

What if we talked a little about IT services company clients and their behaviors?

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This article highlights seven toxic behaviors of certain IT services company clients and their adverse effects on business and management practices. A useful read to better understand the sector's deviations on both the client and IT services company sides.

ESNs are often criticized – sometimes rightly –, but we too often forget to talk about the clients and their faults. Some adopt behaviors that push ESNs to react poorly, either out of opportunism or pure survival. Because if the consulting market is far from perfect, it is also because some client-side abuses lead to questionable commercial and managerial mechanisms.

Here are seven examples of unbearable attitudes from certain clients and their consequences on the functioning of ESNs.

The client who wants a jack-of-all-trades... but paid like an intern

"I'm looking for a cybersecurity expert, skilled in AI, networks, and C++ development, with 10 years of experience... Budget? 450 euros per day." This type of client is out of touch and thinks expertise is a commodity.

In the face of this absurdity, some ESNs, to stay in the race, send profiles that do not meet expectations. They embellish resumes, inflate experiences, or desperately seek candidates who are just as desperate. Others end up accepting ridiculous margins, to the detriment of the quality of support and accompanying consultants. In both cases, it's a negative spiral.

The one who requests 10 resumes for a position... but never reads them

Resumes are sent, follow-ups are made once, twice... and then nothing. Then, a few weeks later, the client calls in panic: *"Do you have someone? It's urgent!"* Obviously, the best profiles have gone elsewhere, and now it's the ESN that's responsible.

To avoid wasting time, Business Managers end up sending resumes en masse, without even serious prequalification. Clients are flooded with more or less relevant candidates in the hope that one of them will pass the filter. Result: the client receives low-quality files and starts to consider all ESNs as resume factories. Vicious circle.

The one who cancels the mission... after signing

Everything is validated, contract signed, consultant ready to start. Then, the day before the start, the client calls: *"Actually, we don't need him anymore."* No consideration for the work done upstream, no qualms about the impact on the consultant and the ESN.

In the face of such a low blow, ESNs learn to protect themselves. When it's about a candidate in the recruitment phase, they do exactly the same thing: they break the contract before even starting the trial period. The consultant, who thought they had landed a job, finds themselves in the lurch without explanation.

And then, we wonder why candidates distrust ESNs...

The one who doesn't pay on time... but demands maximum responsiveness

The invoices pile up, follow-ups are ignored, but as soon as an urgent resource is needed, the ESN must respond immediately.

The ESN, exasperated by these payment delays, starts to prioritize clients based on their financial reliability rather than their real needs. Some client accounts become burdens that one tries to get rid of discreetly. In the long term, this harms the commercial relationship and generates widespread distrust: the client considers the ESN as a second-choice supplier, and the ESN sees the client as a bad payer to avoid.

The one who exploits consultants by overloading them

Contract signed for 35 hours, but in reality, it's 50 hours a week. *"Oh, but that's normal, everyone does that here!"*... except the client's employees.

ESNs, pressed by these toxic demands, end up no longer caring about the well-being of consultants. They turn a blind eye to unpaid overtime, to the pressure exerted by the client, and are content to renew missions without asking questions. Result: consultants end up exhausted and leave the ESN as soon as they have the opportunity. And then, we wonder about turnover...

The one who imposes very low rates to recruit underpaid consultants

Some clients impose untenable pricing grids, supposedly to "*rationalize costs*". But in reality, it mainly serves to force ESNs to hire underpaid consultants. Result: a consultant who becomes an easy prey for the client.

ESNs have their resources plundered and no longer even try to retain their teams, reduce costs to the maximum to fit into the grids, and even sometimes see client recruitment as a response to the risk of inter-contract.

The one who wants to know everything about your consultants... but tells you nothing about his project

"Give me detailed resumes, precise experiences, references, salaries, availabilities, etc." (Yes, I've had clients ask me for the consultants' salaries). But when asked for information about the mission *"Oh, that's confidential."* It's impossible to know in what context the consultant will work, nor what the actual needs of the client are.

Faced with this lack of transparency, some ESNs end up sending fake resumes or approximate profiles, just to get an interview and try to obtain more information. Eventually, clients start to distrust ESNs... even though they created this situation.

ESNs have their faults, but they are not solely responsible for the sector's issues. Some clients consciously or unconsciously push for these abuses. And if we stopped putting all the blame on ESNs and started demanding a minimum of ethics and professionalism from clients as well?

I am open to other negative client behaviors that lead to equally negative behaviors from ESNs.