

## Thought leadership for the GCC 2015

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## Introduction

Our ongoing research of both consulting firms and clients shows that the GCC consulting market continues on a strong upward trajectory. But despite this growth, the GCC is an increasingly tough place in which to be a consultant: maturing clients are demanding more from consultants than ever before, and the difficulty of finding talent has never been greater.

We believe that thought leadership is a key weapon in addressing both of these challenges. In our surveys and interviews, senior executives in client organisations tell us that relevant high-quality thought leadership can change their perception of a firm and encourage them to find out more. Such content can open doors to new clients, build relationships with existing contacts, demonstrate knowledge and credibility during the selection process, and even impact a client's view of the price that a firm can charge.

Although less discussed, high-quality thought leadership can also be a tool in engaging with and recruiting new talent. Content impacts not just the perceptions of those who may choose to buy your services but also those you may wish to recruit.

In this report, we aim to highlight the depth and breadth of content being produced by consulting firms in the GCC for a local audience, to share insights from those creating this content, and to offer our advice to anyone involved in the creation of thought leadership for the GCC.

## Approach

We invited a number of consulting firms in the GCC to submit thought leadership to be featured in this report. Firms were asked to provide up to three examples with the understanding, where multiple pieces were provided, that we would select one to include. In our individual commentaries, we have focused on highlighting good practices.

Our advice at the end of the report, however, takes into account the full range of submissions and is informed by our established methodology for reviewing thought leadership, our ongoing research with senior executives, and our work with consulting firms globally in helping create high-impact thought leadership.

## *Where do ideas for GCC-specific content typically come from?*

**Stephen:** In EY, we use our global innovation centres, but this is only the starting point. We then adapt or amend the global perspective based on our knowledge and experience of our clients' own ambitions and the opportunities and constraints relevant to the markets those clients operate in.

**Rafael:** They come from our interaction with our clients and our discussions of the challenges that they face, as well as our analysis of the different trends in the industry. For example, we came up with the idea to do our report on strategy execution in the Middle East because we were tired of listening to consultants and clients quote 15-year-old research from the US about why strategies failed and assuming it should be applied in the GCC. Our local research provided a very different perspective.

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## *Is it useful to share your firm's global content with senior executives in the GCC?*

**Stephen:** We have more than 200,000 professionals working in almost every country in the world, and there is no doubt that there are many lessons to learn from this experience. EY has been voted the global 'most admired knowledge enterprise' (MAKE) for fourteen years in a row, so bringing this global content to clients in the region is part of the way we work on a day-to-day basis. In our experience, senior executives in the region welcome this kind of input, but they expect it to be tailored to meet their requirements.

**Rafael:** Yes it is. The executives value the thought leadership that we produced through our affiliates in Boston or Europe, which is not localised, too—although the natural question when we discuss it with them is, "But how this will be applied in our context?" Hence the need to have research done specifically on the region.

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## *What challenges do you see in creating thought leadership for the GCC?*

**Stephen:** In our experience, there are no significant challenges, but you need to know the markets in the region, have strong and trusted client relationships, be able to access truly global leading practices, and be prepared to invest in making them relevant, pragmatic, and achievable.

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## *Are your own consultants keen to share their insights?*

**Stephen:** Yes. This is a key performance measure for all EY professionals.

**Rafael:** Yes. We encourage our consultants to actively participate on thought leadership projects, from sharing their insights to being a key part of the analysis.

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## *How easy is it to carry out research?*

**Stephen:** In addition to direct, empirical research (speaking to clients), the GCC has many channels that can be used to collect and collate interesting data and insights (mobile, websites, email outreach, universities, government agencies, regulators, industry bodies, etc). Our experience of using all of these channels has been largely positive.

**Rafael:** When it comes to large surveys, getting a good response rate is quite challenging. While there is always goodwill and executives who want to collaborate, extensive follow-up and reminder protocols are often required in order to achieve good numbers. This is mainly because many participants require authorisation from their organisation in order to participate, and this can be a time consuming process. When it comes to interviews, it's easy when you're able to interview your direct connections within your professional network, but if you want to expand your research horizon—as you often do—getting access to senior executives that are willing to discuss your research subject can be difficult.

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## The team behind this report

### *Rachel Ainsworth*

Rachel is Head of Thought Leadership Strategies and Solutions at Source. She helps consulting firms create and distribute thought leadership that builds their relationship with target and existing clients. Based on reading more thought leadership than is good for her health, a deep understanding of what is happening in the marketplace, and what knowledge about what it takes to make a difference, Rachel supports thought leadership efforts at every level: from creating a firm-wide strategy to refining an individual report.



### *Jodi Davies*

Jodi is General Manager of Source's Dubai office and is responsible for driving business in the Middle East. Jodi first joined Source in 2008, in London, and was responsible for building relationships with consulting firms. She moved to Dubai in 2010 where she launched Source's first overseas office. During her time in Dubai, Jodi has established strong relationships with consulting firms based in the region and has developed a strong regional base for research. She is actively involved in researching the GCC market, interviewing consulting firms as well as buyers of consulting and speaking at industry forums and events.



# About Source

Source is a leading provider of information about the market for management consulting. Set up in 2007, with offices in London and Dubai, Source serves both consulting firms and their clients with expert analysis, research and reporting. We draw not only on our extensive in-house experience, but also on the breadth of our relationships with both suppliers and buyers. All of our work is underpinned by our core values of intelligence, integrity, efficiency and transparency.

## Source in the Middle East

The Middle East branch of Source was opened in 2012 in order to better serve the region's burgeoning consulting market and to demonstrate our firm commitment to the region. It is our ambition to be recognised as the Middle East's leading specialist provider of intelligent, thought-provoking and actionable consulting research and the first place that any consulting firm or buying organisation will want to turn to for specialist consulting market advice.

We have published two major reports on the GCC consulting market, the first of which takes a demand side view of the market, based on the opinions of around 150 major buyers of consulting, entitled *'What clients think and why it matters'*. The second is the definitive guide to the size, shape and prospects for the consulting market in the GCC, based on in-depth interviews with more than 40 consulting firms in the region, entitled *'Planning for growth in the GCC management consulting market'*.

**For further information about purchasing one of our reports, please contact Jodi Davies, General Manager, Source Middle East on +971 (0)52 989 5224 or email [jodi.davies@sourceforconsulting.com](mailto:jodi.davies@sourceforconsulting.com).**

# How Source works with consulting firms to improve the quality of thought leadership

We help consulting firms to create high-quality thought leadership that builds relationships and opportunities in their target markets. Our clients are based around the globe and work for the Big Four (Deloitte, EY, KPMG, PwC), technology firms (including Accenture and IBM), HR experts (such as Hay Group), strategy boutiques, mid-sized consulting firms, and smaller specialists.

We benchmark our clients' publications against those of their competitors; help them to spot issues and topics that their clients are interested in (but that other firms aren't writing about); and identify opportunities to improve the quality of their thought leadership as well as offering training and guidance on how to make that happen. We do this for people working at different levels—from global leaders of marketing or thought leadership through to sector and service line heads and individuals focused on producing a specific piece.

Our clients tell us that they appreciate our established methodology for analysing the quality of thought leadership, our deep knowledge of what consulting firms are producing (we review more than 1,000 pieces of thought leadership each year), our ongoing research with their target readers (last year we surveyed and interviewed nearly 3,000 senior executives), and our culture (maintained by having a small, experienced team) of collaboration, flexibility, and commitment to delivering value in every project.



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