

Amrop Professional Services Practice

Crossing Over The Role Transition From Consulting to Corporate

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Crossing Over

The Role Transition From Consulting to Corporate

C-Suite Experiences, Perceptions and Views

As anyone who has heard the joke about the consultant and the shepherd knows, professional services firms and corporate organizations have something of a love-hate relationship. They can't live with or without each other. Yet they have one imperative in common – superlative leadership. How could both sides benefit from mixing DNA?

More than ever, corporates are on a relentless quest to reinvent themselves. The hunt for transformative competences and approaches is intensifying. Distinctive strategies based on sound analysis must be drawn up and executed swiftly and efficiently, in a way that engages and inspires employees and produces measurable results.

For Partners and Senior Managers from professional services firms, many of these capabilities are ingrained. Once installed in the C-suite of a corporate, they have the potential to bring a wealth of experience and energy to their new role, team and organization, to exercise their hard-earned skills not as visitors to the corporate city, but as its inhabitants. And yet it is not only corporates who are on a quest for reinvention. As practitioners of transformation, many Partners reach a point in their careers at which they turn the spotlight onto themselves and seriously consider 'crossing over to the other side.'

How can consultants and hiring organizations ensure that the result of mixing DNA is greater than the sum of its parts? Whilst the opportunities are many, they are accompanied by as many risks.

To find out more, Amrop confidentially interviewed fifteen CxO's of top corporate organizations using a structured framework. All were top talents, Partners, Senior Executives, Directors and Practice Leaders with a robust track record in global, regional and local professional services firms around the world. And all had crossed over from Professional Services firms to their current C-suite role.

From five countries in Europe: Russia, Poland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Spain, the CxO's came from a mix of backgrounds; from Strategy or Management Consulting, Audit, and Tax to Human Capital Consulting. They are now working successfully within a diverse set of industries – from Banking, Transportation, Life Sciences, Retail, to Technology.

Their narratives will provide indicators for hiring organizations and likeminded professionals who are considering crossing over. More than this, they offer a fascinating insight into the exhilarating and sometimes painful experiences of a new C-suite executive.



Contents

Part One – First Steps

- 1 Time For a Change – Reasons for Crossing Over..... 8
- 2 Preparation is 90% of Success – How to Prepare the Terrain..... 11
- 3 The Shock of the New - Onboarding Surprises 17

Part Two – The Consultant’s New Clothes

- 4 Consulting on the Inside – Exercising the Craft..... 26
- 5 Us and Them – Dealing with Prejudices..... 29
- 6 Old Dogs, New Tricks? – Applying New Habits and Leaving Old Ones Behind..... 33

Part Three – Looking Back, and Forward

- 7 Those Were the Days , Or Were They? - What is Missed Most and Least..... 36
- 8 If I Were Hiring Me - Advice For Hiring Organizations..... 39
- 9 I Can See Clearly Now – Shifts in Perceptions of the Consulting/CxO Role..... 42
- 10 Where Do We Go From Here? – The Next Career Step..... 47
- 11 Crossing Over – Decision Dashboard..... 50

- 12 Acknowledgements..... 56
- 13 About the Authors..... 56
- 14 About Amrop..... 59



Executive Summary

Our interviews revealed that the cross over from professional services to the corporate world is not only possible, but can add considerable transformative value to both sides, thanks to the specific skillset and dynamism of consultants. However, even when the urge to merge is compelling, it is key for both sides to invest in reflection and due diligence. Solid onboarding is critical for any incoming executive, all the more so for these particular profiles, given differences in culture and practice between the professional services and corporate worlds. The crossover should be accompanied by a coach, and carefully-selected and objective internal guides. With onboarding in place, the consultant's skillset, one which combines robust analysis, strategy design and change management, can be an unusually powerful mix.

1 - Time For a Change

Crossing Over Reasons

The move from professional services Partner to a C-Suite corporate role is triggered by a variety of reasons – often combined. Most prominent: looking ahead at the career path and realizing there is a need for change. This can be a '20 year itch' which develops over time. We see the weariness of starting every year with the same Sisyphean cycle: revenue targets, slidewriting, presenting without truly being able to influence the outcome. Excessive travel and family shifts compound the situation and for some, the career path within consulting firms is unappealing or uncertain. If the decision to cross over may be the result of deep internal reflection, it can equally be ignited by the outside world: an opportunity swings by via the network as an executive search firm or longstanding client suddenly extends a compelling invitation.

2 - Preparation is 90% of Success

How to Prepare the Terrain

The need to prepare before crossing over (without falling into analysis paralysis) was made abundantly clear. Some CxO domains are not second nature to professional services – finance, legal, managing diversity, and the learning curve will be steep. At the other extreme: consultants may not know it all, but their hiring

organizations may assume they do, so expectations must be managed on both sides. Due diligence is crucial regarding the financial health and wider structure of the organization. Equally critical is to get to know the key stakeholders. (Preparation is far easier when the hiring organization is an ex client). "Know thyself" is a further key: one's motivations, strengths, weaknesses, preparedness to take on an operational role. Coaching is advised and the process does not stop once on board.

3 - The Shock of the New

Onboarding Surprises

All our executives agreed that onboarding was one of the most critical phases in crossing over. They were struck by cultural differences related to the emotionality and politics they perceived in the corporate world. Some regretted their lack of legal and financial expertise. Being suddenly in the spotlight was also a surprise, and whilst some executives relished a greater freedom to make decisions, others keenly felt the pressure of having to have their finger constantly on the button. Fortunately they had their consulting skills to fall back on – these were critical in assessing a new situation and learning how to navigate. However, they needed support and sought it from various dimensions - from the top, from the frontlines and laterally - by



building a strong team or bringing that team on board. Some discovered that they lacked the resources to form teams, or that the quality of support teams was lower than in the professional services environment.

4 - Consulting On the Inside

Exercising the Craft

Consulting skills are of high relevance in the corporate world thanks to a combination of broad-based thinking, sharp analytical skills, and the ability to motivate teams in times of pressure and change.

5 - Us and Them

Dealing with Prejudices

After crossing over to the corporate world, our ex-consultants encountered prejudice related to their professional services background concerning their understanding of the company, or the relevance and pragmatism of their strategies. These rumblings were either implicit or explicit, yet several new executives successfully rose above them – either thanks to a healthy realism about human nature, the fact that they had successfully overcome prejudice in the past, or were simply able to filter out unhelpful noise. Apart from keeping a cool head themselves, incoming executives helped their entourage to do the same. They exercised leadership and change management skills such as an incremental change approach, active listening and participative decisionmaking and authentic leadership, or building a fact-based business case. During the process, prejudices tended to dissolve, as the positive effects of the ex-Partners' leadership were seen and experienced by those who had previously questioned them.

6 - Old Dogs, New Tricks?

Applying New Habits, Leaving Old Ones Behind

If many aspects of consulting knowledge and practices turn out to be an invaluable resource in a new corporate role, some habits transfer less well. The tendency to conduct extensive, iterative analysis before acting is one. Others relate to management style: the assumption that teams are highly motivated, closely connected and will deliver on the basis of motivation rather than rules. Or that work can, or will be, done outside normal hours. Some well-loved consulting tools have to be put back into their box: Excel, PowerPoint and management lingo.

7 - Those Were the Days (Or Were They?)

What is Missed Most – and Least

Ex-Partners miss performing and discussing intellectual tasks in a likeminded, collegiate setting. They miss *less* the reasons for which they abandoned consulting in the first place – the imbalance between work and private life, excessive travel, workload, the pressure of acquisition and lack of real influence on short- or long-term outcomes.

8 - If I Were Hiring Me

Advice for Hiring Organizations

For consultants as well as hiring organizations, a previous consulting-client relationship can be a fine platform for mutual observation and success. Even more so, because it can be difficult to gain visibility on a Partner's suitability on paper, given the 'black box' of the consulting environment. In the absence of a history of working together, sound assessment is critical, not only to evaluate business competencies, but personal and social fitness for this different and culturally-diverse environment. It is also important to examine the consultant's underlying motivation for the role. Risk can be managed by setting smaller steps towards the



top roles, and here again, well planned and executed onboarding is vital. With these conditions in place, the fresh perspective, broad-based experience and intellectual bandwidth imported by exceptional consulting professionals has the potential to act as a powerful catalyst for change.

9 - I can See Clearly Now

Shifts in Perceptions of the Consulting/CxO Role

Whilst their new life had significantly reduced the esteem of some executives for their former profession, the loyalty and respect of most remained intact. The idea of mutual coaching and learning emerged. Regarding their perceptions of the C-suite, the appreciation of all participants had grown, thanks to first hand experience of this lonely, highly pressured role where their impact on results did not always match their hopes and expectations, as the system raised barriers to getting things done.

10 - Where Do We Go From Here?

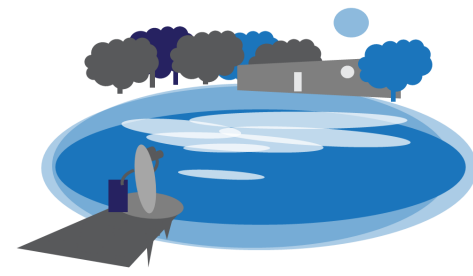
The Next Career Step

Even if it was not yet in focus, the next career was emerging. The notion of going back to consulting was rarely cited. Instead, some were thinking of bridging the advisory and corporate worlds by taking on a future Non Executive Board role. Others were experiencing an entrepreneurial itch. For some, this could be solved by becoming an intrapreneur within their existing organization. Finally, for those not already in a CEO role, feelings were mixed about stepping up to the plate.



“The most applicable knowledge would be my capacity to analyze business strategies, the market and opportunities, the size of existing teams in order to develop them. Equally, redefining the business model for some of the operating units - new KPIs were decisive, since the company was not accustomed to using them, whereas for me it had been very common. Finally, the construction of communication channels and the relationships with clients, which needed redefining from the very first moment.”

Part One: First Steps



- 1 - Time For a Change – Reasons for Crossing Over
- 2 - Preparation is 90% of Success – How to Prepare the Terrain
- 3 - The Shock of the New - Onboarding Surprises

“I had the feeling that if I were ever to leave, it really was now.”

Introduction - Time For a Change

Reasons for Crossing Over



The move from professional services Partner to a C-Suite corporate role is triggered by a variety of reasons. Most prominent: looking ahead at the career path and realizing there is a need for change. This can be a '20 year itch' developing over time. We see the weariness of starting every year with a Sisyphean cycle: revenue targets, slidewriting, presenting without truly being able to influence the outcome. Excessive travel and family shifts compound the situation and for some, the career path within their firms is unappealing or uncertain. If the decision may be the result of deep reflection, it can equally be ignited by the outside world: an opportunity swings by via the network as an executive search firm or longstanding client extends a compelling invitation.

Entrepreneurial yearnings

Said one C-suite Leader: "The first time I quit, to move into a kind of entrepreneurial sphere, was simply a longing to do something real. Instead of writing slides, advising people, my thinking was, "let's take responsibility." The second reason was pretty simple. Everyone was leaving to do dot.com stuff. Thirdly, my last projects were related to what I was to do afterwards. It was like: "well, I have done it, so I am confident I can do that," and I went to establish my own company."

Another executive has a similar experience: "I didn't move to a corporate role, but to my own outfit. The learning curve was flattening. As a Partner for five or six years, it started to be pretty much the same all over again. I left to become my own boss in a consultancy and investment situation. Three or four years later I switched to be CEO of _____[corporate]. That move was clearly one of looking for a new challenge. I mean, 7,000 employees, several companies, 10 plants, 7 markets..."

Selling isn't working

When the financial crisis struck in 2008, one global firm hit problems with sales. "In consulting, your sales counter gets reset to zero every year and past successes don't count. In volatile times it gets tiring and frustrating. I could not refuse the opportunity to become CIO at the largest bank in the country." The situation was not helped by the fact that this executive was asked to head for a project in a country which did not appeal to him.

Family matters

Faced with long hours and extensive travel, several interviewees reached a crisis point because their job was damaging their work-life balance – especially with the arrival of children: "As a Partner, I practically spent all my time outside Spain, away from my family," said one. "That took its toll, and after many years it was time to consider alternatives. When the opportunity arose, I did not think twice."



Time to get real

Perhaps one of the most important reasons for crossing over was the desire to make a real difference. Said one leader: "I wanted to move to the execution side and carry out the things I recommended to my clients. I also thought my career might carry more weight if I switched my experience from the consultancy sector to a more operational position." Another yearned to: "sit on the other side of the table where the decisions are taken, instead of being a consultant, where you can only advise and hope. It is literally about playing an active role and seeing the result to the end."

"It was not a denial of my firm, but of my potential career path if I stayed."

One participant had been back and forth along the bridge. "I became a much better consultant after 2.5 years on the Board of the bank," he said. "However, after a few years of writing slides again, you say: 'do I really want to do this until the end of my life?' And my answer was *no*. Some people cannot live without writing slides. I am not that kind. So when the opportunity arrived, I participated in the beauty contest for the CEO position. It was not a denial of the firm, but of my potential career path if I stayed."

