

The Worshipful Company of Management Consultants

Underestimate The Impact of Ethics at Your Own Peril

Summary

1. Consulting is an exciting and rewarding sector, and clients have high expectations of what they will get for their investment, including an expectation for ethical behaviour. Consultants are likely to be placed in situations which expose them to a type of risk for which they are unprepared – ethical risk!
2. Whilst decision-making is a fundamental part of consulting, professional training programmes rarely consider the ethical dimensions to a situation. When a situation requires a difficult choice to be made from several options, making an ethical decision will not just pose a significant challenge, but also a potential risk. Most notably, for a consultant's, and the profession's, reputation.
3. Professional bodies, such as the CMI and ICMCI help in promoting the highest standards in management and leadership excellence, with a Code that is binding on all members. They also provide a framework to guide ethical and acceptable conduct. However, many of the critics of business ethics suggest that the subject often occupies a rather elevated moral position that bears little resemblance to the real problems facing most business professionals.
4. The consulting profession is different to other professions, such as medicine and law, in the sense that it is not regulated. If it is to remain that way, the organisations, and individuals within it will need to demonstrate that they are capable of proving they can act ethically themselves. This also presents an opportunity as ethics and the professional behaviours are now becoming key differentiators within business. Many customers now expect their suppliers to demonstrate ethical behaviour and in a growing number of cases, state precisely how they maintain an ethical culture within their organisations. If there was ever a need for consulting ethics, it must surely be now.