

Opportunities and Challenges for Business Consulting in Entrepreneurial Ventures; Interviews Conducted in the E-commerce Startups in Thailand

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Abstract

This study identifies the opportunities and challenges for business consulting in the e-commerce entrepreneurial ventures in Thailand. It uses a mono data collection method whereby only a qualitative data was used. The respondents were the founders and co-founders of e-commerce startups in Thailand. The study particularly looks into the different kinds of problems faced by e-commerce startups and then categorizes the problems into groups based on their origin. The problem-solving factors in the startups are then questioned. Factors like knowledge of the problem, the personality of the entrepreneur, competencies available in the startups and the available recourses are scrutinized.

The finding shows that problems both from within the startup and outside the startup lead to the hiring of consulting services. The problems were product offerings, growing the team and digital marketing. Most startups lacked full knowledge of the problem. Startup entrepreneurs stress a problem related to digital marketing. Although founders and co-founders admitted having a good personality to solve problems, the available resources like patents and locations played little role in the problems solving. Most startups hired consulting services in the technical side largely because they were operating in a tech industry. They also preferred to pay them project fees after the completion of the task. Differences in why the projects seemed satisfactory or unsatisfactory are discussed in the final section.

Keywords: Business Consulting, E-commerce, Startups in Thailand, Problem-solving

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาค้นคว้านี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ในการระบุถึงโอกาสและความท้าทายของธุรกิจที่ปรึกษาของธุรกิจเกิดใหม่เฉพาะประเภทอีคอมเมิร์ซในประเทศไทย การวิจัยการเก็บข้อมูลครั้งนี้เป็นวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพโดยผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์คือ ผู้ก่อตั้งบริษัทและผู้มีส่วนร่วมในการก่อตั้งบริษัทเกิดใหม่ประเภทอีคอมเมิร์ซ การศึกษามุ่งไปที่สภาพของปัญหาที่บริษัทเผชิญอยู่และจัดกลุ่มของปัญหาโดยการแยกประเภทตามปัจจัย นอกจากนี้วิธีการแก้ไขปัญหาก็ยังเป็นคำถามอยู่ ส่วนกลุ่มของปัจจัยได้แก่ ปัจจัยด้านองค์ความรู้ในการแก้ไขปัญหา ด้านบุคลิกภาพของผู้ประกอบการ ด้านสมรรถนะขององค์กรและด้านทรัพยากรขององค์กรที่มีจำกัด

จากการศึกษาพบว่า ปัญหาทั้งภายในและภายนอกองค์กรเกิดใหม่นี้นำไปสู่การจ้างที่ปรึกษา จากปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นทำให้บริษัทที่ปรึกษานำเสนอแนวทางที่จะแก้ปัญหาโดยใช้การทำงานเป็นทีมและการตลาดดิจิทัล บริษัทเกิดใหม่ส่วนใหญ่ขาดองค์ความรู้ในการแก้ปัญหาและได้รับแรงกดดันจากการแข่งขันทางการตลาดดิจิทัลเป็นอย่างมาก ถึงแม้ว่าผู้ก่อตั้งบริษัทและผู้มีส่วนร่วมในการก่อตั้งบริษัทมีบุคลิกภาพที่ดีและมีความสามารถในการแก้ปัญหา รวมถึงมีจุดเด่นคือ สิทธิบัตรและตำแหน่งเชิงกายภาพที่แข่งขันได้ก็ตามแต่ยังไม่เพียงพอในการแก้ปัญหา ส่วนใหญ่บริษัทเกิดใหม่เหล่านี้จ้างบริษัทที่ปรึกษาในด้านเทคนิคเนื่องจากอยู่ในอุตสาหกรรมด้านเทคโนโลยีนั่นเอง นอกจากนี้บริษัทขอที่จะจ่ายค่าปรึกษาหลังจากโครงการเสร็จสมบูรณ์ ในส่วนสุดท้ายของบทความจะบอกถึงความแตกต่างระหว่างบริษัทที่พึงพอใจและไม่พึงพอใจต่อบริษัทที่ปรึกษาเหล่านี้

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Introduction

Entrepreneurs and small business owners face a lot of business problems although there is a huge potential for expansion in the ever-growing globalized economy. Evers (2003) states that despite having a huge potential for economic transformation, many startups die in their infancy. Some of the business problems that were stressed were the lack of experience of entrepreneurs in business ventures, difficulty in raising capital and securing new customers. Franco, Santos, Ramalho, & Nunes (2014) also found lack of managing competencies, financing, marketing and problems with information technology as their main problems. Similar problems were found by Gill & Biger (2012) with financing, management competencies, marketing, Information technology and bookkeeping and record keeping being the major business problems.

Entrepreneurs encounter challenges as they establish themselves in the business world. There are factors that can positively or negatively affect their work. The key to handling these extrinsic and intrinsic forces is the determination to push forward.

The main reason why businesses hire consulting service is to solve business problems. (Bronnenmayer, Wirtz, & Göttel, 2016; Kumar, Simon, & Kimberley, 2000; Creplet, Dupouet, Kern, Mehmanpazir, & Munier, 2001; Srinivasan, 2014; Werr and Perner, 2007) validated this point. By hiring firms to solve business problems it is looking at developing a competitive advantage, sharing resources, overcoming the uncertainties of firms in the market and developing internal capacity.

