

Report  
May 2023

EXTRACT



# PERSPECTIVES

Perceptions of Consulting  
in China in 2023

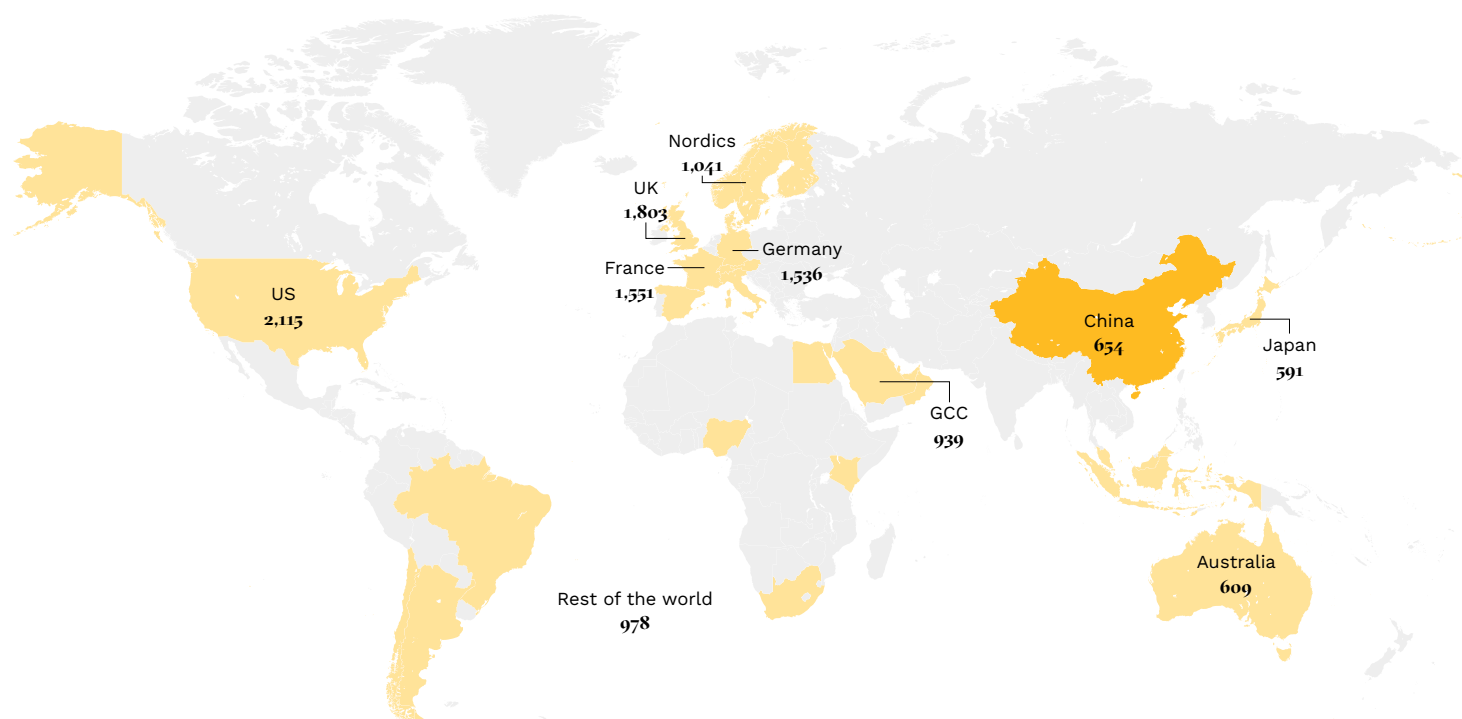


# What is this Client Perception Study?

Underpinned by our extensive and industry-leading client survey, this report reveals what senior end-users think about the leading consulting firms in China. The report contains a detailed analysis of the client journey and examines how clients see firms differently as they move from awareness, to shortlisting a firm, to then becoming direct clients and heavy users of a firm. The report also includes rankings of the leading firms, in order to help you better understand your firm's positioning in the market, and the overall competitive landscape in which you are operating.