This executive confessed: "Frankly I've never felt myself to be just a consultant, or a very good consultant. I always felt the shortage of 'real' life in this world, where theory prevails over practice. I always liked the practical part connected with clients, the development of relationships and business. It was easier for me to offer several solutions in a few words than to theorize them in many pages. I felt I had hit my ceiling."

Up or out?

For some executives, the move was swiftly executed. For most, the transition was slow-burning. "I had a long separation process on and off during ten years, ups and downs when I thought about leaving, but particularly in the last couple of years," this executive told us.

"I had worked for twenty-one years at my consulting firm, become Managing Director for the whole sub-region," another interviewee related. "After seven years, I started conversations with the firm's leadership about the next move - a global role, travelling a lot and signing up for an extra four years. I thought: 'by the time I have done that, I will be fifty, with twenty-five years in the firm, and the chances of crossing over will diminish.'" Furthermore, he felt: "'we have tried this before...'" Some out-of-proportion irritations about stuff that had been going on for too long. Better to leave at the top of my game."

For this executive, the prospect of stepping up from Partner to Senior Partner was an "unattractive option". He told us: "I had been a partner for six years and enjoyed it, but the next step was to become a Director or Senior Partner. You are ramping up the career path and everyone knows that this step is the hardest - what matters is how large your billing is, how large your clients are, less your performance and input. You need to build an internal position. It is a huge effort and people work super hard. The Director role is more political and you are more involved in internal governance with less client focus." The problem was compounded by uncertainty. "Would I be a Director? Did I really want to be?" Again, the notion of 'now or never' emerged. "I had the feeling that if I were ever to leave, it really was now."



Another Partner also faced uncertainty, this time in the form of an organizational change that could compromise his future: "The new organization was based around vertical and specialized responsibilities, a change from geographical responsibilities, and I felt it would result in a loss of focus for my career."

Not only can the upward move be difficult and uncertain, it may not even enhance a CV. This executive told us: "For every year you stay on as a Partner you become more senior and financially compensated in the internal system, but not necessarily more attractive externally... In the end, we made an agreement that I would have a sabbatical, I moved to LA and lived there for six months with my family. I only worked on some assignments, from a distance."

For another executive, the move was inspired by a combination of several forces, starting with the need to challenge himself. "I wanted to try to work in an investment bank - to prove to myself that I could leave my comfort zone and be successful beyond the Big4. Several conditions coincided: I was already Partner, at the peak of my career in consulting. Although I worked in Corporate Finance, where only the best managers, the "elite" worked, this is just a side business for the Big4. So my career path was set, possibilities were limited and only my pension lay ahead. But it was a difficult decision, and had I not known some professionals in the new environment I might not have moved. In terms of corporate culture it was an absolute shock."

From client to employer

If the previous executive had already established some relationships in his new corporate, for others, the bridge was even more solid. Said one executive: "have a long and very good relationship with my current employer, _____[corporate] was my client, I did a big project for them and even had an over commitment to it." Similarly for another, the move was the consequence of a professional relationship: "having provided them with my services and developed a close collaboration for months, I had a thorough understanding of the company, and vice versa."

Flashpoint

The experience of this ex-Partner summarizes most of the trigger factors. Here is his story in a nutshell: "I think it was a combination. Both on the professional and personal side. On the professional side, I was enjoying my career in _____[consulting firm], but I had been there for fifteen years. The learning curve was flattening. I had some geographical transitions, creating new environments for learning and excitement, but even after six years, I wanted to renew myself. The decision was brewing, there was also a trigger on the family front with children starting school, parents getting older and a good reason for coming back home. So I decided it was time, and decided to look for alternatives there. In that process I discovered that it would be difficult to transfer within _____[consulting firm], since they wanted me to stay abroad. Things happened much quicker than I thought. I had planned for a good year of relaxation and thinking through what to do next, reconnecting with some old friends and relationships. I had also started to explore a couple of more entrepreneurial adventures in the financial sector and was well into those when I got the proposition from _____[corporate]."

Preparation is 90% of Success

How to Prepare the Terrain

2

The need to prepare before crossing over (without falling into analysis paralysis) was made abundantly clear. Some CxO domains are not second nature to professional services – finance, legal, managing diversity - and the learning curve will likely be steep. At the other extreme: if consultants may not know it all, their hiring organizations may assume they do, so expectations must be managed both sides. Due diligence is crucial regarding the financial health and wider structure of the organization. Equally critical is to get to know the key stakeholders. (Preparation is far easier when the hiring organization is an ex client). “Know thyself” is a further key: one’s motivations, strengths, weaknesses, preparedness to take on an operational role. Coaching is advised, and the process does not stop once on board.

Know This - You Don’t Know it All

The corporate world presents ex-Partners with managerial areas for which consulting could never prepare them. This C-suite leader was emphatic about the need to exercise humility, to know one’s limits and compensate for these: “I would advise any consultant [wanting] to leave the beauty of the profession and move to a role with bottom line responsibility to learn about... finance, liquidity, legal and running large organizations. Also... set time aside to properly prepare. I just dove in and I believed, you know, bright as I am, I will somehow be successful. It would have been much better if I had agreed to move in a month later, spend that month laying out a plan and talking much more to people who have made that shift, to try to avoid making the same mistakes they made. I effectively made all those mistakes.”

Another warned: “It will be a major shift in every aspect. If you have a senior manager position and never had an operational role, people are really going to challenge you. As you were a consultant it will probably take longer to convince them. Don’t think you know how the corporate environment works because you have advised them for several years. Because you don’t. On the other hand, if you really feel that that is what you aspire to do and have given it great thought, make sure that that the company you will move to is right for you to fulfill your ambitions.” This executive suggested that it can be harder to convince people because of being an ex consultant. (You can read more about prejudices encountered by ex Consultants in Chapter 5).

In short: “Realize that you are ahead of a big change and if you not prepare well you will fail and not move forward in corporate life. Prepare, and do your homework.”

But They May Expect You To

If some consultants encounter cynicism about their added value, linked to their status as an ex-consultant, others may suffer from the opposite: a halo effect. One ex Partner signaled: “there’s the possibility that the hiring organization thinks you’re a new can-do-it-all! Then they can be disappointed. Getting expectations right is very important for success.”



Perform Your Due Diligence

Several people admitted that more haste and less speed would have been advisable. “I prepared badly,” reflected one leader. “The first thing I found out after two weeks was that the company was technically bankrupt, which I should have seen. But I guess I was too eager to make that move. And I talked to other people, who did something similar. Preparing yourself is one of the things you can’t do enough.” Another similarly warned: “I would advise to find out as much as possible about the whole organization. All that I knew about my future subsidiary was the name of the organization it was part of.”

Know the Players

Speaking of the need to ensure top level back-up, this executive told us: “Who you work with is exceptionally important. Many partners moving into a corporate role move into a role similar to mine, i.e. C-suite, and you are incredibly dependent on the CEO or the Board of Directors. He or she needs to back you. You need to be sure of this person, that you know each other and work well together. In comparison, in a Partner role at _____[consulting firm], you do not at all have the same dependency.”

Not only is top level back-up crucial, so too, as we will later discover, is that of the incoming executive’s support team. However, the quality may be inferior to that of professional services firms. It is therefore important to: “take into account the enormous difference between the teams in consulting and those normally found in companies,” according to one executive. Another also evoked: “the type of management and leadership of resources that are normally very different to what we have in the consultancy sector and in our teams.”

The same executive also warned: “One has to assess one’s capability of managing diversity, cultural aspects very different from the professional services sector.”

As we have seen, In several cases, a *client* approached a Partner with a proposition to join. This situation helps preparation enormously: “I went overseas for six months for a sabbatical, got my motivation and energy back. I did some serious thinking and decided I was going to go for the career ramp-up within my consulting firm. But suddenly I was approached by the CEO of _____[corporate]. He was a client. I made sure I could tick as many boxes as possible: a CEO I liked, a role I knew, a big company that could live with my compensation package and had a scope that was interesting within my industry expertise. I believe this was the most helpful - I sort of knew what I was getting into.”

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Not only did this participant know the company and its sector, his network within the hiring organization was already established: “The people I met helped me to bring me up to speed and I got a lot of advice - a very good foundation.”

Eat Your Own Medicine

For another executive, it was his exposure to a client base *in general* that supported his preparation. He described: “reflecting hard on putting together the leadership team. I had been there, meeting senior customers, thinking through how to develop a business plan for an organization. So there were many areas in which I realized I had the know how and felt pretty comfortable about. The biggest challenge was more to think through: “what will my own team think of someone coming from the outside into a company with quite a strong culture and a lot of impressive people with a slightly different background than myself? How can I be a good leader? Will they see me as inspirational, taking them to a better stage? So I spent a lot of time thinking through how to do that and how to spend my first three to six months, because after that, people would pretty much have made up their minds about me.”

Know Thyself

Especially when a seductive opportunity is handed to a Partner on a plate, or when the negative stimuli become overwhelming, it may be tempting to cross over without having performed not only due diligence regarding the *company*, but on *ones-self*. “The first question is to ask yourself is: “what is the reason for the transition? Do you really enjoy consulting? And if you are an excellent consultant but a crap manager, never cross over. You will not succeed,” one leader warned.

Coaching is strongly recommended. “I would look at self-assessment with a coach, or a person you can trust. But I would make it very personal. I don’t like stereotypes, every situation and person is unique and you bring your own strengths and weak spots to the job. And I did think through very carefully about my conditions to take the job. I don’t know if they had a lot to do with the fact that I come from a professional services firm.”

Another confirmed: “I have seen a lot of peers leaving the professional services environment and doing different things, some successful and others less so. It has so much to do with who you are as a person. Think through what your strengths are, where you get your energy from. In consulting firms, people can be quite different, some are hugely intellectual, technical, analytical and some are more extrovert, enjoying building their own success from being influential. And I think there is where I will put myself, what I have always enjoyed.”

Specifically, this executive raised the need for realism: “thoroughly assess whether they would really enjoy the execution side and dealing with those problems, also, being in charge.” Referring to execution, he said: “I am happy with my move but I do not think everyone would enjoy it. You are part of something that you build over time and in _____[consulting firm] a lot of the stuff produced is B___S___. If you get very bored by day-to-day operative work a move like mine is definitely not the right step. “



“Since the moment I started the whole discussion: “do I really want to be in consulting till the end of my life?” things started spinning in my head. Half a year later I went to my Partners and said: “listen, I am quitting.” I didn’t have a clue whether I would get a job or not, but I thought it would be something I would want to do, so, “let’s burn the ships.””



Take Time Out Before Plunging In

Given all these considerations, several highlighted the value of breaking before crossing. “I didn’t prepare, frankly, because it was out of the blue,” one executive told us. “When I got a phone call from a headhunter to participate in the beauty contest, I said: “why not? I’ll try”. Then it went so quickly. The offer was given and drawn up, so I couldn’t prepare myself for the new position.”

And yet, how could Partners create space to evaluate and reflect? Quitting and taking a sabbatical was rarely evoked. Even this needs some research if decisions are to be made for the right reasons. One executive told us: “I left without knowing exactly what I wanted to do, and whilst it was a great liberation it was very strange, not knowing where I would go. Some days it felt fantastic and some days a bit like: “Oh God, what have I done?” I’m not sure I would have done it differently, because it had great benefits, but it was a liberating and also scary time. I wasn’t sure if I was throwing away the momentum in my career. So in hindsight, some further due diligence would probably have been advisable.”

Consulting can be a mentally draining job. Personal energy is critical to making a sound decision, and can be replenished by some serious downtime. “It helped me tremendously that I was not tired when making my final decision” this executive told us. “My break made me think clearly, not focusing on such things as: “all you want is a job where you work less, are home more and travel less.” My time off put me in a place where I remembered that I actually love to work and that I would not be happy unless my new position gave me challenges and stimulation.” Another partner started his preparation process more than a year ahead of his transition. He considered: “many options, directions, the right volume of responsibilities, ambitious goals and interesting tasks.”

For another leader, the move was also self-motivated, and when the decision was made, it was final. “Since the moment I started the whole discussion: “do I really want to be in consulting till the end of my life?” things started spinning in my head. Half a year later I went to my Partners and said: “listen, I am quitting.” I didn’t have a clue whether I would get a job or not, but I thought it would be something I would want to do, so, “let’s burn the ships.””

Kiss More Than One Frog

Some wished that they had *prospected* more thoroughly. “I could have done a more structured job at looking around for more opportunities. Although in hindsight I do not think that I could have found a better job,” one executive reflected. Another said: “I would have liked to have had the chance to evaluate alternatives, to better understand what the best option for me was, and what opportunities the market could have given me.”

Given the need to reflect and be as objective as possible before crossing over, the following insight could be invaluable. “Not many experienced partners want to make the move, so the supply is quite low,” this executive told us. “So if you really want it, there are a lot of companies interested in you. Take your time, as this may not be the only option, and do not jump too quickly on the occasion. Be aware and do not think that you just want to move to corporate life. I sometimes see people just starting to consider: “let me just make that first jump, then I am there.” That is the wrong jump.”