The environmental conditions in which the client firm operates largely determine the hiring of business consulting services. The consulting firms face a host of business challenges, some age-old and some brand new. The forces driving change are many and various. Disruptive technology, the rise of new business models, and the pressures exerted by intense competition are transforming the marketplace here in Thailand. Attracting and developing new clients and dealing with a difficult economy and a competitive marketplace are some of the problems faced today (Christensen, Wang, & Van Bever, 2013).

As consultants guide their clients, the only way to prove that it is of any good is to bring the proof, the data. Paradoxically, however, it is very difficult to apply that sound principle to this business. This is because production in management consulting appears to be mostly intangible and hard to measure. There is also no widely accepted, objective methodology for measuring consulting success and client satisfaction.

This paper studied the roles a business consulting can play in the development of startups businesses in Thailand. The main reasons for choosing Thailand is because Thailand has earned remarkable reputations for strong economic performance through well-sustained growths in the last decade. With the advent of ASEAN economy, together it forms an economic powerhouse. According to McKinsey, (McKinsey, 2014), it is projected to rank as the fourth-largest economy by 2050. With this projected growth the consulting industry will also experience an expansion; and since the nature of the service is very competitive and has very less bargaining power, it is of paramount importance to study the critical drivers of expectation in this industry. Hence, an effort to unravel the key determinants of market demand for consulting services will not only be informative to the consulting firms to formulate a strategy in enhancing their client satisfaction but it will also be helpful for the small business to gauge future consulting projects which will help business solve their business problems. This thesis studies in detail the key determinants of market demand for consulting services in the startup especially in the E-Commerce industry. The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To identify the major business problems entrepreneurs and start-ups face in Thailand
2. To find out the intentions of purchasing the consulting services in the start-up and small business when solving their business problems
3. To examine the areas and ways in which start-ups hired expert advice from consultants
4. To compare and contrast the performance of start-ups which were satisfied after hiring consulting services and the start-ups which were left unsatisfied after the consulting project.

5. To develop an exploratory theory explaining the roles different stakeholders can play in creating a conducive start-up ecosystem in Thailand

These objectives are fulfilled to answer the following research questions. What makes entrepreneurs purchase consulting services? In which areas and ways does the start-up want to hire consulting services? How can consulting firms acquire new clients in the start-up sector?

Interviews are directed at understanding the current entrepreneur and his methods of solving business problems. This paper aims to study the roles a consulting firm can play in developing the business capabilities of small and medium scale businesses. This paper also examines the use of consulting services in the startups with a special focus in the e-commerce industry. This reason for selecting the e-commerce industry is because all traditional businesses are in some ways moving towards e-commerce. It also looks at what is expected from the consultants. It will bring out the clients intention to purchase business consulting services to solve their business problems. This research tries to answer what motivates the client to move from interest in the services to actual purchase. This is also the key to understanding customer conversion and a detailed customer acquisition plan.

Review of Literature

This research is based on the Kubr (2002) generic consulting purposes. This includes: achieving organizational purposes and objectives; solving management and business problems; identifying and seizing a new opportunity, enhancing learning and implementing changes. Since a business cannot exist in isolation every business organization operates in a distinctive environment. Such environment directly or indirectly influences business and also gets affected by its activities and so is the case in the start-up sector. The origin of the business problems are analyzed based on the business environments which consists of external environment (Aguilar, 1967; Porter, 1979) and internal environment (Osteryoung, 2002; Liao & Welsch, 2003; Perks, 2010; Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001; Baba & Zadeh, 2012; Barney, 1991; Hahn, Frese, Binnewies, & Schmitt, 2012; McKelvie & Davidsson, 2009; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 197; Schumpeter, 1996).

Business problem which literally means perceived gap between the existing state of a business and the desired state, or a deviation from a norm, standard, or status quo while running a business and there are plenty of problems the startups face. (Stokes, 2000; Perks, 2010; Klyver, 2008; Jones, Borgman, & Ulusoy, 2015). These problems can be categorized based on the origin of the environments. When there is a gap in between the existing state of a business and desired state, business problems arise and solving a business problem is the single most reason business hires business consulting services (Kubr, 2002) Problem-solving ability of the firm is determined by few factors which in-turn affects the hiring in business consulting services.

Collection of all individuals, entities and other factors, that may or may not be under the control of the organization which can affect its performance, profitability, growth and even survival are generally called business environment. Due to global competition, technological progress and the new needs of consumers and competing paradigms are in constant change. Those changes are leading firms to compete simultaneously in different dimensions such as design and product development, production, distribution, communication and marketing (Singh, Garg, & Deshmukh, 2008; Hubbard et al., 1996) in Kumar, et al. (2000) states that “environment represents all those aspects that affect the strategy of an organization which is outside the organization.” The environment is categorized into two; remote environments and industry environment. For this paper, the leading cause of business problems for start-ups is categorized based on external and internal factors. PESTEL analysis which was first propounded by Francis Joseph Aguilar in 1967 in his book scanning the business environment is used here (Aguilar, 1967). Industry analysis is done by external research agencies, consulting firms or businesses themselves Porter (1979). Furthermore, internal environment is also analyzed. The framework for the research is given in Figure 1 below.

