

MODULE ONE: BECOMING A CONSULTANT

Welcome to Module One: Overview of Becoming a Consultant

In this foundational module, we'll explore what consulting truly means and what it takes to succeed in this dynamic field.

Our key outcome: By the end of this module, you'll have your complete consultant positioning statement and an optimised LinkedIn profile ready to attract clients.

Here's what you'll learn:

- What consulting is and the various forms it takes
- The essential skills every successful consultant needs, from technical expertise to problem-solving and communication
- How to position yourself effectively in the marketplace

Whether you're transitioning from a traditional role or establishing yourself as an independent expert, this module will give you the clarity and tools to start your consulting journey with confidence.

Let's dive in.

What is consulting?

Consulting is a practice of providing services or expert advice to businesses or individuals in need of such professional expertise. This can take many forms, but typically involves conducting research, analysing data, and offering actionable recommendations on a particular subject matter.

Consultants are often hired to help organisations improve their performance, solve problems, and provide insights to help make important decisions.

To be a successful consultant, you need a combination of technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and strong communication and interpersonal skills. Specifically:

- **Deep knowledge and expertise in a specific field:** Consultants are hired for their expertise and knowledge, so it's important to have a thorough understanding of the subject matter in which you are consulting. This may require staying up to date with industry trends and developments and continuing to learn and grow in your field.
- **Problem-solving abilities:** Consultants are often hired to help clients solve complex problems or make difficult decisions. To do this effectively, you need to be able to analyse situations, identify potential solutions, and offer practical, actionable advice.

- **Strong communication and interpersonal skills:** Consultants need to be able to communicate clearly and effectively, both in writing and in person. This includes being able to explain complex ideas in simple terms and tailor your message to the specific audience you are addressing. In addition, strong interpersonal skills are important for building rapport with clients and collaborating with colleagues.
- **Self-motivation and adaptability:** As a consultant, you will often be working independently and may need to motivate yourself to stay focused and on track. Additionally, the nature of consulting requires adaptability and the ability to adjust to changing circumstances or client needs.
- **Business acumen:** To be a successful consultant, you need to understand the business side of consulting, including how to set up a consulting business, manage finances, and market your services. This may require learning about business concepts, such as pricing, contracts, and networking.

Consulting in the M&E context

In the context of monitoring and evaluation (M&E), consulting refers to the practice of providing expert advice and services to organisations to help them plan, implement, and evaluate their programs and projects. M&E consultants help organisations develop M&E frameworks, M&E plans, design and conduct data collection and analysis, and use the findings to make informed decisions and improve programs. M&E consulting can also include providing training and capacity-building support to organisations to help them improve their in-house M&E capabilities. They offer these services to non-profit organisations, social enterprises, government agencies, international development organisations, etc. Below are examples of services M&E consultant would deliver:

- **A non-profit organisation/foundation** is implementing a new program to provide health services to underserved communities. The organisation hires an M&E consultant to help them develop an M&E framework, including indicators to measure its results and impact. The consultant also trains the organisation's staff on how to implement the M&E framework and conduct the data collection.
- **A government agency** is implementing a project to improve education in rural schools. The agency hires an M&E consultant to design and implement a process for evaluating the project's impact, including conducting surveys and focus group discussions with students, teachers, and parents. The consultant also provides recommendations on how the project can be improved based on the evaluation findings.
- **An international development organisation** is implementing a programme to support small farmers in developing countries. The organisation hires an M&E consultant to conduct an endline evaluation of the programme to measure results/impact of the programme, to provide learning and recommendations for future programming.

Definitions

Monitoring	A continuous or periodical surveillance of the project implementation carried out by the project implementers. On one hand, monitoring focuses on the follow-up of work plans and budgets, and on the other hand, on achievement of results and impacts. Systematic monitoring is essential for learning, and it also provides a base for evaluation. The findings of monitoring are presented in progress and annual reports.
Evaluation	An independent assessment of the project, conducted in accordance with the OECD/DAC evaluation principles and criteria. During the project cycle, various evaluations may be conducted: Mid-term Evaluation mid-term of a project or its phase; Final Evaluation , at the end of the project; and Ex-post Evaluation and/or Impact Evaluation some years after the project has been phased out.

Things to consider that'll help you decide whether to become a consultant.

Why do people become consultants?

People leave full-time employment to become consultants for various reasons, but the majority do so because they are dissatisfied with their jobs. Consultants I have come across leave because they want to become their own boss, earn a higher income, and realise their potential. They desire a flexible schedule and the option to work from home or remotely from anywhere in the world. Some may have quit their job or are looking to consult until they land a full-time job.