But Don't Wait For Ever

If time and reflection is essential, it is equally important not to slip into analysis paralysis. Here comes another, positive piece of advice: “Do it. Don't stay a consultant for the rest of your life. If wasn't a success and you wanted to go back to consulting, you would be a much stronger consultant than before.” In the same spirit, another executive warned: “Do not be afraid to lose face, make mistakes – that's what people from consulting are very afraid of. Think over who you want to be in five years and where you want to be.”

“Just try it,” a further leader confirmed. “A number of people advised me not to do it, because I was in a certain luxurious position. You are in a move where you are not necessarily successful, because it is a crossover. If you follow that advice, nothing will happen in your life. I would say: just do it. I may look like a big jump, but it is not so big as it seems. I made a crossover to a large organization. Moving from a consulting position to a small hands-on operation would give you a totally different flavor.”

“I should maybe have moved even earlier,” reflected one executive, “as I was relatively old. It is quite a change to move to the other side.”

And Create Space Once On Board

This executive confirmed the need to prepare before departure. However, he stressed preparation is just as important after arrival. “I prepared very briefly,” he said, “because it was a quick move. But to be honest, I didn't prepare well enough. I would advise anybody to put aside genuine time to prepare, and, starting on the other side, really understand the company and challenge. I got drawn into the typical operational demands. The company had been without a CEO for half a year, so my days immediately filled up with HR, Finance and Legal issues and what have you. If I did it again, I would certainly say: “for the first months do not count on me as the person who is going to sign any papers.” I would take that time to really assess the situation and come up with the right plan. Not having that time, I was forced to do this whilst running the company. And there was no culture of delegation, which meant everything ended up with the CEO. Including spending, giving even lower level employees a raise, or hiring lower grade people.”



How to Prepare the Terrain

1. Senior Consultants may risk being victims of their capacity to make fast evaluations of a situation. Yet, once on board, surprises may lie in store, such as needing to handle legal and financial matters, and manage diversity. A blend of realism and humility is strongly advised.
2. Be aware of the 'halo effect', ensure that mutual expectations are articulated, agreed and managed upfront.
3. A well-run hiring organization should expect you, as a senior professional and C-Suite Leader, to exercise due diligence. This should include subsidiaries and key overseas locations. Connect with current and past leaders of your new organization. Just as it should expect you to perform your due diligence, your new organization should also expect you, as a senior professional, to seek references.
4. In your new C-suite role, you will be highly dependent on the CEO and/or the Board of Directors. Be sure you have the right backing. Make sure you know each other and that you have a high probability of working well together.
5. Ensure that the human resources you will need to support your onboarding and subsequent operation are of sufficient quality – either that this talent is present, or can be installed, especially regarding knowledge areas that you do not possess yourself and are out of your role scope.
6. Seriously consider a sabbatical to replenish your batteries and give your brain the best chance of formulating a well-informed decision. The demand for experienced consultants in the corporate world exceeds supply. As such, allow yourself to examine several opportunities before leaping. Plan it as you would a project for a client, setting milestones. Be your own consultant!
7. Perform due diligence on yourself, as well as on the company you are joining. What are your motivations, what gives you energy? Your personality traits or preferences? Your true sweet spot? Will these factors be relevant or sustainable in the new setting? Honest self-assessment is vital. Prepare to be guided yourself - invest in a coach – a trusted peer, or a professional. Consider moving to a smaller company, since the jump will be a shorter one. Be prepared to move out of your comfort zone and your current – possibly luxurious - position. Be aware that success may not come immediately.



The Shock of the New

Onboarding Surprises

3

All our executives agreed that onboarding was one of the most critical phases in crossing over. They were struck by cultural differences related to the relative emotionality and politics of the corporate world. Some regretted their lack of legal and financial expertise. Being suddenly in the spotlight was also a surprise, and whilst some executives relished a greater freedom to make decisions, others keenly felt the pressure of having to have their finger constantly on the button. Fortunately they had their consulting skills to fall back on – these were critical in assessing a new situation and learning how to navigate. However, they needed support and sought it from various dimensions - from the top, from the frontlines and laterally - by building a strong team or bringing that team on board. Some discovered that they lacked the resources to form teams, or that the quality of support teams was lower than in the professional services environment.

It's Not Logical, Jim

Cultural differences between the consulting and the corporate world surprised several executives. "In consulting, if you have the right facts, you *are* right," said one. "A difficult situation is discussed openly, with all participants. In the corporate world, emotions sometimes have more weight than facts." Said another: "I come from a rational environment. Data proves you're right. The emotional and political part in the organization is very different. It is a different game."

Culture Eats Strategy For Lunch (And it's

Another executive experienced culture shock for other reasons: "An absolute lack of delegation and accountability – a fear to take any decisions - escalating difficult decisions to higher levels. If you want to keep your job you don't want to make big mistakes, because you may be fired. If you take courageous decisions, you are more likely to make big mistakes than if you don't take any. That way you may survive another month, another year." He, also, perceived some emotionality: "That, coupled with a very authoritarian, necessity-driven private owner, who was extremely hands-on and relatively emotional, meant basically people tried to survive. That was very different from the culture in which I was living earlier, where I empowered people, allowed them to make mistakes and watched over them. But not penalizing them for mistakes, and keeping their independence and responsibility on a high level."

"Nobody was telling the truth," a further executive reported: "not in the sense of lying, but in being able to give an accurate diagnosis of the situation. I spent a lot of time scratching layers of data to arrive at the truth. This was connected with the mediocre quality of the people." For him, secrecy was something new. "In ___ or ___ [consulting firms] people would be very honest. In a corporation people tell you what they think you want to hear."

His was not the only case: "There was a culture between departments where it was barely possible to collaborate, information was hidden between different areas," said another participant. Another still, confirmed: "By far my biggest surprise was how fragmented it was.... What that does to people's behavior:



how they look at reality from their part of the organization. We put a lot of effort into becoming much more unified, with clearer accountability. Because, in that sort of amorphous environment: "I am here for my own department and not for the whole, let alone for the [customer]," decision-making is also very blurred, slow and participative. We make decisions not once, but three or four times at a different table."

Another surprise was: "the low number of hours that people worked. Having a set schedule that people normally complied with seemed to me to represent a surprising lack of commitment." Not only were shorter hours observed, but sheer inefficiency. Said one: "The disorderliness and lack of proper organization of almost all processes in comparison to _____[consulting firm] struck me. Everything in the organization works against business."

Fixing problems like this would be no easy matter. One leader confessed: "I thought I would walk in (consulting style) and say: "OK, starting Monday we will be a professional organization and the culture will be changed." Nonsense. Unbelievably hard. I am still not even close."

Not all executives were disappointed. This leader noticed: "from the very start, how professional the corporate company seemed from the inside, vis-à-vis my image of a former state-run monopoly; slow."

In at the Deep End

Not only did the new culture hold some surprises for our executives, it was a fast dive. "I barely had a free day to assess the opportunity in front of me," said one.

Furthermore, there are some knowledge gaps for which a consulting role cannot prepare a C-suite executive, as in this case: "When I told people like yourselves that I thought I was the best guy for the C position, they told me: "you don't have a clue" We almost had a big argument. And they were right. The consultant managing a project with five people on it has no clue what it takes to be a C-guy. It is a painful experience. Legal structures, procedures, commercial code, labor law, and so on. Unfortunately, I had to learn that in the flow."

"While the situation was advertised as a growth situation," said another, "it was a company in decline. It ended up very rapidly being a kind of deep restructuring case." He confirmed: "There are business areas professional services seem ignorant about. Legal, taxes, liquidity. All those things you immediately get confronted with. Especially liquidity. As a management consultant, I had to do a lot of financial modelling. But we would hardly ever focus on: "to what extent there is cash in the company, are our receivables being collected properly and payables being managed?""



Given all of this, what could help? “I could have benefited from coaching on how to allocate time as a CEO,” said one executive. Areas included proactive priority-setting and synthesizing long and short term perspectives. His difficulty was linked to behaviors learnt in the consulting game. “As a consultant, you surf clients, your time is pretty much defined by what your client requires. I got skilled in juggling. Which was a skill totally useless at the corporation, because I wasn’t supposed to juggle things, but focus on the key challenges. The second would have been how to trade off short term results pressure, with the necessity to think about longer term changes and projects. So I dived blindfold, tried to make it to the surface and survive. It was actually successful!”

Being an organization-builder was a new step for another participant. “Even in a senior position in a professional services firm, you are building teams, not organizations. Working in projects, not a line role. To get the mind-set right about how to build an organization and a culture and how you should spend your time doing that, took some time and was quite difficult.”

All Eyes On Me

A top manager is in a harsh spotlight and needs to take care of meta-messages. This surprised some incoming executives. One was astonished by: “how much is centered round you. How people are just looking at you, asking: “what do you want?” People are prepared to do what you want them to do. Also you are observed 24/7, what you *do*, but also what you are *not* doing. What you *say*, but also what you *do*. In hindsight maybe that was to be expected but I was not at all prepared for it.” Another leader confirmed: “how cautious one needs to be talking to different constituencies. Because people read much more than you would expect.”

Being literally center stage was another surprise for this leader: “I had done almost no public speaking. All of a sudden I held speeches for 5000 people live, had to get out on stage... I think I did quite well under the circumstances, but I became much better on it after two years. I found myself a great coach. I thought I was the only one. But then I discovered that more or less everyone was doing it.”

Swimming Freely

“This is so huge...” said one leader, referring to the sheer size of his organization, “but when you make decisions, you see their impact. Like moving assets from one class to the other... one signature, and 2 billion goes from this to that part. It was amazing - quite cool.” Another experienced a similar sense of

“As a consultant, you surf clients, your time is pretty much defined by what your client requires. I got skilled in juggling. Which was a skill totally useless at the corporation, because I wasn’t supposed to juggle things, but focus on the key challenges.”

exhilaration: “You have to approve many decisions in _____[consulting firm], here you do not have to. It was very unusual to feel so much freedom and so much power.”

But Under Pressure

Yet, with power comes responsibility. “The biggest surprise was how hard I had to work as the CEO,” said one executive. “In consulting, you show up at 8 or 9... maybe your day would be relatively busy, but you would have two or three meaningful meetings during which you would play an active or passive role. As CEO, there is not a single meeting where I can snooze. Either people are coming to me for a decision or I have to run a meeting. Every time you have to be on your toes. After ten hours, you’re done.” Another participant had similar feelings about the need to have his finger constantly on the button: “When you are in consulting you just advise. Here you have to push, control the whole process. Just delegating is not enough.”

This leader experienced multiple pressures, starting with the previously-cited feeling of being watched: “It is a different mode of working. I was exhausted and the whole thing about being new, the fact that everybody is watching you, nobody knows who you are ... and every meeting you are expected to say wise things.” Furthermore, he felt *less* freedom in his new organization. In consulting, “you have a lot of pressure because you have deadlines and so on, but how, where and when you deliver is up to you. You do not have a boss, I had a boss now. A bit of a sense that I was controlled... dependent. In consulting, if you didn’t like a team or a client you could always move to another.”

How to Float

Back to the Core

Different and tough as this new environment was, several incoming leaders were grateful to have their consulting skills to fall back on (we will learn more about this aspect, later). For one, these skills were “critical” since they “enabled me to look at a problem from different angles with a broader experience than I think you would have, being raised in a corporate culture.” Another immediately set his cognitive machinery into motion: “to lay out a set of priorities for the business. Area by area, what I would need to tackle and analyze to get the right answers.” Having this machinery helps, because the first results will be needed fast. As this executive quickly understood: “all key decisions, and sometimes not very popular ones, should be taken in the first 6 months - I would not have a second chance later.”

Having a consulting track record gave confidence and ease to an ex-Partner who had already encountered a wide variety of business problems in his client interactions. “For me this is a new sector [but] in many ways large organizations resemble each other. It is all about how to maneuver and manage. I was not worried at all about my first half year; as a consultant you know how to find your way quickly and build new relationships. You also learn to get a perspective about the fundamentals and that gives confidence.” However, “the challenge was more, what would happen *after* a year? Would I get bored? The transition from an organization being a client to being your own [organization], that was what happened the first year.”



“The owner and I would have countless debates, when we would be clearly adults with each other. I would say: “this is about saving the company,” and he would say: “this is about building the strategy.” That expectation was maybe created by the fact that he was specifically trying to hire an ex-management consultant as CEO.”

Support From the Top

Several executives emphasized the importance of building a solid relationship with one or two top people. They were mostly pleasantly surprised, in one case by: “the level of involvement of the General Director and Shareholder in the business” and in another: “the total support of the owner, who trusted me from the first moment and allowed me to implement changes and take decisions. This was critical; my team and the entire organization knew that I had the support of the President and principal shareholder and supported what I decided.” Yet another executive confirmed: “The most critical thing during the first six months was the support of my boss regarding all the changes I proposed. The alignment we developed for objectives and incentives to achieve the strategic plan we had set out was clearly the main reason for our success.” In general: “I felt surrounded by the right professionals for the challenges they faced. Finally, another decisive factor was, again: “the rapid execution of all the designed plans.”

