



THE
RFP COMPANY



CONSULTING CLIENT SATISFACTION

Users of consulting services identify what it takes to achieve satisfaction with consultants.

February 2011

WHAT FACTORS DRIVE CONSULTING PROJECT SUCCESS?

In this unique survey-based research, THE RFP COMPANY analyses the factors that have the greatest impact on generating overall satisfaction with results achieved when working with management consultants. These factors include those that are under the control of the consultants, as well as those that clients control.

The survey showed that less than 30% of clients consider that the consultants they engaged either met or exceeded their expectations. In other words, 70% of all consultant engagements do not fully deliver the results that the client expected.

Although clients acknowledge the strengths of consulting firms in the areas of budget management and familiarity with project content, results show that these do not contribute strongly to consultants delivering results that meet or exceed expectations. Rather the survey results show that if the consultants pay attention to the quality of the individual consultants assigned and maintain focus on the assignment, then they will have the greatest probability of producing results that satisfy their clients.

Users of consulting services realise that they need to play their part by selecting the right consulting firm in the first place and to make sure that the roles assigned to the consultants are appropriate.

We hope that you find this short report useful in guiding your decision-making process the next time you are selecting consultants.

Look out for the results of our next survey where we are collecting the same information, but from the perspective of the consultant.

Jenny Sutton

jrs@rfpcompany.com

ABOUT THE RFP COMPANY

The RFP Company assists organisations to increase the probability of success for complex initiatives, programmes, and projects that are essential for realising strategic, financial, and operational objectives.

The optimism effect and haste to get started often conspire against full and adequate project preparation, resulting in magnified downstream project issues. Therefore The RFP Company provides project preparation services that include clarifying business objectives, stress testing the business case, assessing the organisation's resource capacity and capability, and managing the vendor selection process.

The founding partners, Jenny Sutton and Gordon Perchthold, are also the authors of the book "Extract Value from Consultants: How to Hire, Control, and Fire Them."

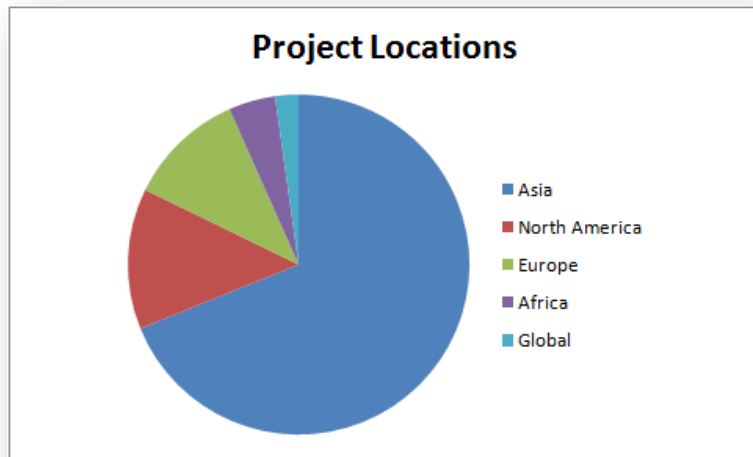
❖ www.rfpcompany.com ❖
www.extractvaluefromconsultants.com



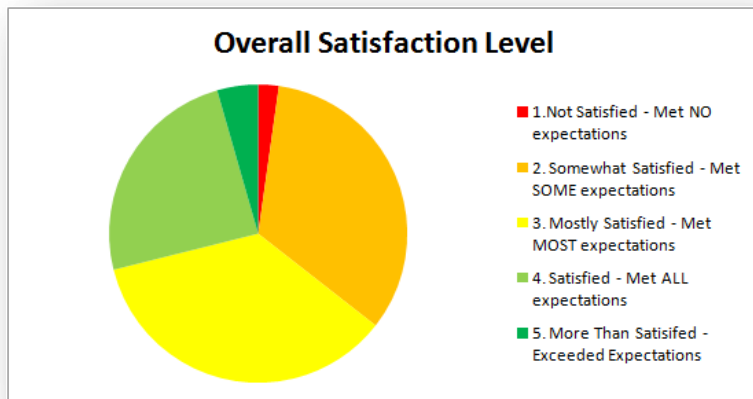
ORGANIZATIONS ALL OVER THE WORLD USE CONSULTANTS, ALL WITH MIXED RESULTS

We asked participants to consider the most recent project they had used a consultant on, and to provide information about that particular project.

