



The Consulting Project Report as a Master's Thesis Format

Applied research for client-driven decision-making.

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Overview

- 1** **Intro & Overview (~5min)**
- 2** **Key Considerations for a Consulting Project Report (~25min)**
- 3** **Exercise & Group Activity (~35min)**
- 4** **Review of Real-Life Examples (~10min)**
- 5** **Wrap up & References (~5min)**

Introduction

- PhD Economist with International Monetary Fund
- Partner with McKinsey & Company
- CEO of CGAP, housed at the World Bank
- Co-founder and Managing Partner of a FinTech Venture Capital Firm with Purpose



Alternative master thesis formats/sessions:

1. Policy brief

2. Consulting project report

3. (Social enterprise) business plan

Drawing on Experience Working in Financial Inclusion

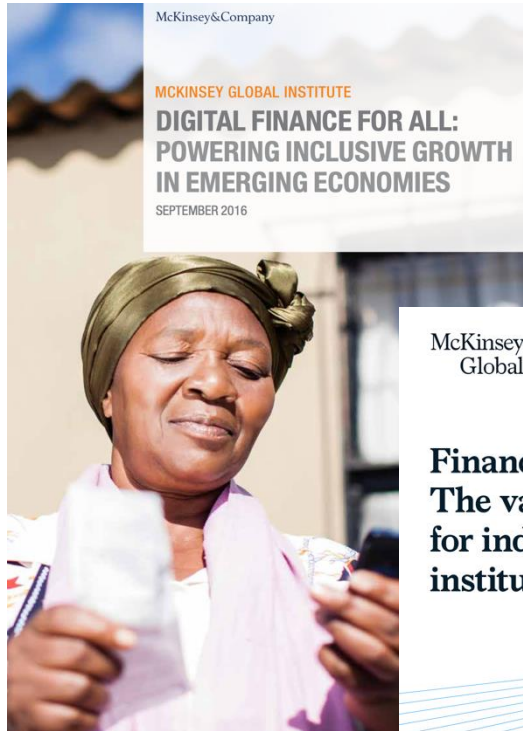
Emerging markets (~2010)

- Half of working-age adults completely outside of formal financial system
- Small, costly & ineffective banking system; branch & cash-based
- Mobile money and microcredit as important proof points

Some results since then

- Share of working-age adults with account: **51%** (2011) → **79%** (2024)
- Gender gap: **9 %**-points (2011) → **4 %**-points (2024)
- Share of adults with digital payments: **60%+** (2024)
- Formal savings participation in emerging markets: **40%+** (2024)

Influential Reports that Shaped Industry Evolution



- Quantified upside from financial inclusion, with focus on digitization
- Provided evidence for strong, latent demand
- Laid out business model innovations that would reach the unbanked with better services at lower costs