Asking his boss for guidance, one senior executive was disappointed at first, but not for long. “He said I needed to figure it out myself...” I’m just afraid that, if I advise you how to spend your time the first three months, I will probably advise you wrongly.” In a way, that was frustrating, but he also forced me to really think it through. I spent the initial three months just meeting people, listening and learning. And I was quite open with my team about that. I took over a great set of individuals, but they didn’t work well as a team. So by gathering them together, I created wonderful discussions. These powerful decisions took place without me knowing about everything, but the team did, and started to collaborate better. I showed them that I did not necessarily know better than them.” (As we will shortly discover, assembling a good team is a critical success factor in the new role).

Sometimes, expectations differ from the outset, and it may be necessary to engage in positive confrontation with one’s closest and most powerful colleague, as in this case: “The owner and I would have countless debates, when we would be clearly adults with each other. I would say: “this is about saving the company,” and he would say: “this is about building the strategy.” That expectation was maybe created by the fact that he was specifically trying to hire an ex-management consultant as CEO - such a person would create the right strategy for him. That expectation, confronted with the fact that I didn’t believe there was a need, nor time, to craft a beautiful strategy, created a lot of friction.”

And From the Frontlines

If relationship building needs to occur top down, there are also precious learnings bottom up. “I had to also really understand the processes,” said one executive, “so I tried to work in supermarkets. I have always



done that... I was for instance a cashier in the supermarket and I was really bad at it. In that time you had all these stamps... Three different programs... And people yelling.”

Another literally got on straight on track: “I drove a train with a conductor, did a night shift, went from station to station, I met all different corners of the organization. One person was assigned to me... a former train driver who is now a part of our corporate University. He also introduced my predecessor and has been with the company over twenty-five years. He knows a lot of people and that was very nice - to start making relationships, because it is also a very relationship-oriented firm.”

Time For A Team

We recall how one executive swiftly discovered that consulting had not prepared him to be the ‘C-guy’ especially regarding fiscal and legal affairs. In the same vein, another executive told us: “They don’t teach you that if you are going to be a successful head of business you need to have your CFO, HR, COO, etc.” As such and unsurprisingly, getting the right people on the bus was a commonly-cited first act.

For one executive a strong team was a *pre*-condition of crossing over: “I wanted to become a part of the top team – six to eight people who felt collectively responsible for the whole organization.” Another echoed: “I wanted to work with a good team, not encounter some real performance issue there and be unable to move on that.” Particularly because: “a professional services firm means working with high quality people. I am spoiled and that was one of the risks coming here. But I am now one year in and can say that I am quite happy with the individual qualities of my team.”

Another executive also cited the high quality of teams in the professional services world. “You are the frontline. So if you prepare something it has to be at a proper quality level and you have a team to prepare it, you just check and review. Here you have to do many things by yourself from beginning to end - even some basics.” This is perhaps why he simply transported the excellence into his corporate: “I brought a team with me – it was a great help. If I had better known the organizational set-up before my move, I would have taken more people.” However: “I also tried to adapt to the system and not to confront it.”

Others built teams out of the human capital *within* their new organization. Said one: “I do not want to endlessly manage my stakeholders, two guys in my team are doing this extremely well, so they help with onboarding. I also chose my team tactically - both experience, and fresh expertise. People from the business, not specially from Head Office.” Another also picked his new entourage with his onboarding in mind: “Getting a few very strong supporters initially. Secondly, unity of the Management Board. And trust in those few people I chose.” He also worked fast: “We had a week to prepare. I say “we”, because I had a chance to handpick two of my colleagues for the Board. So we had an immediate To Do list. Terrific insiders. They knew exactly who we needed to replace immediately, who was not honest, who was, who was professional, who not.” This was just as well, because there was a problem. “Everything was secret, so no one knew that I would be CEO. In a normal world, they would say: “OK, you will be CEO in three months’ time, you have access to people. You can talk to people, interview them.” So, the most important thing in the first month or two is choosing your team.”



...If We Have the Resources

If having a strong team is vital, there can be barriers to forming one. In this case, it was the participants' own error: "I should have been more aggressive in finding resources for my team. It was understaffed and I let it be in the beginning, wanting to show I added value. Now I am completely understaffed and it will take several months until I have recruited. In a sense I need a mini-me and I cannot be too aggressive in bringing in a whole _____[consulting firm] team."

For another, the money simply wasn't available. "People coming from outside were paid relatively well, confronted with people from the inside paid ridiculously low amounts. The solution was not to increase everybody's wages - the company didn't really have a margin to cover that. The recruitment challenge was underestimated both by the owner and myself."

In other cases, the quality was not what they were used to: "At our consulting firm we always had the best people in our country and abroad. I could not understand how adequate resources were not available for carrying out the corresponding functions." Another incoming executive echoed: "I was surprised by the level of back-office. I wasn't spoiled by back-up services in _____[consulting firm], but in the economic sector, in a local industrial company, they are awful. Support doesn't work properly and efficiently. That was an unpleasant surprise."

Not only money, but motivation was a barrier for a further participant as HR surveys revealed that "the company came up extremely poorly in terms of loyalty, beyond getting paid every month. The extent to which they believed they were part of the bigger thing. There was a lack of a sense of direction, purpose."

"At our consulting firm we always had the best people in our country and abroad. I could not understand how adequate resources were not available for carrying out the corresponding functions."



Onboarding Surprises

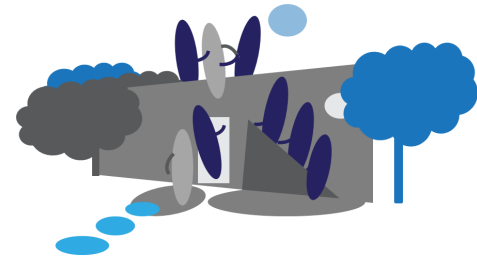
Entry into the corporate world can be described as diving blindfold, trying to make it to the surface and survive and will demand agility, active listening and forward-thinking.

1. If not already implemented in your preparation, get a personal coach to support you as a new leader in the transition process - including self assessment
2. Be alert to meta-messages. Anticipate an environment where emotions and politics may bear more weight than facts, and silos may exist
3. Plan your onboarding: meet as many key people within the organization as possible, listen and continue building insights on the culture, financials and people issues before stepping in if possible, and after stepping in as soon as possible. Find your way quickly around the organization. Build new relationships and get intelligence on who to invest in and who not
4. Leverage your consulting skills in strategic thinking, teambuilding and result orientation. Prepare to use them in learning fast at multiple levels/dimensions
5. Be ready for surprises and finding another organization and people than you planned for. You may find a different financial situation and corporate culture than expected.
6. Be prepared for the fact that much is centered around you and you are observed 24/7 – in terms of what you are saying and doing - and what you are not. Check your own meta-messages
7. Don't go it alone. The need to constructively interact with a co-pilot (also learning from each other) makes it all the more important that you have evaluated whether this person is someone with whom it is possible to work. Practice giving – and receiving - difficult feedback.
8. Invest in teaming
 - Bringing the Board of Directors together – facilitating their interaction
 - Getting a support team. Envisage bringing in your own high quality people, securing the resources for external hiring, or identifying internal members via your internal guides
9. Prepare to handle unprecedented management tasks:
 - Legal, Tax, Liquidity, Investment decisions
 - Building a corporate organization and culture
 - Presenting to large audiences
 - Proactive priority setting - focusing on the main challenges of the company
 - Balancing the short and long term, critical decision making and choices.

Part Two: The Consultant's New Clothes

- 4 - Consulting on the Inside – Exercising the Craft
- 5 - Us and Them – Dealing with Prejudices
- 6 - Old Dogs, New Tricks? – Applying New Habits and Leaving Old Ones Behind

“You do not tell the CEO that he is more a Consultant than a Manager.”



Consulting On the Inside

Exercising the Craft

4

In the previous chapter, we touched upon the fact that, in the first 90 days, the skills honed in a consulting background can be of invaluable help in assessing and steering through the initial turbulence. In this chapter we discover how and when these skills really come into their own: a combination of broad-based thinking, sharp analytical skills, and the ability to motivate teams in times of pressure and change.

The Human Factor

We have seen how important it is for an incoming C-suite executive to assemble a team – some simply imported one. If building that team is vital, some ex-Partners consider teambuilding as an ingrained ability of their trade: “Starting with people: creating and motivating a team,” reflected one: “All the tools you acquire as a management consultant, how to make sure people go the extra mile without being paid an extra mile. So the whole motion of creating a strong team, some sense of unified purpose the majority of people I recruited was basically because they shared the perspective that this was a fantastic challenge. A company that is extremely primitive in the way it is managed and has the potential to become a national blue chip with international significance. One of the top ten producers globally in this industry.”

Another confirmed: “In my previous life I did a lot on team effectiveness, in terms of the portfolio, contracts, wiring who is in the team, the dynamics, agenda and processes. My proposition to the CEO was that I was able to make the executive team a better team. Being part of it, but at the same time, they asked me to act in the spirit of team coach, facilitate discussions around the strategy, or make a process intervention.”

If teambuilding skills were ingrained in some cases, another senior executive who had crossed over to banking was inspired by the idea of developing those all-important people management competencies: “to lead, to motivate, to manage.” Having said this, he was no novice: “I also have an advantage over the bankers. They only negotiate well with each other and it is difficult for them to find a common language with “common people.” I think outside of their box, so I can communicate with different people more successfully and feel more confident.”

Broad Brush, Confident Strokes

The previous interviewee had broken into a closed environment and was able to break down barriers. For several, a key consulting skill was their ability to converse fluently and knowledgeably with senior stakeholders on the basis of solid, yet broad-based, arguments. “With a consultancy background you are very good in a boardroom style culture,” this leader told us: “so you are quite productive in a management meeting. The combination of listening and presenting the argumentation, having a good sense of planning and setting priorities. With a consulting background you also have quite a broad view of things, and being a great generalist is underestimated in a senior role.”



“There is a communication skill that I really learned from my time at _____[consulting firm]. How you structure a logic and break things down. I am highly organized. There is breadth in my experience!”

Others echoed the point, this executive drew upon his consulting skills: “Every day! I have industry knowledge as a backdrop. There is a communication skill that I really learned from my time at _____[consulting firm]. How you structure a logic and break things down. I am highly organized. There is breadth in my experience!” Furthermore, he was able to deal with large volumes of information, adding: “I can cope with a huge workload.”

Still another executive found the wide spectrum of consulting an invaluable platform for corporate life, thanks to: “the knowledge you gain, the broad thinking, the way you have to engage with and convince customers. Actually, in every role I had, including here, I am still able to fall back on the knowledge I gained at _____[consulting firm].”

“If you are good consultant, you need an ability to stretch your thoughts, otherwise you cannot communicate clearly,” another leader confirmed. “I have seen many different companies which I could use as examples. Not only from insurance, but from banking. This company, this country. Definitely helps.”

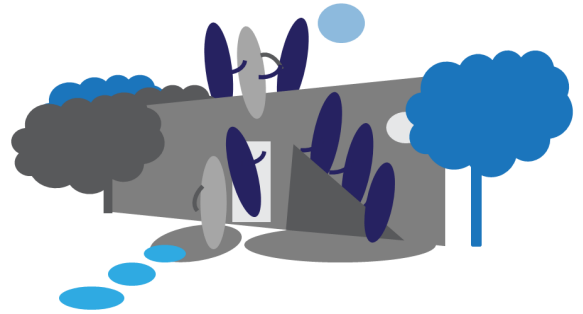
An Analytical Brain

Analytical abilities are typically associated with the consulting environment. To what extent is this level of cognitive processing relevant in corporate life? Highly relevant, said several: “The most applicable knowledge would be my capacity to analyze business strategies, the market and opportunities, the size of existing teams in order to develop them. Equally, redefining the business model for some of the operating units - new KPIs were decisive, since the company was not accustomed to using them, whereas for me it had been very common. Finally, the construction of communication channels and the relationships with clients, which needed redefining from the very first moment.”

As American songwriter ‘Woody’ Guthrie once put it: “any fool can make something complicated. It takes a genius to make it simple.” This adage applies to the *kind* of analysis that most helps an executive. “The first is to cut to the nucleus of a problem, cut out the crap and say: “OK, this doesn’t make sense. So, tell me what the truth is.” Secondly, the ability to communicate. This is one of my major surprises - managers talk and talk. I ask them: “tell me in one minute, in three bullet points, what needs to be done and why and forget about x, y, z.”

And a Nose For Problems

Experience can breed intuition, as in this case: “There is a lot of project work going on, and I smell projects going bad from afar: are there too many people at the table, deliverables not clear enough, questions about who the budget holder actually is? Those sorts of consulting project management no-brainers. I make them explicit with my boss, making sure he is with me - [he] is an important factor in influencing. I bring it to the table, find my liaisons and discuss my potential shortcomings with people in my team. I am an engineer, so I look at the content. If I am convinced that there is enough, I go there.”