Responses came from all over the globe, although the sample was purposely weighted towards Asia, from where consulting industry growth is expected over this decade.



Participants provided an overall assessment of their satisfaction, using five possible ratings, ranging from completely dissatisfied to more than satisfied. Less than thirty percent of the respondents felt that the consultants had met or exceeded expectations.



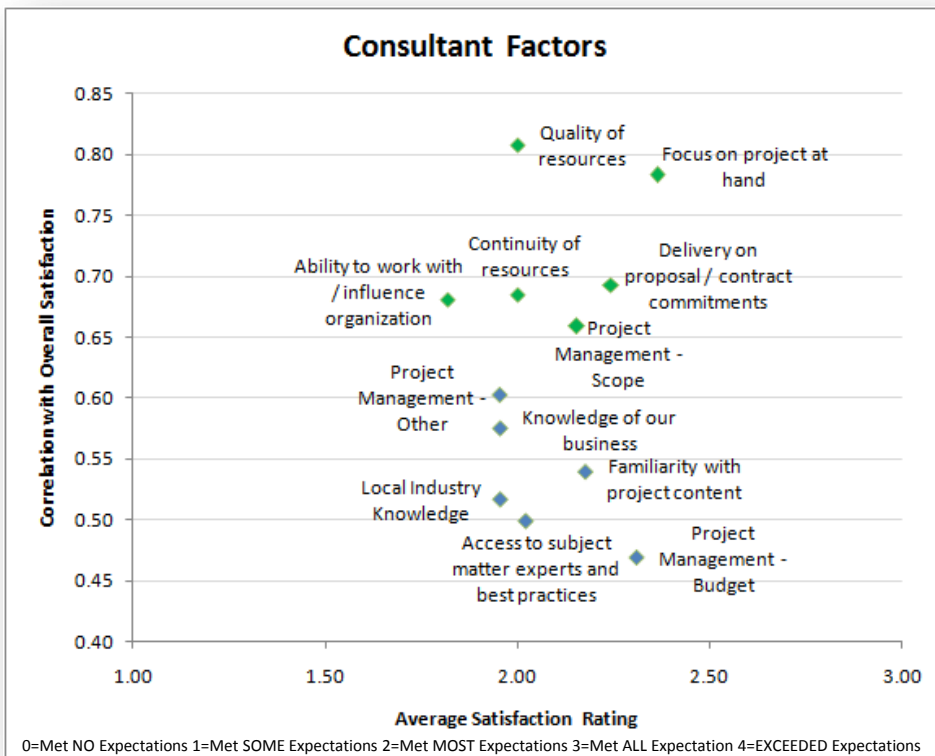
A key objective of the survey was to determine the factors that contributed towards the satisfaction level achieved, so this range of responses provided the basis to do just that.



QUALITY OF RESOURCES IS THE SINGLE LARGEST DETERMINANT OF SATISFACTION

Respondents were provided a list of factors that were possible determinants of eventual satisfaction and asked to rate the consultants on each attribute, with the five-point scale ranging from *meets no expectations* all the way to *exceeds expectations*.

While consultants were given relatively high marks for such attributes as *Project Management-Budget*, *Familiarity with Project Content*, and *Access to Subject Matter Experts*, good performance in these areas often did not produce an equivalent level of overall satisfaction.



The factors that were most highly correlated with overall satisfaction were *Quality of Resources*, *Focus on Project at Hand*, and *Delivery on Proposal / Contract Commitments*. In other words, when the client was satisfied with the consulting firm's performance in these areas, they also tended to be satisfied with the overall project result.

Compared to the factors which were individually regarded as satisfactory (but which did not have as direct an impact on overall satisfaction), these success factors are often much more difficult to assess during the selection process, which may be why overall satisfaction is so illusive.



