

Title:

Management Consultancy interviews - planning to succeed

Word Count:

1009

Summary:

"Recruitment at management consultancies is highly buoyant but the competition for these positions is still intense - according to one survey there are over two hundred applicants for every role in strategy consulting! The vast majority of these will be screened out at the C.V. stage and go no further - but if you do get through to the interview stage the following advice may prove highly valuable. "

Keywords:

managemeny consultancy, recruitment

Article Body:

The following article arose from discussions between Mindbench and its clients about where candidates go wrong in interviews. This prompted us to carry out a qualitative survey with clients, candidates, HR personnel and recruitment consultants involved in the management consultancy sector to establish some of the key skills and major pitfalls of ...

Recruitment is buoyant - so is the number of candidates

The current market for recruitment at management consultancies is highly bouyant - indeed it appears set to reach record levels this year. However the competition for these positions is still intense, with record numbers of MBAs looking for work in the sector! There are over two hundred applicants for every role in strategy consulting - the vast majority of these will be screened out at the C.V. stage and go no further - but if you do get through to the interview stage the following advice may prove highly valuable.

Understand whom you are applying to

A significant skill-set in consultancies of all types is research - and the less published information available the more important consultants become to their clients - and the more these skills are tested. It is very important that you don't waste time in the interview room - also that you display a genuine

interest in the company and it's work - good research is the key! Research the company on the internet - not only on their own website, but follow any links they may give, search press articles, industry associations and look at their clients' sites. Try to fully understand what type of work they do and what is it like to work for them. Know which industries and sectors they operate in and who their major clients are. Never be afraid to pick up the telephone and ask other people's opinions. Talk to anyone who has worked in the sector or ideally at that firm! Again, a good recruitment consultant should be able to put you in touch with such people.

As in life - it is all about selling! In this case you are there to sell yourself into the consultancy - make it easy for them to hire you! Show them how your qualifications, qualities and experience will match and enhance their own - but you can only do this successfully if you understand what they do and who for. Corporate culture has become more important in recent years and consultancies in particular have embraced this idea. Again their website should furnish you with a good overview of how they see themselves as a work-environment - but remember, this is how they like to see themselves. Speaking with a current or former employee will give you a better insight.

The ideal candidate

First of all we discussed the key characteristics that a candidate should possess and - crucially - be able to demonstrate during the interview process:

- Strategic thinking - is this candidate able to think in terms of strategic direction?
- Analytical rigour - does this candidate think in a logical, methodical way?
- Mathematical ability - does the candidate have the mathematical aptitude to cope with financial modelling, understanding of statistical analysis, corporate financial reporting etc
- Commercial awareness - is this candidate able to think in terms of pricing, competitive environment etc?
- Intellectual curiosity - is this candidate sufficiently curious to go beyond the surface and seek out the detail and underlying reasons?

In addition to identifying these specific qualities a number of less tangible facets were mooted. These are traits that a consultancy would ideally like all it's consultants to have, but are rather more difficult to identify or display:

- Drive - has the candidate demonstrated the necessary levels of drive and ambition so far in their career?
- Focus - can the candidate demonstrate the ability to ignore distractions and follow the main thrust of a project?
- Ability to manage people - has the candidate shown a willingness/ability to manage others, in any environment? This can be managing down (staff,

subordinates), managing colleagues or managing upwards

- Commitment - is there a willingness to work long hours and under pressure
- And finally, "Depth of character" - this last trait proved the most difficult to define. The following quotes from Consultancy Recruitment Heads were inciteful in summarising their views:

"As long as the candidate is reasonably intelligent and willing to work hard we have in place training plans and mentoring systems that will enable us to pass on all the skills our consultants need to fulfil their roles - the one thing that you cannot teach is character... and it's probably the most valuable trait of all!"

"How do you recognise it in interviews? We look at the prepared responses that candidates give to the more predictable questions, and we also try to ask them some questions they won't be prepared for! But ultimately - you know it when you see it!"

Successful interviewing

It is in the consultancies' interests to allow you an opportunity to sell yourself to them. They want you to be able to demonstrate your qualifications, your abilities, your enthusiasm and - to some extent - your personality! You need to be able to do this effectively and efficiently - so BE PREPARED! Preparation will allow you to speak fluently about whichever facet you are called upon to discuss - as well as talking about yourself and your achievements in a structured and logical manner. These are all highly attractive abilities in a consultant!

The best way to prepare for this is PRACTICE!

- Think about the questions you are likely to be asked
- Search on the internet and in libraries for further examples
- Talk to the recruitment consultant or the interview co-ordinator

Work out some answers to these questions that allow you to show your best qualities and highlight your achievements.

We would also highly recommend that you practice answering these questions out loud. Find some friends or colleagues and arrange to spend some time asking each other interview-style questions and listening to responses. Discuss your own and others performance - there is no substitute for 'performing' in front of other people!

The ultimate goal in these situations is a difficult balance to achieve:

"Be prepared - sound spontaneous!"