time management grid, argues that most small business owners spend their time in the quadrant.1 of the table below, that's why they have no time for quaderant.2, which is so crucial for the success of small companies. The task of the consultant, therefore, is to shift the small business owners' emphasis to the upper right quadrant in the table below.

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	**QUADRANT I:** - Crises - Pressing problems - Deadline-driven projects, meetings and preparations	**QUADRANT II:** - Preparation - Prevention - Planning - Reflection - Empowerment - Ideas and creation
Not important	**QUADRANT III:** - Needless interruptions, some phone calls - Some mail - Some meetings - Pressing matters - Popular activities	**QUADRANT IV:** - Trivia - Junk mail - Some phone calls - Time wasters - Escape activities

Table 5.1: Covey's time-management grid (Covey et al., 1994) adapted from McNamara (2016)

Regarding small business owners' mindsets regarding success, Stoll and Brookshire (2012) emphasize the subjective analysis of success and argue that small business owners may have different definitions regarding business success. That's why they may have different perspectives regarding valuable information. Gorgievski et al., (2011) also argue that in general, small business success is the combination of financial and professional success and also having a "balanced life." That was one of my findings during this study as well, in which small business owners requested help in a way that improves both their personal and professional lives. As an example, the home health and hospice business owner preferred to work on her dream projects rather than daily business activities. The engineering firm owner also desired to have a more balanced life instead of working many hours at his firm.

Regarding learning in small companies, as stated by Coetzer et al., (2017), I discovered that in small companies learning is mostly informal, and business owners are usually the gatekeepers of the new knowledge in their organizations. Through this study, all small business owners wanted me to deliver knowledge to them before approaching their employees. That shows learning about small business owners' preferred approaches in sending and receiving knowledge should be a crucial part of my consulting approach. In this regard, I found that most, but not all, small business owners require tacit knowledge through face-to-face meetings; therefore, the consultant must have experience in that field to able to transfer the new knowledge.

"We are looking for someone who has a lot of experience in real estate industry." The real estate company owner.

"We prefer to work with someone who has dry-cleaning industry experience." The dry cleaner business owner.

"If want to enter a new field of business such as beauty, I prefer to work with someone who has experience." The internal medicine physician

That's why probably, some of participants in this study did not continue due to the lack of experience in their industries.

This is supported by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995); and Maruta (2014), who argues that social interactions through in-person meetings and storytelling are two of the best ways to transfer tacit knowledge. Polanyi (1967) also states that human interpretation is the central column of tacit knowledge; therefore, sense-making and sense-giving are two primary approaches in developing tacit knowledge. Conversely, some of my participants preferred a written, explicit type of knowledge in the form of instructions.

Accordingly, these approaches helped me to have a successful business consulting project with the home health and hospice business, since not only I had experience in the medical field, but also, I was able to use 'sense-making' and 'sense-giving' successfully in dealing with the business owner. In this regard, learning about small business owners' learning styles through Honey and Munford's and VARK helped me make better communication with small business owners. As an example, since the home health business owner was a theorist and auditory learner, I always discussed matters with her profoundly before suggesting and implementing any new ideas. However, since Honey and Munford's test was lengthy and time-consuming, a shorter version of it would be more effective in approaching small business owners.

From another view, as stated by Kululanga et al., (2001), I found out that blocked organizational learning in which small business owners know the importance of changing behavior but are unable to take actions due to various reasons such as lack of enough skills is one of the main reasons that small business owners may need an outside advisor.

Reflective pause: This was the point at which I really understood that that teaching small business owners' soft skills such a time-management, and planning might be effective in taking actions by them and consequently having successful business consulting projects.

Lack of financial resources is another main obstacle in hiring business consulting services; however, since during this study I was delivering free advice to small business owners as participants, I was not able to experience it here although during my career, as a business consultant, I have seen many small business owners who were not interested in my services due to lack of having financial resources. This is supported by Kotey and Sorensen (2014), who state that lack of having enough resources is one of the main barriers to making effective changes in small companies. From another perspective, Kuhn et al., (2017) argue that many factors affect how small business owners benefit from an outside advisor as the following:

1) Their perceptions regarding business consulting. While collecting data and interviewing small business owners, I noticed their opinions regarding the 'value' that a consultant can provide is very important in going forward in our relationships. In this regard, one of the questions that I asked small business owners was about their stereotypes regarding business consulting services. Although most of them were positive, their perceptions of value were different. The following table summarizes the perceptions regarding business consulting advice for some of the participants (these perceptions represent only an interim stage in their thinking).

Participant	Perception regarding business consulting services
The Home Health and Hospice	Consistency
The Limousine Company	Providing help
The Structural Engineering Firm	Adding benefits
The Lawyer	Providing knowledge
The Real estate Company	Sharing experience
The Dry Cleaner	Return on investment
The fitness club	Providing better ideas

Table 5.2: Summary of some of the participants' perceptions regarding business consulting

The above is supported by Parasuraman et al., (1988), who state that the quality of professional services could be measured by identifying the differences between the clients' expectations and services delivered by professional service providers. Brown and Swartz (1989) also argue that one of the main challenges in measuring the quality of service is an existing gap between clients' and providers' perspectives of high-quality service. Casidya and Nyadzayob (2019) also argue that relationship value and the quality of the relationship between small business owners and outside advisors have a great impact on their loyalty and willingness to pay. "Relationship value is defined as "the value generated from the relationship between two parties when we compare all benefits and sacrifices" (Casidya and Nyadzayob, 2019, P.32).

Vos et al., (2016) discuss that in professional service firms, the organizational value is completely subjective and depends on the mindsets and perceptions of beneficiaries. In this regard, Howden and Pressey (2008) state that recently, value creation has been shifted from transactional to relational by service provider firms; therefore, service firms must understand and create value from the viewpoint of clients. From my findings, having a conceptual agreement with small business owners regarding the perceived value and how to measure the success of the project is one of the main prerequisite steps of any business consulting project. This approach may prevent many potential conflicts between the business consultant and the client.

2) Having a trustworthy relationship with the advisor. During this study, I found that creating trustworthy relationships with small business owners is one of the crucial steps before delivering new knowledge. Small business owners who accepted my advice believed that I am a knowledgeable consultant because they had attended my seminars before, watched my videos, were my prior clients, or just were persuaded during our first meeting that I was the right person to listen to. This is supported by Grayson et al., (2008), who talk about the importance of trust in influencing customers and state that there are two types of trust 1) broad-scope trust, which is a customer's trust to a specific industry as a whole. As an example, when a small business owner trusts and believes in business consulting services to improve his business, 2) narrow-scope trust, which is a customer's trust to a specific person or company. As an example, when a small business owner trusts a specific business

consultant as the source of reliable advice. Accordingly, I decided to provide my potential clients some informative materials such as articles regarding the importance of having a business consultant in succeeding small companies to develop broad-scope trust; and my videos and business coaching catalog to develop narrow-scope trust.

3) Receiving social and emotional support from the advisor is important, especially for women entrepreneurs. I discovered during my research that to have a successful consulting project; I need to be prepared to do personal coaching as well, especially for female business owners. As an example, the home health business owner who, as a female, mentioned that since hiring me a business consultant, she felt more powerful and got more motivated. This is supported by Kuhn et al., (2017), who talk about the importance of emotional support in coaching businesswomen.

4) The type of advice. Generally, there are two types of business advice 1) tactical advice, which is related to day-to-day business operation 2) strategic advice, which is about growth and plans. Kuhn et al., (2017) state that usually experienced business owners, value strategic advice more than tactical advice, while new business owners prefer to get advice for their daily business activities. I do not agree with Kuhn et al., (2017) in this regard. From my findings, I met some experienced business owners who needed new knowledge to improve their day-to-day business operations such as employee management, business process improvement, and so on (see section 4.1).

From a broader perspective, Argyris and Schön (1974) state that people have mental patterns that make them act in different situations. "When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that governs his actions is this theory-in-use" (Argyris and Schön 1974, P. 6-7). In this regard, Argyris and Schön (1974) argue that there might be some governing variables that affect people's actions in different conditions. From my findings, it became clear that some factors such as having enough time, and small business owners' mindsets regarding business consulting services have a direct impact on their rationalities and desire to learn new knowledge and taking actions accordingly. In this regard, what small business owners mentioned that they would do during the first round of interviews, was different from what they did later, especially after receiving the new knowledge. That contributes to the actionable insight that shows the limitation of a business consultant's knowledge regarding small business owners' desires or capabilities at the beginning of a consulting project.

To sum up, during different cycles of action research, and based on articles by Kuhn et al., (2017); and Kotey and Sorensen (2014), I discovered that the main factors which impact small business owners' decisions in hiring an outside advisor are the following:

1) Time

2) Financial Resources

3) Mindset regarding business consulting services

4) Having a trustworthy relationship with the business consultant

That's why I consider a small business owner who has all these factors, a perfect business consulting client to start working with.

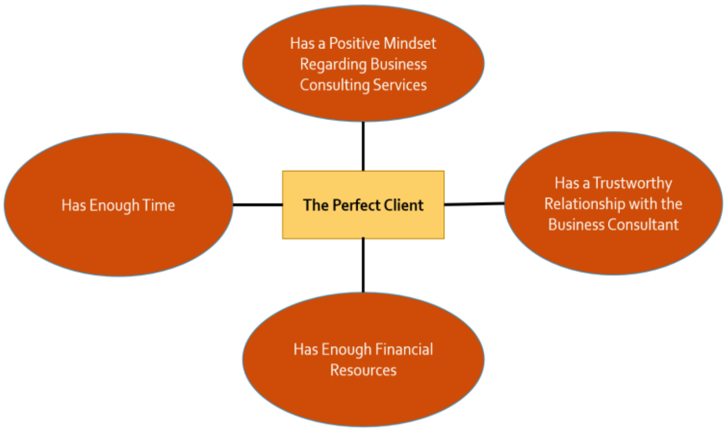

Figure 5.1: The factors which make a client perfect for a business consultant

However, most small business owners are not perfect clients.

Table 5.3 below shows how the lack of these four variables in a small business owner may create negative impacts on hiring my services and how I decided to face them.

Variables May Have Negative Impacts on Hiring My Services	
Potential Barriers	My Approach
Lack of time by the business owner	1) Offering time management education. McNamara (2016) 2) Providing bite-sized advice. Turner (1982); and Brown (2001) 3) Offering help in implementation. Chaston and Baker (1998)
Lack of financial resources by the business owner	Justifying the benefits vs. costs of hiring my consulting services. Casidya and Nyadzayob (2019)
Lack of a trustworthy relationship with the business consultant	Providing informative materials regarding my background and testimonials of my former clients. Sonmez and Moorhouse (2010); Kuhn et al., (2017); Casidya and Nyadzayob (2019); Day et al., (2006); and Chaston and Baker (1998)
Lack of a positive mindset regarding business consulting services by the business owner.	Providing some valuable information and show how my services can provide value for the small business owner. Barreto and Martins (2017); Casidya and Nyadzayob (2019); Day et al., (2006); and Chaston and Baker (1998)

Table 5.3: Potential barriers in hiring my services and my approach in dealing with them

5.2 The Perfect Business Consulting Project

In the following section, I develop the concept of a 'perfect consulting project'. By this, I mean a project which' works' and ultimately delivers value to the business owner, the business itself, and to the consultant. In developing this idea, I gradually move from my initial position, whereby the owner possessed certain personal and professional characteristics (e.g., receptive, positive, and action-orientated). These attributes are most suited to the 'transactional' style of consultation (Howden and Pressey 2008) that I was most familiar with.

I begin by discussing the consulting project in terms of its desired outcomes. Crompton et al., (2012) talk about various tangible and intangible outcomes that show the influence of business consulting/coaching on different small companies. The following tables show some of the outcomes of business consulting /coaching based on Crompton et al., (2012) and also my own experience in working with different small companies.

Business Consulting/Coaching Potential **Tangible** Outcomes
Increasing profitability by ……percent
Reducing employee turnover by …percent
Increasing the number of new customers by……..percent
Reducing business expenses by……. percent

Table 5.4: Business Consulting/coaching potential tangible outcomes

Business Consulting/Coaching Potential **Intangible** Outcomes
Developing a better working environment
Increasing creativity and innovation
Reducing conflicts
Improving efficiencies

Table 5.5: Business Consulting/coaching potential intangible outcomes

Accordingly, as mentioned earlier, it is very important for the business consultant and the client to reach a conceptual agreement regarding outcomes, procedures, and related elements before starting the project. In this regard, based on my findings during the last action research cycles, a perfect consulting project should have the following characteristics to begin:

1) The perfect client who has a positive mindset regarding business consulting services, trustworthy relationships with the consultant, and enough resources.

2)Providing the right added value. The required knowledge must be valuable in the eyes of the business owner, so he would like to pay for it.

3) The right knowledge domain. The required knowledge must match the consultant's knowledge and experience. As an example, I should not have spent time on the accounting service, which needed succession planning, which was not my expertise. In this regard, by reviewing various cases, I noticed that I could be much more effective in business process improvement in small companies which have more than ten employees and may include human resource, marketing, operation management and so on.

4) The right amount of time. The consultant needs to have enough time to solve the clients' issues.

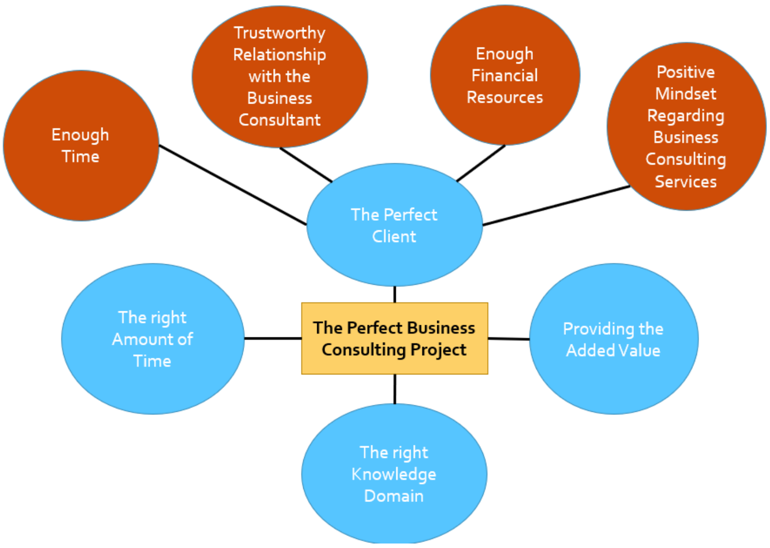

Figure 5.2: The factors which make a perfect business consulting project

5.3 The Successful Business Consulting Project

So far, I have focused upon the notions of the 'Perfect Client' and the 'Perfect Business Consulting Project.' This focus only explains two parts of a three-part set, which must also include a degree of self-reflection into what constitutes the 'Perfect Business Consultant.' Thus, although the factors mentioned above are essential to start a new project, transferring and implementing the new knowledge are two crucial elements of completing a business consulting project successfully. Accordingly, the successful consulting project, also requires the consultant to be flexible to a whole variety of personal personalities and characteristics, changing his approach as necessary in order to build a 'relational' project. Furthermore, it requires a high degree of personal reflection on the consultant's part, to know the difference between those elements of the relationship that he/she can influence and potentially alter, those that he can't.

In this regard, I found that regular interactions with small business owners and helping them in implementing new knowledge have a significant impact on transferring new knowledge to small companies. This is supported by Holschbach and Hofmann (2010); and Casidya and Nyadzayob (2019) who state that being responsive, having regular contacts, going beyond expectations, delivering customized services, and sharing know-how besides solid knowledge are some of the main elements which provide value for small business owners. If, therefore, a successful relationship is to develop between a consultant and a client, then both need to be 'perfect' for each other, although the term 'perfect' is, in this regard, entirely subjective to both parties.

Day et al., (2006) also emphasize the constant interactions between outside advisors and small business owners. From a similar view, Chaston and Baker (1998) discuss that business advisors who are seeking to create long term relationships with small business owners are not successful if they focus on offering advice. "There are a whole range of other variables influencing client attitudes such as contact regularity, behavior consistency, actively listening to the client and creating a relationship based on trust and commitment" (Chaston and Baker, 1998, P.253).