Whatever the reason, yours is unique to you and your experience. Why do you want to become a consultant? [Check out my story video.](#)

Here are the realities you should consider

POV: I will keep it brutally honest

Pros	Cons
<p>Flexibility and Independence - This is one of the big pros of being a consultant. You can set your schedule and have more time with family, friends, pets, and other pursuits that you have been putting off. One of my consultant friends works 160 days a year, earns enough to travel the rest of the year.</p>	<p>Income variability - There are high periods of busy work and low periods. You can potentially get paid enough to last through the low periods, but you must plan for feast-and-famine cycles. Most new consultants underestimate how long dry spells can last.</p> <p>Market volatility - The 2025 aid cuts demonstrate that consulting markets can contract rapidly due to political decisions beyond your control. Having diversified income sources and financial reserves is critical.</p>

<p>Diversity of work - It is always exciting to experience different projects that enable you to learn and challenge you as opposed to doing repetitive work.</p>	<p>Loss of employer benefits - No maternity leave, annual leave days, sick days, bonuses, medical insurance, or retirement contributions. You must budget for all of this yourself.</p>
<p>Unlimited geographical location - You can work remotely from home or a shared office with a team of your choosing. Or take a short-term project in another city or country-travel and experience new places. You are not limited.</p>	<p>Wearing all business hats - Like it or not, you will have to wear all the business hats needed to operate a business: business development, sales, marketing, accounting, IT, etc., unless you are working in a consultancy team. You must be a jack of all trades.</p>
<p>High income potential - At the beginning, you might not get paid the same amount as a full-time staff member. Research shows consultants surpass their previous income level within 18 months. In 2025, experienced M&E consultants earning \$80-150K annually is realistic with the right positioning.</p>	<p>Start-up costs - Individual consultants need computing hardware and software to operate. Budget \$2,000-5,000 for laptop, software subscriptions, website, business registration, and initial marketing.</p>
<p>Full responsibility = Full reward You must bring your "A" game on each deliverable. You are fully responsible for your service to clients. It may be more pressure at the beginning, but less stressful once you get the hang of it. When you succeed, ALL the credit and income is yours.</p>	<p>Unpredictable payment schedules - Your clients may not pay your fees on time or at all. You will need to manage cash flow and have financial reserves. International clients can take 60-90 days to pay.</p>

Assessing Your Readiness

Before you start your journey as a consultant, evaluate your skills, experience, and interests to determine if consulting is a good fit for you. Here are key questions to consider:

Technical Readiness

- Do you have the necessary skills and experience? Consulting requires a high level of expertise in your field, as well as strong problem-solving and communication skills. **Minimum recommended: 3-5 years' experience in your target niche.** (M&E, Tech, Engineering, Communication, Data Analytics, Law, research)
- Do you have a clear idea of the services you want to offer? You need a clear understanding of the services you are offering and how they will benefit your clients. Can you articulate your value in 30 seconds?
- Do you have the necessary resources and tools? Consulting requires access to certain resources: a reliable computer, an internet connection, a phone, a video conferencing setup, and core software (data analysis tools, design software, project management platforms).

Psychological Readiness

- Do you have a passion for consulting? Consulting can be challenging and demanding. Ask yourself if you enjoy working with clients, solving complex problems, and helping organisations succeed.
- Are you ready to be your own boss? As a consultant, you will be responsible for managing your own business, including marketing, sales, and administration. Are you comfortable with this level of responsibility?
- Can you handle income uncertainty? Will irregular income cause you significant stress? If you need predictable monthly paychecks for psychological stability, consulting may not be right for you right now.
- Are you self-motivated? You will often be working independently and may need to motivate yourself to stay focused and on track without a manager providing structure.

Support System

- Do you have a support network? Consulting can be solitary, so you need a network of friends, family, and colleagues who can provide support and advice. Do you have people who will encourage you during difficult months?
- Does your family situation support consulting? If you have dependents relying on your income, do you have a financial cushion? Is your partner supportive of the risk?

Financial Readiness

- Are you willing to invest in your business? Consulting requires a commitment of time, money, and effort. Are you willing to invest \$2,000-5,000 in setup costs?
- Do you have 3-6 months of savings? Can you cover your personal expenses for 3-6 months while building your client base?

Market Readiness

- Have you considered your target market? Do you have a clear idea of who your target clients are and how you will reach them? Can you name 20 organisations that could hire you?
- Have you thought about your business model? Will you work solo, partner with others, or join a consulting firm? Will you focus on platforms, direct clients, or both?
- Have you created a plan for your business? Do you have a clear plan including your services, target market, pricing, and marketing strategies?

Consulting May Not Be Right If

- You have less than 3 years of M&E experience (insufficient credibility)
- You need a guaranteed monthly income for basic survival (too much financial stress)
- You strongly prefer being told what to do rather than figuring things out
- You hate networking, relationship-building, and selling your services
- You have no financial savings and high fixed expenses
- You struggle with self-discipline and time management when unsupervised
- Your personal situation is unstable (major life changes, health issues, family crises)



By carefully evaluating your skills, experience, and interests, you can determine if consulting is a good fit for you and take the first steps towards building a successful consulting career.

Reflection Exercise: Write down your honest answers to these readiness questions. Identify your top 3 strengths for consulting and your top 3 concerns. We'll address both throughout this course.

Congratulations on completing Module One!

You've just laid the critical foundation for your consulting career. You now understand what consulting truly involves, the key skills required, and, most importantly, you should have drafted your positioning statement and begun optimising your LinkedIn profile.

Let's recap your key outcome: You now have your complete consultant positioning statement and an optimised LinkedIn profile ready to attract clients.

Before moving to the next module, make sure you've

- Identified your specific area of expertise
- Articulated your unique value proposition
- Updated your LinkedIn profile to reflect your consultant positioning

In our next module, we'll build on this foundation by helping you identify your optimal transition strategy and create an actionable roadmap to launch your consulting career.

See you in Module Two!