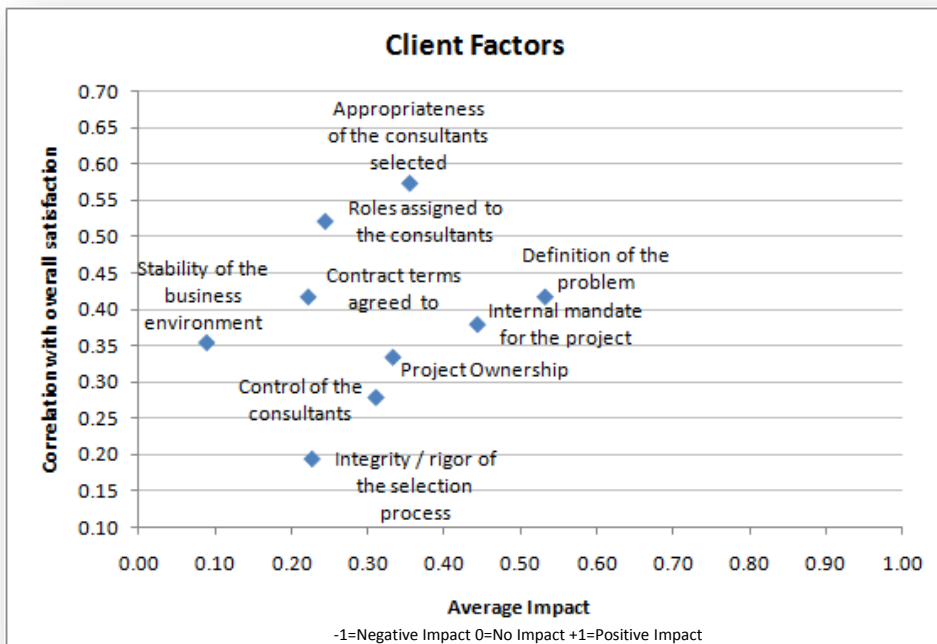
SATISFACTION STARTS WITH SELECTING THE APPROPRIATE CONSULTING FIRM

As we believe that users of consulting services should be just as accountable for the success of the project as the consultants they engage, we also asked participants to identify the factors under their own organisation's control that had the most positive, or negative impact on the results they experienced.

From this we learned that:

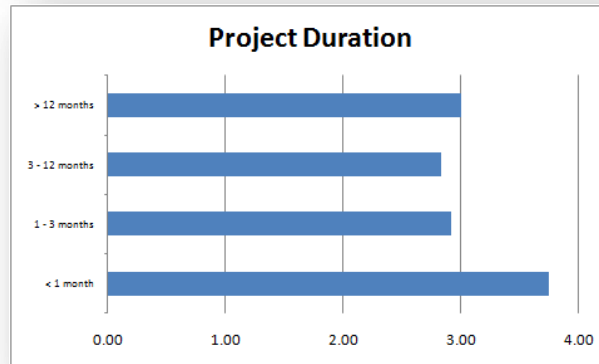
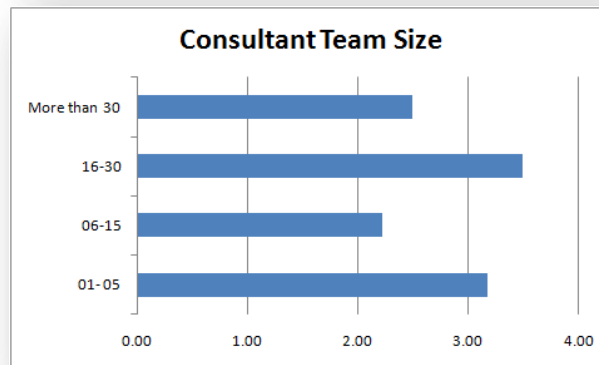
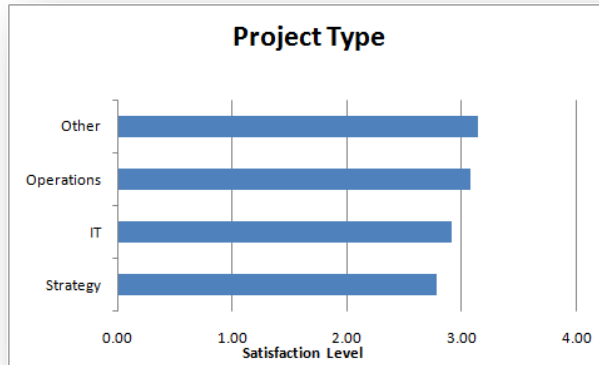
- ❖ *Definition of the Problem* that consultants are to work on is considered to have a strong positive impact on satisfaction, as is getting an *Internal Mandate for the Project*
- ❖ But, ensuring the *Appropriateness of the Consultant Selected*, and making sure that the *Roles Assigned to Consultants* are valid, have a much higher correlation to overall satisfaction levels