To sum up, a successful business consulting project requires the business consultant to be knowledgeable in that specific field, has enough time to transfer the knowledge, and take various actions to achieve the desired results. By taking 'various actions,' I am suggesting an additional element to my notion of perfection: flexibility. In this regard, I discovered that as a business consultant, I need to take the following actions to deliver a successful business consulting project:

1. Building trust by maintaining constant interactions with small business owners. So, after delivering new knowledge, I should contact them once a week to see their progress; to find out what has worked and what has not worked so far.
2. Adopting a flexible attitude to the needs and preferences of the client.
3. Proposing effective ways to implement advice and knowledge into the business.
4. Offering help to implement the new knowledge rather than merely being the 'provider' of knowledge.

This is supported by McKenna (2006), who argues that implementing business consulting in small companies is not an easy job. Spatig (2013) also states that one of the main obstacles in implementing business consulting services in small enterprises is business consultants' approaches. From another aspect, Seiders e al., (2014) argue that the success of a professional service provider depends on the willingness and capabilities of clients to get involved and follow professional advice. Ng et al., (2016) also recommend that there is no specific style in dealing with different clients; therefore, to get better results, professional service providers should wear different hats and select various positions such as mentor, coach, consultant, validator, and partner in dealing with clients.

In this regard, two of the main steps in having a successful business consulting project are:

1) Transferring the new knowledge from small business owners to their employees.
2) Embedding the new knowledge in their companies for future usages.

During this study, I found that developing systems and training materials can be so effective in transferring knowledge inside small companies. As an example, in the Home Health company, we created employee training handbook, which includes working procedures, job descriptions of people involved, their required information, and so on. This handbook would be updated and improved regularly based on new situations. This way, not only new knowledge was transferred to employees but also embedded in the organization. In this regard, I noticed that the role of small business owners in creating a knowledge-sharing environment is so important. This is supported by Matlay (2000); and Gelderen et al., (2004) who argue that two main factors which affect learning in small companies are 1) learning the behavior of organizational members which includes personal characteristics and learning styles, and 2) learning environment which is affected by organizational culture, structure, and procedures. Barrett (2006) also argues that mentoring, which is occurred through the interaction of two people sharing tacit knowledge, is one of the most effective business training approaches to address the lack of having enough resources by small companies. From another view, Wee and Chua (2013) argue that in small companies, knowledge sharing happens through cross-functionality and overlapping roles; however, business owners are creators and facilitators of the knowledge management process.

> **Reflective pause:** This was the point at which I really understood that the main elements of having a successful business consulting project are 1) a perfect client, 2) a perfect project, 3) a perfect consultant, and 4) an effective organizational learning system for both the consulting firm and the client. However, as stated earlier, it is rarely possible to have all the above factors in the real world, and in any case, perfection is subjective.

During this research, I reflected that although in some instances, I had presumed that I was going to have successful consulting projects, some participants stopped participating in this research. In this regard, the role of a business consultant in choosing an appropriate approach to deliver the best results is crucial. That shows as a scholar-practitioner, how I approach a business consulting project is much more important than my initial perception of it.

Accordingly, I learned the importance of double/triple-loop learning (Kululanga et al., (2001); Gelderen et al., (2005); and Petrovic (2012)) during this study (see section 4.5.4). Before this study, as a business consultant, I only used single-loop learning in which I used to improve the same approach or only search for perfect clients. By attempting to develop a learning system to study small business owners' learning styles and their required knowledge – in essence, I continued with the same approach.

During this study, especially after the main action research cycle.1 and complementary action research cycle.2, I started applying double-loop learning by questioning the fundamentals and structure of my approaches, such as my pre-assumptions in approaching small business owners (looking for perfect conditions) and the way I used to present my advice (without offering any help to implement it). That's why I decided to adopt a holistic approach that considers and reflects on the small business owners, the businesses' issues, and myself as the business consultant. Accordingly, through the new approach, first, I tried to build trust with small business owners. Second, I attempted to diagnose the personal and professional issues that business owners face. Third, I reflected on myself as the business consultant to see if I can deliver the new knowledge effectively to the business owner and making sure that he can implement it in his business. Fourth, I reflected on the results of my approach and made corrections accordingly. This is how I developed as a scholar-practitioner to have more profound views and approaches while facing small business owners.

In this regard, I learned that the relationship between the business consultant and the client plays a crucial role in the success or failures of business consulting projects. This is supported by Skjølsvik (2017) who state that there are four elements which affect the relationship between a professional service firm and its clients: 1) accessibility of services 2) customization of services 3) interaction and cooperation between clients and the service provider and 4) knowledge at the company level. Schertzer et al., (2012) also argue that relationships between professional service firms and their clients have a solid effect on the co-creation of value by them. Howden and Pressey (2008) also indicate that information symmetry between service providers and clients has a robust effect on developing trustworthy relationships between them. In this regard, Barreto and Martins (2017) emphasize on customer participation during value creation procedures by professional service providers.

To sum up, although there are various methods and approaches for sharing and embedding knowledge in small companies, to make successful consulting projects, they have to be tailored to the learning styles and personality traits of the small business owners. That is what this study was about.

5.4 The Holistic Business Consulting Approach

To develop a profitable business consultancy framework, based on my researches and literature reviews, I decided to revise my business consulting approach as the following. As mentioned in the last section, my holistic approach is based on 1) building trust with small business owners by maintaining constant interaction with them. 2) adopting a flexible attitude to the needs and preferences of the client. 3) proposing effective ways to implement advice and knowledge into the business and 4) offering help to implement the new knowledge rather than merely being the 'provider' of knowledge. However, reflection and critical thinking is an essential part of all these steps. Schön (1991, 2016) states that there are two types of reflective thinking 1) reflection in action, which is about experiencing, thinking about the next action, and acting accordingly. 2) reflection on the action which reviewing what has happened and what I would do if I had another chance or in the future based on my learning. Regarding my holistic approach, I have both types of reflection for each step and have a comprehensive reflection on the action at the end of each business consulting project.

Each stage, therefore, may need to be re-visited to rectify 'findings' and assumptions held by myself and/or the client (see Fig. 5.3 below). The five-step plan is depicted as a series of mini action research cycles encompassing planning, data gathering, action, evaluation & reflection. As such, the plan has the dynamic qualities necessary to allow for corrections and additions. Moreover, it and goes as far as allowing for a total re-think of the project's scope and direction commensurate with double-loop learning.

Step.1: Building Trust (See section 5.1 for rationale)

The purpose of this step is to show the small business owners that as a business consultant, I have enough experience and expertise to help them solve their business issues.

Construction:

Set the objectives of this step, which is building trust with the business owner to be able to go to the data-gathering phase. Collecting information regarding the potential client, his business issues and concerns, the industry he works in, and so on.

Planning:

Preparing my materials which includes the benefits of business consulting services, and my expertise.

Taking Action:

- Sharing my business consulting catalog, which describes my background and services to the business owner.
- Sharing some of my informative videos in which I talked about different professional success tips and also my former clients' testimonials.

Evaluating My Action & Reflection:

- Did I build trust with the business owner? If No, what should I do?

- Is the trust broad-scope or narrow-scope?
- How can I keep a trustworthy relationship with the client?
- What did I learn from this step?

Step.2: Data Gathering (See section 5.1 for rationale)

In this section, my role is like a medical doctor in which I need to learn about small business owners' issues by interviewing them and conducting some tests and analysis.

Construction:

Set the objectives of this step, which is collecting reliable data regarding the business owner and his/her business. Gathering more information regarding the potential client, the industry he/she works in, and so on.

Planning:

Preparing various questionnaires and tests to collect reliable data which can help me in diagnosing the business issue and offering the solution and also setting the interview time and location with the business owner.

Taking Action:

Interviewing the business owner to collect the following data:

- **The Business Owner Analysis. (See section 5.1 for rationale)**

I need to acquire the following information to learn more about the small business owner. This step should take less than 30 minutes, not to bore the business owner.

  - The business owner's mindset regarding business consulting services
  - The business owner's learning styles (Honey& Mumford's; VARK)
  - The business owner's personal and professional goals.

- **The Business Owner's Required Knowledge:**

I need to acquire the following information to learn more about the small business owner's professional issues through an interview. I also need to conduct a business analysis to verify the data collected from the business owner.

  - The business situation and issues. (See appendix.3 for sample questions)
  - The business owner's required management skills (Time management, planning...). Here I am going to ask the small business owner to describe his regular day at the workplace.
  - The business owner's required knowledge (Tacit/ Explicit). (See appendix.3 for sample questions)

Evaluating My Action and Reflection:

1. Did I collect the required data? If Yes, go to the next step; If No, go to the next question.

2. Did I still have a trustworthy relationship with the client? If Yes, review data gathering approaches; If No, go back to the step.1 to build trust.

Step.3: Diagnose (See section 5.1 for rationale)

Based on the information collected during the last two steps and reflecting on my own knowledge and capabilities as the business consultant, I answer the following questions:

- What's the business issue and how it could be solved?
- What does the business owner consider as value?
- Do I, as a business consultant, have enough knowledge and experience to solve the issue?
- How can I help the business owner to solve the issue? This may include analyzing my power and influence to address the issue.

Accordingly, my action research cycle includes the following steps:

Construction:

Set the objective of this step, which is diagnosing the business issue correctly. Organizing the collected data to be able to diagnose the problem.

Planning:

Preparing charts, forms, and other tools and resources which might help me in diagnosing the business issue.

Taking Action

Diagnosing the business issue and answering the questions mentioned earlier.

Evaluating My Action and Reflection:

1. Was I aware of my mindset, my personal biases, my learning issues, my culture, and my communication style during this step? If Yes, go to the next question
2. Did I diagnose the issue correctly? If Yes, go to the next step; If No, go to the next question.
3. Did I collect the required data? If Yes, go to the next question.
4. Do I still have a trustworthy relationship with the client? If Yes, review data gathering approaches; If No, go back to the step.1. to build trust.
5. What did I learn from the data gathering step?

Step.4: Offering My Solution (See section 5.2 for rationale)

Here, I offer my solution and explain my business consulting procedure in addressing the issue. This may include various steps as the following:

Construction:

Set the objective of this step, which is developing the best solution for the business issue. Reviewing the potential solutions and costs and benefits of them. Choosing the best solution.

Planning:

- Developing my proposal and agreement for the business owner.
- Developing a plan of action to present and implement my solution.
- Setting the time and location of my meeting with the business owner.

Taking Action:

Meeting with the business owner to go through different actions such as:

- Reviewing the basics of my plan to solve the problem. Talking about the value which the client receives by my services.
- Going through my various consulting packages, including the part-time CEO package in which I work as the part-time CEO and help the business owner and his team in implementing my advice.
- Reaching to a conceptual agreement in which we agree on the goals, factors to measure the consultant's performance (tangible/ intangible outcomes), consulting procedures, and fees.
- Signing the consulting agreement (I may not sign the business consulting agreement with participants of my thesis).

Evaluating My Action and Reflection:

1. Did I reach an agreement with the client? If Yes, go to the next step; If No, go to the next question.
2. Did I choose the right approach to present my solution? If Yes, go to the next question, If No, review my approach and make corrections.
3. Did I diagnose the issue correctly? If Yes, have another meeting with the client to learn more about his/her concerns; If No, go to the next question.
4. Do I still have a trustworthy relationship with the client? If Yes, go to the next question; If No, solve the trust issues.
5. Did I collect the required data? If Yes, request another meeting with the client to take another chance; If No, go to the data gathering step and collect new data.
6. What did I learn from this step?

Step.5: Preparing and Delivering the New Knowledge (See section 5.2 for rationale)

If I reach an agreement with the business owner, I will need to start customizing my consulting package based on the client's need and deliver it accordingly. This may include the following steps:

Construction:

Set the objectives of this step, which is delivering new knowledge effectively and efficiently. Reviewing various ways to achieve the objectives of the business consulting project.

Planning:

Finalizing the action plan to implement my advice and preparing to start the project.

Taking Action:

- Customizing my business consulting solution based on the information collected during the last meetings and my researches.
- Providing an action plan to solve the issue. That might include various steps and milestones to solve the business issue.
- Transferring the new knowledge. Providing bite-sized advice that is easy to be implemented.
- Installing the task management app on the business owner's cell phone to follow up for the required actions
- Offering help for implementation. This may change our consulting agreement if the business has not already asked for implementation help in our agreement.
- Setting up the time and date for the follow-up sessions

Evaluating My Action and Reflection:

1. Did I choose the right approach to deliver new knowledge? If Yes, go to the next question, If No, review my approach and make corrections.
2. Did I diagnose the issue correctly? If Yes, go to the question.4; If No, go to the next question.
3. Did I collect the required data? If Yes, go to the next question.
4. Do I still have a trustworthy relationship with the client? If Yes, review data gathering approaches; If No, solve the trust issues.
5. What did I learn from this step?

Developing a successful consulting project (See section 5.3 for rationale)

As mentioned earlier, a successful business consulting project has various requirements that as the business consultant, I do my best to apply as the following:

- Following up with the business owner or his/her team during implementation
- Reviewing the results of taking actions by/with the business owner
- Evaluating organizational learning in the business
- Reviewing the progress and make corrections
- Setting up other required plans and actions

Reflection:

1. Did we achieve the objectives of the consulting project? If No, go to the next question.
2. Did the client implement my advice correctly? If Yes, go to the next question, If No, review the implementation issues and make corrections.
3. Do I still have a trustworthy relationship with the client? If Yes, go to the next question; If No, solve the trust issues.
4. Did I choose the right approach to deliver new knowledge? If Yes, go to the next question, If No, review my approach and make corrections.
5. Did I diagnose the issue correctly? If Yes, go to the question.2; If No, go to the next question.

6. Did I collect the required data? If Yes, go to the question.2 If No, review the collected data and conduct a new data-gathering step.
7. What did I learn from this step?

Refection on My Approaches and the Results of the Project.

This is a reflection on the action at the end of any business consulting project and may include asking the following questions:

1. Did I choose the right approach to present my services?
2. Which part of my knowledge was more valuable in the eyes of small business owners?
3. Was I aware of my mindset, my personal biases, my learning issues, my culture, and my communication style during this project?
4. Did I keep my trustworthy relationship with the business owner in various stages of the project?
5. Which changes do I need to make in my future approaches and which skills do I need to learn to be more successful in my profession?

I will address these questions in the next chapter.

Figure 5.3 below illustrates the latest business process for my consulting firm:

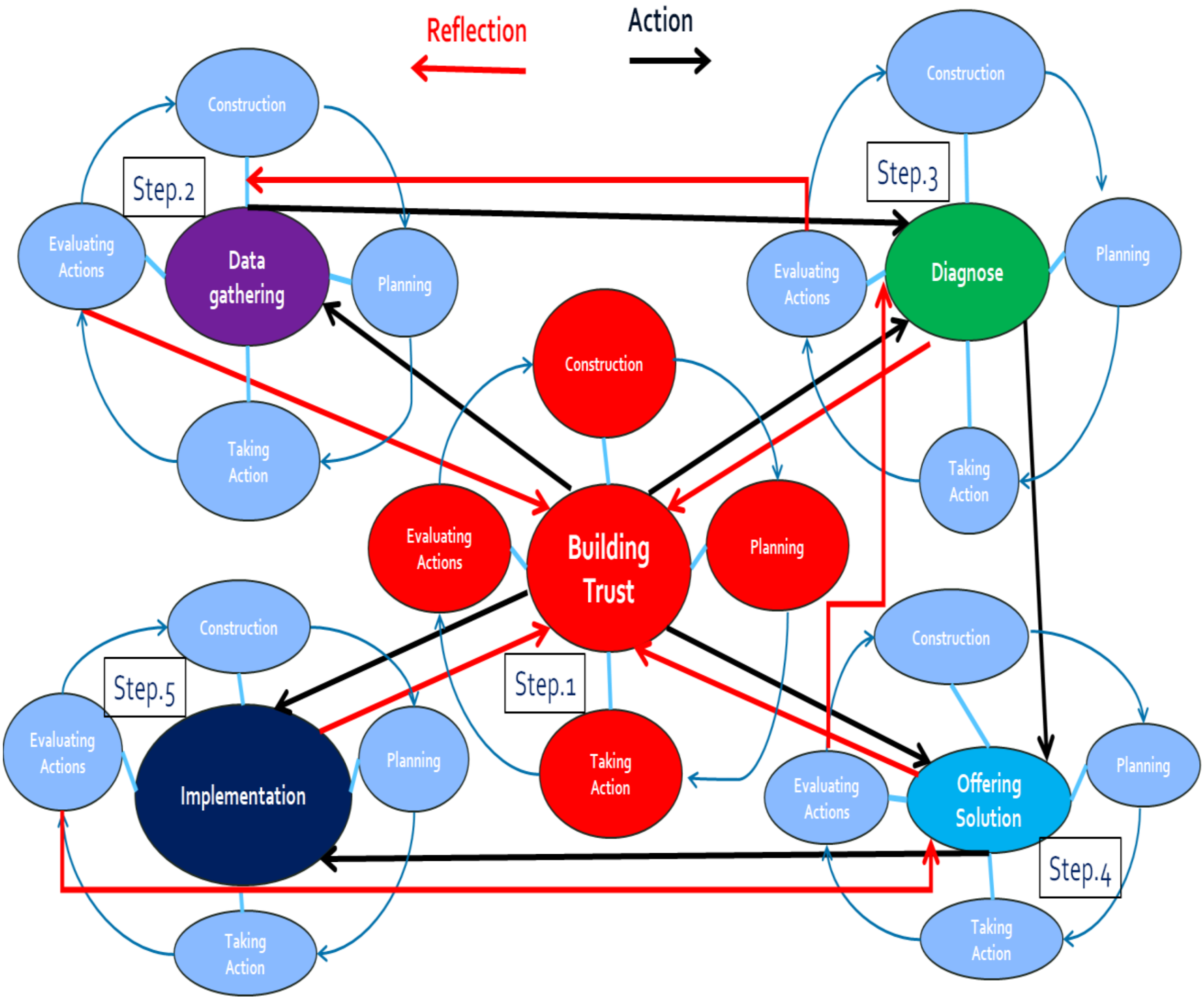

Figure 5.3: My holistic business consulting approach

5.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, as a scholar-practitioner, I discussed my findings, which helped me answer my research questions during this study. In this regard, I found that personal characteristics and objectives of small business owners have a direct impact on their desire to acquire new knowledge. Having a trustworthy relationship with the business consultant and enough time to learn and implement new knowledge are other factors that affect hiring business consulting services by small business owners. In this regard, I discovered that most small business owners are busy with daily activities to solve business issues to survive; therefore, they have little time available for planning and improvement. In regard to financial barriers in hiring my services, although I faced this issue through my career as a business consultant, I was not able to verify it during this study since I could not charge participants for my consulting advice.

