MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGERS

The evolution of consultants is often the weak link in many IT services companies

Frédéric Le Pennec · 11 February 2026

The annual review cannot make up for a year without a structured follow-up. To fairly evaluate a consultant's progress, the Business Manager must observe, document, and adjust throughout the year.

When no structured follow-up has occurred during the year, the annual review does not become more important. It simply becomes too burdensome: it is asked to evaluate, recognize, amend the unspoken, and build a trajectory in a single meeting.

THE STARTING POINT

A good annual review is never a starting point. It puts into perspective objectives that have already been followed, feedback that has already been shared, and decisions that have already been prepared.

The annual review concentrates what should have been addressed throughout the year

On paper, the annual review appears well designed. It allows for reflection on performance, identification of progress, discussion of the consultant's expectations, and definition of new development directions. The problem, therefore, does not come from the tool.

It appears when this meeting becomes the only real time dedicated to the consultant's development. For twelve months, exchanges focused on the mission, client emergencies, vacations, or administrative matters. Then, at the end of the year, the Business Manager must suddenly provide a comprehensive overview of the trajectory.

They then try to reconstruct what has happened based on a few memories, incomplete figures, and impressions. The consultant does the same exercise on their end. Each comes with their own version of the year, and the review becomes less a summary than a negotiation between two memories.

This approach is common because it gives the impression that the topic is being addressed. The review is scheduled, a support exists, and a box will be checked. However, following a procedure does not guarantee that progression has genuinely been overseen.

A call to the client doesn't summarize twelve months of work

In some organizations, preparation for the review starts a few days, or even a few hours, before the meeting. The Business Manager quickly calls the client and asks how the mission is going. The feedback obtained then becomes the main material for the evaluation.

This feedback can be useful, but it remains a snapshot. The client responds based on the most recent events, their own expectations, and their relationship with the consultant. A difficulty that occurred the previous week can take on a disproportionate role. Conversely, progress made six months earlier may have vanished from their memory.

Consider a consultant who significantly improved their communication over the year but has just missed an important deadline. A call made the day before the review risks concentrating the discussion on this delay. Without history, the Business Manager can neither put the feedback in perspective nor highlight the evolution or distinguish an incident from a trend.

THE LIMIT OF LATE FEEDBACK
Client feedback collected just before the review can enlighten the discussion. It cannot, on its own, become the proof of performance or progress over an entire year.

The consultant should discover nothing essential

When follow-up is regular, the annual review contains no major revelations. The consultant already knows the points they are expected on, the recognized progress, and the difficulties that still need work. The meeting serves to gain perspective and decide on the next steps.

Conversely, discovering during the review that a client judges the communication insufficient or that autonomy hasn't progressed creates a breach of trust. The consultant can legitimately wonder why no one discussed it earlier, while they would have had several months to act.

The Business Manager then finds themselves in an uncomfortable position. They must defend feedback they did not observe themselves, explain why it arrives so late, and propose a development path without having set intermediate steps. The conversation shifts from the legitimacy of the evaluation to focusing on development.

Useful feedback must be actionable. For example, saying in November that a consultant lacks impact in client meetings mainly produces frustration. Saying it in March, defining two expected behaviors, then

frederic.lepennec@coact.fr · +33 6 03 06 05 02 · coact.fr

observing their evolution in June and September turns the same feedback into a progression path.

Evolution is measured over time, not in an impression

The progress of a consultant does not boil down to a general impression like "they have gained autonomy" or "they need to communicate more." It must rely on observable facts and a comparison over time.

A consultant becomes more autonomous when they prepare a committee alone, identify a risk before it becomes blocking, or propose a solution without waiting for detailed instructions. These situations constitute evidence. They must be identified when they occur, not wait for the review to try remembering them.

Continuous monitoring also allows for adjustments in objectives. A mission may change, a client may reorganize their team, or an initially planned skill may no longer be needed. Maintaining an inaccessible objective for a year and then blaming the consultant for not achieving it is akin to evaluating the original plan rather than the actual work.

OBSERVABLE PROGRESS

A useful objective associates an expected skill, situations in which it can be exercised, concrete evidence, and a review date. Without these markers, the evaluation remains largely subjective.

The Business Manager cannot track what they never observe

The monitoring of consultants often falls victim to commercial urgency. Prospecting meetings, recruitments, and mission endings have visible deadlines. Progression can always seem to wait a few weeks. From delay to delay, the annual review arrives before substantial exchanges have occurred.

The issue is not to add long monthly meetings to already busy schedules. An exchange of twenty to thirty minutes, prepared around the mission, the client relationship, the progression, and the next step, can suffice if it is regular and documented.

For example, at the end of a quarterly meeting, the Business Manager can note three elements: what has progressed, what needs to be worked on, and the action to take before the next review. Three months later, the discussion starts from these engagements rather than a blank page.

This light trace changes the quality of the review. The manager no longer reconstructs the year; they reread a trajectory. The consultant can see what has evolved, discuss the facts, and understand how decisions were made.

The client is a source, not the sole evaluator

The client has an essential perspective on the service, but they do not observe everything. They see the consultant's contribution in their mission context. They do not always know the training efforts, internal contributions, support for other consultants, or the organizational constraints specific to the ESN.

The Business Manager must therefore cross-reference multiple sources: client feedback collected over time, exchanges with the consultant, mission results, and observed behaviors. They can also distinguish what pertains to a specific client expectation from what constitutes a skill sustainably useful to the consultant.

frederic.lepennec@coact.fr · +33 6 03 06 05 02 · coact.fr

Imagine a client who mainly appreciates rapid execution and solicits little initiative. The consultant can perfectly satisfy the mission while making little progress on autonomy. If the Business Manager limits themselves to positive client feedback, they risk concluding that all is well and missing an important development topic.

THE ROLE OF THE MANAGER
Evaluating does not mean transmitting the client's opinion to the consultant. It means cross-referencing facts, putting them into perspective, and taking a position on the expected progression.

Make the review the conclusion of a cycle

A useful annual review starts several months before its date. Objectives are clarified at the beginning of the period, then observed in concrete situations. Feedback is shared when it can still be useful. Priorities are revised when the context changes.

The review can then fulfill its true function. It links various exchanges, recognizes established progress, analyzes remaining gaps, and formalizes the next step. It no longer seeks to address everything in an hour.

For the consultant, this continuity makes the evaluation fairer and the recognition less random. For the Business Manager, it provides facts, avoids discussions solely based on feelings, and facilitates decisions concerning training, mission evolution, or taking on new responsibilities.

A management problem rather than an evaluation problem

When an annual review seems empty, subjective, or disconnected, the temptation is often to modify the framework, add criteria, or train managers to better conduct the review. These improvements can help, but they do not replace a year of absent exchanges.

The question to ask is not just: how to succeed in the next review? It is: what conversations, observations, and decisions need to occur before this review so that it is based on a story already known to both parties?

THE MANAGEMENT QUESTION
If the manager has to reconstruct twelve months at the time of the annual review, they are not really evaluating a trajectory. They are trying to catch up on the absence of oversight that preceded it.

The annual review must no longer be a catch-up

The annual review remains a useful appointment. It provides perspective, allows formalizing recognition, and initiates a new stage. But it can only play this role if it is part of a continuity.

A consultant does not progress because a framework is filled out once a year. They progress because they know what is expected, receive timely feedback, have opportunities to try differently, and can see the path traveled.

Without follow-up, the review produces a debatable snapshot. With regular oversight, it becomes the film of an already visible evolution. The difference is not about the quality of the form but everything that

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has happened between two reviews.

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