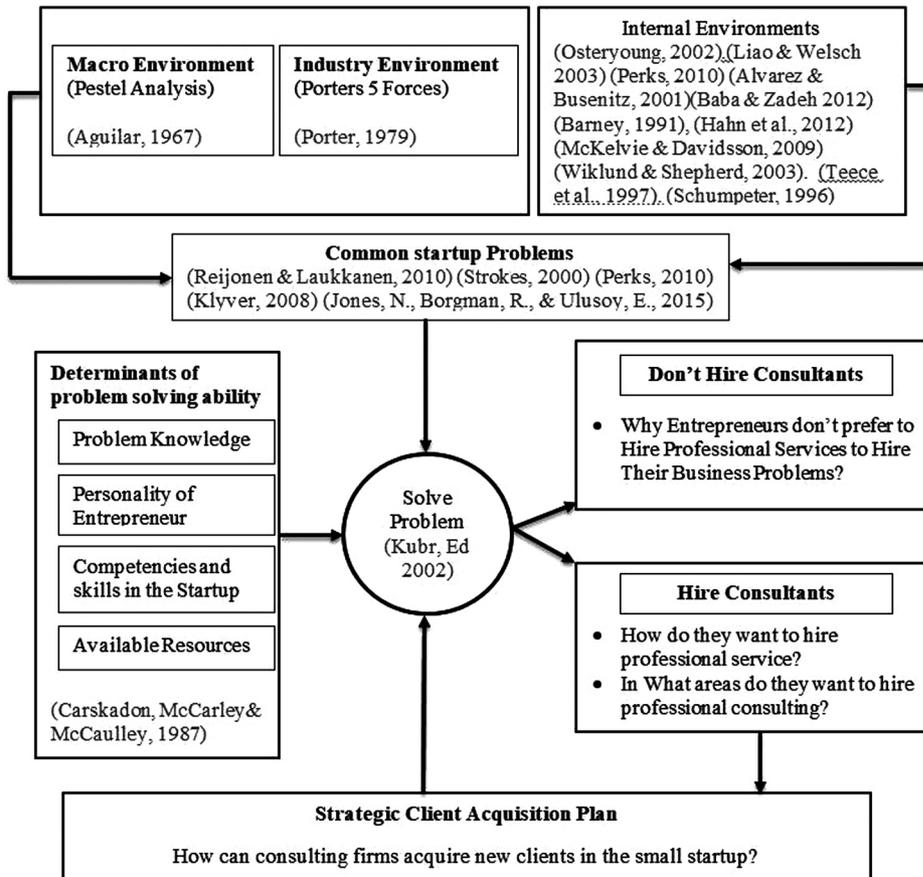


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the opportunities and challenges for business consulting in entrepreneurial venture.

Conceptual Framework

The ability of the firm to solve their business problems is determined by factors such as problem knowledge, the personality of entrepreneur, competencies, and skills in the startup and the available resources (Carskadon, McCarley & McCaulley, 1987). The use of consulting services by startups is analyzed and a closer look at why startups end up satisfied or unsatisfied is discussed in detail. Discussions also suggest the roles different stakeholder can play in creating a conducive startup ecosystem.

Consulting Industry

Business consulting is purely services based and today firms seek external advice and support for matters as critical as the strategy to seemingly procedural matters like accounting, taxation, compensation or operations. Srinivasan (2014) points out that “consulting is one of the business’ earliest instances of outsourcing.” Consultants help businesses improve their performance and grow by solving problems and finding new and better ways of doing things (Lassala, Carmona, & Momparler, 2015). To address the challenges and opportunities in business the consulting industry saw a meteoric rise in the last century. Kubr (2002) points out that, “Consulting as it emerged from the scientific management movement focused on factory and shop-floor productivity and efficiency, rational work organization, time and motion study, elimination of waste and reduction of production costs.” He then goes on to say that the ones who helped solve these problems were known as ‘efficiency experts’. Moving on from there McKenna (1995) found out that professionally trained accountants and engineers often with backgrounds in law or banking, founded the early “management engineering” firms to offer advice to executives on the organization of their boardrooms, not on the efficiency of their shop floors. The emergence of present-day business consulting has its background in both the above-mentioned roots.

While there are many types of consulting in various fields, the consulting this paper refers are those known as business consulting. Business consulting is an advisory service contracted for and provided to organizations by specially trained and qualified persons who assist, in an objective and independent manner in the client organization to identify management problems, analyze such problems and help, when requested, in the implementation of solutions (Greiner & Metzger, 1983). For this research consulting includes any external professional service hired by the entrepreneur to provide outside knowledge, diagnostic feedback, and solution implementation to solve business problems. It included all outside expertise including sales, marketing, operation, logistics, HR, IT, bookkeeping, financing.

Today the consulting industry plays a huge role in the global economy and this in part is evident from the huge consulting fees firms pay. Appelbaum & Steed (2003) stressed that consulting industry is here to stay. Consulting firms are also major players

in the knowledge-based economy Creplet et al. (2001) and Kipping & Clark (2012) say that because the boundaries of management consulting are not well delineated and it keeps on changing it is notoriously difficult to obtain any accurate statistics on the size of the global consulting market. Today the global consulting industry is estimated at \$449 billion in 2015 (Plunkett Research Ltd, 2014).