Regarding the knowledge that small business owners consider valuable and want to pay for, I discovered that small business owners have different perceptions regarding business consulting services (see table 5.2). I also found out that as a business consultant, not only I need to be knowledgeable and have the experience to solve small businesses' issues, but also I need to provide customized, understandable solutions, offer help to implement my advice and be in constant interactions with small business owners to deliver successful business consulting projects. This is not always possible, as I discovered when dealing with a realtor (see section 4.6.4)due to the nature of the client's business, this project put me way outside the scope of my knowledge as the technicalities associated with that industry demand a deep level of understanding and a great deal of experience. Before this thesis and my research, I would have judged the project and my part in it as a failure, but it became clear in this instance that the client's perception of 'value' was mainly limited to the addition of technical expertise (Nolan, 2003) which I do not possess. Seen from a personal level, experiencing too many such 'failures' is inevitably harmful to one's self-belief and esteem. And, due to constant exposure to varied industries over time, it is important for self-preservation that I am able to start out by framing each project using appropriate criteria, otherwise, there is a danger of losing my own self-confidence and efficacy as a business consultant, which may lead me to quit altogether, i.e., engaging in triple-loop learning by re-evaluating my own self-worth.

In this regard, I learned that how I approach a business consulting project, and its elements is much more important than my initial perception of it as a 'perfect' or 'imperfect' Instead, it is vital for business consultants to reflect upon what they themselves really 'know,' and to work within those domains of knowledge, at least until they have gained the experience and understanding to extend their zone of influence. This is where the 'Holistic Approach' is effective.

Accordingly, I developed a holistic approach that is so helpful in approaching small business owners as a business consultant. This approach considers all my findings and learning during this study and includes different steps such as 1) building initial trust with small business owners, 2) data gathering which may include analyzing the business owner to learn about his goals, mindset regarding business consulting, learning styles and his required knowledge; analyzing the business to find the issues that the business owner may not know 3) diagnosing the problem. 4) offering solutions which include informing the business owner regarding the business consulting process and reaching a conceptual agreement about the value and success of the project 5) delivering new knowledge and helping in the implementation. In this regard, having constant interactions with the business owner during execution, reviewing the job and making corrections, and critical thinking during and after each step are the main requirements of having a successful business consulting project.

This holistic approach used correctly as a means for engaging with double-loop learning, is proposed as actionable knowledge that could be used by other small business consulting firms or professional service providers who deal with small business owners.

At the end of this chapter, developing a holistic business consulting approach based on action research was both exciting and satisfying for me. Accordingly, I needed to review and organize the knowledge that could be passed to others as the results of this study.

In the next chapter, I discuss my evaluation and conclusion of this study.

6. Evaluation and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I evaluate my research in terms of the following points: 1) how well my research meets the stated goals of my project i.e., what worked and what is lacking. 2) the actionability of my findings, given what I now know about their reception by my clients. 3) what elements of the Action Research project challenged me to approach problems differently (reflexivity) and when they occurred; 4) How has this changed my approach to the solution of problems.

During this study, as a scholar-practitioner, I studied literature and resources on various topics such as small business characteristics, small business management, success in small companies, business consulting in small companies, developing learning systems, and so on. I also interviewed eighteen small business owners to learn about their learning styles, their required knowledge, and their mindsets regarding business consulting services. During different action research cycles, I learned about the factors which impact small business owners' desire to learn and implement my advice or not. I also learned as a scholar-practitioner, which factors I need to consider in preparing and delivering the new knowledge to small business owners. These learnings brought me new insights and helped me develop a holistic business consulting approach. Accordingly, I added a new section in which I explain what I learned during this study, which is considered as a contribution to the actionable knowledge and could be used by other professional service provider firms, especially business consultants.

As an insider action researcher, I had some limitations and challenges such as persuading small business owners to participate in this research, finding a mutually agreed time to interview participants, driving long distances to participants' offices and facing participation drop out by some small business owners (see section 3.2.1). However, all these challenges also brought me new insights and helped me, not only to revise my business consulting approaches, but also to develop as a scholar-practitioner.

6.1 How well my research meets the stated goals of my project i.e., what worked and what is lacking.

As mentioned in the introduction, my consulting firm was suffering from a lack of paying clients leading my research to be focused around finding answers to the following questions:

1) What are the mindsets of small business owners regarding business consulting services, especially my consulting firm? Small business owners are my main clients; therefore, learning about their perspectives would help me a lot in removing potential barriers in hiring my services.

2) Which types of knowledge and services as a business consultant can I provide for small business owners and managers, so they consider it valuable and want to pay for it? By learning about what small business owners consider as value, I would be able to customize my consulting services in a way that could create win-win situations for both small business owners as clients and myself as the business consultant.

3) How can I develop a profitable business consultancy framework encompassing the modes of learning, forms of knowledge, and media for knowledge exchange valued by clients? By creating a new approach, I would be able to have a more organized system in dealing with small business owners from the first meeting to finishing the projects. This way, getting more clients, delivering successful consulting projects, and making more profit would be more achievable.

In relation to the first question, it became clear that managing a small business is a challenging job for most small business owners due to lack of having updated business management knowledge (Gottfridsson, 2014; and Scuotto et al., 2016); their need to multi-task which provides no extra time for personal and professional development, and finally lack of having enough financial resources. (Łobacz et al., 2015; Massaro et al., 2015; and Zieba et al., 2015). In this regard, I noticed that having more time is one of the crucial elements which enables small business owners to focus more on fundamental business issues such as the lack of having enough cash flow. That's why, in particular, time management, delegation, and task management are the three primary skills that help small business owners in improving their enterprises (McNamara, 2016). However, persuading small business owners to learn and update their skills is not an easy job either.

During this study, I learned the importance of behavioral factors in accepting changes and making decisions by small business owners (Burd and Hallsworth 2016; and Owens et al., 2011). As an example, small business owners may have different mindsets, limitations, and Intrinsic motivations in applying new changes to their companies (See sections 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.4, 4.5.3). I also met small business owners who did not have enough metacognitive capability to analyze their current knowledge and find their required types of knowledge (Fogarty, 1994; and Sugiharto et al., 2018). As an example, while one of the participants believed that her main business issues were marketing and micro-management, I discovered that having inefficient business procedures is the main problem of her business (See section 4.6.1). That might also be due to the lack of feeling the urgency to solve those issues. Most small business owners are in survival mode (Adams et al., 2015) and busy with day-to-day business challenges, which do not allow them to think about other matters until they become critical. Thus, the task of persuading owners to effect change at a personal level is far more complicated than merely helping them change a method (McKenna, 2006).

From another aspect, during this study, it also became clear that small business owners have various definitions of value and successful outcomes (Owens et al., 2011; Gorgievski et al., 2011). As an example, during my interviews, while one of the participants was looking to improve the customer service of his business as value, the other business owner preferred to have more clients as successful outcomes of the new knowledge (See section 4.1.1.3). Therefore, learning about small business owners' value system and personal objectives is so crucial in helping them achieve their desired results.

As a small business owner, many things that I learned about other small business owners, in general, are applied to me as well. As an example, I noticed that my personal characteristics and objectives have a hand in hand relationship with my professional activities as a business consultant. This could be applied in various situations, such as persuading potential clients, accepting new clients, or even attending networking events. I always believe that peace of mind and health are two of the most precious things a human can have; that's why I might have hesitated in dealing with my potential clients or had avoided some challenges in my career. Accordingly, I decided to reflect more on my thoughts and personal characteristics in my professional endeavors.

In relation to the second research question, during this study, I noticed that most small business owners do not have a clear idea of how business consulting works (Gray.D et al., 2011). Therefore, it is important to inform them regarding the methods and benefits of business consulting (see section 5.2) in solving small companies' challenges before sending them any proposal. In this regard, I learned that there are many factors which may have positive effects on business consulting in small companies such as 1) a client who has resources, 2) has a positive mindset regarding business consulting services, 3) has a trustworthy relationship with the consultant who can provide knowledge which is valuable in the eyes of the business owner, so he would like to pay for it (See section 5.3 for rationale).

The above factors, when (rarely) present, illustrate 'The Perfect Business Consulting Project' (see fig 5.2). Knowledge of these factors is, however, necessary to recognize when certain elements are not perfect, to customize the knowledge and knowledge transfer approaches by the business consultant.

A further element of 'The Perfect Business Consulting Project' is a 'successful outcome,' generally denoted by recognizable improvements having been made to the business as a result of the project. This element, however, also implies behaviors and actions on the part of the owner in implementing business consulting advice. In this regard, an essential part of my learning during this study has been in recognizing the relationships between psychology and management (Argyris and Schön 1974; and Kuhn et al., 2017). As mentioned earlier, small business owners have a crucial role in the success or failure of their businesses. In this regard, learning about their perceptions regarding business consulting services and value provided by a consultant (Stoll and Brookshire, 2012; Forstenlechner et al., 2008; and Vos et al., 2016) is very helpful in persuading them not only to hire my services but also implementing my advice to get the desired results. As an example, during this study, small business owners who had positive mindsets regarding business consulting services were more accessible to approach than those who believed that hiring outside advisors is not effective in solving their issues. However, behavioral factors must be considered for both the business owner and the consultant as two essential parties involved in any consulting project.

In this regard, based on Burd and Hallsworth (2016), the behavioral factors which have a direct effect on the success of a business consulting project 1) positive mindset and courage 2) removing obstacles in conducting the project 3) social connections and support 4) intrinsic motivation 5) goal setting and feedback. In the following table, I show the effects of behavioral factors in developing a successful consulting project based on my findings during this research.

Behavioral Factors	The Consultant	The Business Owner
Positive mindset	Having a positive mindset regarding working with the business owner and the project. With a positive mindset, the business consultant may work harder and more enthusiastic to deliver successful outcomes.	Having a positive mindset and courage to learn and implement new knowledge. When Small business owners are cooperative and have positive mindsets regarding outside advisors, the business consulting process will be much smoother.
Removing obstacles to conduct the job	Having simple procedures and smooth interactions with the business owner. Developing a holistic but simplified approach makes the consultant's job easier in identifying and transferring the required knowledge.	Simplifying the business consulting process in determining small business owners' learning styles, business issues, and transferring the required knowledge will make the process less complicated and more understandable for small business owners.
Social connections and support	Having a social connection and support from the business owner and his/her staff. Feeling welcomed by the business owner and his/her team is so important in bonding stronger relationships with the business consultant and the client and achieving the desired results.	Providing social and emotional support for small business owners by the business consultant and team members is another essential behavioral factor in learning and implementing new knowledge.
Intrinsic motivation	Having self-satisfaction and feeling achievement in solving the business owner's issues.	Having self-satisfaction and feeling achievement and empowerment in solving his/her business problems.
Goal setting	Achieving personal and professional goals, such as delivering a great job and gaining financial benefits.	Splitting big objectives to small achievable milestones to encourage small business owners to learn and implement new knowledge.

Table 6.1: Considering behavioral factors in developing a successful consulting project

From another aspect, I also learned that developing a trustworthy relationship (Grayson et al., 2008) with business owners and offering a service to help implement my advice are other elements not only to get hired by small business owners but also creating more satisfying results for both the business owner and the business consultant. In this regard, it became clear that one of the main requirements of having a trustworthy relationship with small business owners is having knowledge and experience of their industry as defined by Davenport, De Long and Beers (1998, P.43) "Information combined with experience, context, interpretation, and reflection: it is a high-value form of information that is ready to apply to decisions and actions." For example, since I have been working in the medical industry for more than ten years, I was able to easily demonstrate my 'insider' knowledge and capabilities to the Hospice & Home Health care center business owner.

The importance of having constant interactions with small business owners (Casidya and Nyadzayob, 2019; Day et al., 2006; and Chaston and Baker 1998) is another knowledge that I gained during this research. While I used to advise the small business owners and got back to them in a week or ten days to see if they implemented the new knowledge, I learned that having constant interactions with my clients is one of the pillars of developing a successful business consulting project.

Finally, in relation to the third research question, in my quest to develop a learning system, I began by using various Learning Styles tools (Appendices 4,5) in a bid to provide them with information in ways appropriate to their personal learning styles. However, after the first iteration of Action Research, it became apparent that this understanding was of limited value for, if as stated above, the owners did not have the time to learn or had perceptions regarding outside advisors negatively affecting their desire for new knowledge, then it would be wasted. On discovering that they had not even attempted to read my advice, I began to understand that other factors were at play. The Learning Styles inventories were limited in that, although indicating "different people prefer to process information in different ways" (Pashler et al., 2009, P.106) and "therefore learn more effectively when they receive instruction in a way that conforms to their preferences" (Cuevas, 2015, P.309), they did not inform me other attributes of the learning process such as why, when or what they wanted to learn.

Accordingly, there are pitfalls which may put the success of a business consulting project in danger as the following:

1) Losing trust during different steps of the holistic approach. Although a business consultant may start a project through a trust-worthy relationship with a business owner, that doesn't guarantee to keep this relationship later. In this regard, many factors affect trust during a consulting project such as 1) conflicting between the business owner and consultant in determining the issue and proposed solutions. 2) adding more costs than benefits, 3) not achieving the desired results.

2) Losing the perceived value by the business owner. The business owner may change his mind regarding the value of the project or what the business consultant can provide.

3) Losing enthusiasm from the business owner due to personal and professional issues.

4) Getting back to old-time management habits and survival mode by the business owner (see section 5.1).

5) Not achieving a conceptual agreement, which includes agreeing on the objectives and timeline of the project before starting the project. This may provide many issues in the future.

6) Offering solutions by the business consultant based on wrong assumptions.

7) Offering business consulting services beyond the scope of knowledge and expertise of the business consultant.

8) Not considering and reviewing behavioral factors in business consulting projects (See table 6.1).

In this regard, although discovering small business owners' cognitive/behavioral factors, learning styles, required knowledge, and challenges are important in delivering more potent consulting services, analyzing and learning about myself as a consultant is also a crucial part of having a successful consulting project. In this regard, as a business consultant, I learned that I should answer the following questions (applying single-loop and double-loop learning) in various phases of my holistic approach.

The following are my reflective questions and answers regarding this study.

1. Did I choose the right approach to present my services?

Although the way I used to present my services before this study and even the first drafts of my holistic approach was linear (analyzing only small business owners and their desires to hire and implement my consulting advice) during this study, when I noticed that most small business owners as participants in this study, did not implement the knowledge that I transferred to them, I decided to change to a comprehensive approach which analyzes different sides and parties involved in business consulting services (small business owners, the business consultant and businesses) to be able to deliver the desired results. That was the point that I noticed that in a consulting project, I am both the knowledge provider and the learner, so I needed to review my own thoughts and approaches in facing small business owners as well. Accordingly, I went back to the literature and learned about new factors which would help me in delivering more value to small business owners, such as considering behavioral factors for both myself and them: having knowledge and experience in the industries that my clients work in, providing bite-sized advice to be more understandable by small business owners, offering help to implement my advice and more interactions with small business owners. By applying the above factors and reflecting on my thoughts and actions through later action research cycles, it helped me develop a holistic business consulting approach for my business.