Exercising the Craft

The most useful skills ex-Partners apply to their new role can be summarized as follows:

1. A highly-developed ability to interact productively with the boardroom style in management team meetings (and in general)
 - Strong communication and presentation skills
 - Focusing on the priorities and core of a problem, people and business issues
2. Experience in handling a large workload, working under intense pressure with tight delivery times
3. The capacity to develop business strategies quickly, analyze the market and the opportunities to target and penetrate these
4. Team effectiveness, leveraging and deploying the right team to execute the new strategy and growth agenda
5. Redesigning the business model for the business lines, setting new KPI's.
6. Developing constructive communication channels and enhancing relationships with key clients and markets
7. Capitalizing on previous industry knowledge
8. Thinking 'Outside-In,' having seen different business models and perspectives.

“There is a lot of project work going on, and I smell projects going bad from afar: are there too many people at the table, deliverables not clear enough, questions about who the budget holder actually is? Those sorts of consulting project management no-brainers. I make them explicit with my boss, making sure he is with me.”

Us and Them

Dealing with Prejudices

5

After crossing over to the corporate world, our ex-consultants encountered prejudice related to their professional services background - concerning their understanding of the company, or the relevance and pragmatism of their strategies. These rumblings were either implicit or explicit, yet several new executives successfully rose above them. This, thanks to their healthy realism about human nature, the fact that they had successfully overcome prejudice in the past, or were simply able to filter out unhelpful noise.

Walls of Silence

Several incoming leaders did not face direct criticism related to their background. However, they were by no means naïve regarding the gossip around the coffee dispenser. For them, to doubt was human: "Maybe nobody was brave enough to tell me, said one CEO. "Probably in the majority of the cases the CEO is seen as a God. You do not question the CEO. You do not tell the CEO that he is more a Consultant than a Manager." Another confirmed: "I am sure there were many prejudices. The question is more, had anyone told me?" This participant was equally realistic: "I think that people want to spread doubts, it is easy to say: "he has a consulting background, he is not a manager." It is often heard." Another, in true consulting style, put himself in the shoes of his stakeholders. Again, even though he did not hear any direct criticism, he sensed it. "I think people were quite skeptical, asking themselves, what would I know about this, coming from a consulting company? Among my team members, some were not sure I knew technology that well, I mean they were country managers at Microsoft, IBM, HP or Oracle and they had twenty years of career in technology. Also, my leadership team is older than me. While I don't think that was a problem, I still think they looked at this relatively young guy coming in and doing this."

Another had an additional problem: "This is almost a family oriented business. The people are in the third generation, the average is ten years in a job. Those are family relationships and I almost feel like a voyeur: am I allowed to be part of this family? I have only been here for a short time, what do I know?" Wisely, he admitted that this could related to his personal filter: "But this is much more in my mind than in the people's minds, they are very open to new people and ideas."

Stranger in a Strange Land

The previous young leader had an atypical profile in a technical world. Others had no doubt that the prejudice was related to their alien status, as in this case: "The people here did not know how to perceive me, they were even afraid." Said a further leader: "From the very beginning I encountered prejudices, as I was the only one who moved to the executive position from consulting, everybody else came from investment banks. I was a stranger here, but only up to the beginning of the real work."



Brushing it Off

The healthiest reaction to prejudice was to expect it and avoid chewing on it. “Of course,” said one leader. “They say that people in consulting can only talk. Another prejudice: you don’t know the subject matter deeply.” Another was equally coolheaded, helped by the fact that he had seen it all before: “I guess there was prejudice in the company I moved to. “Well, he is a consultant, he doesn’t know the business, he doesn’t know the culture,” the normal stuff you would expect. In corporate life, moving from telecoms to banking, I got the same questions. So it is no different from moving as a consultant to a corporate or business role.” Another confirmed, equally rationally: “I tend to ignore those kinds of rumors, this is information I cannot use or I would rather not know.”

Building Bridges

Dismissing implicit or explicit prejudice helps the mental state of the incoming leader. What can he or she do to support his or her doubting entourage? Integrity and the demonstration of that cool head was one strategy: “I tried to find an approach to them, a correct and professional one,” said this leader. Another was able to demonstrate that the differences between the two planets were not so great, by picking compatible and easily-digestible tactics: “I use specific elements in the consultant profile which are similar to the corporate role.”

Another practiced the incremental change approach, and allayed fears by doing so: “I showed them that by taking small steps in the right direction, my recommendations and solutions could be implemented.”

This leader took a similar view: “I decided to be involved in the details from the beginning, so that I did not come crashing in on people from above. I did not demand too much, coming in with a ____ [consulting firm] background, this was what people were afraid of. Finding the right balance of challenging and backing off. I came in with a structured, practical way of working rather than a bureaucratic one. I believe that taking it easy in the beginning was critical for my success. The other thing was of course to spend time building relationships with people. Lastly was probably finding a good role split between me and the CFO.”

A further tactic to engage and motivate was to apply active listening and participative decision-making. Thanks to this leadership style: “people felt respected, that they could say things, I think I managed to create a quite open atmosphere and I picked up some concerns. I tried to make decisions but still involve people. I could have gone terribly wrong if I had had a strong mind about what to do.”

If a basic grasp of people’s emotional landscape is one approach, another is the application of logic, as in this example. “Many times I had to face the prejudice of my teams and people in other departments who thought my recommendations and solutions were pure ‘consultancy.’ I had to convince them of their validity, veracity and functionality. In light of this, I would say that personally I have no other problems other than the credibility at the beginning on my team. Today I can say that the prior opinion that I was “a mere consultant” has disappeared.”

We saw that ‘crashing in from above’ would not have worked for a previously-cited leader, another important key was simple authenticity. “Do not play a role. Explain to people what you need from them



“I demonstrated to them over time my knowledge and capacity of taking decisions in real aspects and practices of the company.”

and why. Be very clear. In most cases I found out that people are able and also willing to deliver. Just be yourself.”

This approach paid off. Furthermore, the authentic leader was pleasantly surprised by the increased transparency he experienced after crossing over to be part of the tribe: “the attitude from the people I’d worked with as consultant became more open, more trust-based. When you are part of a team, the members understand better what you say than when you are its consultant.”

Proof of the Pudding

Several incoming leaders found that the negative perceptions of their colleagues changed during their the work process. For one, the prior opinion of irrelevance dissolved because: “I demonstrated to them over time my knowledge and capacity of taking decisions in real aspects and practices of the company.” Another confirmed that: “During the work process the prejudices were gone.” Still another had confidence that his colleagues would eventually come round. Instead of worrying, he invested his energy in walking the talk. “I don’t try to change these views - during the work process people understand that this is not true. I am not worried about this aspect.”

In conclusion, “I think it is all about how to overcome it, delivering. Credibility. So if you start delivering on the promises that have been made about getting you on board, which always happens, either by the person who hired you or yourself, no one will ever complain about where you came from.”

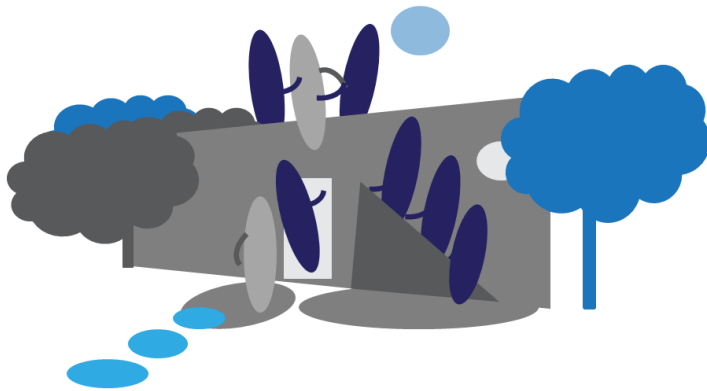
It Works Both Ways

Of course, prejudices can be present on both sides of any table. “I do not know if it was a prejudice, but I definitely had a certain assumption that the vast majority of people are willing to work very hard and are self-motivated,” said this ex-Partner. He was not the only one, as we have seen, to be disappointed by the quality and/or motivation of people in the corporate world. “In consulting, according to a two-by-two matrix: ‘will’ and ‘skill’, you have extremely willed people and extremely skilled people... lots of tolerance for ambiguity. Who are bright and put pieces together. Here, or in an average company, you have a mix. The worst is ‘low skill’ and ‘high will.’ My assumption was that everyone should be ‘willing’ and ‘skilled.’ I found myself in a situation where only a percentage of people were in the right corner and the majority of them were in a different corner to my team.” The solution? “I have two people from _____ [consulting firm] who are now Board members. They are doing terrifically well. It took them some time to get to this point, and some consultants will never get it.”



Dealing With Prejudices

1. Be prepared that your recommendations may be considered 'pure consultancy' - based on hypothesis rather than experience or knowledge of the business
2. These prejudices may not be directly communicated to you, especially given your seniority. Staff may have a tendency to spread doubts focused on your ex-consulting profile
3. Strategies to overcome prejudices are as follows:
 - Keep a cool head! Know that prejudices will likely dissolve as the positive effects of your leadership are seen and experienced by doubters
 - Exercise your leadership and change management skills such as:
 - Taking an incremental approach
 - Active listening
 - Participative decision-making
 - Authentic leadership
 - Building a fact-based business case.



Old Dogs, New Tricks?

Applying New Habits, Leaving Old Ones Behind

6

Many aspects of consulting knowledge and practices turn out to be an invaluable resource in a new corporate role. Some habits transfer less well. The tendency to conduct extensive, iterative analysis before acting is one. Others relate to management style: the assumption that teams are highly motivated, closely connected and will deliver on the basis of motivation rather than rules. Or that work can, or will be, done outside normal hours. Some well-loved consulting tools have to be put back into their box: Excel, PowerPoint and finally, management lingo.

Cut to the Chase

The consulting world is characterized by pressure, deadlines, travel, long hours. Yet it does feature one luxury that is seemingly absent from the corporate world: the space to conduct iterative analysis. This approach simply did not belong in the new life. "Being a consultant, you tend to want to be very sure before acting," said one executive: "you could do a project for six months before deciding what to do. Here, time is crucial, so you need to change that mindset, think through: "how much do I need to know before I can act?" After a while on the corporate side, I become better at increasing the pace of my own decision-making process. It is difficult, because you can not only do it yourself, I think that is probably the biggest change. I still work with consultants. As an outsider, you sometimes wonder, "why are you spending all this time?" Another leader agreed. These days he even considered reflection to be a form of procrastination. "Then – they say somebody is long on hypotheses and short of facts or vice versa. In _____[consulting firm] you rely on facts, here you also have to rely on your intuition. But you need to balance well." In terms of balancing, another participant needed to install *more* analysis in his new company: "I had to realize that not everybody had analytical skills, in general the case with consulting teams. I found I had to support and develop the people more with their analysis and evaluation processes."

And Set the Rules

A CEO described how his principal shareholder would constantly remind him that his new role demanded rules and regulations. "In a large company, in disperse geographies, it was important to give people guidance, but in a written, procedural form. In a professional services firm you can be pretty sure that 90% of the things you ask people to do, they will do, because a) they are motivated, b) evaluated. They know what they are working for. So they basically get things done."

Time to Change

Even if some ex-Partners considered that consulting allows greater analytical space and time than the corporate world does, we also saw difficulties balancing work and private life. Whilst they also faced time-related challenges in their new lives, the reasons were slightly different. For this participant, "I had to change from a culture where the work had to be done regardless of hours and effort, to a culture which was a little more relaxed and did not have the same pressure and intensity as in consultancy." If consulting minds are trained to be 'open all hours,' habits related to that mindset could backfire in a more regulated



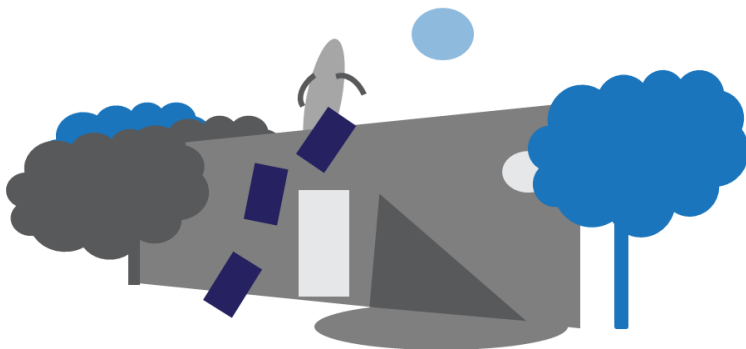
corporate environment and even give a false impression of chaos: “Well, I had to stop being late, an incredibly large cultural difference. In _____[consulting firm] nobody is ever on time, no meeting starts on time. I had to shape up on discipline, scheduling and planning ahead. You cannot just wing it and say, “we will have a call at 22h this evening.” In _____[corporate name] it means an early morning start but also a relatively early evening finish.”

Hand Over Your Toys - and Mind Your Language

Finally, some consulting tools did not survive the crossing: “I was very proficient with my laptop, PowerPoint, the whole Office suite, made my own presentations and calculations in Excel. Basically this is an organization which is so rich in resources and the nature of the job is different, so I am not supposed to do that anymore, I have to delegate.” Another had to shed: “Consulting-speak. I had to try to speak a much simpler language, without management lingo. “

Applying New Habits, Leaving Old Ones Behind

1. Check the working style of your direct reports and the extent to which these should be *directive* (rules, procedures and controls), or *facilitative* (co-agreeing on desired outcomes, rather than setting the way in which these are achieved). You may choose to modify their style and bring a fresh approach into the organization
2. Use your coaching skills to develop analytical skills within your new team - these may well be lacking
3. Retaining your capacity for robust analysis, speed up your pace of decision-making, whilst thinking long-term
4. Identify which technical analytical tools and tasks can and should be delegated to others
5. If you find yourself using management lingo, check and use terminology with which your new entourage can easily identify.



