

Business Manager-Consultant Relationship: Allegiance or Alliance?

Frédéric Le Pennec · 30 April 2025



The relationship between a Business Manager and a consultant can no longer rely on a simple hierarchical logic. To be sustainable, it must become an alliance based on transparency, co-construction, and shared responsibility.

In IT services companies and consulting firms, the relationship between the business manager and the consultant is often unclear and ambivalent. From the outside, it may appear as a simple hierarchical chain: the business manager finds the projects, and the consultant executes them. But this model, inherited from an old way of working, shows its limitations today.

The traditional model: an unbalanced relationship

In many structures, particularly in IT services companies or young or very "numbers-driven" firms, the relationship is based on a top-down logic: the business manager is perceived as the superior, and the consultant as an executor. The consultant is expected to be available, adaptable, and silent. As long as they are on a mission, everything is fine. As soon as they are between contracts, the relationship becomes tense: the consultant becomes a "problem to solve."

This model can work in the short term. However, it leads to deep frustration: loss of motivation, feeling undervalued, psychological wear, and early departure of top talents.

Changing the paradigm: toward a partnership relationship

An alternative model exists: a **true partnership** between the business manager and the consultant. A partnership is an equal relationship where each has a complementary role, and where communication, trust, and co-construction prevail over power dynamics.

This partnership is based on:

- **A shared vision** of business challenges, objectives to achieve, and each one's constraints.
- **Transparency** regarding margins, opportunities, mission choices.
- **Co-construction** of career paths, with regular support.
- **Recognition** of the consultant's role in commercial success.

But beware: for this partnership approach to work, **the consultant must also evolve in their stance.**

Be an actor, not just an executor

Shifting from a subordinate relationship to a partnership requires the consultant to no longer adopt a waiting stance. **They can no longer simply hope that the business manager finds them an "interesting" project.** They must get involved, express themselves, contribute. In short, they must **become the actor of their career.**

Concretely, this means:

- **Clearly expressing their desires, goals, and areas of interest.**
- **Sharing field feedback, client signals, opportunities they perceive.**
- **Contributing to their own visibility:** updated profile, mastered pitch, participation in internal events, etc.
- **Getting involved in the life of the company:** mentoring, internal initiatives, feedback on practices.
- **Understanding business challenges,** not necessarily becoming commercial, but with an awareness of the economic model.

This is not an extra workload. It is a **change of stance.** As long as they are part of the company, the consultant has every interest in ensuring it operates well. For the healthier the structure, the more interesting the projects, the more stimulating the prospects.

A relationship built over time, not only at the end of a project

Another common mistake: believing that this relationship only becomes useful **at the end of a project.** Waiting for this critical moment to discover what a consultant can (or cannot) do, what they like or what they no longer want to do, is already too late. A solid partnership requires **regular and structured checkpoints throughout the project,** not just at the end.

These checkpoints enable:

- Anticipating evolution desires or weak signals of demotivation,
- Envisioning smooth transition paths, without jeopardizing the ongoing project,
- Identifying new opportunities internally or with the client,
- And sometimes even... preparing for a change of project **before the current one ends,** in a win-win logic for everyone — **including the client.**

This type of approach is not incompatible with the client's interest. Quite the contrary. A fulfilled consultant, who feels listened to and supported, will be more committed, more reliable, and more performant. And a client well-supported in a well-managed transition will remain loyal.

The business manager–consultant relationship should neither be a disguised hierarchy nor an absence of a link. It's an alliance to build, over time, with transparency, dialogue, and shared responsibility. Because a consultant who is an actor is also a more committed, more visible, and better-supported consultant.