Accordingly, my final model was more dynamic, including constant reflections through different action research cycles. This is the way; I developed as a scholar-practitioner. However, learning about small business owners' personalities, leadership styles and organizational culture will be so helpful in providing a more comprehensive approach in facing small business owners.

2. Which part of my knowledge was more valuable in the eyes of small business owners?

During this study, I noticed that I could provide two types of knowledge for small business owners as participants in this study. 1) specialized knowledge based on the industries in which my clients work in such as health care industry. 2) soft knowledge such as time management, planning, task management which are needed by most small business owners regardless of industries they work in. Accordingly, I learned that having specialized knowledge in my clients' industry is one of the main requirements of not only getting hired by small business owners, but also developing successful busines consulting projects. I deduced that my lack industry-specific knowledge probably led some small business owners to withdraw their participation in the study due to their lack of confidence in me, thus preventing me in assisting them to develop much needed soft skills and knowledge. From another view, I also learned that offering help in implementing my advice and having constant interactions are valuable in the eyes of small business owners.

3. Was I aware of my mindset, cognitive/ behavioral factors, personal biases, learning issues, and communication style?

During this study, when I was not successful in transferring knowledge to small business owners, I decided to change my approach from single-loop learning to double and triple-loop learning by questioning my own assumptions, approaches and skills in providing the new knowledge. In this regard, I had various reflective pauses in which I analyzed my thoughts, my personal biases, and consulting approaches. By doing this I was able to reflect upon my own biases and habits, that I had acquired over time as a consultant – not all of which were appropriate to each situation. As an example, when I noticed that some participants dropped out although they showed interest at the beginning of this study, I noticed that I had wrong impression regarding the success of my business consulting approaches. From another view, I also noticed that providing a business consulting services is much more complicated than learning about small business owners' required knowledge and the way they wanted to learn the new knowledge. That's why, I had to consider other factors such as behavioral factors in both the consultant and small business owners.

6.2 The actionability of my findings given what I now know about their reception by my clients.

During this study, I learned new insights and knowledge, which is considered as my contribution to actionable knowledge and could be used by other professional service provider firms, especially business consultants. In this regard, it became clear that Action Research was an effective tool in solving real-world issues. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, one of the main challenges of my consulting firm was the shortage of clients; that's why I decided to develop a new approach for my business by using Action Research methodology. In this regard, as stated by Greenwood and Levin (2007), during this research, as an insider researcher, not only I was part of the study than an observer but also, I reflected on various aspects of this study to improve it. In this regard, I was initially disappointed with the results of my Action Research cycles in which I attempted to make changes to my business by means of a simple, linear style learning system and though a series of small, incremental changes. As a result of further necessary reading, I was converted to Argyris's double-loop learning theory (and to realizing the importance of feedback loops) which led me to adopt my holistic approach (see section 4.5.4), In so doing, I was able to achieve better results in transferring new knowledge to small companies. This holistic approach might be used by other business consulting companies that work with small businesses where the business owners are almost always the primary decision-makers and gatekeepers of new knowledge. In this regard, as a scholar-practitioner, I learned that most small business owners are too busy with daily business activities to engage in co-learning with a consultant. Thus, teaching time management techniques - particularly Covey's 'holistic' approach (see table 5.1) may help in this matter.

When hiring a consultant, small business owners may have inaccurate understanding of their own knowledge requirements or about the real business issue that needs fixing (see section 4.4.1.3). That might be due to small business owners' mental patterns or behavioral factors. Therefore, the role of a business consultant is to evaluate the limitations to their own knowledge and to verifying their understanding with the business owner before attempting to reach a solution. In this regard, the business consultant should, ideally, have tacit knowledge and experience in a specific industry to be able, not only to build trust with small business owners in this field but also to deliver a successful business consulting project (see section 4.6). However, if the consultant does not have this knowledge, he might still pass on 'soft' skills and knowledge about time management, people management, decision making, organizational learning and so on.

Understanding the meaning of 'knowledge' is critical for the consultant to make the necessary changes to her thinking and practice and the ability to differentiate between explicit and tacit knowledge forms is a basic requirement in this quest. The ability to discern in the moment, which form of knowledge is required together with the ability to express that requirement appropriately, are critical factors in ensuring the knowledge is transferred to the client.

Thus, for codified – explicit forms, the consultant should be prepared to develop instructions, codes of practice, templates, graphs, and charts and so on, because 'Objective' or 'Explicit' knowledge can be "readily written down, codified and understood". Furthermore, "it is not specific or idiosyncratic to the firm or person possessing it" (Sobol and Lei, 1994, p.170).
In discerning a requirement for Tacit knowledge, the consultant must be aware of its characteristics, as described in the Literature Review, to which I add the following as a reminder.

Polanyi (1966), in referring to Tacit knowledge, stated, "I shall reconsider human knowledge by starting from the fact that we can know more that we can tell" (p.4). He and others (see e.g. Nonaka,1991; Kogut & Zander 1992) describe tacit knowledge as 'personal knowledge', consisting of mental knowledge which are used in certain situations. Moreover, it is practical – 'know-how' knowledge and context specific. Hence tacit knowledge is more fundamental than explicit knowing. "We can know more than we can tell, and we can tell nothing without relying on our awareness of things we may not be able to tell". Polanyi (1966) claims that tacit knowledge has two distinct properties: the 'proximal' and 'distal' terms. The proximal term is that which is closest to us and might be described as the tactile or awareness (such as a sense or feeling) link to a knowledge item. The distal term is a more distant or abstract picture, such as the task in hand, to which we refer when actually performing an act. Polanyi stressed the unity that this proximal/distal pair constitutes, and that we should consider both as interminably linked. Despite not being easily expressible in words, tacit knowledge may be both shared and taught (Stenmark, 2001). Choo (op.cit) explains that through rich modes of discourse including analogies, stories and metaphors, tacit knowledge may be revealed.

Attitudes toward risk are also a deciding factor for making the holistic approach workable. The consultant (and the client) must have a strong desire and commitment to changing their practice; to re-evaluate their perception of self. For example, is he or she prepared to face the realization that they really do not know as much as they thought they did, that their own knowledge or skills are lacking? Is she or he prepared to risk failure along the way by trying to learn and practice new things? The flip side to adopting new practices is that the individual might already possess may skills required without consciously realize it. For example, many people have inherently good soft skills, such as listening, empathizing, and questioning, which can be put to good use in a coaching role or for finding root causes.

Behavioral factors from both the consultant and the client also have a crucial role in success or failure of business consulting projects (See table 6.1). As an example, considering personal goals and providing emotional supports were important factors in making better communications and understanding between small business owners and the business consultant. The consultant must also have constant on-going contacts in order to help to implement the new knowledge. Some changes, however, take longer than others, for example, changes to an organization's culture where shifts are required to deeply rooted beliefs and attitudes that have been built up over many years, will usually outlive the time limit of a consulting project. Similarly, should the small business owner's leadership style be the issue for change, then that too could be beyond the project's scope, as it will require the owner to engage in double or even triple-loop learning by questioning their assumptions, thoughts, or making fundamental changes to their businesses. In both these cases, it becomes the consultant's job to provide the tools and techniques to enable the owner to make the changes required.

Accordingly, there is no perfect condition in the real world; therefore, that is the role of the business consultant to extract good results out of imperfect situations (see section 5.3). That insight could be applied in both personal and professional lives.

6.3 What elements of the Action Research project challenged me to approach problems differently (reflexivity) and when they occurred. How has this changed my approach to the solution of problems.

Throughout this study, my ways of thinking, rationalizing, and analyzing improved dramatically. While I used to adapt shortcuts and templates in dealing with small business owners, providing a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. The chances of achieving a successful outcome were, therefore, limited. During this research, I learned that small businesses (and their owners) comprise a complex mixture of elements (Łobacz et al., 2015; Falkner and Hiebl, 2015; and Brouthers et al. 1998) even when from the same industry, such as small business owners' learning styles, characteristics, goals, and business success criteria (Stoll and Brookshire, 2012). Reviewing different literatures regarding small business owners and business consulting in small companies not only broadened my knowledge but also informed me that there are still some areas that I need to work on, such as developing cognitive and behavioral personality profiles for small business owners to able to serve them better.

In shifting my personal paradigm from experienced consultant to scholar-practitioner, the biggest leap in personal learning was achieved by recognizing the importance of understanding and asking the right questions (Marquardt, 2007), before seeking answers or 'solutions.' This mature understanding developed both from ongoing successes and failures throughout my Action Research. As an example, while I used to criticize small business owners not interesting in improving their companies, during this study, I learned to question and reflect on my approaches as well (See sections 4.3, 4.4.1.4, 4.5.4 reflective pauses). This new knowledge helped me a lot in customizing my business consulting approaches.

Regarding problem-solving, I learned to have a holistic approach rather than finding solutions by reviewing visible matters (Grint, 2005). As an example, I learned that one of the main causes of not buying my advice by small business owners was the lack of having time to implement my business suggestions; therefore, offering help to implement my advice might be so helpful in persuading small business owners to work with me (see section 4.5.4). This approach helped me a lot in dealing with new potential clients and enabled me to make agreements with some new clients such as the Home Health and Hospice company (see section 4.6). Being realistic and avoid perfectionism were other skills that I improved in myself throughout this study. As an example, while I used to search for perfect clients (see sections 5.1 and 5.2) and consequently perfect consulting projects, by finishing this research, I learned that it is rarely possible to have all the desired elements in a client. Perfectionism was probably one of the main causes of lacking enough clients for my business consulting firm before. This gaining helped me a lot not only in my career but also in my personal life as well that it is not possible to have perfect conditions all the time; therefore, it is important to see how to consider different variables, ask insightful questions, take actions, and review my actions to bring successful outcomes out of imperfection conditions.

By analyzing various points of view through interviews and literature review and also customizing the results based on my situation, were other important skills that I improved during my thesis. I gained other crucial skills through reflections, and subsequent correction of my mistakes were other crucial skills that I gained during this study. To sum up, during this study, I learned how to learn better.

6.4 Future Research

I discovered the importance of learning about the small business owners' personalities in approaching them. In this regard, applying different personality tests and finding connections between various personality types and potential business consulting clients might be helpful in creating a more comprehensive business consulting approach. However, since small business owners have less free time for new development, persuading them to take different learning styles and personality tests might have a negative impact, that's why selecting tests with the lowest number of questions might be helpful. A further topic for future study requires is marketing for business consulting services. As an example, how to use online marketing tools to attract potential business consulting clients. During this study, I talked about various approaches after meeting a potential client for the first time. Persuading small business owners to meet or contact for the first time is another important area that need to be studied.

Accordingly, the main questions for future research might be 1) what is the relationship between the personality type of small business owners and their desire to hire a business consultant and learn new knowledge? 2) which factors do impact small business owners' desire to contact a business consultant for help? 3) how to make a successful business consulting project while not meeting the clients in person?

In regard to choosing the research methodology for future research, I believe that action research is a very effective way that not only helps the scholar-practitioner to target the real-world issue but also it allows him/her to make corrections and adjustment through various action research cycles. To choose the research method, a mixed quantitative and qualitative method might helpful; A quantitative method to ask participants to take personality tests and a qualitative method to determine which factors persuade small business owners to contact a business consultant for help. However, the scholar-practitioner may use other types of research tools besides in-person interviews such as virtual meetings and video conferencing to collect data.

6.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I evaluated my research in terms of the following points: 1) how well my research meets the stated goals of my project i.e., what worked and what is lacking. 2) the actionability of my findings, given what I now know about their reception by my clients. 3) what elements of the Action Research project challenged me to approach problems differently (reflexivity) and when they occurred; 4) How has this changed my approach to the solution of problems?

This research showed the effectiveness of action research in solving real-world issues, such as the lack of having enough clients by my consulting firm. During this study, by interviewing eighteen small business owners and going through different action research cycles, it became clear that managing a small business is a difficult job due to the lack of enough resources such as time and business management knowledge. In this regard, I learned that small business owners' mindsets, limitations, Intrinsic motivations, and their perceptions of value have essential impacts in applying new changes to their companies.

Throughout this research, I learned that most small business owners did not have a clear idea of how a business consultant can help them, which is one of the challenges of applying business consulting in small companies. In this regard, I learned that having a trustworthy relationship with a business consultant, customizing business consulting advice, helping in implementing business consulting solutions and constant interactions are factors which not only persuade small business owners to hire a business consultant, but also develop a successful business consulting project. Accordingly, I learned that there is no perfect situation in which all the requirements to have a successful business consulting projects exist before starting a project. That's why the role of the business consultant in getting good results out of imperfect conditions is crucial. This insight helped me develop a holistic business consulting approach which not only reviewed small business owners' learning styles and the required knowledge but also helped me reflect on my knowledge, approaches, and mindset as the business consultant to deliver the best results.

I also learned that looking for a perfect set of relational conditions: considering only superficial variables and not having a more in-depth analysis through double-loop / triple- loop learning, were the leading causes of not having enough business consulting clients by my firm. This new insight also helped my improvement as a scholar-practitioner.

Accordingly, I suggested future research that may complete this study, such as studying the relationships between the personality of small business owners in accepting and transferring new knowledge, or the factors which impact hiring business consulting services, especially when there is a geographical distance between the consultant and potential clients.

To sum up, this comprehensive research not only helped me find solutions for my business consulting firm's issues but also improved my knowledge and capabilities as a scholar-practitioner.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form For Participants

Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

Developing a Learning System to Improve a Professional Service Provider Firm: The Case of Asadi Business Consulting, Inc.

Researcher(s):

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [V.2, August 2018] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. ☐

3. I understand that interviews will be recoreded to enable accurate data analysis. ☐

4. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish. ☐

5. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications ☐

6. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

7. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research. ☐

8. I understand that none of the above will interfere with my statutory rights.

Participant Name	Date	Signature
Name of Person taking consent (if applicable)	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

Principal Investigator:
Name
Work Address
Work Telephone
Work Email

Student Researcher:
Name : Ali Asadi
Work Address: 1403 W.Lomita blvd, Harbor city
Work Telephone: 310-977-7533
Work Email: ali.asadi@online.liverpool.ac.uk

[Version 4(1) Sept 2018)

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

1. Title of Study

Developing a Learning System to Improve a Professional Service Provider Firm: The Case of Asadi Business Consulting, Inc.

2. Version Number and Date

Participant Information Sheet. V.2, August 2018

3. Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

4. What is the purpose of the study?

The main objective of this research is to develop an effective learning system to learn more about the mindset of small business owners and how to satisfy their business needs as a business consultant. The results will help me develop an effective business consultancy framework encompassing the modes of learning, forms of knowledge and media for knowledge exchange valued by clients.

At no time, before, during or following this research, will any sales pitches to you or offers of any inducements whatsoever be made to join in any business relationship with my company.

5. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You and many other small business owners have been chosen to participate in this research, because as a small business owner, you have knowledge about the research topic and the required data.

6. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to participate. If you do decide to take part you will be able to keep a copy of this information sheet and you should indicate your agreement to the online consent form. You can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

7. What will happen if I take part?

The project is conducted by Ali Asadi as the researcher and Dr. Terry Nolan as the supervisor from the University of Liverpool. You will be asked to participate in three surveys mainly as in person interviews in three different times which we estimate will take you up to two hours for each survey. You may also wish to agree to a follow-up phone interview to find out more about your responses. Please note that in person and phone conversations will be recorded.

8. Expenses and / or payments

There will be no expenses or payments to participate in this research project.

9. Are there any risks in taking part?

There will be no perceived disadvantages or risks involved to participate in this project. Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. You will not be asked any personal or business information which might be misused by third parties. No information pertaining to any individual's business will be asked for, or if any is unwittingly provided that it will be omitted. Please let the researcher know immediately if you experience any discomfort or disadvantages as part of this research.

10. Are there any benefits in taking part?

As a participant to this research, you may develop a better awareness of your mindset, managerial skills and business needs in regards to the hiring of business consulting services. it is hoped that this work will help us learn more about applying business consulting services in small enterprises which may benefit both business consultants and small companies which hire them.