The geography of business in Thailand has evolved, grown and progressed tremendously in the last two decades after the 1997 economic crisis and Thailand is one of the most successful developing countries according to Asian Development Bank outlook (2016). Thailand needs to continue its efforts of improving business infrastructure, trade integration, and skills, as well as intensifying its governance reforms. Thailand's progress has been largely successful and the growth of the business has led to the need for many international business consulting companies in Thailand. According to the management consulting case interview, there are a total of 41 major international management consulting firms in Thailand and the clients are spread in public sector, business, and start-ups. There are also many local consulting firms that provide business consulting services to different business.

Consulting firms are seen to add a lot of value to the client firms. Apart from improving revenues and operation it also has indirect impacts. Haverila, Bateman, & Naumann (2011) stressed that "The advice provided by strategic consulting firms directly influences the success of the client firms." They concluded by saying clients firm will perform more efficiently thus earning more revenues. (Clark 1995; Loveclock, 1996) in Kumar, et al. (2000) stressed that since consulting is a service both financial and operational success is necessary. Consulting firms provide small business the outside experts who can do the work, as well as provide training on what needs to be done and it is actually appreciated by businesses of every size.

Startup Sector

Entrepreneurship, on the other hand, is fast emerging as a transformational megatrend of the present century given the capacity to reshape economies and industries throughout the world. As key drivers of economic growth, entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of an expanding economy, generating jobs, introducing new

products and services, and promoting greater upstream and downstream value-chain activities. Entrepreneurship is growing in popularity as more countries worldwide realize the importance entrepreneurs play in improving their local economies. As the regions prosper, the global economy grows too. According to the International Monetary Fund Outlook (2017) last year, it was 3.1% and it is expected to reach 3.4% in 2017 and 3.6% in 2018, respectively.

Therefore, blossoming of entrepreneurship is in the best interest of all countries as this would eventually lead to the creation of new jobs and new opportunities to improve the infrastructure and quality of services. Thus, over the past few years, the topic of entrepreneurship has received a serious attention from policy-makers worldwide as more entrepreneurship supporting initiatives are rolled out.

Startups and small and medium enterprise (SME) plays an increasingly important role in the world economy and it is considered the backbone of economic growth in many countries, contributing to the creation of job opportunities and acting as suppliers of goods and services for large organizations. This paper explores the use of consulting services in the start-ups in Thailand.

Digital Thailand refers to the country's strategy in taking full and creative advantage of digital technologies to develop infrastructure, innovation, data capability, human capital, and other resources, to propel the country's economic and social development towards stability, prosperity, and sustainability (Thailand Board of Investment, 2016). Thai startups in the tech scene are given a lot of attention with events focusing on funding for the startups. Techsauce is one such event. The pitching of a business idea from emerging startup is given funds from the different financial institution or independent investors to establish a business in Thailand. Foreigners interested to invest in Thailand are also given special consideration with many foreigners even starting their own startups.

There is a long list of why startups fail; rapid growth, adding talent, fast-paced market, falling support, difficulty scaling up, weak team, partner incapability, dwindling cash, financial management, poor business planning, lack of proper marketing strategy, lack of dedicated team, fierce competition, partnership decision making, cyber security. Thus mixtures of problem from both internal and external environments contribute to the failing or startups.

Methodology

Every research involves theoretical concepts and to begin with, a literature review is conducted comprehensively which includes the current knowledge including substantive findings, as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to the study of business consulting. The use of scholarly papers is considered secondary sources and therefore a secondary data analysis was undertaken to form the initial theoretical foundation for the paper.

After the initial exploration, an in-depth interview of the consultants was the most appropriate method for this study because it provides a standardized way of checking the initial findings from the literature review. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. According to Boyce & Neale (2006), in-depth interviews are useful when researchers want detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors or want to explore new issues in depth. Interviews are often used to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more complete picture of what happened in the program and why.

A semi-structured in-depth interview question tries to shed some light by interviewing entrepreneurs and knowing about their business problems and their intention of purchasing consulting services. The categorization of whether it was a consulting service or not was based on the response from the entrepreneur. As stated in the previous section any external professional service hired by the entrepreneur to provide outside knowledge, diagnostic feedback and solution implementation to solve business problems were considered consulting service. That included sales, marketing, operation, logistics, HR, IT, bookkeeping or financing are all considered consulting services for the research. For the conclusive part of the study, the finding of the study was compiled into a strategic client acquisition plan for the consulting firms. A comparison of satisfied clients and the unsatisfied client is compiled in the end. The findings are aimed to solve the questions what makes small business owners and entrepreneurs purchase consulting services, in which areas and in which ways. For this thesis paper a mono data collection

method was used which implies the use of only a qualitative or a quantitative method (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Qualitative data will be used to examine the research problems in this paper.

Qualitative analyses typically require a smaller sample size than the quantitative analyses. Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. Obtaining most or all of the perceptions will lead to the attainment of saturation. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information. Glaser & Strauss (1967) recommend the concept of saturation for achieving an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. Other guidelines have also been recommended. For an ethnography, Morse (1994) suggests approximately 30-50 participants. For grounded theory Morse (1994) has suggested 30 - 50 interviews, while Creswell (2013) suggests only 20 - 30. And for phenomenological studies, Creswell (2013) recommends five to 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six. There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative sample size may best be determined by the time allotted, resources available, and study objectives says other authors.