From these results we infer that organizations understand the importance of doing their homework (problem definition, mandate) before engaging consultants, and that these issues have a bearing on overall project success, but satisfaction with the consultants themselves is subject to engaging the right type of consulting firm in appropriate roles.



THERE IS NO MAGIC FORMULA FOR PROJECT TYPE, DURATION OR TEAM SIZE

Project size, project duration and type of project were also attributes we considered to see if they had any determining influence on client satisfaction.

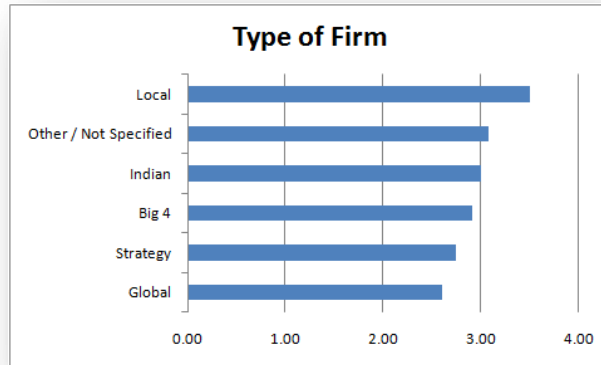


However there was no correlation between the type, size, or duration of the project and the overall satisfaction level, confirming that overall satisfaction is based on selecting the right consulting firm and individual consultants, whatever the nature of the project.



LOCAL FIRMS OUTPERFORM GLOBAL FIRMS

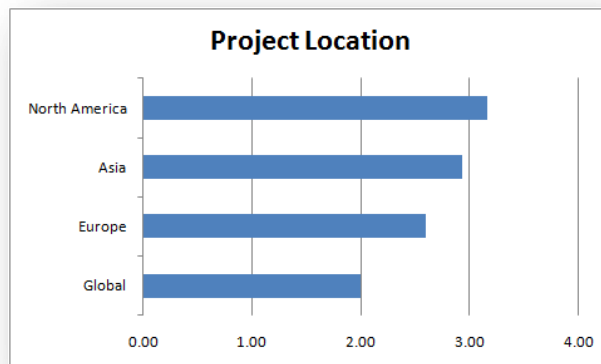
Some slight differences in satisfaction level appear to be dependant on the type of firm engaged, with small local firms meeting expectations more often than larger ones.



And some variations depending on the region where the work was undertaken were noted.

Global projects yielded low satisfaction levels, probably because by their nature they are complex and have many other variables to contend with.

Satisfaction levels in Asia were higher than other regions, perhaps due to the fairly limited and targeted engagement of consultants in Asia. North America, the cradle of the consulting industry with deep pools of expertise, and highly qualified, well-trained, experienced resources, yielded a “meets most expectations” on average.



CONCLUSION

Organisations planning to engage consultants should focus on the following key areas in order to increase the likelihood that they will be satisfied with the results produced by the consultants:

- ❖ select the **appropriate type of firm** for the project under consideration - evaluate prospective firms to determine that the work they are proposing is in their core competency
- ❖ define **roles that are valid** for external consultants to fill
- ❖ do not be overly influenced by the possibility of access to broader knowledge and expertise than that which the team themselves bring
- ❖ focus on the **quality of the individuals** who will be assigned to the engagement, rather than the credentials of the consulting firm as a whole
- ❖ once a firm is engaged, keep them **focused on the original assignment** – do not distract them with other potential projects until they have successfully delivered on their current engagement.

