MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGERS

# Inter-contract periods in service companies: inevitability or opportunity?

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Often undergone, inter-contract periods mainly reveal flaws in recruitment, management, and prospecting. This article helps business managers understand the causes and turn them into action levers.

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The inter-contract period, when a consultant finds themselves without a project between assignments, is a frequent reality in service companies. Often perceived as an economic constraint or an occupational inevitability, it actually stems from internal practices and specific choices. For business managers, understanding the underlying causes of inter-contract periods and knowing how to address them is essential for ensuring the profitability and sustainability of their activity. This article reviews the main reasons for this phenomenon and offers concrete solutions for better management.

## 1. Recruitment focused on the immediate needs of clients

In service companies, recruitment is often guided by the urgency to meet a client's demands. This model favors candidate alignment with a specific project, at the expense of a longer-term vision. Focus is on the technical and human skills specific to a mission, without evaluating the abilities necessary and specific to the consulting profession, or the existence of a continuous demand for technical skills.

**The consequences of this approach:**

- Consultants are integrated into the company for a specific mission but may not have been evaluated for their overall potential.

- Candidates themselves seldom project into the consultant profession, focusing solely on the immediate opportunities offered by a mission.

**What needs to change:** Prioritize recruitment for oneself, not just for a project or client. This involves a more robust recruitment process with professionalization of actors, as recruiters are too often considered as "small hands" whereas they are the primary guarantors of quality recruits.

This approach allows building a strong team capable of adapting to diverse client needs and economic fluctuations.

## 2. A blurred responsibility between service company and client

When a service company hires a consultant, it commits to managing their employability and professional development. However, in practice, these responsibilities are often unclear, with some companies expecting the client to handle the follow-up, support, and sometimes even training of the consultant.

**Why this confusion is problematic:**

- The client focuses solely on project needs, without obligation for long-term management or support.
- Service companies, by neglecting these aspects, jeopardize their consultants' satisfaction and evolution.

**The solution:** Clarify roles and responsibilities. A service company must fully assume its role as a career manager for its consultants. This involves structured support, investments in skills development, and opportunities for internal mobility for each collaborator. Clients, on their side, should view the service company as a partner in project success, leaving them with the responsibility for managing their consultant.

## 3. Insufficient or absent management during missions

A recurring issue in service companies is the lack of follow-up and management of consultants during their missions. Once the consultant is "placed" at the client – a dreadful term revealing a transactional and non-human approach – they are often left to fend for themselves. This situation results from an organization where business managers are focused on finding new opportunities, under pressure from top management, KPIs, and ever-growing targets.

**Signs of deficient management:**

- Managers lack knowledge about their consultants' skills, aspirations, and developments, and generally about their consultants as people.
- Consultants do not develop a sense of belonging to their company, which can affect their commitment, motivation, and leads to a loss of connection between them and their company, exacerbated when asked to "re-employ themselves" by updating their skills dossier at the end of a project to justify their expertise.

**Good practices to adopt:** Establish close management. This involves:

- Personalized follow-up exceeding mere "courtesy calls", with regular meetings with consultants at their mission sites, to discuss their successes, challenges, and aspirations.
- Implementation of support that continuously integrates the possibility of inter-contract periods (any project can stop overnight), to turn this period into an opportunity to rebound.

## 4. A commercial prospecting disconnected from reality

When a project comes to an end, business managers must change their posture: shift from a "client need" logic to a "available resource" logic. This transition is often poorly handled due to a lack of specific skills or adapted processes.

**Most frequent missteps:**

- Mass CV dispatches to prospects often never met, hoping someone will open the email, read it, open and read the skills dossier, and make the connection between potential needs and this dossier not at all personalized for their activity.
- Relaxed prospecting efforts, limiting themselves to scrutinizing current tenders, hoping to find the holy grail.

**To address this:** Rethink strategy and commercial action. Effective prospecting relies on:

- A significant part of proactive and targeted prospecting, directly linked to the skills and aspirations of consultants in a project, as if their mission were ending.
- Consistency in prospecting efforts, even during growth periods, to avoid losing reactivity and especially skills.

**Take control of the inter-contract period**

The inter-contract period is not an inevitability. It's a key indicator of a service company's maturity in talent management, managerial practices, and commercial strategy. By adopting a long-term vision and investing in your teams, you can turn this constraint into an opportunity.

**Want to discuss your practices and discover concrete solutions to optimize your inter-contract management?**
Contact me today, and together, we will build a sustainable and effective strategy to meet this challenge.