**Table of contents**

**Acknowledgements** ........................................................................................................... 7

**Consultants in pursuit of meaningfulness in work** .................................................. 9

**Table of contents** ............................................................................................................. 13

**Introduction to the research and overall design** ...................................................... 17

1 **Today’s challenge:** The consulting profession and its members in tension........................................................................................................... 21

1.1 The consultant: Being part of a weakly regulated profession........................................... 21

1.2 Roles and skills: Manifold expectations towards consultants ........................................ 26

1.3 Asked to open up: The intense consultant-client relationship ...................................... 31

1.4 Competition and self-neglect: Relationship to the firm and co-workers ......................... 38

1.5 Individuals in trouble: Work and its impact on identity and behaviour ............................. 43

1.6 Missing elements: Looking at the consultants’ needs within the profession ..................... 49

1.7 Wicked problem: The individual consultant’s attitude towards the profession ................... 55

2 **Empirical research design:** Gaining insights from responsive interviews with consultants........................................................................................................... 59

2.1 Introduction: Overview of the research design by chapter ................................................. 59

2.2 Empirical design: Open in-depth qualitative research as leading method .......................... 60
2.3 Method of data gathering: Conversational partnerships through responsive interviewing ........................................ 69
2.4 Documentation, analysis, and interpretation: Explorative analysis of the research results ..................................... 77

3 Interview results: Individuals’ attitudes to the profession of consulting .......................................................................................................................... 85
3.1 Interview themes: Structure and content of the interviews .................................................................................. 85
3.2 Theme “initial purpose”: Motives for joining the profession of management consulting ........................................ 90
3.3 Theme “motivation for consulting”: Consultants’ motivation during their ongoing career ............................... 95
3.4 Theme “expectations towards consulting”: Consultants’ expectations towards self and other stakeholders ....... 110
3.5 Theme “tensions”: Consultants struggling within the profession ............................................................................ 138
3.6 Conclusion on research results: Comprehensive view on a challenging environment ........................................ 172

4 Framework for discussion: Pathways to meaningfulness in work ........................................................................ 177
4.1 Work and meaning: Meaningfulness in work as an elemental part of a meaningful life ........................................ 177
4.2 Theoretical framework: How to experience meaningful work involving self and others ..................................... 183
4.3 Achievement and benefits: Enablement of meaningfulness in work and its benefits ........................................ 191

5 Supporting the individual: Meaningful work in management consulting ........................................................................ 201
5.1 Research results in the context of the framework: Consulting and meaningful work ........................................ 201
Abstract ............................................................................................................. 229
Thesis propositions ............................................................................................ 231
Summary ........................................................................................................... 233
Samenvatting .................................................................................................... 241
Zusammenfassung ............................................................................................ 249
References ........................................................................................................ 259
Appendix A: Quotes of respondents in German by page ............................. 271
Appendix B: Sampling criteria ....................................................................... 295
Appendix C: Interview outline .................................................................... 297
Appendix D: Interview details ..................................................................... 299
Appendix E: Transcription system .............................................................. 301
Appendix F: Codebook .................................................................................. 303
List of figures ................................................................................................... 315
List of tables ..................................................................................................... 317
Curriculum vitae, Sebastian Müller-Bellé ..................................................... 319