11. **What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting me, Ali Asadi [ali.asadi@online.liverpool.ac.uk] or the Thesis Supervisor Dr Terry Nolan [terry.nolan@online.liverpool.ac.uk]. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the University of Liverpool Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

12. Will my participation be kept confidential?

Data might be collected through phone interviews, in person, or online surveys and will be stored in a form of online files protected by passwords and other relevant security process and technologies. All the information that we collect about you and your business during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified or identifiable in any reports or publications. Your company will also not be identified or identifiable.

Data collected may be shared in an anonymised form to allow reuse by the research team and other third parties. These anonymised data will not allow any individuals or their institutions to be identified or identifiable.

13. What will happen to the results of the study?

Results of the research will be published. You will not be identified in any report or publication. Your business will not be identified in any report or publication. If you wish to be given a copy of any reports resulting from the research, please ask us to put you on our circulation list.

14. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw at any time, without explanation. Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that they are destroyed and no further use is made of them. Since the final results are anonymised, the results may only be withdrawn prior to anonymisation.

15. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Thesis Supervisor Dr Terry Nolan terry.nolan@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

1. Which areas of your organization need to be improved?

2. Which type of knowledge do you need to overcome challenges or to improve your business?

(Tacit/ Explicit) Show him the table of tacit/ explicit

3. What is your general perspectives regarding business consulting services? What do you think they do?

4. What do you think of the effectiveness of business consulting services in improving small companies?

5. What approach do you prefer in solving your business issues: 1) solving the problems by yourself or 2) hiring outside advisors? 3) Working informally with others? Why?

6. if you have had previous experiences dealing with business consultants,

    What did you value from those experiences?

    What was of little or no value?

7. what are your challenges hiring business consulting services? How do you think you can overcome them?

8. If you decided to hire a business consultant, what do you consider as value offered by a business consultant?

- Daily online contact available (Skype / Messenger etc.)
- Regular face to face meetings
- As a social hub to chat with other Owner/managers
- As an information source so I can learn more by myself
- Providing manuals and working procedures that you can learn step by step. (like an academic course)
- Helping you in decision making and other management areas
- Helping you implement new tools and techniques

Appendix 4: Honey and Mumford's Learning Style Questionnaire

Learning Styles Questionnaire

Name: ____

This questionnaire is designed to find out your preferred learning style(s). Over the years you have probably developed learning "habits" that help you benefit more from some experiences than from others. Since you are probably unaware of this, this questionnaire will help you pinpoint your learning preferences so that you are in a better position to select learning experiences that suit your style and having a greater understanding of those that suit the style of others.

This is an internationally proven tool designed by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford.

There is no time limit to this questionnaire. It will probably take you 10-15 minutes. The accuracy of the results depends on how honest you can be. There are no right or wrong answers.

If you agree more than you disagree with a statement put a tick by it.

If you disagree more than you agree put a cross by it.

Be sure to mark each item with either a tick or cross.

☐ 1. I have strong beliefs about what is right and wrong, good and bad.

☐ 2. I often act without considering the possible consequences

☐ 3. I tend to solve problems using a step-by-step approach

☐ 4. I believe that formal procedures and policies restrict people

☐ 5. I have a reputation for saying what I think, simply and directly

☐ 6. I often find that actions based on feelings are as sound as those based on careful thought and analysis

☐ 7. I like the sort of work where I have time for thorough preparation and implementation

☐ 8. I regularly question people about their basic assumptions

☐ 9. What matters most is whether something works in practice

☐ 10. I actively seek out new experiences

☐ 11. When I hear about a new idea or approach I immediately start working out how to apply it in practice

☐ 12. I am keen on self discipline such as watching my diet, taking regular exercise, sticking to a fixed routine, etc.

☐ 13. I take pride in doing a thorough job

☐ 14. I get on best with logical, analytical people and less well with spontaneous, "irrational"

☐ 15. I take care over the interpretation of data available to me and avoid jumping to conclusions

☐ 16. I like to reach a decision carefully after weighing up many alternatives

- ☐ 17. I'm attracted more to novel, unusual ideas than to practical ones
- ☐ 18. I don't like disorganised things and prefer to fit things into a coherent pattern
- ☐ 19. I accept and stick to laid down procedures and policies so long as I regard them as an efficient way of getting the job done
- ☐ 20. I like to relate my actions to a general principle
- ☐ 21. In discussions I like to get straight to the point
- ☐ 22. 1 tend to have distant, rather formal relationships with people at work
- ☐ 23. I thrive on the challenge of tackling something new and different
- ☐ 24. I enjoy fun-loving, spontaneous people
- ☐ 25. I pay meticulous attention to detail before coming to a conclusion
- ☐ 26. I find it difficult to produce ideas on impulse
- ☐ 27. I believe in coming to the point immediately
- ☐ 28. I am careful not to jump to conclusions too quickly
- ☐ 29. I prefer to have as many resources of information as possible - the more data to think over the better
- ☐ 30. Flippant people who don't take things seriously enough usually irritate me
- ☐ 31. I listen to other people's points of view before putting my own forward
- ☐ 32. I tend to be open about how I'm feeling
- ☐ 33. In discussions I enjoy watching the manoeuvrings of the other participants
- ☐ 34. I prefer to respond to events on a spontaneous, flexible basis rather than plan things out in advance
- ☐ 35. I tend to be attracted to techniques such as network analysis, flow charts, branching programs, contingency planning, etc.
- ☐ 36. It worries me if I have to rush out a piece of work to meet a tight deadline
- ☐ 37. I tend to judge people's ideas on their practical merits
- ☐ 38. Quiet, thoughtful people tend to make me feel uneasy
- ☐ 39. I often get irritated by people who want to rush things
- ☐ 40. It is more important to enjoy the present moment than to think about the past or future
- ☐ 41. I think that decisions based on a thorough analysis of all the information are sounder than those based on intuition
- ☐ 42. I tend to be a perfectionist
- ☐ 43. In discussions I usually produce lots of spontaneous ideas
- ☐ 44. In meetings I put forward practical realistic ideas
- ☐ 45. More often than not, rules are there to be broken
- ☐ 46. I prefer to stand back from a situation
- ☐ 47. I can often see inconsistencies and weaknesses in other people's arguments

☐ 48. On balance I talk more than I listen

☐ 49. I can often see better, more practical ways to get things done

☐ 50. I think written reports should be short and to the point

☐ 51. I believe that rational, logical thinking should win the day

☐ 52. I tend to discuss specific things with people rather than engaging in social discussion

☐ 53. I like people who approach things realistically rather than theoretically

☐ 54. In discussions I get impatient with irrelevancies and digressions

☐ 55. If I have a report to write I tend to produce lots of drafts before settling on the final version

☐ 56. 1 am keen to try things out to see if they work in practice

☐ 57. I am keen to reach answers via a logical approach

☐ 58. I enjoy being the one that talks a lot

☐ 59. In discussions I often find I am the realist, keeping people to the point and avoiding wild speculations

☐ 60. I like to ponder many alternatives before making up my mind

☐ 61. In discussions with people I often find I am the most dispassionate and objective

☐ 62. In discussions I'm more likely to adopt a "low profile" than to take the lead and do most of the talking

☐ 63. I like to be able to relate current actions to a longer term bigger picture

☐ 64. When things go wrong I am happy to shrug it off and "put it down to experience"

☐ 65. I tend to reject wild, spontaneous ideas as being impractical

☐ 66. It's best to think carefully before taking action

☐ 67. On balance I do the listening rather than the talking

☐ 68. I tend to be tough on people who find it difficult to adopt a logical approach

☐ 69. Most times I believe the end justifies the means

☐ 70. I don't mind hurting people's feelings so long as the job gets done

☐ 71. I find the formality of having specific objectives and plans stifling

☐ 72. I'm usually one of the people who puts life into a party

☐ 73. I do whatever is expedient to get the job done

☐ 74. I quickly get bored with methodical, detailed work

☐ 75. I am keen on exploring the basic assumptions, principles and theories underpinning things and events

☐ 76. I'm always interested to find out what people think

☐ 77. I like meetings to be run on methodical lines, sticking to laid down agenda, etc.

☐ 78. I steer clear of subjective or ambiguous topics

☐ 79. I enjoy the drama and excitement of a crisis situation

☐ 80. People often find me insensitive to their feelings

Scoring And Interpreting The Learning Styles Questionnaire

The Questionnaire is scored by awarding one point for each ticked item. There are no points for crossed items. Simply indicate on the lists below which items were ticked by circling the appropriate question number.

	2	7	1	5
	4	13	3	9
	6	15	8	11
	10	16	12	19
	17	25	14	21
	23	28	18	27
	24	29	20	35
	32	31	22	37
	34	33	26	44
	38	36	30	49
	40	39	42	50
	43	41	47	53
	45	46	51	54
	48	52	57	56
	58	55	61	59
	64	60	63	65
	71	62	68	69
	72	66	75	70
	74	67	77	73
	79	76	78	80
TOTALS	________	________	________	________
	Activist	**Reflector**	**Theorist**	**Pragmatist**

Learning Styles Questionnaire Profile Based on General Norms for 1302 People

Activist	Reflector	Theorist	Pragmatist	
20	20	20	20	Very strong preference
19				
18		19	19	
17				
16		18		
15		17	18	
14				
13	18	16	17	
12	17	15	16	Strong preference
	16			
11	15	14	15	
10	14	13	14	Moderate
9	13	12	13	
8				
7	12	11	12	
6	11	10	11	Low preference
5	10	9	10	
4	9	8	9	
3	8	7	8	Very low preference
	7	6	7	
	6	5	6	
2	5	4	4	
	4	3	3	
	3			
1	2	2	2	
	1	1	1	
0	0	0	0	

Learning Styles - General Descriptions

Activists

Activists involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. They enjoy the here and now and are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences. They are open-minded, not sceptical, and this tends to make them enthusiastic about anything new. Their philosophy is: "I'll try anything once". They tend to act first and consider the consequences afterwards. Their days are filled with activity. They tackle problems by brainstorming. As soon as the excitement from one activity has died down they are busy looking for the next. They tend to thrive on the challenge of new experiences but are bored with implementation and longer-term consolidation. They are gregarious people constantly involving themselves with others but in doing so; they seek to centre all activities on themselves.

Reflectors

Reflectors like to stand back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. They collect data, both first hand and from others, and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to any conclusion. The thorough collection and analysis of data about experiences and events is what counts so they tend to postpone reaching definitive conclusions for as long as possible. Their philosophy is to be cautious. They are thoughtful people who like to consider all possible angles and implications before making a move. They prefer to take a back seat in meetings and discussions. They enjoy observing other people in action. They listen to others and get the drift of the discussion before making their own points. They tend to adopt a low profile and have a slightly distant, tolerant unruffled air about them. When they act it is part of a wide picture which includes the past as well as the present and others' observations as well as their own.

Theorists

Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical, step-by-step logical way. They assimilate disparate facts into coherent theories. They tend to be perfectionists who won't rest easy until things are tidy and fit into a rational scheme. They like to analyse and synthesise. They are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories models and systems thinking. Their philosophy prizes rationality and logic. "If it's logical it's good". Questions they frequently ask are: "Does it make sense?" "How does this fit with that?" "What are the basic assumptions?" They tend to be detached, analytical and dedicated to rational objectivity rather than anything subjective or ambiguous. Their approach to problems is consistently logical. This is their "mental set" and they rigidly reject anything that doesn't fit with it. They prefer to maximise certainty and feel uncomfortable with subjective judgments, lateral thinking and anything flippant.

Pragmatists

Pragmatists are keen on trying out ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice. They positively search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with applications. They are the sorts of people who return from management courses brimming with new ideas that they want to try out in practice. They like to get on with things and act quickly and confidently on ideas that attract them. They tend to be impatient with ruminating and open-ended discussions. They are essentially practical, down to earth pile who like making practical decisions and solving problems. They respond to problems and opportunities "as a challenge". Their philosophy is: "There is always a better way" and "if it works it's good".

In descending order of likelihood, the most common combinations are:

1st	Reflector/Theorist
2nd	Theorist/ Pragmatist
3rd	Reflector/Pragmatist
4th	Activist/Pragmatist

Appendix 5: VARK Learning Style Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to find out something about your preferences for the way you work with information. You will have a preferred learning style and one part of that learning style is your preference for the intake and output of ideas and information.

Choose the answer which best explains your preference and circle the letter next to it. Please circle more than one if a single answer does not match your perception.

Leave blank any question which does not apply, but try to give an answer for at least 10 of the 13 questions

When you have completed the questionnaire, use the marking guide to find your score for each of the categories, Visual, Aural, Read/Write and Kinesthetic. Then, to calculate your preference, use the Scoring sheet (available in the "advice to teachers" section of the VARK web site).

1. You are about to give directions to a person who is standing with you. She is staying in a hotel in town and wants to visit your house later. She has a rental car. I would:
    a. draw a map on paper
    b. tell her the directions
    c. write down the directions (without a map)
    d. collect her from the hotel in my car

2. You are not sure whether a word should be spelled 'dependent' or 'dependant'. I would:
    a. look it up in the dictionary.
    b. see the word in my mind and choose by the way it looks
    c. sound it out in my mind.
    d. write both versions down on paper and choose one.

3. You have just received a copy of your itinerary for a world trip. This is of interest to a friend. I would:
    a. phone her immediately and tell her about it.
    b. send her a copy of the printed itinerary.
    c. show her on a map of the world.
    d. share what I plan to do at each place I visit.

4. You are going to cook something as a special treat for your family. I would:
    a. cook something familiar without the need for instructions.
    b. thumb through the cookbook looking for ideas from the pictures.
    c. refer to a specific cookbook where there is a good recipe.

5. A group of tourists has been assigned to you to find out about wildlife reserves or parks. I would:
    a. drive them to a wildlife reserve or park.
    b. show them slides and photographs
    c. give them pamphlets or a book on wildlife reserves or parks.
    d. give them a talk on wildlife reserves or parks.

6. You are about to purchase a new stereo. Other than price, what would most influence your decision?
    a. the salesperson telling you what you want to know.
    b. reading the details about it.
    c. playing with the controls and listening to it.
    d. it looks really smart and fashionable.

7. Recall a time in your life when you learned how to do something like playing a new board game. Try to avoid choosing a very physical skill, e.g. riding a bike. I learnt best by:
    a. visual clues -- pictures, diagrams, charts
    b. written instructions.
    c. listening to somebody explaining it.
    d. doing it or trying it.

8. You have an eye problem. I would prefer the doctor to:
    a. tell me what is wrong.
    b. show me a diagram of what is wrong.
    c. use a model to show me what is wrong.

9. You are about to learn to use a new program on a computer. I would:
    a. sit down at the keyboard and begin to experiment with the program's features.
    b. read the manual which comes with the program.
    c. telephone a friend and ask questions about it.

10. You are staying in a hotel and have a rental car. You would like to visit friends whose address/location you do not know. I would like them to:
    a. draw me a map on paper.
    b. tell me the directions.
    c. write down the directions (without a map).
    d. collect me from the hotel in their car.

11. Apart from the price, what would most influence your decision to buy a particular textbook:?:
    a. I have used a copy before.
    b. a friend talking about it.
    c. quickly reading parts of it.
    d. the way it looks is appealing.

12. A new movie has arrived in town. What would most influence your decision to go (or not go)?
    a. I heard a radio review about it
    b. I read a review about it.
    c. I saw a preview of it.

13. Do you prefer a lecturer or teacher who likes to use?

a. a textbook, handouts, readings
b. flow diagrams, charts, graphs.
c. field trips, labs, practical sessions.
d. discussion, guest speaker

Use the following scoring chart to find the VARK category that each of your answers corresponds to. Circle the letters that correspond to your answers

e.g. If you answered b and c for question 3, circle R and V in the question 3 row.

Question	a category	b category	c category	d category
3	A	R	V	K

Scoring Chart

Question	**a** category	**b** category	**c** category	**d** category
1	V	A	R	K
2	R	V	A	K
3	A	R	V	K
4	K	V	R	
5	K	V	R	A
6	A	R	K	V
7	V	R	A	K
8	A	V	K	
9	K	R	A	
10	V	A	R	K
11	K	A	R	V
12	A	R	V	
13	R	V	K	A

Calculating your scores

Count the number of each of the VARK letters you have circled to get your score for each VARK category.

Total number of **V**s circled = Total number of **A**s circled = Total number of **R**s circled = Total number of **K**s circled =

Calculating your preferences

Use the “Scoring Instructions” sheet (available in the “advice to teachers” section of the VARK web site) to work out your VARK learning preferences.

