

Career Opportunities in Consulting (Management and Strategic)

Management consultants are professionals who are trained to solve problems, devise strategies, and improve the general health of clients no matter what the industry. Management consultants help clients solve specific problems (usually focused on the short-term), while a strategy consultant researches and develops strategies for improving the long-term goals of the company. Companies hire consultants not only for their problem solving abilities, but also for their objectivity.

Typically, consultants conduct research, analyze data, prepare reports and present findings; less frequently a management consultant will become involved in the actual implementation of the plan. Profits are derived from fees to clients, which consequently breaks down to "billable hours." In general, the work environment is fast-paced and stimulating and involves long hours. Work weeks of between fifty to seventy-five hours are not unusual.

Management consultants tend to work in teams of three to four individuals with one person assuming the leadership role. Travel is another important aspect of a management consultant's professional life. Spending time with the client on the premises is an essential part of the consultant's responsibilities. If you are working a management case, you may spend three to four days each week at the client site. It is not unusual for a consultant to fly out Sunday night and fly home Friday night until the project is finished.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

While different firms have different titles for the same positions, entry-level positions traditionally are analysts/research Associates. These positions are typically filled by undergraduates with salaries that range from \$45,000 to \$65,000, with signing bonuses of between \$3,000 and \$7,000. For those with experience or advanced degrees, it is possible to be employed as an Associate or Senior Associate. These positions can be filled by M.A., M.B.A., Ph.D. and J.D. graduates. Salary Range: \$70,000 to \$120,000, with signing bonuses ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000.

The type and amount of work depends on the kind of project the consultants are working on. The three main types of cases are: strategy, management (which would include operations and business organization) and systems design.

It is possible for a management consultant to have an entire career with one company. From the associate level, an individual can work up to manager, managing director, vice president to partner and/or principal. Some management consultants will focus on one industry and others will work with a wide array of clients from various sectors.

More typically, after a few years, a management consultant might choose to leave the firm and work for one of their clients. Usually, in this situation, the management consultant will assume a strategic planning role for the organization; however, the possibilities are not limited to this one function.

Qualifications Necessary/Application Procedures to Enter Field

Most consulting firms tend to hire people with advanced degrees, typically law, business and other specialty areas or with some specialized experience. Academic excellence, leadership and team skills gained from extracurricular activities and private sector experience derived

from internships are important in the consideration process. The following qualities are essential for consultants: excellent oral and written communication skills; strong analytical abilities (including quantitative methods); attention to detail and deadlines; and proven leadership capabilities.

Sample Employers

- Booz Allen & Hamilton (BAH), www.bah.com
- Grant Thornton, grantthornton.com/
- Ernst and Young, www.ey.com
- Deloitte, www.deloitte.com
- Logistics Management Institute (LMI), www.lmi.org
- Public Financial Management (PMF), www.pfm.com
- KPMG, kpmg.com
- Knowledge Systems and Research (KSR), <http://www.ksrinc.com/>

Demand and Future Challenges of Profession

Consulting firms are the beneficiaries of outsourcing and contracting. The management consulting industry's challenges reflect the challenges that are facing today's leading businesses and government agencies. Both big and small organizations are looking for new ways to increase profits and decrease costs, especially in this harder economic climate. As the market becomes increasingly international, an ability to approach problems from a global perspective will be useful. In this more difficult economic period, specialized skills such as language fluency and technical knowledge become increasingly important, because just as in other sectors that are hard hit in this economy, there are fewer opportunities. However, companies are still hiring, therefore it is essential to build contacts by contacting alumni from your school that are working with firms you are interested in to build your networking infrastructure. When a client company's budget shrinks, the relative cost of a management consultant rises; it is essential for a successful firm or consultant to add noticeable value to their clients' operations and bottom line.

Resources For More Information

Comparative Advantage by Michael Poner and In Search of Excellence by Tom Peters are also extremely helpful preparation tools for people interested in management consulting.

Listings in the business press such as special editions of Forbes, Fortune, Business Week, and the Wall Street Journal.

The Harvard Business Review also puts out a pamphlet on management consulting firms.

The Harvard Business School Guide to Careers in Management Consulting, published by Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.

Wet Feet Press (www.wetfeet.com)

Associations

Association of Management Consulting Firms - <http://www.amcf.org/index.asp>
International Council of Management Consulting Institutes - <http://www.icmci.org/>

Internet Resources

Vault www.vault.com

Career Journal <http://www.careerjournal.com> Wall Street Journal online careers information

Wetfeet www.wetfeet.com

Publications

- *The Harvard Business Review publishes a pamphlet on management consulting firms*
- *The Harvard Business School Guide to Careers in Management Consulting*, by Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2000.
- *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*, by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, 2004
- Listings in the business press such as special editions of *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *Business Week* and *the Wall Street Journal*.
- *Operations Ratios for Management Consulting Firms - 2005 U.S. Edition* Association of Management Consulting Firms, New York, NY (has salary information)
- Consulting Magazine
- The Vault Guide to the Case Interview, 4th edition, Vault, Inc. (2001)

Field Specific Information

Applicant/Interview Procedures

The recruitment staff in the top management consultant firms play a major role in the application process. Interested candidates should inquire about each firm's deadlines and forward resumes and cover letters accordingly. The traditional timeline starts with information sessions (often on campus) in the early fall and interviews beginning as early as October and concluding as late as April. Initial contact with a consulting firm should be done in the beginning of the fall semester rather than later in the academic year.

Personal, professional and alumni contacts can be helpful when one is applying to a management consulting firm. Depending on the firm to which a candidate is applying, two to three rounds of interviews will be held. The first interviews are with one or two members of the recruitment team. (Recruitment teams are comprised of line staff from varying levels who rotate on and off recruitment duty.) One interview will usually be a "fit" interview and the other a "case" interview.

The "fit" interview is generally a discussion about the candidate's background and experience. This is an important opportunity for an applicant to demonstrate essential characteristics such as leadership, innovation, and creativity through the stories and examples that he or she decides to discuss.

The "case" interview is highly structured. The applicant will be presented with a business problem and asked to provide a strategy and possible solution in 20-25 minutes. The interviewer is looking to see how the applicant analyzes a problem and how he or she attempts to solve the problem. The interviewer is not looking for technical expertise -- this is truly an evaluation of how the applicant thinks. Mock case interviews are strongly encouraged for M.A. candidates.

The interviewee should be prepared to demonstrate quantitative skills and highlight

leadership skills, all while being a team player. Communication and interpersonal skills are paramount. Is the interviewee engaging and enthusiastic? Does the interviewee have the poise and sophistication to impress and persuade a client? The interviewers will be asking themselves whether or not they would feel comfortable having you present in front of a client.

The most important part of the interview is the case question.

Consultants must be able to effectively synthesize mass quantities of foreign data, structure an approach to a given client issue and hypothesize logically and creatively. The case question is designed to test a candidate's ability to think logically, to determine tolerance for ambiguity and data overload, to observe his/her thought process, to assess poise and communication skills under pressure and, ultimately, to determine if the candidate is a good "fit."

For more information on Case Questions candidates should read:

- Ace Your Case, Wet Feet Press (www.wetfeet.com)
- The Wharton MBA Case Interview Study Guide, published by the Wharton MBA Consulting Club
- The Harvard College Guide to Case Questions, available through the Office of Career Services at Harvard College (617) 495-2595

The Vault Guide to Case Interviews