For this purpose, a total of 17 face to face interviews or video call interview was planned with the entrepreneurs, founders and co-founders of the tech-start-up in the e-commerce industry. The 17 startups were selected in the e-commerce which had online stores. This sample was based on the capital raised from several round of pitching between 2012 and 2017. A total of 25 deals were made involving these 17 startups. From 17 startups only 10 founders agreed to give interview each representing a startup.

The interview as a data collection method is extensively used in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interview helps to generate data about studied phenomena by asking respondents to share their experiences, leading to a form of an interactional conversation between the researcher and the respondent (Silverman, 1997). The e-commerce start-ups are those start-ups that have been funded by venture capitalists recently and are currently in operation. This list is taken from Techsauce which is the leading source of all tech and business news in Thailand and Southeast Asia.

Content analysis was used to analyze the details of the interaction between the researcher and the entrepreneur. Content analysis is a technique for systematically describing written, spoken or visual communication. It provides a quantitative description. Since content analysis also allows the researcher to analyze new material recorded by the researchers, and to classify open-ended responses to interview or survey questions, content analysis was used for the purpose.

Research Results

Combinations of factors determine the hiring of external consulting services as found in the empirical data. It is very clear that the first reasons why entrepreneurs hire consulting services are mainly because of the problems they faced in a particular area of their business. When there is a huge gap between the business requirement and the available competencies, start-ups often hire external expertise to fill the void. Table 1 shows the summary of problems faced by the star-ups.

Six out of ten entrepreneurs faced problems with product offering, five entrepreneurs faced positioning problems, eight entrepreneurs faced problems growing the team, four-faced problems with product innovation and gaining traction. Three start-ups had problems with operation in the delivery of their products and services. Four start-ups faced problems negotiation some deals with either government or business partners. Another three startups faced some kind of problems when entering a foreign market or advertising their offering in the foreign market.

Various factors affect the problem-solving ability of a start-up and it can become complicated and drawn out when they are unaccounted for. Taking into account the factors that affect the process and taking them into account when forming a solution gives a start-up the best chance of solving the problem effectively. Table 2 shows the summary of the knowledge of problems.

Table 1 Summary of Problems Faced by the Start-up

Sn	Start-ups	Product Offering	Positioning	Growing Team	Innovation	Traction	Operations	Negotiation	Foreign Entry
1	Start Up 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
2	Start Up 2	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
3	Start Up 3	✓		✓				✓	✓
4	Start Up 4	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Start Up 5		✓	✓		✓	✓		
6	Start Up 6			✓		✓			
7	Start Up 7	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
8	Start Up 8		✓						
9	Start Up 9	✓		✓	✓				
10	Start Up 10		✓						

Findings show only one start-up has the full knowledge of problems starting from the identification of the problem, Analysis of the problems so as to why it was occurring, plan development to solve the problem, implementation plan and plan to evaluate. Rest of the start-up didn't know parts of the problems. They could analyze problems why it was all there but they didn't know problems plan development, implementation, and evaluation. Table 3 shows the summary of entrepreneur's personality.

Table 2 Summary of the Knowledge of Problems

Sn	Start-ups	Identification	Analysis	Plan	Implement	Evaluate
1	Start Up 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2	Start Up 2	✓	✓			✓
3	Start Up 3	✓	✓			✓
4	Start Up 4	✓	✓	✓		
5	Start Up 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6	Start Up 6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Start Up 7	✓	✓			
8	Start Up 8	✓	✓	✓		
9	Start Up 9	✓	✓	✓		
10	Start Up 10	✓	✓	✓		

Table 3 Summary of Entrepreneur Personality

Sn	Start-ups	Patience	Communication Skill	Team Player	Cognitive Skill
1	Start Up 1	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Start Up 2	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Start Up 3	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Start Up 4	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Start Up 5	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Start Up 6	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Start Up 7	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Start Up 8	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Start Up 9	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Start Up 10	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 4 Available Competencies in the Start-up

Sn	Start-ups	Sales/ Marketing	Operation	Accounting/ Finance	Support Legal/HR/IT
1	Start Up 1			✓	✓
2	Start Up 2		✓	✓	✓
3	Start Up 3		✓	✓	✓
4	Start Up 4			✓	✓
5	Start Up 5		✓	✓	✓
6	Start Up 6		✓	✓	✓
7	Start Up 7			✓	✓
8	Start Up 8		✓	✓	✓
9	Start Up 9			✓	✓
10	Start Up 10		✓	✓	✓

When asked about the personality of an entrepreneur they answered that everyone had qualities with patience, communication skills, team player and cognitive skills. All the entrepreneurs admitted to having shown patience while working. They also reiterated that they have very good communication skills. They also stressed that they can work very well in the team. Regarding cognitive skills and the ability to process thoughts in solving the problem they pointed, they did well. A summary of the skill is shown in table 4.

Regarding available competencies in the startup to solve business problems, The responses made it very clear that all the start-ups are not very satisfied with their front end of a business that is to do with marketing and sale which are to educate new customers and do positioning. This problem is mainly in the digital world where they want to be found more easily in the web search so they focus on digital marketing. On the operation side, start-ups are less happy with operation speed because they think that the operation process is too slow and they want to improve in those areas. Since start-up is very small so in the accounting and

financial part, they said that nothing is going wrong because they use technology to track all the expenses and they have access to new finances. Support staffs like IT and HR are also doing well.