Appendix 6: Preliminary Action Research Cycle One. Taking Action (Data Gathering Research Journal)

Field Research Journal

My learning Styles as the Business Consultant

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very strong (Reflector), Moderate (Theorist- Pragmatist- Activist)

Activist=Accommodator; Reflector= Diverger; Theorist= Assimilator; and Pragmatist= Converger

VARK: 1) Read/Write 2) Auditory 3) Kinesthetic 4) Visual

Nolan's: Network Expert

Small Business Owners as Participants

2) The Internal medicine physician
Date: 1/28/19

Number of Employees:10

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Moderate (Theorist- Pragmatist- Activist), Low (Reflector)

In my opinion, he is more pragmatist than other types of learners. Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986); pragmatist learners have the following characteristics:

4. They are looking for short-cuts and tips
5. They learn from role models
6. They learn when there is a clear link between theory and practice

VARK: Very close rating in all but a little more Auditory. Based on Fleming's (2001), auditory learners prefer to learn through listening to audio materials or discussions.

Nolan's: Both Professional and Network experts. In my opinion, he is more of a network expert than a professional expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the network expert learns through face to face meetings and storytelling.

Interview Data: Today, I interviewed an internal medicine doctor. He was knowledgeable and believed in his management styles. He considers himself a hybrid, which has both medical and business expertise; that's why he prefers to solve the problems by himself first.

Regarding his business, he mentioned that he needs to improve customer service and communications among staff.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit knowledge. He prefers to have face to face meeting with someone has a lot of experience to solve his business issues. He wants the knowledge to be transferred tacitly.

General perspective regarding business consulting:

He hired a consultant who had expertise in the medical field for a very short period when he was going to establish his company. He thinks that business consultants can have an objective view of his business by which they review the business and recommends ways to improve it. In general, he does not think, business consultants are helpful unless they have experience in his particular line of business. He also does not like the cookie-cutter approaches in which consultants use the same templates for different businesses. He also afraid if someone misrepresents his/her expertise. What motivates him to hire a business consultant is the field of business he has not been involved in before like cosmetics. If he wants to hire a consultant, he prefers initially to have face to face meetings to define the parameters of their relationship and then go from there.

First impression about business consulting: "An informal advisor"

My reflection: I noticed some discrepancies in this business owner's comments. While he was trying to be positive regarding business consulting services and indicated that he needed help, he mentioned that he believed more in himself than hiring an outside advisor. Regarding his learning styles, there was compatibility in all three tests which shows that he prefers practical business tips through face to face meetings. It was also interesting that he does not like general solutions and he wants customized business solutions based on his company's situation. In the beginning, he states that he needs to get helped in customer service and employee management, but when I asked him what about marketing and cost management, he mentioned that it would be great if someone can help him have a more profitable business. That shows some small business owners do not know their business needs although they say that no one knows about their companies better than them. In this regard, having a business analysis to find out the gaps between what they know and what they need to improve in their businesses sounds necessary. According to the above, the goal of business consultants should be filling in those gaps.

2) The Chiropractor:

Date: 1/29/19

Number of Employees:5

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Strong (Reflector), Moderate (Theorist- Pragmatist), Low (Activist). Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), reflector learners have the following characteristics:

1. They learn through watching videos or listening to speakers
2. They need to take time to understand and digest knowledge before implementing
3. They do not learn effectively when they are under pressure

VARK: Strong visual. Based on Fleming's (2001); visual learners prefer to learn through seeing and watching.

Nolan's: Professional expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the professional expert prefers to learn the knowledge explicitly.

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a chiropractor. He has never hired a business consultant. He just attended seminars that are specifically for chiropractor businesses, but he thinks that it was like selling a template to all businesses. He was knowledgeable about marketing areas, and he does many aspects of his online marketing himself. He thinks that getting new clients and retain his current clients are the areas that need to be improved in his business; however, he does not have time to hire an outside advisor. That's why he prefers to learn materials at his own pace and solve the problems internally.

Type of required knowledge: He prefers both tacit and explicit knowledge. He wants the knowledge to be transferred explicitly through web seminars and informative videos.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He thinks that business consultants can help people set up their businesses and train their employees in areas such as what to say, how to say and so on. He is not sure about the effectiveness of business consulting for his business because of his personality who does not welcome new ideas and does not change easily. He believes that although business consultants may provide good advice but that advice might not be practical in the real world; that's why it puts more stress on him by hiring an outside advisor. He prefers an advisor who takes some actions, not just recommends something and adds more burden. If he wants to hire a consultant, he prefers that person to provide online training videos for him.

First impression about business consulting: "Adding more stress"

My reflection: Although this small business owner has never hired a business consultant, he had a negative opinion regarding business consulting services. It seems he is not aware of something that he has never experienced; that's why he prefers a remote or part-time manager who is capable of conducting some activities that he does not have time or knowledge for them. There was compatibility among his learning styles in various tests. He prefers explicit knowledge through video training and other visual methods. He also wants customized approaches and prefers learning at his own pace. In my opinion, he needs to know how to differentiate himself from his competitors to get more patients; that's why video training might not be the only way to solve his knowledge gap.

3) The Structural Engineering Services Firm

Date: 2/2/19

Number of Employees: 5

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very Strong (Theorist), Strong (Reflector- Pragmatist), Moderate (Activist)

Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), theorist learner has the following characteristics:

1. They prefer handouts or something they can study at their own pace.
2. They want to learn about the theory behind the actions
3. They prefer to analyze the situation and create their own findings

VARK: Read/Write. Based on Fleming's (2001); Read/Write learners prefer to learn through reading.

Nolan's: Technical and Professional expert. In my opinion, he is more of a technical expert than a professional expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the technical expert prefers the tacit knowledge to be transferred explicitly to study.

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a structure engineer service firm owner. He has never hired a business consultant since the company has been in business for many years and used to get many clients without marketing. Now, He thinks that marketing is the area that needs to be improved in his business. He has a great relationship with his staff and has a great personality that can attract clients; however, he prefers not to meet with potential clients before they bring their projects. Some of his employees (engineers) are pushing him to be more active in marketing and advertising. He said that he does not have any time to talk with a business consultant; however, if he would welcome a business consultant who can train his employees regarding marketing and advertising.

Type of required knowledge: He prefers someone who can transfer both tacit and explicit marketing knowledge to his staff. That includes how to meet with architects and contractors to get new projects. He prefers the knowledge to be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He has never thought of business consulting services since he acquired an established business that had its clients. He mentioned that he has no clear idea of what business consultants do. He said that business consultants might probably bring jobs to his firm or give some advice regarding his business.

First impression about business consulting: "Adding benefits"

My reflection: This business was so behind in marketing both online and offline. He focuses more on the technical aspect of his job; however, he welcomes getting new ideas to improve his business and get more clients. There was a contradiction between his learning styles and his required knowledge. While the test shows that he is so analytical and prefers to read materials at his own pace; he mentioned that he prefers to learn through face to face meetings. In my opinion, both approaches are helpful for him. Although he mentioned that he does not have time to talk with a business consultant, he seems to be open to listening to my advice and spends time.

4) The Accounting Services Firm

Date: 2/5/19

Number of Employees: 14

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Strong (Reflector), Moderate (Theorist, Pragmatist), Very Low (Activist)

Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), reflector learners have the following characteristics:

1. They learn through watching videos or listening to speakers
2. They need to take time to understand and digest materials before implementing
3. They do not learn effectively when they are under pressure

VARK: Reading. Based on Fleming's (2001); read/write learners prefer to learn by reading notes, texts, and manuals.

Nolan's: Technical expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the technical expert prefers the tacit knowledge to be transferred explicitly to study.

Interview data: Today, I met with the owner of an accounting service firm. He Had hired a business consultant when he started his business and he had a great experience. He has been in this business for a long time and now, he requires some help in transferring the business to his successors. He does not need any marketing advice since he has enough number of clients.

Type of required knowledge: He needs both tacit and explicit knowledge but he wants the knowledge to be transferred explicitly through written manuals.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He has a very positive perspective regarding business consulting. He believes that business consultants can be so helpful especially in startup companies. For his business, he requires the business consultant to have experience in the accounting field. He also prefers the business consultant provides him a manual and step by step platform so he can read to solve his business issue.

First impression about business consulting: "Adding value"

My reflection: The business owner is going to retire soon, so he requires to creates a system for his business which can be easily transferred. There was compatibility among his learning styles and his required knowledge. He prefers to learn by studying on his own pace. Although he mentioned that he requires the knowledge to be transferred as a written manual, since succession planning usually involves hands-on experience, he may need to gain and transfer the knowledge tacitly through face to face meetings as well. In this regard, developing a learning and knowledge management system might be helpful for his business.

5) The Real Estate Sales and Investment Company

Date: 2/8/19

Number of Employees: 38

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very strong (Reflector- Pragmatist- Theorist), Moderate (Activist)

In my opinion, he is more reflector than other types of learners. Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), reflector learners have the following characteristics:

1. They learn through watching videos or listening to speakers
2. They need to take time to understand and digest materials before implementing
3. They do not learn effectively when they are under pressure

VARK: Reading. Based on Fleming's (2001); read/write learners prefer to learn by reading notes, texts, and manuals.

Nolan's: Artisan expert. In my opinion, he is a more network expert than an artisan expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the network expert learns through face to face meetings and storytelling.

Interview data: Today, I interviewed the business owner of a real estate development, sales, and investment company. He had hired a business consultant before who was so not able to deliver new knowledge to his business. He believes that real estate sale is the area of his business which needs improvement. In this regard, he prefers an outside advisor to direct him and his team to get more customers.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit knowledge. Experience based knowledge is very important for this business owner. He also needs the knowledge to be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He thinks that business consulting could be fantastic if it improves his company's sales and marketing; however, he only prefers to work with a business consultant who has a history and track of success in the real estate industry. After reviewing the business consultant's rate of success and past experience, he only prefers to have face to face meetings with the business consultant to get help.

First impression about business consulting: "Providing experience."

My reflection: This business owner is very successful and has a lot of experience in his field. That's why to approach him; the business consultant may need to show him experience and knowledge not only in real estate but also in new ways of promoting real estate companies. There was a contradiction between his learning styles and his required knowledge. Although his test shows that he prefers to gain the knowledge explicitly through reading manuals. He mentioned that he prefers face to face meetings. He also mentioned that he is an artesian expert based on Nolan's (2003); although he seems to be more a network expert.

6) The Limousine Company

Date: 2/9/19

Number of Employees: 15

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Moderate (Reflector), Low (Activist), Very Low (Pragmatist, Theorist)

Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), reflector learners have the following characteristics:

1. They learn through watching videos or listening to speakers
2. They need to take time to understand and digest materials before implementing
3. They do not learn effectively when they are under pressure

VARK: Auditory. Based on Fleming's (2001), auditory learners prefer to learn through listening to audio materials or discussions.

Nolan's: Artist – Technical expert. In my opinion, he is more an artist expert than a technical expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the artist expert prefers to learn by observing and adapting to other people's work.

Interview data: Today, I met with a limousine company owner who had been my client for 2.5 years. We used to have face to face meetings once a week or talking on the phone regarding his business matters. He has recently called to have consulting services again. He mentioned that he had a great experience with me as his business consultant since not only I could push him to do many activities, but also, I was providing him new ideas to improve his business. These days, he wants to improve his marketing and online marketing activities to get more customers.

Type of required knowledge: He requires both tacit and explicit knowledge which could be transferred both explicitly and tacitly based on the knowledge.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He was very positive regarding business consulting services. He believes that hiring an outside advisor can be so effective in solving his business issues.

First impression about business consulting: "Providing help"

My reflection: It is great that my former client still wants to use my professional services. He requires a business consultant to open new windows of opportunities and see issues in his business that he might ignore. There was a little contradiction compatibility in his learning styles and required knowledge. While he mentioned that he is a technical expert based on

Nolan’s (2003), in my opinion, he is a more artist learner. Although he prefers face to face meetings, based on my experience, phone conversation or skype chat are also other useful approaches for this business owner.

7) The Restaurant

Date: 2/18/19

Number of Employees: 30

Business owner ‘s Learning styles:

Kolb’s/Honey and Mumford’s: Strong (Reflector- Theorist- Pragmatist), Low (Activist).

In my opinion, he is more of a pragmatist learner. Based on the Honey and Mumford’s (1986); pragmatist learners have the following characteristics:

1. They are looking for short-cuts and tips
2. They learn from role models
3. They learn when there is a clear link between theory and practice

VARK: 1) Auditory 2) Visual- Kinesthetic 3) Read/ Write. Based on Fleming’s (2001), auditory learners prefer to learn through listening to audio materials or discussions.

Nolan’s: Artist expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the artist expert prefers to learn by observing and adapting to other people's work.

Interview data: Today, I met with a casual Italian restaurant owner. He mentioned that his business needs to be improved in using new technologies in marketing and customer service areas. To solve the issue, he has already talked to other restaurant owners. He also attended workshops that are designed specifically for restaurant businesses. He prefers to learn by himself and then train his employees.

Type of required knowledge: He required both tacit and explicit knowledge regarding new technologies in customer relationship and marketing areas, which could be transferred as tacit knowledge through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He has never hired a business consultant and seems more relying on his experiences. If he wants to hire a business consultant, he prefers to hire someone who knows s both about the restaurant business and also the geographical area of this business very well. He mentioned that since his business is close to the los Angeles harbor, it is a combination of residential, commercial, and industrial areas; therefore, the business consultant must be familiar with the area and how to approach this mixture.

First impression about business consulting: "Someone who identifies business problems."

My reflection: This business has a good reputation in the local area. It seems the business owner is welcoming new ideas to improve his business. He believes that he knows best about his business and prefers to work with a consultant who knows about the industry. He also insists that the business consultant should be familiar with the local area both geographically and demographically. He does not realize that an experienced business consultant can provide generic techniques to fit almost any market. There was compatibility among his learning styles and his required knowledge. He prefers to learn business tips through discussions in face to face meetings. It was also important for him to see how other restaurants conduct their marketing and customer services as an artist expert does base on Nolan's (2003).

8) The Manufacturer Company

Date: 2/26/19

Number of Employees: 12

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very Strong (Theorist), Moderate (Reflector, Pragmatist, Activist)

Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), theorist learner has the following characteristics:

1. They prefer handouts or something they can study at their own pace.
2. They want to learn about the theory behind the actions
3. They prefer to analyze the situation and create their findings

VARK: 1) Auditory- Kinesthetic 2) Visual 3) Read/ Write. Based on Fleming's (2001), auditory learners prefer to learn through listening to audio materials or discussions.

Nolan's: Artisan expert. In my opinion, he is more a process expert than an artisan expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the process expert is a manufacturer who knows his business problems, but he has a poor understanding of his required knowledge. He also prefers to learn by doing.

Interview data: Today, I met with the owner of a manufacturer company, which makes parts for commercial air planes. His customers are large aerospace companies. He thinks that all areas of his business need to be improved especially marketing. To solve this issue, he prefers to hire an outside advisor. He was about to retire and assign most management activities to his son.

Type of required knowledge: He required both tacit and explicit knowledge in marketing areas, which could be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He had hired a business consultant before and he had a good experience; however, it is not something that he has recently thought about it.

First impression about business consulting: “More knowledge”

My reflection: This business was unique, which I need to learn more to see how I can help it. Their clients are large limited aerospace companies. The business owners did not talk about his preferences in hiring a business consultant. There was a contradiction among his learning styles tests and what he talked about. Based on his learning styles, he prefers to learn by studying on his own pace; however, he mentioned that he prefers to learn through in-person meetings. While he mentioned that he is an artisan expert based on Nolan's (2003), he was a more process expert. Since he is going to retire soon, it might be better to talk to his son as the successor.

9) The Painting Contractor

Date: 2/27/ 19

Number of Employees: 5

Business owner ‘s Learning styles:

Kolb’s/Honey and Mumford’s: Very Strong (Theorist), Strong (Reflector- Pragmatist), Moderate (Activist)

Based on the Honey and Mumford’s (1986), theorist learner has the following characteristics:

1. They prefer handouts or something they can study at their own pace.
2. They want to learn about the theory behind the actions
3. They prefer to analyze the situation and create their findings

VARK: 1) Read/ Write 2) Visual 3) Kinesthetic 4) Auditory.

Based on Fleming’s (2001); read/write learners prefer to learn by reading notes, texts, and manuals.

Nolan's: Artisan expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), an artisan expert prefers to be a better practitioner than to learn about his practice.