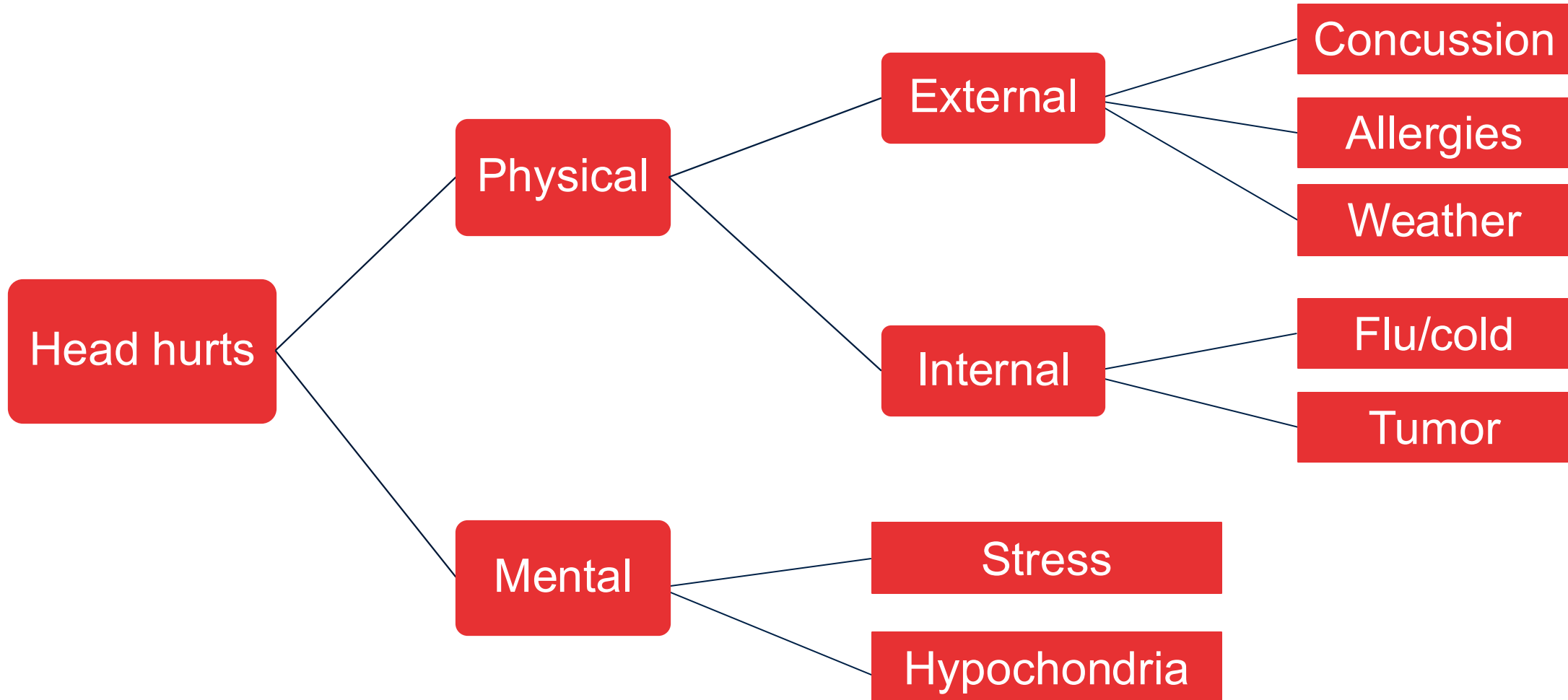
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Who Reads Consulting Reports?

- Primary readers: Senior executives/decision-makers
 - Care about: Insights, feasibility, and next steps
 - Focus on: Executive summary, conclusions, and recommendations
- Implications:
 - Structure logic and analysis for completeness (MECE = Mutually Exclusive, Collectively Exhaustive)
 - Write up findings for quick comprehension (Pyramid Principle)

Example for MECE Problem-Solving Structure



Organizing Findings & Recommendations for Clarity (1/2)

Raw data: Customers are unhappy with our sales & inventory systems report

1. Report frequency is inappropriate
2. Inventory data are unreliable
3. Inventory data are too late
4. Inventory data cannot be matched to sales data
5. They want reports in better formats
6. They want elimination of meaningless data
7. They want exceptions to be highlighted
8. They want having to do fewer calculations themselves.

Organizing Findings & Recommendations for Clarity (2/2)

Summary type of problem	Original complaints
A. Bad timing	• Report frequency is inappropriate • Inventory data are too late
B. Poor data	• Inventory data are unreliable • Inventory data can not be matched to sales data • They want elimination of meaningless data
C. Unhelpful format	• They want better report formats • They want better highlighting of exceptions • They want having fewer calculations to do themselves

Organizing for Clarity – The Pyramid Principle

Findings: Customers find our sales and inventory systems report useless.

- Issued too late to permit practical action
- Contains unreliable data
- Presented in an unwieldy format.

Recommendations: Three improvements ensure that a revised report provides actionable information.

- Ensure weekly publication in line with restocking cycle
- Focus on fewer, relevant data points and automate all calculations
- Present summary information with color-coded variances and suggested remedies.