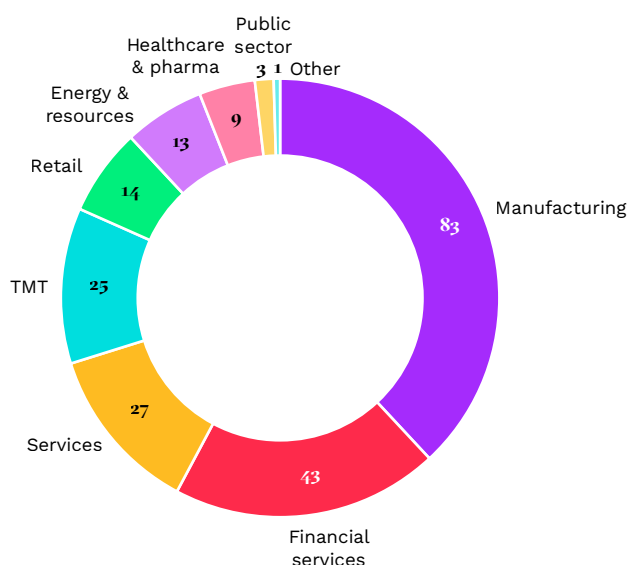
Created to provide you with a snapshot of client views, and to better understand how well positioned your firm is to support clients' needs, this report also comes with individual firm profiles to allow you to better understand your competition.

Below, we have illustrated the survey responses that underpin the analysis included in this report. You can read the full methodology [here](#).



## Who did we talk to?

We have 218 responses from our survey of executives, directors, and senior managers in China undertaken in November 2022, all of whom have been responsible for buying consulting services in the past two years. We ask all respondents about three firms they're familiar with, giving us 654 responses about different firms. They represent a wide range of sectors and business functions, and 76% work in organisations that generate more than \$500m in revenue.



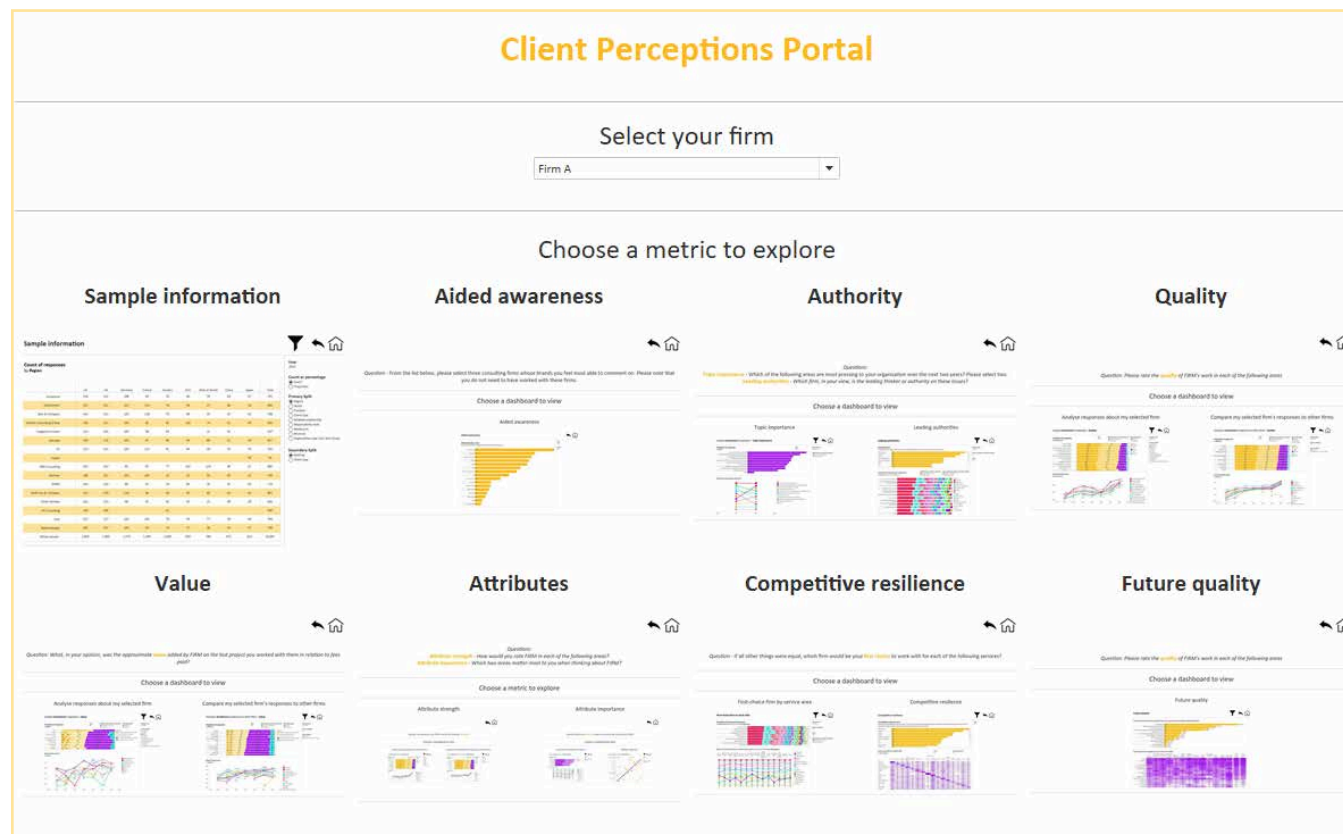
## Which firms are included in this report?

