The worst criterion for promoting a business manager

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Evaluating a business manager by the number of consultants they manage is a misleading and toxic shortcut. The real impact is better measured by retention, satisfaction, anticipation, and the ability to sustainably develop their area.

There are entrenched misconceptions within ESNs. Intellectual shortcuts, presented as common sense, that become standards for management. Among them, one occupies a prominent place: assessing the performance and potential of a Business Manager based on the *number of consultants they manage*. In other words, the more consultants you manage, the better you are. The more ready you are for advancement. And thus, you deserve a promotion, a better fixed salary, managerial responsibilities. This logic is not only simplistic; it is deeply toxic. It's time to dismantle it.

A quantitative view that denies the complexity of the role

Let's start with the obvious: **managing 15 consultants means nothing in itself**. Fifteen juniors on a long and stable assignment with a single client do not require the same involvement as eight senior profiles on short assignments in demanding contexts. The difficulty does not lie in the volume, but in the nature of the assignments, the level of autonomy of the consultants, the diversity of clients, the relational challenges, the risks of turnover. By reducing all of this to a simple number, we erase all the richness (and sometimes harshness) of the real work.

An example? A business manager might very well "manage" a large number of consultants on paper, while having **no involvement in their follow-up**, no knowledge of their aspirations, and above all **no real influence on their retention**. They then become a distributor of payslips and timesheets, nothing more. Yet, their number is there. They can claim advancement. Meanwhile, another manager, more involved, more attentive, but with a smaller scope, remains sidelined. Spot the mistake.

A biased indicator due to structural effects

Another issue: **the number of consultants also depends on the structure, not just individual talent**. A manager who inherits a portfolio of historical clients, a key account recruiting in bulk, or an already well-staffed team, starts with an advantage. Conversely, one who is entrusted with a new scope, a complex sector, or a portfolio to rebuild, will mechanically take longer to grow their base. And yet, it is often in these contexts that the profession is most fully expressed: developing a new account, convincing a reluctant client, supporting the first assignments… But all of this goes unnoticed by the famed indicator.

It's a bit like judging a salesperson by the size of their client portfolio, without ever looking at **who built it, how, and at what cost**.

An incentive for bad practices

Worse still, this obsession with numbers encourages counterproductive behaviors. By making quantity an objective, **we end up recruiting on the cheap**, selling poorly defined assignments, or staffing at all costs to "make volume". Result: consultants become bored, clients become wary, projects fail. But on paper, the manager ticks the box. We applaud, we congratulate, we promote. Until the next crisis.

This system also encourages **artificial retention**. A business manager may slow down internal or external mobility of consultants, not for good reasons, but **to avoid losing headcount**. They then become the jailer of their own teams. Again, we are far from the spirit of close management or the trust relationship.

What alternative criteria, then?

Rather than counting heads, we would do better to **measure the real impact** of the manager on their scope. For example, by evaluating:

- **Consultant satisfaction rate** (anonymous, regular, and taken seriously). A manager who knows how to create a lasting relationship, who follows, trains, listens, and supports, leaves a mark.
- **Mission retention**. How many consultants are extended, re-signed, or advance in their position? It's not just the client who decides: a good manager creates the conditions for this continuity.
- **The ability to develop new clients**. It's a strong signal of maturity: stepping out of comfort, opening new accounts, building trust relationships where everything must be constructed.
- **The quality of reporting and anticipation**. A manager who knows how to detect risks of idle time, who alerts in time, who proposes concrete solutions, demonstrates a much more useful mastery than one who endures departures and project ends without seeing anything coming.
- And of course, **the ability to transmit**. Training a junior, supporting a peer, sharing best practices: these are obvious markers of legitimacy and leadership.

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In conclusion

Promoting a business manager based on the number of consultants they manage is like promoting a football player because they run a lot. It's an indicator, sure. But it says nothing about the accuracy of passes, vision of the game, or the ability to make the team progress. It's time to move away from this lazy logic. Advancement should not reward mass, but impact. Not quantity, but value.

So next time you hear: *"They manage 15 consultants, they deserve to be promoted to senior"*, ask this simple question: *Yes, but what does that really mean?*

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