Part Three:

Looking Back, and Forward



“I think both worlds can learn from each other. My experiences are from different worlds. There are not that many people that go from one to the other.”

- 7 - Those Were the Days , Or Were They? - What is Missed Most and Least
- 8 - If I Were Hiring Me - Advice For Hiring Organizations
- 9 - I Can See Clearly Now – Shifts in Perceptions of the Consulting/CxO Role
- 10 - Where Do We Go From Here? – The Next Career Step
- 11 - Crossing Over – Decision Dashboard

Those Were the Days (Or Were They?)

What is Missed Most – and Least

7

Ex-Partners miss performing and discussing intellectual tasks in a likeminded, collegiate setting. They miss less the reasons for which they abandoned consulting in the first place – the imbalance between work and private lives, excessive travel, workload, the pressure of acquisition and lack of real influence on short- or long-term outcomes.

Food For Thought

One ex-consultant was nostalgic about the joy of creative exploration, (leading us to wonder who was setting the Board agenda in his new organization): “The majority of professional tasks were related to intellectual curiosity. You had to solve problems, design something, spend time on analyzing, creating. And this is the biggest part that is missing in my life. Because you go to the Board meeting and talk about approving the contract for toilet paper or water. From time to time you have a few interesting questions, but a large part is spent on things that are not extremely stimulating intellectually.”

Several executives did not only miss intellectual exploration, they missed their fellow explorers. The feelings of this ex-Partner could also be linked to a lingering sense of being a stranger in a strange land. He regretted: “The presence of peers for intellectual discussion and for advice, but also spending time together. I also never became a part of _____[corporate company] culture, because I never moved to _____[town]. I was a constant commuter.”

He was not alone. Another incoming executive missed: “the continuous influx of new and inspiring ideas... The degree of specialization, commitment and dedication you usually find in consultancy teams I still do not have in the present company.”

“I think I miss the people the most,” this leader confirmed, “an everyday, intense alignment with an enormous amount of talented, top notch people.” Said another, (perhaps due to poor onboarding, or his failure to build a team): “I miss the support, people to rely upon. I miss the team. In a consulting partnership there are the best people in their field, here you can’t always hire the best ones.” However, he added: “Sometimes there is no need to hire them.” Whether this implies that good people are already in place, or that the intellectual level of his new organization does not demand superlative brainpower, is not clear.

If the previously-cited executive missed specialization, a peer missed the opposite - the broad spectrum approach of consulting. (As seen, this is valued in the corporate world). “Sometimes I miss working across a broader set of companies and subjects and countries. I realize I have become much more knowledgeable and probably more effective, and I probably become better by the week here. At the same time I am also narrowing myself down a bit. And I both enjoy and miss it.”



Several executives, as previously found, were happy to leave account acquisition behind. Not this leader. “Apart from some colleagues I loved to work with, (which does not say anything about my new colleagues here), acquisition was always a great facet of consulting. You think as a client: “Where are they, what would help them?” And then get the license to operate. The intervention is cool, both in terms of finding the hook on the content but also with the stakeholders, buyers. That is exciting, to get the sale.”

In contradiction to the executives who had had to shed their habit of iterative analysis, this ex Partner had a different regret: “rhythm and intensity. In many cases we did not even have time to think, and events, as well as client requests, overwhelmed us. It was essential to always be on the run, recruiting and delivering on time. I do not experience such rapid and demanding dynamics at my company today.”

Memories of Emptiness

Ex-Partners were also asked about what they missed *least*. These aspects mirrored their reasons for leaving professional services in the first place. There could be two possible reasons for this. Firstly, that their motivations were sound and lasting, such as the imbalance between work and private life, excessive travel, workload, acquisition pressure, limited influence on outcomes or participation in execution. It may also indicate a form of ‘commitment bias’ – a desire to self-confirm that the decision to cross over was the right one. Without further interpretation, here is what the executives told us.

“I probably would never want to be a management consultant again, unless my life forced me,” said one. “I was extremely happy to leave behind the constant fight to convince clients to buy overpriced projects and implement the drafted recommendations. I am not very nostalgic about my consulting times. It was a very good school. I should have left much earlier than I did.” Could ‘overpriced’ also mean ‘inconsequential’? If so, a further participant had a similar feeling. He did not miss: “Empty reasoning. You are consulting, you are not taking decisions.”

Another did not miss empty *hours*. “In consulting you have a lot of slack during a day due to transportation to and from clients. Also in phone meetings you were expected to call in but not really take part. An eight hour working day at my current company equals twelve hours in my consulting firm.”

“It was essential to always be on the run, recruiting and delivering on time. I do not experience such rapid and demanding dynamics at my company today.”



This executive had no regrets about internal - and probably non-productive – over-complexity. He recalled: “Firms can make things so complex. If it is about the results of the clients it is really action-orientated, but when it is about internal process, a lot of partners have to look at it, complaining, not taking any decisions.”

For another, life in general had seemed rather empty. “What I am missing least is the fragmentation - I worked across twenty-five different countries and thirty different companies on a management level and a couple of hundred different _____[consulting firm] people. So we were always everywhere and sometimes you almost didn't know where you were waking up.”

Finally, this leader summed up: “I feel very happy about being able to stay with the same company and develop something and see the benefit. It is a bit scary because you are really accountable, [yet] the reward you see from the results of all the work you put in, with your team and everything, is extraordinarily satisfying.”

What you May Miss Most – and Least

Many of the features of consulting which are not missed by incoming executives mirror the reasons they quit in the first place. However, other features are clear sources of nostalgia. When crossing over, be mindful of what you may have to sacrifice. Examine whether your chosen corporate organization will offer the culture, team, or opportunities that will enable you to carry into your new life the aspects of consulting that you most cherish. Alternatively, find ways to create them yourself, or be prepared to trade them against the benefits of moving. These features are:

1. The innate practice of creative, intellectual exploration
2. Interaction with like-minded peers in a ‘professional collegiate’ (or even élite)
3. Working with several companies, and possibly sectors
4. Account and business acquisition – hunting and farming (not missed by all)
5. A dynamic and delivery-focused rhythm with clear time parameters.



If I Were Hiring Me

Advice for Hiring Organizations

8

For consultants as well as hiring organizations, a previous consulting-client relationship can be a fine platform for mutual observation and success. Even more so, because it can be difficult to gain visibility on a Partner's suitability on paper, given the 'black box' of the consulting environment. In the absence of a history of working together, sound assessment is critical, not only to evaluate business competencies, but personal and social fitness for this different and culturally-diverse environment. It is also important to examine the consultant's underlying motivation for the role. Risk can be managed by setting smaller steps towards the top roles, and here again, well planned and executed onboarding is vital. With these conditions in place, the fresh perspective, broad-based experience and intellectual bandwidth imported by exceptional consulting professionals has the potential to act as a powerful catalyst for change.

Examine them – in Vivo If Possible

We have seen that a consultant can experience a smoother crossing if he or she has already performed work for the corporate organization. This history can also serve the hiring organization well. "It is an excellent plan," said one leader. He is putting that plan into action himself: "We have been pretty successful in attracting people from _____[consulting firm] doing certain projects. They finished and said: "OK, now we need to implement." And they started, moved from the project to a key executive role."

Pre-nuptial knowledge is vital and in the absence of previous co-habitation, the advice is clear. "Really get to know the person, it's really difficult to look at credentials and what people have done," one executive concluded, after reflecting: "It's quite a brutal environment. I think some people really are very well suited and can probably be some of the best line managers you can ever find. Quite a few cannot fit at all. I had advised my future boss, we spent lot of time working together and he knew pretty much who I was. I don't think he would ever been willing to trust me with the responsibility if he didn't. Because, on paper, I didn't have the qualifications, but he just knew and was taking a little bit of a bet. I think I proved him right, things have been going very well."

If the previous participant did not have the qualifications 'on paper,' the difficulty of evaluating an ex-Partner's true metal can be linked to the diffuse nature of the consulting world: "The consulting time is pretty much a black box," said one. From the outside, "it's very difficult to penetrate what someone has really done in 15 years in _____[consulting firm]. You have been doing so many different things, not running a big organization or a big P&L, it's difficult to pinpoint, you almost need to go back and understand the person behind all these projects."

In all cases, a “proper evaluation test” is key, according to one executive. Another confirmed the need to assess, in particular, whether the consultant “is really capable of managing diversity, and is a good fit for the cultural and organizational environment in the corporate world. Secondly, if he really has the ability to run, construct and develop the business, and above all to empathize with and relate to others in a very different way to what happens in consultancy.”

We have raised the need for self reflection, and corporate organizations are advised to check levels of self awareness. “Make sure that you really understand the candidate’s preferences, whether it really is the right move.”

Small Steps Are Advisable

If, for one participant, the jump was not so great, in other cases, the risk both sides can be considerable. Here is a potential solution: “Don’t hurry to hire a person from professional services for a primary role. Take him or her for a secondary role, i.e. head of a business unit, and give some time to adapt to the corporate environment. The problem is that consultants either risk too much or not enough.”

Another leader emphasized the need for rigorous onboarding: “Unless the guy from consulting knows the company extremely well, do not put him in a C position without some kind of accelerated development track or onboarding path.” The best kind of leadership candidate, onboarding and expectations to envisage were clearly outlined by this executive: “take a realistic view of a person’s capabilities, do not consider that a consultant can do everything. For example, a consultant couldn’t become a bureaucrat all at once. And a consultant is more effective in cross-business environment, not in a specific subsidiary. Try to take consultants with a broad view, not niche ones. Sometimes they are very narrow specialists.”

Another had a similar view: “[You can] do assessments and that sort of thing, not just focused on whether this is a right candidate - they are all bright, otherwise they would not have survived in those roles. But it is more about the other needs of an individual and company; is there a cultural match, is there maybe too much ambition and drive on one side? Which may need to change, but cannot be changed in six months; it is a three, four year program. And has the individual the experience to know how to make those steps in smaller steps? What you see in a lot of companies, specifically in senior roles, is that people come in, get a PA and system, and it is literally ‘good luck!’ And every week or two, the CEO puts his head around the corner on the Friday at 5 o’clock asking: “do you still enjoy it?” At that level there are no onboarding processes. There is a huge opportunity to get people to be even more successful in their roles.”

One executive seemed to be wondering how he made the crossing at all: “I am actually surprised that people consider hiring consultants into corporate roles. If I was an owner, I wouldn’t, because there is only so much you can do with intellect... They are probably bright enough, they are motivated enough, but

“Take a realistic view of a person’s capabilities, do not consider that a consultant can do everything. For example, a consultant couldn’t become a bureaucrat all at once.”



they are not necessarily experienced enough.” He added, however: “Of course, people with a lot of years in consultancies have proven themselves in a difficult situations.”

But Big Changes are Possible

The very difference between worlds was, for this participant, the source of possible gold – and gold mining implies risk. “I think corporates are too hesitant to do it... obviously, it is safer to get someone from outside from the same industry. But hiring with another background and bringing in a new, very analytical, great individual, who it seems has never managed, brings in total new energy and a new perspective which has an huge impact on the future success of the organization. I guess the advice is here to take some risks and consider whether it is the right moment in time.”

Another confirmed the value of this bright, fresh perspective: “The mindset I have seen in several industries, has quite often been a “no” from the start. It cannot work, this is too big, he does not have the experience. [Yet] there are many successful cases: I just returned from Turkey where the CEO as well as the COO both came from professional services directly into their current roles. Sure, there are always things that can be done better but they are very successful in transforming the company, bringing in a completely different view and managing the people excellently.”

Advice for Hiring Organizations

1. Perform a thorough assessment of the competencies of executives coming from Professional Services. Read between the lines – look into the details of their experiences, and prepare questions regarding qualitative and quantitative outcomes to establish the business case for the hire
2. Have them work for you as a consultant first, get to know them and their strengths and capabilities, particularly regarding implementation capacity. If you are already working with consultants, consider them as a primary talent pool for the role
3. Hire a consultant first into a C-1 or C-2 role. Help him or her grow into a more senior role where the stakes are higher
4. Hire for the right role. Examine your candidate possesses the relevant consulting competencies: transformation, program management and management expertise in a cross-functional and possibly international business environment
5. Recruit consultants with a broad view
6. Take a realistic view of their capabilities, do not assume that a consultant can do everything, right away
7. Consider whether it is the right moment, then take some calculated risks. The upside: hiring from ‘the other side’ will bring in considerable fresh knowledge, experience and innovation and can be key in creating culture change.



I can See Clearly Now

Shifts in Perceptions of the Consulting/CxO Role



Whilst their new life had significantly reduced the esteem of some executives for their former profession, the loyalty and respect of most remained intact. The idea that both sides could learn from and coach each other emerged. Regarding their perceptions of the C-suite, the appreciation of all participants had grown, thanks to their first hand experience of this lonely, highly pressured leadership role where their impact on results did not always match their hopes and expectations, as the system raised inevitable barriers to getting things done.