|                           | Did we ask about this firm in this market? | Detailed profile available? |
|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Accenture                 | ✓  | ✓                           |
| AlixPartners              | ✓  | ✓                           |
| Bain & Company            | ✓  | ✓                           |
| Boston Consulting Group   | ✓  | ✓                           |
| Capgemini Invent          | ✓  | ✓                           |
| Deloitte                  | ✓  | ✓                           |
| EY                        | ✓  | ✓                           |
| Fujitsu                   | ✗  | ✗                           |
| IBM Consulting            | ✓  | ✓                           |
| Kearney                   | ✓  | ✓                           |
| KPMG                      | ✓  | ✓                           |
| McKinsey & Company        | ✓  | ✓                           |
| Oliver Wyman              | ✓  | ✓                           |
| PA Consulting             | ✗  | ✗                           |
| PwC (including Strategy&) | ✓  | ✓                           |
| Roland Berger             | ✓  | ✓                           |

## Discover more online

The data contained and referred to within this report is also available online on our new, redesigned online portal, where it can be sorted and filtered according to your preferences, also providing access to historic data from our past surveys back to 2016.

To access the data, visit the main [report page](#) and click the blue “Explore the data” button. Alternatively, you can visit the data portal page at <https://reports.sourceglobalresearch.com/portal/abacus/9419/dataview-china-cps-2023-customer-data-portal>.



When you log on, you'll notice a sample information dashboard. Here you can check the sample size for certain cuts of the data. In addition, hovering your cursor over values on a chart will display the number of responses related to that particular value. If you have any questions about any of the data, please [contact us here](#).

## How are these studies different?

The views about each firm expressed in this report come from senior end-users of professional services—your clients and prospects, in other words. They differ from typical feedback studies firms often perform with their own customers in three important ways:

- **A multi-firm view.** Our reports enable consulting firms to see how they stack up against their competitors in the minds of clients.
- **A view from prospects, not just existing clients.** We include the views of direct clients (those who have bought services from a firm on a reasonably regular basis) and prospects (clients who feel qualified to share an opinion about a firm but aren't among the firm's direct clients). Prospects may have had exposure to the work the firm has done elsewhere in their organisation or have simply formed an impression based on reading a firm's thought leadership or being exposed to its marketing in some other form. This enables us to understand what we tend to think of as a firm's "brand pipeline", and about the differences between expectation (prospects) and reality (direct clients). It also tells us something about the differences between a firm's marketing and what it actually delivers.
- **Independence and expertise.** The trouble with conducting your own client research is that clients are often reluctant to express negative views about firms (and people) with whom they've worked closely. They have no such concerns when they're telling us. Added to which, we're able to bring the expertise we've gained over years of analysing the consulting market to bear, helping to interpret the results within the context of the wider market and the strategic priorities of consulting firms.

It's important to remember that this is a study of client perceptions; a summarised view of what we're hearing from the market. It's not Source's view, nor is it a comment on market share or a recommendation to clients about which firms to buy from. The audience of these reports is very much the firms featured in them, and those interested in the strength of the competition in any given market.

