The Consultancy Codex

Intro

Few professions have faced as much criticism as consultants in recent years.

In many Western countries, the consulting industry happens to be described as a professional class of con artists and snake-oil salesmen who drain the public sector and seize the budgets of private companies without delivering sufficient value. This applies to lawyers, communication agencies, management consultants and IT experts alike.

In reality, consultants are often just skilled specialists brought in to solve a specific task. Consultants give organisations flexibility and access to expert knowledge. It is the cheapest and most effective way to activate the brightest minds on the biggest problems.

However, some parts of the consultants industry have grown susceptible to complacency. Burdened by their own power, they over-complicate their services, design projects to make the customers dependent on them, and field over-priced teams of juniors and whoever is on the bench instead of the senior partner they promised.

The industry needs a codex, a formalised set of norms for external experts and professional service providers. The demand for a contingent workforce of highly skilled and specialised talents will not subside. On the contrary, the war for talent will escalate and flexibility will remain a differentiator in the years to come.

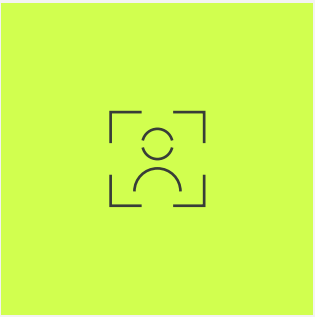
Against this backdrop, we aim to set the tone and reinstate trust, integrity and customer centricity in the next phase of the gig economy. We want to disrupt a complacent consultancy industry with a new code of conduct in the form of seven rules for the future of consultancy.

Everyone can make a mistake. It is nearly impossible to make every single customer 100 % satisfied at all times. But you can approach your work with the right motives. That is what this codex is about. It is a set of guidelines for a better, healthier consultancy industry based on transparency, fairness and common decency.

In the end, we believe that reads positively on the bottom line. At least that is our experience.

Source:
https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2024/03/12/book-review-the-big-con-how-the-[...]s-and-warps-our-economies-mariana-mazzucato-rosie-collington/

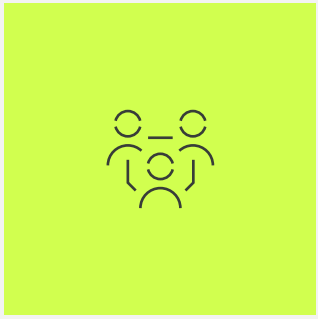
01 Know your client



Too many consultancies jump to solutions without grasping the client's business model, constraints, and decision dynamics, so recommendations look polished but don't land. That's how you get deckware instead of outcomes.

Invest time to thoroughly understand the client's industry, operations, culture, and specific challenges. Engage stakeholders, ask probing questions, and align solutions with their strategic goals to deliver meaningful impact.

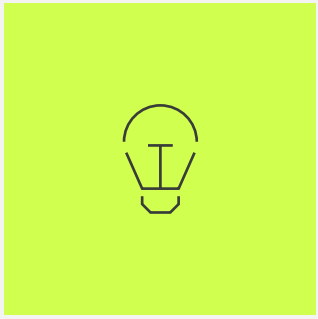
02 Field the A-team



In consulting, it’s not unusual to sell the A-team, only to deploy the B-team or C-team once the contract is signed. Senior partners make the pitch and seal the deal, but it’s the juniors who end up doing the actual work. That’s dishonest bait-and-switch practice.

A consultancy should field the strongest, most relevant team for every project. The right line-up might be a blend of juniors and seniors, nearshore and offshore talent, but the mix should always be transparent in the project’s scope and reflected in its price.

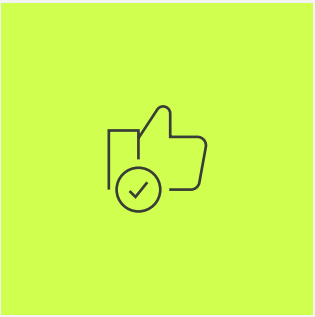
03 Solve real problems



It’s not uncommon to see consultancy firms tailor projects to fit the skills of their team rather than to solve the issue of the client in the ideal way. Again, you sell a team of highly specialized seniors and then field whoever happens to be available, or “on the bench” to use the industry term.

A consultancy should deliver what the client needs. Not what’s coincidentally on the shelf that day. It also means right-sizing the team and solution to fit the client’s context—no more, no less. Solve real problems, deliver real value.

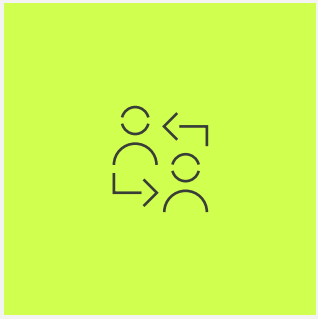
04 Deliver what you promise



The consulting industry has occasionally faced criticism for over-promising, under-delivering, and focusing on short-term gains rather than client value.

The remedy is simple: don’t oversell. Scope projects realistically, with clear timelines and an honest assessment of the skills involved. Be transparent about what you can and cannot do. Price fairly, deliver on your commitments, and ensure the client gets genuine value for money.

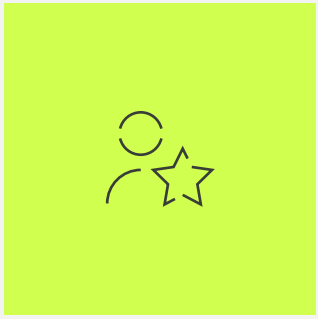
05 Give back ownership



The consulting industry has developed a habit of overcomplicating services and structuring projects to make their clients hooked, making it easier to expand budgets over time.

Good consulting does the opposite: it plans for transition, transfers knowledge, and builds capability. Make sure your clients can maintain their own solutions, and design systems that are open, interoperable, and sustainable long after you're gone. That includes clear, accessible documentation that helps the client understand, operate, and evolve the solution independently. Good documentation is part of good delivery.

06 Put your skin in the game



Likewise, accountability is key. It goes without saying that you must deliver quality work - on time. When something goes wrong as they sometimes do, hiding behind excuses or contractual technicalities is unacceptable.

A real partner has skin in the game, taking responsibility and working proactively to resolve issues. That means owning both success and failure. If something fails, fix it.

07 Deliver and disclose



Some consultants have a habit of mystifying their work making the tasks seem more laborious and the scope harder to predict. The delivery becomes a black box: the result might be fine, but no one can be certain how it was achieved or whether it could have been better.

A good consultant works in the open: no hidden fees, no surprise cost changes, and a clear account of how time is spent. Share how decisions are made and why. Let the client see how you work, not just the finished product. This is craftsmanship in consulting—not just solving problems, but doing so with clarity, integrity, and pride in the process.

Who we are

emagine is a high-end business and technology consultancy. Enabled by in-house consultants and an extensive network of experts, emagine powers progress, solves challenges and delivers real results through tailored high-end consulting services, Near-shoring-as-a-Service and a range of Managed Services.

Our continued success and growth stem directly from our ability to build strong relations to clients and consultants alike.

Since 1989, we have been able to refine our delivery capability by helping our clients on thousands of critical business projects.

Read more about emagine and our mission to reinstate trust in the consulting industry at:

emagine.org