Most of the consulting services were on the digital side and this is especially true because of the tech industry in which it operates. Since most of the marketing is done on the websites and social media so they are much focused for consulting services in this sector. When they face problems in the sector which are mainly to do with marketing they lacked resources in the company whereby the available competencies were not enough so they have to look outside for external expertise to bring those activities to fruition. Table 5 shows the summary of tangible and intangible resources

Table 5 Summary of Tangible and Intangible Resources

Sn	Start-ups	Location	Equipments/ Technology	Facilities	Patents Copyrights Trademarks
1	Start Up 1	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Start Up 2	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Start Up 3	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Start Up 4	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Start Up 5	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Start Up 6	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Start Up 7	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Start Up 8	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Start Up 9	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Start Up 10	✓	✓	✓	✓

Furthermore, the empirical evidence gathered from the research it can be concluded that of the ten start-ups interviewed all of them which is hundred percent of the tech start-ups have hired consulting services. The main areas of consulting where web designing, digital marketing, software development, search engine optimization, and to develop their web interface to attract more customers to their website through which they sell most of their products. The specific area of digital marketing where they spend a lot of money was search engine optimization (SEO). The area of another consulting was in the area of developing software and applications for their program and application interface. Table 6 shows the consulting services hired by the startups.

Table 6 Consulting Services Hired by the Start-ups

Sn	Start-ups	Previous Consulting	Area	Outcome	Payment
1	Start Up 1	✓	Web designing	Not Satisfied	Project Fees
2	Start Up 2	✓	Digital Marketing	Satisfied	Retainer
3	Start Up 3	✓	Web Designing	Satisfied	Project Fees
4	Start Up 4	✓	Software Developer	Satisfied	Project Fees
5	Start Up 5	✓	Digital Marketing	Satisfied	Project Fees
6	Start Up 6	✓	SEO	Satisfied	Project Fees
7	Start Up 7	✓	Web Designing	Expensive	Project Fees
8	Start Up 8	✓	Web Designing	Satisfied	Project Fees
9	Start Up 9	✓	Software Engineer	Satisfied	Project Fees
10	Start Up 10	✓	Digital Marketing	Satisfied	Project Fees

Most of the consultants were hired based on the projects. When the consultant completed the task start-ups made payment in full but except for one startup where they paid an upfront cost to the consultant for doing the work, this method is often called retainers. Following table shows a summary of the consulting projects initiated in the e-commerce industry and this, in particular, tells the story that most of the start-ups were satisfied after the consultant finished their work and only two entrepreneurs felt that they didn't get the value for money.

Discussion and Conclusions

Findings from the interview data reveal entrepreneurs facing problem in all parts of their business. Product offering was one main problem and six entrepreneurs confirmed this. Another huge problem was growing the team in the startup and eight entrepreneurs confirmed this. Five entrepreneurs faced positioning problems. Four startups faced problems with product innovation, gaining traction and negotiating deals with either government or business partners. Other problems were entering a foreign market and the delivery of products and services and this was confirmed by three entrepreneurs.

Most of the consulting services were on the digital side and this is especially true because of the tech industry in which it operates. Since most of the marketing is done on the websites and social media so they are much focused for consulting services in this sector. When they face problems in the sector which are mainly to do with marketing they lacked resources in the company whereby the available competencies were not enough so they have look outside for external expertise to bring those activities

Like stated earlier, the problems can originate from both external and internal environments. After having conducted the interview it can be concluded that the problems start-ups face in the e-commerce industry are mainly to do with technology. Explaining the product offering to a new market and positioning itself among competitors is especially stressed by almost all respondents. Another problem highlighted throughout was developing a team capable of running and growing the start-ups. Problems related to innovating the products and services were also

highlighted. Since they sell the products with the help of technology and when they market those products getting traction was one problem. They also faced problems regarding operation although the tech industry has seen huge benefits from technology the operation problems still possessed because of the slow process and then there are problems regarding negotiation and they have problems.

From the empirical data ten entrepreneurs faced problems with product offering, five entrepreneurs faced positioning problems, eight entrepreneurs faced problems growing the team, four-faced problems with product innovation and gaining traction. Three start-ups had problems with operation in the delivery of their products and services. Four start-ups faced problems negotiation some deals with either government or business partners. Another three startups faced some kind of problems when entering a foreign market or advertising their offering in the foreign market. From the above finding, it can be summarized that 5 problems come from the external environment and three problems come from internal environments.

Various factors affect the problem-solving ability of a start-up and it can become complicated and drawn out when they are unaccounted for. Taking into account the factors that affect the process and taking them into account when forming a solution gives a start-up the best chance of solving the problem effectively. From the finding, only one start-up had the full knowledge of problems. That start-up had the full knowledge starting from the identification of a problem, analysis why it was occurring, and planned development, implementing the plan and evaluating the progress. Rest had some knowledge of the problems, but they didn't have full knowledge of the problems. They know what the problem was and why it was occurring but they didn't have a particular plan, implementation plan, and evaluation.