Interview data: Today, I spoke with a painting contractor who has been in this business for almost twenty years. His main business challenge is getting more customers. He is switching his service from residential to commercial properties; however, he does not have the required knowledge (reading blueprints), which enables him to bid on commercial projects. He believes that word of mouth is so important to get new clients in his field; that's why he thinks that learning how to find and approach new clients is helpful for him; however, he prefers to solve this issue by himself.

Type of required knowledge: He required both tacit and explicit knowledge, which could be transferred as both tacit knowledge and explicit through face to face meetings and training materials such as videos and written manuals. However, his priority is face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He has never hired a business consultant. He believes that business consultants can advise business owners where to focus and how to get more customers and consequently, income; however, he has never thought of hiring a business consultant. If he wants to hire an outside advisor, he prefers to meet the advisor in person and know him before starting a professional relationship.

First impression of business consulting: "Improving my company"

My reflection: The business owner was positive regarding business consulting; however, his priority is to learn more technical knowledge regarding his job. He was confident in his job quality and his marketing tools, but he still needs to get more customers. It seems he does not know what he should learn in the marketing area to get more clients. There were contradictions among his test results, and he mentioned. While his test results show he is a theorist learner and he is open to learning the new knowledge explicitly, it seems his emphasize is more on knowledge transferred through face to face meetings (tacitly).

10) The Financial and Insurance Service Company

Date: 2/28/19

Number of Employees: 8

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Low (Activist)**,** Very Low (Reflector- Theorist- Pragmatist)

Based on the Honey and Mumford’s (1986), activist learners have the following characteristics:

1. They prefer to practice than to learn theory
2. They prefer to involve in problem-solving actions
3. They learn through activities which include new experiences

VARK: 1) Auditory-Read/ Write- Kinesthetic 2) Visual

In my opinion, he is more Kinesthetic than other types of learners. Based on Fleming’s (2001), Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing

Nolan’s: Professional expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the professional expert prefers to learn the knowledge explicitly.

Interview data: Today, I met with a financial advisor who only works with physicians and real estate offices as his niche market. He mentioned that his business needs to be improved in communicating with his current clients. He stated that he was not very happy with the results of his current activities since people may have different preferences in receiving information; that’s why he is learning about his clients’ preferences by trial and error. If they do not respond to his emails, he will text them through his phone or so. He prefers to solve the issue by learning how similar companies do the same and then solve the problem internally. He thinks that an outside advisor is not able to find out about his clients’ preferences since it is a relationship between his company and the clients; however, he welcomes an outside advisor who can teach him how to do that.

Type of required knowledge: He required both tacit and explicit knowledge to have a better communication with his clients. The required knowledge must be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He has never hired a business consultant. He stated that his business has a complicated setup so that no one can understand and help his business than himself. If he wants to hire a business consultant, he prefers to hire someone who can show proof that his advice or the way of conducting business works better than the business owner’s current approaches. He also mentioned that since he has partners, they need also to be involved in hiring an out-side advisor. Lack of time and financial resources are other challenges of this business owner.

First impression about business consulting: “Time and financial resource consuming”

My reflection: This business owner is not very positive regarding business consulting services. It seems that he prefers to learn the new tools and techniques by himself and then apply them to his business; however, he contradicted himself and mentioned that he would welcome if someone can solve his business issues. There were contradictions among his various learning styles and his required knowledge. Although he mentioned that he requires the knowledge to be transferred tacitly, part of the required knowledge could be transferred explicitly as well, such as having a step by step manual on how to communicate with various clients and so on. In regards to Honey and Mumford's test, although his test results show that he is a low activist, in my opinion, he is a strong pragmatist.

11) The Dry Cleaner

Date: 3.4.19

Number of Employees: 8

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Strong (Reflector) -Moderate (Theorist- Pragmatist), Very Low (Activist)

Based on the Honey and Mumford's (1986), reflector learners have the following characteristics:

1. They learn through watching videos or listening to speakers
2. They need to take time to understand and digest materials before implementing
3. They do not learn effectively when they are under pressure

VARK: 1) Auditory 2) Read/ Write – Kinesthetic 3) Visual

Based on Fleming's (2001), auditory learners prefer to learn through listening to audio materials or discussions.

Nolan's: Technical- Network Expert. In my opinion, he is a more network expert. Based on Nolan's (2003), the network expert learns through face to face meetings and storytelling.

Interview data: Today, I met with a dry cleaner owner who has been in this business for 35 years. The main challenge of his business was getting more clients through social networks and other sources of advertising. He also mentioned that one of the other challenges of his business is losing clients due to moving to another geographical area; therefore, it is necessary for his business to keep bringing new customers. To solve this problem, he is going to out-source his online marketing to an advertising company. In this regard, his son is also getting involved and learn how to do that so that they can do online marketing internally soon. What was important for him was that the advertising company is specialized in the dry-cleaning industry.

Type of required knowledge: He required both tacit and explicit knowledge, which could be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He was willing to spend money, but he required to get the return. He mentioned that one of his main issues with outside advisors and doers is that they do not provide the approximate return on investment if he hires them and spends money. He had hired a business consultant who was specialized in the dry-cleaning industry to review all aspects of his business, but he could not add any value to his business, so he was not happy with the experience. His main challenge in hiring a business consultant is trust issues since he believes that he knows a lot about this business more than anyone else; however, he still welcomes who can teach him how advertising works and how he needs to split his budget for advertising.

First impression about business consulting: "Return on investment"

My reflection: I had a great experience and got new insights after talking with this business owner. In the beginning, he was emphasizing on hiring someone who knows specifically about the dry-cleaning business. However, after talking with him and indicating that I have written a book in marketing, he was so excited to learn from me. He even mentioned that he prefers to know my opinion regarding the companies that he may hire for his online marketing. That was the new insight to me that although at the beginning, most small business owners mentioned that nobody knows about their businesses better than themselves and they prefer to work only with a business consultant who worked in their industries, they may change their minds and open to get advice. There was compatibility among his learning styles and his required knowledge. He is a reflector who prefers to learn new knowledge through discussions in face to face meetings.

Appendix 7: Preliminary Action Research Cycle Two. Taking Action (Data Gathering Research Journal)

The previous participants:

2) The Chiropractor:
Date: 4/11/19

Interview data: Today, I met again the chiropractor that I interviewed during the first interview round to confirm his learning styles and get deeper into his business issues. In this regard, we confirmed that he is a visual learner who prefers to learn by watching videos at his own pace. We also confirmed that his main business issue is the lack of having repeating patients and new patients. Regarding his marketing activities, he mentioned he knows what he needs to do; however, he does not have time to do it; that's why he does not need any training videos. He also mentioned that although chiropractic treatment should be conducted continuously, most patients stop their treatments as soon as they feel no pain. That's why educating patients regarding the benefits of continuous treatment might be effective in having repeating patients. In this regard, we talked about creating various educational videos and different channels such as emailing and phone text messages to send those videos to patients. The following are his answers to my questions:

1. **What do you think about the causes of your business problem?**

High competition, lack of knowledge among patients regarding the benefits of chiropractic treatments, and also the lack of having time due to multitasking which is running both technical and managerial sides of the business.

2. **What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?**

There is no severe impact on the business; however, the business would be much profitable if he can have repeating patients.

3. **How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?**

Getting new patients and having more repeating patients

4. **What do you think of my potential solution for your business?**

Creating educational videos to educate patients regarding chiropractic treatment procedures, benefits, risks, and so on.

My reflection:

He was still negative about business consulting; however, when I told him regarding sending educational videos to his patients through text messaging, he liked my idea. Learning how to create and use educational videos for his patients and also creating different membership packages that could bring him regular patients might be very helpful for this business.

3) The Structural Engineering Services Firm

Date: 4/13/19

Interview data: Today, I met again the owner of a structural engineering firm that I interviewed during the first interview round to clarify some discrepancies in his tests results, his required knowledge and get deeper into his business issues. In this regard, we confirmed that although he is a read/write learner, he prefers to have face to face meetings, since he does not have time to read materials. However, he approved that the best method for him is learning through face to face meetings and then have some materials as bullet points (lists) so he can go through them on his own pace to understand them better. Regarding his business problem, although he had mentioned during the first interview that he preferred to get more clients, he mentioned that adding more clients may put more pressure on him due to the lack of having enough expertise among his employees. He said that instead of spending more hours and going back and forth with his younger engineers, he prefers to do some jobs himself for more efficiency. He also mentioned that some of his former clients stopped sending projects due to the lack having a social connection with him as the business owner; that's why meeting with architects and contractors is essential to get more projects for this business. The following are his answers to my questions:

1) What do you think about the causes of your business problem?
Lack of having time to meet with potential clients. Lack of expertise among current employees to work as initiators to bring new clients.

2) What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?
Losing clients, adding more pressure on the business owner, and lack of having a balanced life.

3) How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?
Getting more clients, having more free time for the business owner.

4) What do you think of my potential solution for your business?
Having a system that can bring more clients without putting an extra burden on the business owner.

My reflection:

The business owner is positive about business consulting and is willing to make effective changes in his company. In my opinion, having an effective business system that may include different sections such as knowledge management, employee performance management, task delegation, and marketing is necessary for this business. I am going to research more to start and create such a system for this firm.

4) The Limousine Company
Date: 4/20/19

Interview data: Today, I met again the owner of a limousine company that I interviewed during the first interview round to clarify some discrepancies in his tests results, his required knowledge, and get deeper into his business issues. In this regard, we confirmed that he is an auditory learner who prefers to learn through discussions in face to face meetings. However, since he is also a reflector based on Honey and Mumford's test, providing educational materials like audio files will be so helpful for him to digest the knowledge that he gains through our face to face meetings. Regarding his business problem, although he had mentioned during the first interview that he preferred to get more clients, I noticed that one of the main causes of the lack of getting more clients is his complacency in using the tools he already has, such as social networks and so on. The other issue of his business is also lack of having a solid contract with his contractor drivers. Most of his drivers are contractors so that they may steal his clients after the first trip. To increase the number of his clients and profitability, he was thinking of developing a new mobile app. In this regard, we talked a lot about it, and I provided many useful tips for him.

The following are his answers to my questions:

1. **What do you think about the causes of your business problem?**

Increased competition, having an old website, needing a push to do marketing activities, stealing accounts by contractor drivers.

2. **What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?**

Losing clients and consequently, profitability.

3. **How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?**

Increasing the number of new and returning clients.

4. **What do you think of my potential solution for your business?**

Developing a mobile app, a new website, getting more visibility in various cities in the Los Angeles area through different google business accounts.

My reflection:

As one of my former clients, the business owner is very positive about my services. That did not bring any ethical issues for my study since he participated deliberately and answered all questions honestly.

Regarding his business, there are various things that he needs to do to improve his business such as having a non-compete agreement with his drivers to protect his accounts; developing an app to make it easier for his clients especially regular ones to make reservations; and having some reminders for him to be active more in marketing. In this regard, I am going to do more researches to come up with an effective solution for this business.

5) The Internal Medicine Physician

Date: 4/22/19

Interview data: Today, I met again the internal medicine physician I interviewed during the first interview round to get deeper into his business issues. In this regard, we confirmed that his main business issues are decreasing the rate of customer satisfaction and also employee management. He mentioned that due to the low insurance rate payment to medical service providers, they need to get as many as patients they can, which causes increasing waiting time and decreasing the amount of time that they spend with patients. He also talked about challenges that he has in managing employees, such as performance review, giving bonuses and so on. During our conversation, he also stated that since he has other businesses and there are more profitable, he prefers to spend more time on those businesses. Regarding his business issues, we talked about having an employee training manual, which includes different rules and regulations of his business. In this regard, he said that they already have a manual that is outdated and needs an update. He also mentioned that they used to have a high employee turnover, which is much lower now due to hiring better employees.

The following are his answers to my questions:

5) **What do you think about the causes of your business problem?**

Lack of having an effective human resource management system, lowering payments by insurance companies which put more pressure on medical service providers.

6) **What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?**

Customer dissatisfaction, employee dissatisfaction, and turnover, lowering income

7) **How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?**

Increasing the rate of customer satisfaction, lowering employee turnover

8) **What do you think of my potential solution for your business?**

Training employees

My reflection:

Due to having other profitable companies and lack of having motivation as the business owner mentioned, he does not take this business seriously. However, he is welcoming new ideas to improve his business, especially regarding the human resource management area. Having an effective human resource management system, which includes hiring, training and retaining effective employees, is very helpful in solving these business issues.

6) The Real Estate Company

Date: 4/23/19

Interview data: Today, I met again the real estate company owner whom I interviewed during the first interview round to clarify some discrepancies in his tests results, his required knowledge and get deeper into his business issues. In this regard, we confirmed that he is read/write learner who prefers to learn through discussions in face to face meetings. However, since he is also a reflector based on Honey and Mumford's test, providing educational materials as lists will be so helpful for him to digest the knowledge that he gains through our face to face meetings. He mentioned that he prefers to learn 70% through meetings and 35 through reading bullet point materials. Regarding his business, he mentioned that they are happy with their current number of clients; however, they would like to get more quality clients. In this regard, he states that they have assigned employees to do only marketing activities; therefore, he only reviews their jobs. In this regard, I talked to them about some ideas like having seminars to get more clients, which he welcomed and said that they are planning to do that soon.

The following are his answers to my questions:

1) What do you think about the causes of your business problem?

There is no business problem. They prefer to get more clients.

2) What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?

Nothing. They are already successful and have enough number of clients

3) How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?

Getting more clients

4) What do you think of my potential solution for your business?

Not know! Probably having seminars to invite people and introduce investment opportunities in their area.

My reflection:

This company is very successful; however, the business owner welcomed getting new ideas. Having a separate marketing team is one of the main differences between this business and other small businesses that I surveyed. That's why I will need to offer my consulting ideas to the marketing department before approving by the business owner.

7) The Accounting Services

Date: 4/25/19

Interview data: Today, I met again the accounting service firm owner whom I interviewed during the first interview round to clarify his learning style tests results, his required knowledge, and get deeper into his business issues. In this regard, we confirmed that he is read/write learner who prefers to learn by reading educational materials as lists and bullet points. Regarding his business, he is considering various succession plan options such as giving shares to his employees and keep the current organizational structure and culture or join a bigger company.

The following are his answers to my questions:

5) **What do you think about the causes of your business problem?**

There is no business problem. He is just thinking to evaluate the best option for this business when he retires.

6) **What are the three key impacts that this problem has on your business?**

Nothing. It might be challenging for some of his clients and his team after he retires since he believes that he has a direct role in various aspects of the business, especially customer satisfaction.

7) **How can you measure improvement in solving this problem?**

Having a smooth succession plan which makes both clients and employees happy after his retirement.

8) **What do you think of my potential solution for your business?**

Not know yet! Analyzing various options.

My reflection:

In my opinion, he prefers to keep the company as it is and slowly assign tasks, shares, and responsibilities to his staff. He does want to be fully retired and wants to keep his connection for the company; therefore, finding a succession plan which considers this matter might be effective for this business.

New participants:

2) The Flower Shop

Date: 3/29/19

Number of Employees: 4

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very Strong (Reflector), Strong (Activist), Low (Theorist-Pragmatist)

VARK: Auditory

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a flower shop co-partner. He has a partnership with one of his relatives to provide flowers to their three main clientele. He was enthusiastic about improving the business and getting more clients; however, he mentioned that his partner is happy with the current business situation and does not want any improvement. He states that his partner's patents were the founders of the business and now he is the main owner. Regarding the business problems, he mentioned that the main business issue is his partner's mindset and complacency which creates decision-making conflicts. He stated that his partner says that if they get more clients, they may not be able to fulfill deadlines and so on.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit/Explicit knowledge. He prefers the knowledge to be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting:

He has never thought about or hired a business consultant before. He does not know what a business consultant does; however, he mentioned that he might need someone to guide the business in the future. He states that his main challenge in hiring an outside advisor is his partner; that's why he wants the business consultant to talk to his partner to persuade him to make effective changes.

First impression about business consulting: Good advice

My reflection:

It seems the partner has more authority and power than him in making decisions. This business is a kind of family business without even having a partnership agreement. During the interview, I noticed some discrepancies in this business owner's test results and comments. His test results showed that he is a very strong reflector who prefers to learn by listening, while during the interview, he mentioned that he prefers to learn by watching and doing. In this regard, when I explained those discrepancies, he mentioned that he is a great listener and prefers to digest the knowledge before implementing; that confirmed the test results. In my opinion, I should approach his partner as the main decision-maker if I want to transfer any knowledge to this business; that's why I asked him to make some arrangements to meet his partner.