9.1 – Appreciation Shifts of the Consulting Role

An Underperforming Profession, Say Some

This leader's post-consulting experience had significantly reduced his appreciation of the profession's value: "Changing seats, I was immediately bombarded with firms who wanted to do consulting projects for me. I was on the other side, imagining how I would feel if I suddenly let in this team of people who had no clue about the industry. I remember as young business analyst going into any type of company, not knowing anything about it, interviewing people with twenty years' experience and believing I was much brighter than them. For the two years at _____[corporate company] I was fighting back the idea of bringing in a consultancy to create a strategy for us; if we were ready to do a strategy, we would do it ourselves." He concluded: "The longer I am outside consultancy, the less respect I have for the profession, the more I have for CEO's and even more, for entrepreneurs and owners. Of all those classes, I have the most respect for people who have actually built a business and are now running it on daily basis. I am wondering what the future is for management consulting as a profession."

Another ex-Partner had also become somewhat cynical. For him, consultants were not just under-informed, but the quality of their input could vary, undermined, furthermore, by the very lack of responsibility that drives many out of the profession in the first place: "Consultants give you a standard product and many aspects depend on the person who does the project, on his/her involvement and expertise. Now, expertise is abroad, but the foreign consultants coming here do not know local reality. You have two ways to solve this: do everything by yourself or take consultants from the Big4, adapt and teach them. External consultants are not responsible for the result, they are not responsible for anything at all."

That Could Benefit From Some Consulting, Say Others

If the first participant had doubts as to the future of management consulting as a profession, and saw the teaching of Big4 consultants as one way of correcting their ignorance about local reality, a peer evoked the value of coaching - especially regarding impact: "There are a couple of partners in _____[consulting firm] who have asked me to be their coach to do things better. I think the biggest change is that I have understood that they focus even more on the big picture. Sometimes I think the approach of any



consultancy firm is to define a good statement of work with clear deliverables and then to be very focused on delivering. Then life feels good. But if there are no meaningful decisions made on the advice, what was really the impact of it? On the consultant side I don't think I was thinking enough about this." Another was interested in mutual education: "I think both worlds can learn from each other. My experiences are from different worlds. Not that many people go from one to the other."

The next leader could perhaps be consultant-coach. Whilst his views of the profession had not changed, "what you see much more clearly is the effects of certain behavior on the client, because you feel it."

This executive had an additional learning for professional services firms – live up to your name. This means being *professional* and delivering *service*, resisting shareholder pressure on the short term: "the focus is more and more on commercial results; the adage that we always used to deliver to the customer on time and on budget does not always seem to be there anymore, less than it used to be as, I can recollect from the old days. More competition, prices down, a lot of them become public and therefore need to show results."

Or Does Absence Make the Heart Grow Fonder?

The respect others ex Partners held for their former profession was intact. "My concept of consultancy has not changed at all," said one. "I continue to think that a value added service is rendered that companies cannot normally provide for themselves due to the specialization and commitment of the teams and because at certain times they do lack the adequate internal resources to carry out projects. From this point of view, resorting to a consultancy contributes tremendous value to the problems we face in the day-to-day."

Another confirmed this view, displaying clear professional loyalty: "My perception of the world of consultancy and professional services has not changed much, that would not be fair to me or to my colleagues. I still believe positively in the added value of consultancy and professional services, and having been on both sides of the table I recognize the enormous capabilities and specializations of consulting teams, and their high capacity to deliver on time and in accordance with companies' needs [regarding] certain projects or changes. These are challenges for which companies do not usually have the resources, determination or commitment to take on; they need someone from outside with more vision and experience to provide ideas and recommendations."

Still a Consultant at Heart

Finally, this participant was grateful to the solid performance basis with which consulting had provided him: "I do not think it has changed. I learned, at least for myself, within _____[consulting firm] an incredible amount, which I still use today on a day-to-day basis. Basically these are my fundamentals, from where I start everything. And nowadays they continue to deliver good results and deliver to their people, so nothing changed."



9.2 - Appreciation shifts of the C-suite role

Now I am Older, You seem So Much Wiser

“Everything is centered around you. It is demanding, being constantly on your toes and the fact that you are a role model.”

We previously heard from a corporate executive who had serious doubts as to the future of the consulting profession. One of the reasons was – in his view - a distinct improvement in the quality of corporate management. Why would any modern manager need external help?

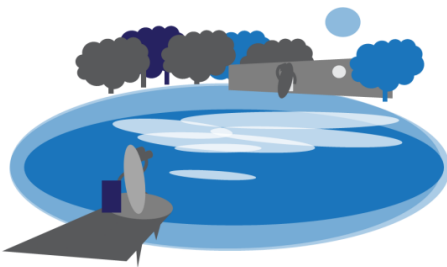
“Twenty years ago, we served stupid companies with very poor managers. Which means, you would be able to provide data in any area. I went to a cosmetics factory. Anything we touched, even straight out of university, we would be able to substantially improve. And those situations do not happen anymore... these companies became stronger and stronger.”

Tough at the Top

Experience had given some participants a keen appreciation of the importance of the Executive Committee role as well as the relentless pressure placed on senior executives. For one executive, joining that environment had only confirmed his previously-held view: “My opinion regarding Executive Committees has not changed. Previously, I had a lot of contact with them and was aware of the composition, factors and needs at the time of deciding on critical aspects of companies. Now that I am a member of a Management Committee, this continues to be the case - it is one of the principal executive bodies.”

For others, their prior appreciation had grown. Said one leader, echoing the need for consultants to be a little more humble: “I appreciate the work that a CEO puts in a lot more now when I was on the other side. I see how difficult it is. At _____[consulting firm] you have a lot of opinions about your clients based on how they interact with the things that you find important. You tend to judge them on how smart and strategic they are - all the things that consulting people feel they are good at. I now see how much more difficult a CEO role is and how important it is to be a good leader, to make the judgment calls when hiring and firing people. I see the constant pressure on the CEO.”

“I know much more about the role today,” another confirmed. “I had a lot of respect for the role before and what a difficult responsibility it is. Another thing is that everything is centered around you. It is demanding, being constantly on your toes and the fact that you are a role model.”



Others were sharply feeling the isolation of leadership. “Some factors you do not meet in consulting – there is no help, no advice,” said one. “Here you have to take decisions, responsibility. Even taking a wrong decision is better than not taking any decision at all.” Said a peer: “When I was in consulting I had a phrase that it is very lonely at the top. The consultant is not lonely, even as a Partner. But as the C, and especially the CEO, I have to tell you that it is very, very, very lonely. So, get ready for that. There is a huge crowd around you at the top, but it is very lonely.”

Limits and Possibilities

If several participants, as we previously saw, relished their new sense of freedom and the impact on results that was possible in a senior corporate role, others had a warning – freedom has boundaries: “You think you have all possibilities and a lot of power, but the system limits your actions, as every system,” said one. He also confirmed: “You don’t have as many resources and as much support as you need – that’s the reality, you have to rely first of all on yourself to create these. You have to balance, develop your program and not be afraid.” This finding was supported by a peer: “I believed that in this role, when you have interesting ideas, you had possibilities to implement them. But in fact you have so much routine work, so much pressure, yet no time to realize your creativity. So it’s an operational role.”

“The consultant is not lonely, even as a Partner. But as the C, and especially the CEO I have to tell you that it is very, very, very lonely. So, get ready for that.”

For several, their appreciation of managing the human side of organizations had grown: “I wanted to sit in the driver’s seat. I wasn’t a bad consultant but they did not always take the advice I gave them. And now I am sitting at the other side of the table I ‘get’ that it is sometimes bigger than the project I worked for as consultant. And I am working with five consultants to deliver this big picture: it is more challenging, dynamic, bigger. So I gained more appreciation of being in a corporate role and responsible for the roles of individuals in that process.” Said another: “Above all I would highlight the importance of leadership qualities and the ability to manage an organization and a team. I believe that the power of ideas and vision is very important.”

Bridging the Gap

The final note is struck by an executive who believed in the synthesis between the two worlds and the value of both: “If you run an organization with more highly educated professionals, it is similar to professional services. The one thing I learned over the years is that you adjust your management style to the different levels you’re in. If you are not flexible to adjust, you are not a good CEO in my opinion.” He concluded: “Yes, that is one of the things I learned in professional services. To adjust your laws, read the situation quickly, get to the core, back up.”



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4. Ask, "in my leadership style, am I able to resolve the tension of *authenticity* and *adaptiveness*?" If *authenticity*, as we have seen, is a key to trust building, consistency and clarity, it is equally important to *adapt* to employees who are operating at levels and in different situations.



Where Do We Go From Here?

The Next Career Step

10

Unsurprisingly, given that most of our interviewees were relatively new to their role, the next step seemed somewhat distant. And yet, even if it was not yet in focus, it was emerging, even at this early stage. The notion of returning to consulting was rarely cited. Instead, some were thinking of bridging the advisory and corporate worlds via a future Non Executive Board role. Others were experiencing an entrepreneurial itch. For some, this could be solved by becoming an intrapreneur within their existing organization. Finally, for those not already in a CEO role, feelings were mixed about stepping up.

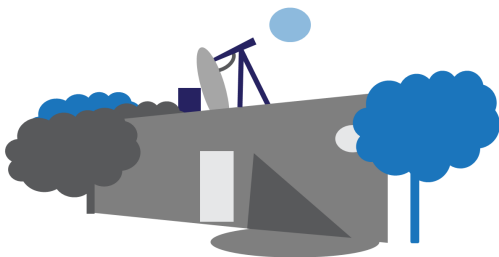
Back to the Future?

One executive considered the possibility of returning to a life in consulting, as one of several options: “When I left _____ [consulting firm], I saw three options: a CHRO role, further consulting or general management. Two of these are still open. I could go back to that junction and reevaluate. Here I find myself in a national business, in different types of networks - it could become a more political or public role.” However, “I’m not sure I have enough patience or savvy for such a career path. Another could never envisage a U-turn. “I have no plans to return to the consultancy sector. I think my next career stage will be related to the execution and corporate side.”

A New Kind of Advisory

One of the clear reasons for leaving consulting was the frustration of advising without being able to make, or implement, decisions. As a next step, some leaders were considering synthesizing their advisory and executive experience. Said one: “I sincerely believe I have a future goal in the company in which I am now involved... in four or five years I will retire from the corporate world and enter an activity more related to Non Executive Boards.” Another had a similar intention envisaging: “A much calmer situation, almost retired, focusing on activities that have something to do with consulting aspects or Non Executive Boards. I do not believe I will return to Professional Services.”

Two participants had already begun the next phase of their journey. “A few years ago I started to do some non executive roles as well, which is normally a step you take, and from which you get a lot of satisfaction. I just made the shift again to a completely different industry, so I would not have any other ambition.” For him, this was the next step. Finally, for another: “There is always the Non Executive Board track, I am on two Boards right now but it’s too early to do only that, at my age.”



I might return to consulting or start an entrepreneurial career. Anyway this position opens many doors and levels.”

That Persistent, Entrepreneurial Itch

“Buying companies in a distress situation, turning them around and selling them at a much higher price,” was an ambition of one executive. The last two years at his corporate had prepared him well for the challenge: “its magnitude and scale has similar challenges... hiring people at the right level and cost, running after sales targets every single month, making sure working capital make sense, fighting for the right finance structure. For all these responsibilities I was totally unprepared before leaving _____[consulting firm].”

Another participant was hesitant, but open minded: “I can continue my professional development here, but... I might return to consulting or start an entrepreneurial career. Anyway this position opens many doors and levels.”

If being an entrepreneur means running one’s own organization with all the risk that entails, it is also possible to scratch the itch by becoming an intrapreneur – exercising ownership *within* an organization. “My next step will be dependent on how much my skills will be demanded in some concrete situation. If the context is good, it will be on the next level with even more freedom of decision making,” said one leader. For another: “The process of corporate development of the subsidiary is not finished. We might become quite an independent company inside the Group. And my own goals will be dependent on this. Probably I may develop in the direction of investment funds. I like my current job, but there is a big emotional pressure and I haven’t decided how long I can bear it.”

CEO or Not CEO? That is the Question.

Several of our interviewees were already in the CEO seat. What about those who were not? Feelings were mixed. “I wouldn’t mind getting my CEO’s job one day. It would be a bigger scope than my SVP (BU) role only managing one third of the company. I can already get excited about the thought. If for some reason it does not [happen], I probably need at some point to look at doing something else. I don’t yet know what that would be.”

Another executive had mixed feelings – was he ready for the top job? “Outside _____[corporate company], I am still a risk as a CEO because I have no proven track-record of a full P&L, but less of a risk now having shifted over to the corporate world.”