When asked further about their personality, all entrepreneurs rated themselves to have patience, good communication skills, ability to work in a team and the cognitive skills to process their problems. Furthermore, all entrepreneurs stress the importance to improve their competencies in the team, starting with marketing where they particularly pointed to digital marketing with regard to social media marketing,

search engine optimization, analytics skills. In the operations, they stressed the need for quality software designers and app developers and an efficient logistics system which they often relied on other companies or start-ups. The finance and accounting part, they said the need to be more driven by the idea of a cashless transaction with different types of FinTech emerging every day. The use of POS directly linked to the account of a business. All the current competencies were driven by technology. On the support system, they stressed the need for quality advice regarding legal matters for negotiation.

Also, the empirical evidence gathered from the research shows that all startups hired some form of consulting services. Web designing, digital marketing, software development, search engine optimization, developing web interface were the main areas of consulting. One specific area of digital marketing where they spend a lot of money was in search engine optimization. Other consulting project was in the area of developing software for desktop and mobile.

Most of the consultants were hired based on the projects. When the consultant completed the task start-ups made payment in full but except for one startup where they paid an upfront cost to the consultant for doing the work, this method is often called retainers. Following table shows a summary of the consulting projects initiated in the e-commerce industry and this, in particular, tells the story that most of the start-ups were satisfied after the consultant finished their work and only two entrepreneurs felt that they didn't get the value for money.

Consulting firms can use the digital platform to sell their services especially with regard to growing the team. How can consulting firms acquire new clients in the start-up sector? Most start-ups were open to listening from consulting firms to help with team building and digital marketing.

One promising point of departure for further research can be a simple change of the respondent's perspective. Hence, the research topic could be investigated from the perspective of the entrepreneurial consultant. The research approach (interview guide) could be by and large the same; the only but distinct difference would be to ask the consultant instead of the start-up entrepreneurs. Focus on a different particular industry of sample population. In the study, the focus was on one particular industry that is the e-commerce industry and included the experiences of

the co-founder. A future research approach could be to focus research on another industry in order to find out about the particular challenges that founder have to cope with when dealing with problems in that specific industry. By making use of this approach the research findings could be sharpened. Another interesting approach could be to validate the research findings by making use of a quantitative research design. In doing so, the researcher could collect additional data by distributing a survey to a huge number of employees or customers. In terms of this research approach, one benefit could be to ask the respondents to evaluate the given challenges in terms of their importance, respectively frequency of occurrence. Another benefit could be to obtain a list of even more challenges since with an increasing number of respondents; the number of mentioned challenges is also likely to increase.

In answering how can consulting firms acquire new clients in the start-up sector? Most start-ups were open to listening from consulting firms to help with team building and digital marketing. Clients regard consulting firms as a source of valuable information and ideas that can be turned into a wide range of initiatives, innovations, and improvements in any area or function of the business. Strong and important corporations have developed many ideas for action and have seized major business opportunities with the help of consultants. Morris & Empson (1998) pointed out that, "If this knowledge can be appropriated from the individuals who generate it, it presents the opportunity for the firm to create new revenue streams."

Furthermore, the empirical evidence gathered from our research we can conclude that of the ten start-ups interviewed all of them which is hundred percent of the tech start-ups have hired consulting services. The main areas of consulting where web designing, digital marketing, software development, search engine optimization, and to develop their web interface to attract more customers to their website through which they sell most of their products. The specific area of digital marketing where they spend a lot of money was SEO. The area of another consulting was in the area of developing software and applications for their program and application interface. Start-ups would be very interested in purchasing the Consulting Services focused on human resource development. Everyone has a problem with the building team but are surprised no one has hired consulting services in growing their team to play in developing human resources.

Most of the consultants were hired based on the projects. When the consultant completed the task start-ups made payment in full but except for one startup where they paid an upfront cost to the consultant for doing the work, this method is often called retainers. Summary of the consulting projects initiated in the e-commerce industry and this, in particular, tells the story that most of the start-ups were satisfied after the consultant finished their work and only two entrepreneurs felt that they didn't get the value for money.

Most of the start-ups right now face a problem with digital marketing and growing the team. So consulting firms can market products with help of stimulus for improvement directly to the start-ups. Since they operate online marketing the services online would not be a bad idea. However, direct contacting the start-ups directly as a partner to help would by far be a more effective method. After that, the consulting firms can take initiatives in initiating the contact and make sure the sponsorship deal is in place. During the same time, the consulting firm can establish improvement infrastructure. With the help of current problems they're facing which are still with digital marketing and growing the team. The consulting firms can appraise and characterize the current practices and develop the recommendation. To do so appraise current process and compare it to the future process and intense discussion with the founders are encouraged with a very clear improvement infrastructure plan in place.

Complete set of documents with strategy and priorities can then be developed which includes the recommendation and initial results. Establish the process, do the action plans and define a process and measures the plan and execute the pilot projects. Plan, execute and measure the results and presented to the founders and co-founders of the document and ask management to leverage into use in the start-up. This is called leveraging and if the start-up can see viable results it will be a great outcome.

Based on the data we can conclude that most of the firms face innovation problem regarding products and growing team so they can invest in pieces of training that help them in developing effective teams. Training and Team management are the core skills no matter what changes come in the technology. So investing in teams will see much more results that the budget constraints.

