

# QUALITY RATINGS OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP FOR THE FIRST HALF OF 2018

*Analysis of thought leadership and ranking of leading  
consulting firms based on our established methodology*

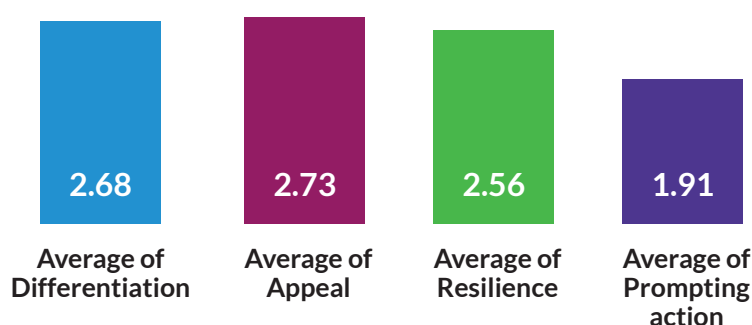
## Why don't consultants want to tell people what to do?

Consultants make their living from telling organisations how to do things better. So why, when it comes to thought leadership, are they so hesitant to offer actionable recommendations, or to say a little about how they could help beyond the advice already provided on the page or screen?

In our latest ratings, and this is very much in line with past experience, prompting action scores—on average—a dismal 1.91, far lower than the average score for differentiation, appeal, or resilience.

**Figure 1**

**Average scores for all content reviewed**



Are we being particularly demanding in the way we assess whether and how thought leadership prompts action? We don't think so. Here's what it takes to score 3/5 for each of the three questions within prompting action:

Question	What is required for a score of 3/5
A. Is the audience given justified and actionable recommendations to apply within their own organisation?	Offers specific actionable recommendations
B. Does it give the reader a clear idea of how the consulting firm could help whilst avoiding being a thinly disguised sales pitch?	Provides information, relevant to this specific topic, about what the firm does
C. Is the target audience likely to conclude that this is a topic they need to take action on?	Persuades the audience to consider this issue with colleagues to decide if action is required

Despite what feel to us like reasonable demands, prompting action is the lowest scoring of the four criteria for every single firm in this report. And even the highest scorers on prompting action (North Highland and Capgemini) only reach 2.27.

# METHODOLOGY

## Our definition of thought leadership

We include material that is intended to say something new about business, technology, or the economy and is positioned by the firm as such (e.g., as thought leadership, insight, or research).

### We do not include material that:

- is primarily and obviously designed to sell a particular consulting service or solution or is clearly straightforward marketing material;
- describes a single case study, except in cases where a firm is doing so to illustrate a broader point it is making about a subject;
- outlines the results of a survey with minimal analysis; or
- provides factual operational guidance on legislative or accounting changes.

However, what seems perfectly clear on paper can at times be less clear when applied in practice. The first challenging boundary to manage is material around guidance on legislative or accounting changes. On this one, we do our utmost to separate factual guidance (which shouldn't be included) from material that brings the firm's experience and perspective to add value to the reader (and so should be added to our list).

A second challenge is generated by firms themselves when they decree some material to be "thought leadership" and other material (although it fits our criteria) as "something other than thought leadership". In order to be fair to all firms, we take the intelligent reader's perspective: If they would view this in the same light as other "thought leadership", then we do, too.

The third and final area we often find ourselves debating is around material produced in conjunction with outside bodies. On this one, if the intelligent reader would assume the consulting firm is the key driving force behind the piece, then we do, too, and we add it to the list.

## Formats

We include material that the reader would perceive as thought leadership—this may be a traditional PDF, an online report, or material presented through an interactive site. In order to compare like with like, we exclude blogs and blog-like material as well as standalone videos.

Where content is presented in multiple ways, we always aim to score the optimum format or mix of formats.

## Sampling

We review a random sample of each consulting firm's thought leadership based on a minimum of 20% of output or 10 pieces, whichever is the greater. For those firms producing more than 150 pieces of thought leadership in the six-month period, we cap our reviews at 30.

## Firms included

The primary driver for inclusion in our list is the size of firm. However, some large firms produce little thought leadership and some smaller firms produce a significant amount of high-quality content. The former we exclude from our process (although we keep a close eye on output), and the latter we consider including if we see a persistent commitment to thought leadership.

The following firms have appeared in our rankings at some point but have been previously excluded and not reinstated due to a scarcity of relevant content: Aon Hewitt (last appeared 2016 H1), Booz Allen (2015 H2), Infosys (2016 H2), and Mercer (2015 H2).

CSC last appeared in our rankings in 2015 H1; we include DXC Technology (of which CSC became a part in 2017) for the first time this review.

Historically, we reviewed content from Hay Group and then Korn Ferry Hay Group from 2016 H1. This firm now appears as Korn Ferry.

BearingPoint and FTI Consulting published fewer than 10 significant pieces but more than five in 2018 H1. We have reviewed this content but have not given these firms a ranking position.

Please do let us know of any firms that we are not analysing but which you believe merit inclusion.

## Our quality criteria

Our criteria are based on research with senior executives in large organisations and assess the factors that drive individuals to pick up a piece of content; to read past the first paragraph and beyond; to have confidence in what they have read; and to take action based on what they have absorbed.

Each piece is rated individually against a series of 15 questions spread across four criteria. For each criterion, the piece of content receives a score between 1 and 5; this generates a total score for each piece of between 4 and 20.

Full details, including information about how each question is scored, can be found on White Space: [Our quality ratings methodology](#).

## Would you like to explore the findings of this report in more detail?

We can help you consider what our findings mean specifically for your firm. We run webinars and small group discussions based on in-depth analysis of our quality ratings and our knowledge and experience of thought leadership. Questions we often help our clients answer include:

- Are we maximising returns on our thought leadership investment?
- Where are the biggest opportunities for increasing the impact of our thought leadership?
- What can we learn from the best—and the worst—of our content?
- What can we learn from our competitors' content?
- Where and how can we innovate effectively?
- What do the results suggest about our ways of working on thought leadership?

## Can we help you assess the quality of individual publications?

Underpinned by our quality criteria and benchmarking data, we provide feedback on individual pieces of content. This can be carried out pre-publication, in which case we will also make suggestions about what can be improved before your deadline. Clients use our post-publication feedback to train creators of thought leadership, to identify opportunities, and to track progress.

To find out more, or simply to request a quote, please contact [hayley.urquhart@sourceglobalresearch.com](mailto:hayley.urquhart@sourceglobalresearch.com).

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