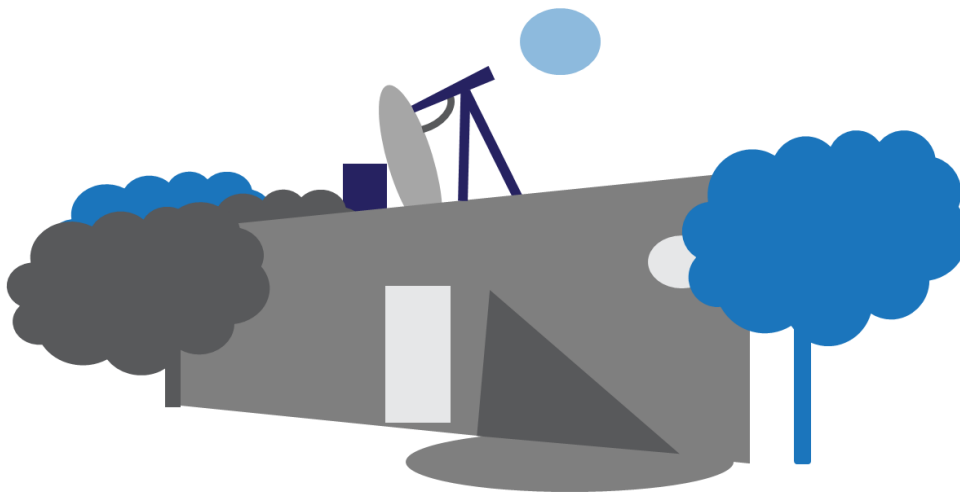
One executive was in no doubt: “I always said that I do not want to run a company, I do not want to become a CEO.”



The Next Career Step

As an ex Partner now in a C-suite role, consider the following options:

1. A Non Executive Director position – this will blend your experience acquired in the corporate setting with your analytical and advisory skillset acquired as a consultant
2. Equally, this portfolio of skills, complemented with your background in business development and due diligence can equip you well for starting your own company, or investing in and restructuring companies. This, if you have an entrepreneurial mindset.



Crossing Over – Decision Dashboard

At the close of each chapter we have provided a set of insights and main messages. Here we combine these into a 'decision dashboard.' We invite consultants and hiring organizations to use this as a thinking aid to ensure that the crossing over fulfils its considerable potential to be a source of real value enhancement for all.



How to Prepare the Terrain

1. Senior Consultants may risk being victims of their capacity to make fast evaluations of a situation. Yet, once on board, surprises may lie in store, such as needing to handle legal and financial matters, and manage diversity. A blend of realism and humility is strongly advised.
2. Be aware of the 'halo effect', ensure that mutual expectations are articulated, agreed and managed upfront.
3. A well run hiring organization should expect you, as a senior professional and C-Suite Leader, to exercise due diligence. This should include subsidiaries and key overseas locations. Connect with current and past leaders of your new organization. Just as it should expect you to perform your due diligence, your new organization should also expect you, as a senior professional, to seek references.
4. In your new C-suite role, you will be highly dependent on the CEO and/or the Board of Directors. Be sure you have the right backing. Make sure you know each other and that you have a high probability of working well together.
5. Ensure that the human resources you will need to support your onboarding and subsequent operation are of sufficient quality – either that this talent is present, or can be installed, especially regarding knowledge areas that you do not possess yourself and are out of your role scope.
6. Seriously consider a sabbatical to replenish your batteries and give your brain the best chance of formulating a well-informed decision. The demand for experienced consultants in the corporate world exceeds supply. As such, allow yourself to examine several opportunities before leaping. Plan it as you would a project for a client, setting milestones. Be your own consultant!
7. Perform due diligence on yourself, as well as on the company you are joining. What are your motivations, what gives you energy? Your personality traits or preferences? Your true sweet spot? Will these factors be relevant or sustainable in the new setting? Honest self assessment is vital. Prepare to be guided yourself - invest in a coach – a trusted peer, or a professional. Consider moving to a smaller company, since the jump will be a shorter one. Be prepared to move out of your comfort zone and your current – possibly luxurious - position. Be aware that success may not come immediately.



Onboarding Surprises

Entry into the corporate world can be described as diving blindfold, trying to make it to the surface and survive and will demand agility, active listening and forward-thinking.

1. If not already implemented in your preparation, get a personal coach to support you as a new leader in the transition process - including self assessment.
2. Be alert to meta-messages. Anticipate an environment where emotions and politics may bear more weight than facts, and silos may exist
3. Plan your onboarding: meet as many key people within the organization as possible, listen and continue building insights on the culture, financials and people issues before stepping in if possible, and after stepping in as soon as possible. Find your way quickly around the organization. Build new relationships and get intelligence on who to invest in and who not
4. Leverage your consulting skills in strategic thinking, teambuilding and result orientation. Prepare to use them in learning fast at multiple levels/dimensions
5. Be ready for surprises and finding another organization and people than you planned for. You may find a different financial situation and corporate culture than expected
6. Be prepared for the fact that much is centered around you and you are observed 24/7 – in terms of what you are saying and doing - and what you are not. Check your own meta-messages
7. Don't go it alone. The need to constructively interact with a co-pilot (also learning from each other) makes it all the more important that you have evaluated whether this person is someone with whom it is possible to work. Practice giving – and receiving - difficult feedback.
8. Invest in teaming
 - Bringing the Board of Directors together – facilitating their interaction
 - Getting a support team. Envisage bringing in your own high quality people, securing the resources for external hiring, or identifying internal members via your internal guides
9. Prepare to handle unprecedented management tasks:
 - Legal, Tax, Liquidity, Investment decisions
 - Building a corporate organization and culture
 - Presenting to large audiences
 - Proactive priority setting - focusing on the main challenges of the company
 - Balancing the short and long term, critical decision making and choices.



Exercising the Craft

The most useful skills ex-Partners apply to their new role can be summarized as follows:

1. A highly-developed ability to interact productively with the boardroom style in management team meetings (and in general).
 - Strong communication and presentation skills.
 - Focusing on the priorities and core of a problem, people and business issues.
2. Experience in handling a large workload, working under intense pressure with tight delivery times
3. The capacity to design business strategies quickly, analyze a market and the opportunities to target and penetrate it
4. Team effectiveness, leveraging and deploying the right team to execute the new strategy and growth agenda
5. Redesigning the business model for the business lines, setting new KPI's.
6. Developing constructive communication channels and enhancing relationships with key clients and markets
7. Capitalizing on previous industry knowledge
8. Thinking 'Outside-In,' having seen different business models and perspectives.

Dealing With Prejudices

1. Be prepared that your recommendations may be considered 'pure consultancy' - based on hypothesis rather than experience or knowledge of the business
2. These prejudices may not be directly communicated to you, especially given your seniority. Staff may have a tendency to spread doubts focused on your ex-consulting profile
3. Strategies to overcome prejudices are as follows:
 - Keep a cool head! Know that prejudices will likely dissolve as the positive effects of your leadership are seen and experienced by doubters
 - Exercise your leadership and change management skills such as:
 - Taking an incremental approach
 - Active listening
 - Participative decision-making
 - Authentic leadership
 - Building a fact-based business case.

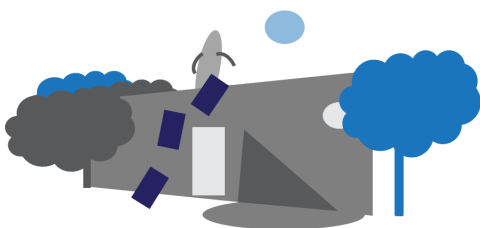
Applying New Habits, Leaving Old Ones Behind

1. Check the working style of your direct reports and the extent to which these should be *directive* (rules, procedures and controls), or *facilitative* (co-agreeing on desired outcomes, rather than setting the way in which these are achieved). You may choose to modify their style and bring a fresh approach into the organization
2. Use your coaching skills to develop analytical skills within your new team - these may well be lacking
3. Retaining your capacity for robust analysis, speed up your pace of decision-making, whilst thinking long-term
4. Identify which technical analytical tools and tasks can and should be delegated to others
5. If you find yourself using management lingo, check and use terminology with which your new entourage can easily identify.

What you May Miss Most – and Least

Many of the features of consulting which are not missed by incoming executives mirror the reasons they quit in the first place. However, other features are clear sources of nostalgia. When crossing over, be mindful of what you may have to sacrifice. Examine whether your chosen corporate organization will offer the culture, team, or opportunities that will enable you to carry into your new life the aspects of consulting that you most cherish. Alternatively, find ways to create them yourself, or be prepared to trade them against the benefits of moving. These features are:

1. The innate practice of creative, intellectual exploration
2. Interaction with like-minded peers in a 'professional collegiate' (or even élite)
3. Working with several companies, and possibly sectors
4. Account and business acquisition – hunting and farming (not missed by all)
5. A dynamic and delivery-focused rhythm with clear time parameters.



Advice for Hiring Organizations

1. Perform a thorough assessment of the competencies of executives coming from Professional Services. Read between the lines – look into the details of their experiences, and prepare questions regarding qualitative and quantitative outcomes to establish the business case for the hire
2. Have them work for you as a consultant first, get to know them and their strengths and capabilities, particularly regarding implementation capacity. If you are already working with consultants, consider them as a primary talent pool for the role
3. Hire a consultant first into a C-1 or C-2 role. Help him or her grow into a more senior role where the stakes are higher
4. Hire for the right role. Examine your candidate possesses the relevant consulting competencies: transformation, program management and management expertise in a cross-functional and possibly international business environment
5. Recruit consultants with a broad view
6. Take a realistic view of their capabilities, do not assume that a consultant can do everything, right away
7. Consider whether it is the right moment, then take some calculated risks. The upside: hiring from 'the other side' will bring in considerable fresh knowledge, experience and innovation and can be key in creating culture change.

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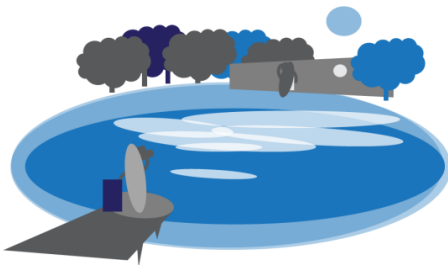
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Acknowledgements

Amrop sincerely thanks all the executives who shared their time, experiences, and insights with us. All names of participants and organizations have been withheld for confidentiality purposes. Furthermore, the male gender has been used throughout, reflecting the majority of the participants, and the terms 'C-suite executive, Partner, executive or leader,' used as descriptives.

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The interviews were conducted by the following Amrop Partners on behalf of the Amrop Global Professional Services Practice Group and based on an original idea by Job Voorhoeve, Amrop Netherlands and Tomasz Magda, Amrop Poland.

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About the Amrop Global Professional Services Practice

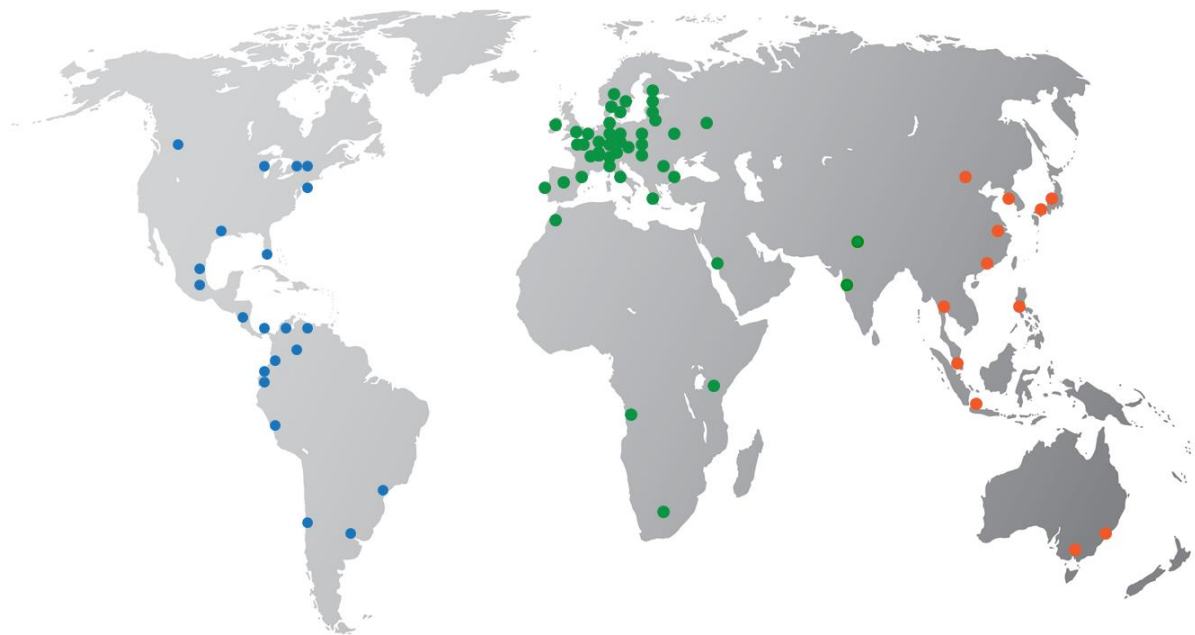
Human capital is the enduring success factor in the professional services world. Amrop's Professional Services Practice works with clients to build solid and integrated leadership capability at every level and every opportunity. We get to real issues and reach practical solutions, fully participating in a transparent, trust-based process and co-creating an outstanding results.

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