3) The Physical Therapy Office

Date: 4/2/19

Number of Employees: 18

Business owner ‘s Learning styles:

Kolb’s/Honey and Mumford’s: Moderate (Reflector, Theorist), Low (Activist, Pragmatist)

VARK: Read/Write

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a doctor of physical therapy who has seven full time and 11 part-time employees. He is very successful and popular in his area; however, he mentioned that his main business issue is operation management such as employee task management. He said that the main cause of that issue is his neglect in selecting and training employees effectively. This issue affects the revenue of this business. To solve this issue, he prefers to talk to someone who has experience since he already read academic materials in this regard. To measure the improvement in solving his business problem, he is going to look at the revenue and the number of new clients; however, he does not have a clear idea of it.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit/ Explicit knowledge. He prefers the knowledge to be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He has never hired a business consultant, but he thinks a business consultant observes a business operation and gives advice on how to improve it. His maim challenges in hiring a business consultant is determining if the advisor could be a good fit for his operation and also the cost. He also mentioned that it is very important for him the business consultant understands his type of operation.

First impression about business consulting: Cost

My reflection: This business needs an effective business system by which the business owner can supervise his business in various areas such as marketing, human resource management, working procedures, and so on. During the interview, I noticed some discrepancies in this business owner’s test results and comments. His test results showed that he is a reflector/theorist who prefers to learn the materials by reading, while during the interview, he mentioned that he prefers to learn through face to face meetings. In this regard, when I explained about those discrepancies, he agreed that it is a great idea to have face to face meetings with a business consultant and then to have some materials so he can read to digest the knowledge that he gains from the business consultant.

4) The Hair Stylist

Date: 4/3/19

Number of Employees: 1

Business owner ‘s Learning styles:

Kolb’s/Honey and Mumford’s: Strong (Reflector), Moderate (Activist, Theorist, Pragmatist)

VARK: Kinesthetic

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a hairstylist who has her chair in a hair salon. This type of business is in a way that different hairstylists have their chairs and pay a rental fee to the salon. The salon also provides some marketing activities and pays for the utilities and so on. She mentioned that the most important part of her business is providing a good service. She thinks that she already has enough number of clients so she prefers to provide a better service than marketing. To gain new knowledge, she prefers to learn from someone who has the experience, that's why she goes to various hair shows in which she can learn both technical and business topics regarding her business.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit knowledge. She prefers the knowledge to be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: She was so positive regarding business consulting and mentioned that in hair shows, there are some experts who running and managing this type of business; however, she has never hired a business consultant.

First impression about business consulting: Learning

My reflection: She was very nice and cooperative; however, her main focus was on her technical side, such as hair cutting and coloring than the business matters. This business has two sections, the management section which is mostly done by the salon, and the technical job, which is done by hairdressers. During the interview, she kept talking about the technical aspects of the job; that's why I need to talk to the salon manager to gain more perspectives regarding the management aspect of this business.

5) The Fitness Club

Date: 4/27/19

Number of Employees: 35 Independent fitness trainers

Business owner 's Learning styles:

Kolb's/Honey and Mumford's: Very strong (Pragmatist), Strong (Activist, Theorist, Reflector)

VARK: Kinesthetic

Interview data: Today, I interviewed a fitness club owner who owns this business for more than fifteen years. This type of business is in a way that different personal trainers work as independent contractors who have their clients and share the income with the gym. The gym also provides some marketing activities and pays for the utilities and so on. He mentioned that the most important part of his business is providing great customer service to encourage people to continue their memberships. Lack of having enough clients due to increased competition is one of the main challenges of this business. If this issue continues, he will need to change his business model. To gain new knowledge, he prefers to learn from someone who has experience. Increasing the number of new clients will show improvement in solving his business problem.

Type of required knowledge: Tacit knowledge. He prefers the knowledge to be transferred tacitly through face to face meetings.

General perspective regarding business consulting: He was not clear about business consulting services, and he has never hired a business consultant; however, he mentioned that a business consultant might provide him some advice to run his business better. He also stated that he does not have any challenge in hiring a business consultant.

First impression about business consulting: Better idea

My reflection: He was so cooperative and positive to learn new knowledge. He prefers to learn about real-world examples so that he can implement them in his business. I need to analyze his business, especially in the marketing area to determine how I can provide him effective solutions. I will need to have face to face meetings to show him in practical ways to get more clients.

Appendix 8: Main Action Research Cycle One: Taking Actions**. (**Knowledge Transfer **Research Journal)**

1) The Limousine Service Provider:

Date: 6/22/19

Interview data: Today, I met with the limousine company owner whom I interviewed before to offer my solutions for his business. In this regard, my advice included the following items:

1) How to post on social networks:

- I suggested him to add links to his posts so people can get to his websites and booking pages.
- I talked to him regarding the number of times he needs to posts on various social networks.
- I introduced him to a platform by which he can connect all his social networks, schedule his posts, and so on.

2) How to write a non-competition agreement with his drivers

- I showed him some sample agreement which he can get some idea from
- I advised him to consult with his lawyer to finalize the agreement before using

3) I talked to him regarding micro-websites and how to choose a proper vendor.

4) I spoke to him about the factors which affect organizational learning in small enterprises.

4) I recorded an audio file for him; he can listen about the matters mentioned above not only to digest the new knowledge but also to be reminded.

My Reflection:

Our meeting was so effective and productive. The business owner was so positive and is going to use the new knowledge. I am going to contact him in less than two weeks to see how he has been using the new knowledge.

2) The Fitness Club:

Date: 6/22/19

Interview data:

Today, I met with the fitness club owner that I interviewed before, to offer my solutions for his business. In this regard, my advice included the following items:

1) How to use some online websites and his connections to rent part of one of his big rooms to get more income

2) How to develop a working manual which makes it so easy to train new personal trainers and so on

3) I introduced a platform to him by which he can connect all his social networks, schedule his posts, and so on.

4) How to get more personal trainers

5) How to create a referral card

My Reflection:

Our meeting was so effective and productive. The business owner wants to improve his business, and he considers me as a knowledgeable business consultant. I am going to contact him in less than two weeks to see how he has been using the new knowledge.

3) The Accounting Services Firm:

Date: 6/24/19

Interview data: Today, I met with the accounting service firm owner and provided him some tips as bullet points with explanations regarding succession planning. He liked my tips and asked some questions regarding hiring an outsider or choose one of his current employees as his successor. I also give him a list of organizational learning questions to ask himself while applying the new knowledge.

My Reflection:

Our meeting was successful, and he liked my advice. I am going to contact him in three weeks to see the progress.

4) The Structural Engineering Firm

Date: 6/27/19

Interview data: Today, I had a great meeting with the engineering firm and his team regarding improving business procedures and marketing activities. At first, I had a private meeting with the business owner, and then we invited all employees to join and share their opinions. The business owner was so open to listening to employees' opinions and even criticisms. He has an amiable personality with his staff and gave them some shares of the company as well. Communication, collaboration, and sharing were great among employees, and they decided to do the following actions with my help:

1) Changing business procedures to be more efficient and satisfy clients

2) Developing a "structural design manual," including the rules that must be followed during structural designs. This way, engineers know when during the projects, they are limited, and when they can use their judgments in handling issues.

3) Having meetings with current and new clients to make a better relationship and get more projects

4) Regular monthly meetings to share their new knowledge and discuss how to improve the company.

My Reflection:

I really enjoyed my meeting with the business owners and his team. They are willing to improve the company. I am going to contact them soon to see how they use new knowledge.

5) The Dry Cleaner

Date: 7/2/19

Interview data: Today, I had a two-hour meeting with the dry cleaner business owner and his son to discuss their business issues and providing my advice to them. At the beginning of our meeting, they got my opinion regarding the proposal that they received from a marketing company that offered to design a new website, conduct search engine optimization and other marketing activities at a very high price. Then I talked to them about different marketing tools and techniques, which could bring them more customers, such as how to find a professional web developer, deal with online marketing service providers, and so on. I also talked about how to take advantage of the new situation in which their close competitor is relocating to another city. The following is a summary of the ideas and actions that I suggested for this business.

1) Finding a professional web designer and search engine optimization provider. I am also going to refer them, the company I know.

2) Learning Hootsuite, an effective platform, by which they can connect various social networks and schedule their posts

3) Developing a marketing table to review the effectiveness of their marketing activities.

4) Reviewing and implementing text messaging services to their customers

5) Learning Mailchimp, a platform by which they can send mass emails to their customers at a very low price.

6) Preparing to advertise effectively and efficiently when their close competition moves from the area.

7) creating referral cards both online and offline to get new customers

My Reflection:

It was a very effective meeting, and they liked my recommendations. I am sure; they will implement some of my ideas. I will contact them in two weeks to see their progress.

6) The Real estate Company

Date: 7/3/19

Interview data: Today, I met with the marketing manager of the real estate company and talked about various ideas to propose the business owner. In this regard, we talked about having webinars, social media marketing, referral marketing, micro websites, seminars, and many other topics in which creating online and offline referral program and affiliate marketing caught her attention. In this regard, we are going to work with each other to create an affiliate program by which whoever refers to clients who buy properties will get a percentage of the sale price. The following is a summary of the ideas and actions that I suggested for this business.

1) Using 80/20 rules in social media marketing, which is to provide free advice and tips eight percent of the time and advertising twenty percent of the time.

2) Creating online and offline referral cards and a platform to give commissions to people who refer to purchasing customers.

3) Using a specific platform to create recorded webinars that are broadcasted at different times through the internet.

4) Creating micro-websites for different cities in the Los Angeles area and link them to the main company website.

My Reflection:

It was a very satisfying meeting, and the marketing manager was impressed by some of my ideas. I think we should stick to one great idea instead of approaching various ideas at the same time. We are going to be in touch before proposing my idea to the business owner and other board members.

7) The Internal Medicine Office

Date: 7/12/19

Interview data: Today, I spoke on the phone with the internal medicine physician who was too busy to meet, gave him my advice on how to develop effective organizational policy. I have also emailed him a link by which he can update his business policy easily based on the latest rules and regulations by the government. He appreciated my time and mentioned that there is a company that can do all the HR stuff for them, and he is going to send my materials to them. He also states that he is going to lower his activities in his medical practice.

My Reflection:

Although he thanked me for my time and research, he seemed not interested to take any actions. He mentioned that there is a company that does all HR requirements for them, so how have they not updated their employee handbook for many years?

8) The Chiropractor

Date: 7/15/19

Interview data: Today, I emailed my business consulting advice to the chiropractor, who was too busy to meet. Through my email, I sent him a couple of video links on how to capture short videos to promote his business on social networks. I have also sent him a link, including 65 marketing ideas for chiropractic offices and know-how tips. Although I appreciated my time and effort, he mentioned that he is too busy for the next couple of months due to moving to a new location.

My Reflection: He is too busy to implement my ideas.

9) The Physical Therapy Office

I contacted the office and left a couple of messages for the business owner to provide my solutions. He has never responded to me.

My Reflection: He is not interested to participate anymore.

Appendix 9: Complementary Action Research Cycle Two: Taking Actions (Research Journal).

1) The Internal Medicine Office:

If you have implemented the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1. Did you use my advice? What was the feedback? "*Yes! We already talked to our management company to update our policy. They reviewed our current policy based on your recommendations and mentioned it is updated and ready to go.*"
2. Did you share my advice with your staff? "*Yes!*"
3. Did you involve them in using it? "*Yes!*"
4. Was my advice beneficial in solving your business issues? "*Yes! It helped us update our employee handbook, which is so important for our business.*"
5. Did my advice become part of your business procedures? "*Yes!*"
6. Did my advice target one of the main issues in your business? "*Yes!*"

If you have not used the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1. Do you need help with implementing my advice? If yes, in which part? When? *N/A*
2. Do you have other priorities? *N/A*
3. What action can you do today to progress that will take ten minutes of your time? *N/A*
4. How can we make it happen together? *N/A*
5. Do you think the format of my consulting advice should be changed? *N/A*
6. Do you prefer to hold this project for now? *N/A*
7. Do you need more time to digest and use new knowledge? *N/A*
8. Do you have any other questions or concerns? *N/A*

My reflection:

He did not sound very interested in improving his business. I think he just wanted to finish his participation in a very polite way. He also mentioned that he is planning not to work in this office anymore and focus on investment activities.

2) The Structural Engineering Firm:

If you have implemented the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1) Did you use my advice? What was the feedback? *N/A*
2) Did you share my advice with your staff? *N/A*
3) Did you involve them in using it? *N/A*
4) Was my advice beneficial in solving your business issues? *N/A*
5) Did my advice become part of your business procedures? *N/A*
6) Did my advice target one of the main issues in your business? *N/A*

If you have not used the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1) Do you need help with implementing my advice? If yes, in which part? When? "*In marketing. Any time."*
2) Do you have other priorities? "*Reducing my workload.* "
3) What action can you do today to progress that will take ten minutes of your time? "*No idea."*
4) How can we make it happen together? "*Most likely."*
5) Do you think the format of my consulting advice should be changed? "*I don't know. I haven't had time thoroughly go through the advice you rendered on June 26th."*
6) Do you prefer to hold this project for now? "*Yes, if you don't mind. Let me ponder on what was outlined in June's meeting."*
7) Do you need more time to digest and use new knowledge? "*Yes. Please see the 6 above."*
8) Do you have any other questions or concerns? "*Not for now. And thank you for your time so far!"*

My reflection:

He is very nice and professional, but if I leave it to him, he will never do anything for his business. I think I should begin my consulting approach by defining action plans and involving in implementing my advice instead of just leaving the business owners.

3) The Limousine Company:

If you have implemented the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1) Did you use my advice? What was the feedback? "*It helped to know where to emphasize more."*
2) Did you share my advice with your staff?*" Yes"*

3) Did you involve them in using it? *"Yes"*
4) Was my advice beneficial in solving your business issues? *"Yes! It was very helpful."*
5) Did my advice become part of your business procedures? *"Yes"*
6) Did my advice target one of the main issues in your business? *"Yes"*

If you have not used the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1) Do you need help with implementing my advice? If yes, in which part? When? *N/A*
2) Do you have other priorities? *N/A*
3) What action can you do today to progress that will take ten minutes of your time? *N/A*
4) How can we make it happen together? *N/A*
5) Do you think the format of my consulting advice should be changed? *N/A*
6) Do you prefer to hold this project for now? *N/A*
7) Do you need more time to digest and use new knowledge? *N/A*
8) Do you have any other questions or concerns? *N/A*

My reflection:

As I mentioned before, one of the main issues of this business was stealing his clients by his drivers as an independent contractor. In this regard, developing a non-compete agreement signed by drivers was a solid step to protect this business. Although the business consultant implemented with a lot of delays, I am glad that my advice was helpful. Regarding other business issues like marketing and advertising, I need to get involved in the implementation and set milestones instead of leaving them to the business owner if we want to go forward.

4) The Dry Cleaner:

If you have implemented the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1) Did you use my advice? What was the feedback? "*Yes! It was effective; however, we are trying to find someone who can help us implementing some of them."*
2) Did you share my advice with your staff? "*Yes!"*
3) Did you involve them in using it? "*Yes!"*
4) Was my advice beneficial in solving your business issues? "*Yes! We are still working on it."*
5) Did my advice become part of your business procedures? "*Yes! Especially regarding finding web design and SEO experts, as you recommended."*

6) Did my advice target one of the main issues in your business? "*Yes! Getting more customers is our main issue, which we are targeting.*"

If you have not used the business tips and advice that I shared with you, please respond to the following questions:

1) Do you need help with implementing my advice? If yes, in which part? When? "*Yes! For some parts of it, such as using social media marketing platforms and mass emailing that we will let you know soon.*"
2) Do you have other priorities? "*No! We are working on your advice.*"
3) What action can you do today to progress that will take ten minutes of your time? "*Nothing! We will have a meeting with another marketing guy next week.*"
4) How can we make it happen together? "*We will let you know if the new marketing guy cannot make it happen for us.*"
5) Do you think the format of my consulting advice should be changed? "*No! We are really happy with the way you transferred knowledge and also make us responsible for improving our business.*"
6) Do you prefer to hold this project for now? "*No! We are working on it.*"
7) Do you need more time to digest and use new knowledge? "*No!*"
8) Do you have any other questions or concerns? "*No!*"

My reflection:

I am glad that they used my advice and happy although I am still thinking of offering my help in implementation, and having an action plan while offering my advice will be much more effective than just transferring knowledge.

5) The Chiropractor

He did not respond

6) The Real estate Company

They emailed that they have other priorities and will get back to me later

7) The Fitness Club

He did not respond

8) The Accounting Services

He did not respond