Two Communication Styles, Two Purposes

	Stylized sample excerpts
Consulting focus ▪ Answer first ▪ Decision-oriented with priority data to support primary argument	“The company can increase customer retention by 15% within a year by launching a mobile rewards program. This approach leverages existing customer data, requires minimal new infrastructure, and generates a measurable return-on-investment within six months.”
Academic focus ▪ Concept first ▪ Exploratory with reference to prior knowledge and remaining limitations	“Customer retention has been identified as a multi-dimensional challenge that depends on both customer attitudes and behaviors. Prior studies (e.g., <i>citations</i>) suggest that reward mechanisms can influence loyalty under certain conditions; however, their applicability require empirical validation for each, individual context.”

Comparing Different, Applied Thesis Formats

	Policy Brief	Consulting Report	Academic Paper
Audience	• Policymakers	• Private/public/social-sector clients	• Research/peer community
Goal	• Influence policy	• Drive operational actions	• Contribute to knowledge
Evidence	• Synthesized data	• Applied project data	• Original empirical data
Tone	• Persuasive	• Analytical, neutral	• More formal, theoretical
Structure	• Problem statement → policy options → recommendations	• Executive summary → findings → recommendations	• Literature → methods → results
Success Metric	• Policy adoption	• Client decision or action	• Scholarly contribution

Mapping Traditional Thesis to Consulting Report

Thesis Component

Literature review

Data/analysis

Discussion

Conclusion

Consulting Report Equivalent

Client context & objectives

Analytical framework

Key insights

Strategic recommendations

Typical Structure of Consulting Project Report

- Executive Summary (1–2 pages)
- Client Context and Objectives
- Analytical Framework
- Key Findings and Insights
- Strategic Recommendations
- Implementation Roadmap
- Annexes (data, assumptions, financials)

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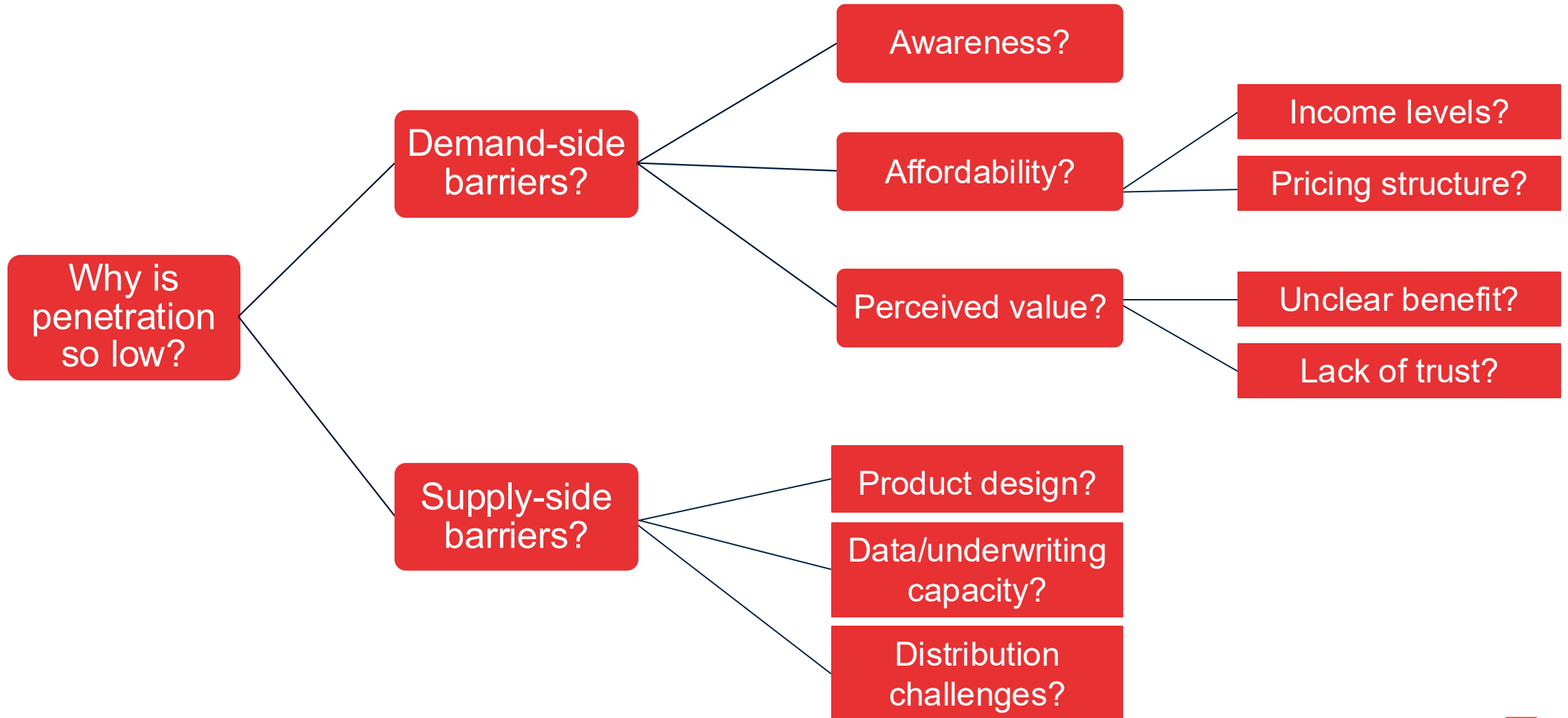
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Group Exercise in Teams of Three