Educational institutes can focus in teaching and training graduates in digital marketing courses especially relating to searching optimization, social media marketing, and analytics. In the present market this tools are used by all business and especially startups. The courses will give the students a chance to develop the skills that are in demand in the current market place. These skills will then benefit businesses of all sizes by not having to train the graduates to acquire these skills once they are hired. Unlike traditional marketing like television and print media, digital marketing gives the business a truly personalized platform in reaching targeted audience in a more cost-effective manner. If this courses are offered in educational institutions it can bring lots of new students seeking to learn digital marketing. Government institutions should clarify the excise duty and other tax related to doing work through the internet. Most of the regulations were not clear regarding the income earned through pay-per-click or income earned through the internet related work. The government could also facilitate the development of FinTech to make payment possible.

Limitations

A huge amount of effort was put into ensuring the generalizability of the research result, however, a few limitations to the study must be acknowledged. The limitations are discussed below. The research took a comprehensive and broad approach initially and formulates the respective factors and dimensions in a rather general manner, i.e. not tailored to one specific consulting sector or industry. The use of Kubr's five generic purpose and ten principal ways of providing consulting services might not encompass all the ways in which consulting services are provided and hired nowadays. The small business problems might not be the same in all parts of Thailand. Final limitation of the study would be measuring of entrepreneur's personality. It was based on the assumption that the startups are very important to the entrepreneurs because they put in their lifetime's personal savings into the business. No one but themselves would be the best judge of their leadership in growing and managing the startups.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

PART 1: Introductory Questions

Question		Purpose
1.	Please tell us about yourself and how you came up with the idea of starting this company.	To get the interview started
2.	Can you tell us something about your startup in general?	Understand the overall business
3.	How far have you come and how far do you think this business will go?	To understand at what stage is the startup at.

PART 2: Business problems

Question		Purpose
4.	What were the most common problems and challenges you faced in your business in the past.	<p>To understand the origin of the problem and classify into external and internal problems</p> <p>External problems</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Macro environment (Pestle analysis) 2. Industry environment (Porters 5 force) <p>Internal problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership - Business partners - Employees - Financing and accounting - Operations - Innovation
5.	What problems do you face right now?	To understand if past problems still exist at present and to classify the current problems
6.	What are some of the problems you anticipate in the future?	To anticipate future problems and opportunities for areas of consulting

PART 3: Determinants solving business problem

	Question	Purpose
7.	<p>I am going to ask you a set of questions regarding the problems, please answer briefly.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Problem identification</p> <p>What was the difference between what you expected and what was occurring?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Problem analysis</p> <p>Why was the problem occurring?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Plan development</p> <p>What was the goal? What was the intervention plan to address that goal?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Plan implementation</p> <p>How was or will the progress be monitored?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Plan evaluation</p> <p>How was or will implementation integrity be ensured? Was the intervention plan effective?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Carskadon et al., 1987)</p>	<p>To understand how well the entrepreneurs understood the problems. Questions will be asked based on the following.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Problem knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem identification - Problem analysis - Plan development - Plan implementation - Plan evaluation

	Question	Purpose																				
8.	<p>Please rate yourself out of 5. 5 being very good and 1 being very bad.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Patience</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">1</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">Communication skills</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">1</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">Ability to work in teams</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">1</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">Cognitive skill</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="width: 20px; text-align: center;">1</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">(Carskadon et al., 1987)</p>	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	<p>To measure the ability of an entrepreneur to solve problem</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Personality of entrepreneur</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patience - Communication skills - Ability to work in teams - Cognitive skills
5	4	3	2	1																		
5	4	3	2	1																		
5	4	3	2	1																		
5	4	3	2	1																		
9.	<p>I am going to ask you a set of questions regarding your marketing, operations and finances.</p> <p>- Marketing and sales (front end) Can you tell us about the people who handle your marketing and sales at present? Any ideas of how satisfied your current customers are?</p> <p>- Operation (middle) Can you tell us about the people who handle your operations to deliver products and services effectively? - Financing and accounting (back end)</p> <p>How do you manage your finances and accounting? Will you be able to acquire new funding if you want to expand?</p> <p>- Support (legal and hiring) How do you handle your legal matters including taxation and hiring new employees?</p>	<p>To understand how well equipped and organized the startup are.</p> <p>Question will be asked based on the following</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Competencies and skills in the startup</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing and sales - Operation - Finance and accounting - Support (legal and hiring) 																				

Question		Purpose
10.	<p>Do you feel you have the right mix of tangible and intangible resources for your startup?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Tangible</p> <p>What do you feel current location in the marketplace? Any comments on the equipment, facilities and Technology?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- Intangible</p> <p>Are you products and ideas protected by Patents, copyrights and Trademarks?</p>	<p>To understand if startups have all the necessary resources.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Available resources</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Tangible</p> <p>Location Equipment and technology Facilities</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Intangible</p> <p>Patents Copyrights Trademarks</p>

PART 4: Attitudes of hiring consultants and outside expertise

Question		Purpose
11.	<p>Have you hired any external consultant outside of you startup to help you with your business when you had faced business problems? (Yes/No)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">If YES</p>	<p>To understand the outcome of hiring and not hiring consulting services.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Based on YES/NO answers</p> <p style="text-align: right;">If NO</p>
	<p>In which areas did you hire consulting services?</p> <p>What were the outcomes of the consulting?</p> <p>How did you pay them? (Pricing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hourly - Daily - Monthly - Longer term commitments - Project fees - Payment for results 	<p>What were the reasons you felt you didn't need to hire consultants or external advice?</p> <p>How did you solve the problems and what was the outcome?</p>