Task:

- Brainstorm root causes for market-entry challenge (try MECE logic).
- Identify possible top ~3–4 solutions to root causes.
- Prepare a brief, “recommendation-first” elevator pitch for executives (try Pyramid Principle).

Possible Ghana Micro-Insurance Problem-Solving Structure



Sample Consulting Project Executive Summary

Market-Entry Strategy for Digital Micro-Insurance in Ghana

FinSure Global aims to launch a digital micro-insurance product for Ghana's 6 million informal-sector workers. Market analysis shows strong potential demand, but low purchasing power. Trust in insurers is limited, and traditional distribution channels are weak.

Working with Ghana's successful mobile-money operators and innovating the insurance pricing model can overcome these challenges and accelerate market entry while ensuring business sustainability. The company should:

- Partner with Mobile-Money Operators (MTN, Airtel Tigo) for nationwide, low-cost distribution reach.
- Leverage existing Mobile Money Agent Networks for customer onboarding and claims education while minimizing operating costs.
- Adopt a "freemium" pricing strategy for high-value products, such as a hospitalization cash benefit, e.g., provide a base coverage for free and charge premium for higher coverage and cross-subsidy.

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Review of Consulting Report Examples

- *From separate pdf files*
- *Caveat:*
 - *Confidential client reports are typically not available*
 - *Published ones tend to be at least sanitized, and often are more generic*

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Takeaways – What Makes a Good Consulting Report

- **Decision-oriented**, not descriptive.
- Ingoing **hypotheses** drive required analysis
- Findings derived from **logic-structure** and **validated data**.
- Communication via the **Pyramid Principle**.
- Written with **clarity, neutrality, and professionalism**.

References and Further Resources

References

- Minto, B. (2010), "The Minto Pyramid Principle: Logic in Writing, Thinking, and Problem Solving," *Minto International Inc.*
- Wits University (2009), "Business Consulting Report Guidelines," *School of Mechanical, Industrial & Aeronautical Engineering Publication.*
- Simply Coach Company (2025), "How to Write a Business Consulting Report that Works," *published on simply.coach.com on July 9, 2025, accessed October 21, 2025.*

Further Resources

- <https://www.theanalystacademy.com/consulting-presentations/> (library of some 600 consulting reports and presentations).
- Pavlinek, A. (2025). How to Write a Great Business Consulting Report: Best Practices and Report Examples," *updated on databox.com on June 25, 2025, accessed on October 22, 2025.*