We profile individual firms in our reports—indeed this remains one of the most popular parts of the reports with readers—and we do, separately, provide tailored presentations to firms that buy this report, contextualizing the results for that individual firm. However, our Client Perception Studies are not exhaustive studies of clients' opinions about specific firms that remain statistically robust when filtered to provide detailed data about views at a very granular level of the market, and are not designed to replace the sort of in-depth client research that many firms often ask us to carry out for them.

All analysis is our own—as experts in interpreting client data, our aim is to help you make sense of it and bring the important messages to your attention quickly. It is not possible to influence our rankings either by subscribing to our research or by paying us money—it never has been and it never will be. To that end, Source is completely independent of any professional services firm we work with or comment on.

# Contents

## Overview of client perceptions in China 8

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Leading firms across the buying cycle            | 8  |
| Who is front of mind with clients in China?      | 9  |
| What topics are front of mind with clients?      | 10 |
| Who delivers high-quality work?                  | 12 |
| Quality rankings by service                      | 14 |
| Perceptions of the value added by firms in China | 16 |
| Who is best to work with?                        | 18 |
| Who is first choice with clients?                | 20 |
| Who is best positioned for the future?           | 20 |

## What clients are telling us 22

Key insights about what clients are telling us about consulting firms

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Clients in China are increasingly positive about quality, although perceptions of sustainability work have stalled                     | 22 |
| Prospects are less likely to say global reach and breadth of services are important when thinking about a firm                         | 23 |
| Three groups of firms appear to emerge in terms of relevance—and some firms need to work hard to be seen as highly relevant to clients | 25 |

## Firm-by-firm analysis 27

A summary of clients' views about each firm in turn

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Accenture               | 28 |
| AlixPartners            | 31 |
| Bain & Company          | 34 |
| Boston Consulting Group | 37 |
| Capgemini Invent        | 40 |
| Deloitte                | 43 |
| EY                      | 46 |
| IBM Consulting          | 49 |
| Kearney                 | 52 |
| KPMG                    | 55 |
| McKinsey & Company      | 58 |
| Oliver Wyman            | 61 |
| PwC                     | 64 |
| Roland Berger           | 67 |

## About this report 70

Our report mainly draws on our annual global client perceptions survey of senior end-users of consulting firms. A detailed view of our methodology and more information about Source can be found below:

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Methodology in full           | 70 |
| Our MegaModel                 | 72 |
| Meet the expert               | 73 |
| About us                      | 74 |
| Publication schedule for 2023 | 75 |

Figure 1

The top firms across key metrics in China



## Who is front of mind with clients in China?

Every year, we ask senior end-users of consulting firms to select three brands from a list of up to 15 of the world's leading consulting firms that they feel most comfortable talking about in more detail (the list varies slightly depending on where the respondent is based—see the methodology for more details). This simple question tells us something powerful about the extent to which firms have carved out space in clients' minds. It's more than a measure of brand awareness—it's more a measure of brand familiarity.

To give each firm an "aided awareness" score for this, we've looked at how quickly respondents selected any particular firm. The firm that reached the quota for responses first gains the top score (which is 100). All other firms are scored in comparison based on how many respondents have selected each firm relative to the quota. Think of it as firms racing each other to a finish line.



# Firm-by-firm analysis

In this section of our report, we summarise the views of clients about each firm in turn. We explain further the methodology behind the data presented here in the [Methodology in full](#) section later in this report.

|                           |                                  |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Accenture                 | <a href="#">page 28 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| AlixPartners              | <a href="#">page 31 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| Bain & Company            | <a href="#">page 34 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| Boston Consulting Group   | <a href="#">page 37 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| Capgemini Invent          | <a href="#">page 40 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| Deloitte                  | <a href="#">page 43 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| EY                        | <a href="#">page 46 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| IBM Consulting            | <a href="#">page 49 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| Kearney                   | <a href="#">page 52 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| KPMG                      | <a href="#">page 55 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| McKinsey & Company        | <a href="#">page 58 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| Oliver Wyman              | <a href="#">page 61 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| PwC (including Strategy&) | <a href="#">page 64 &gt;&gt;</a> |
| Roland Berger             | <a href="#">page 67 &gt;&gt;</a> |





# About this report

## Methodology in full

### Who did we talk to?

Figure 21

Respondents' level of responsibility

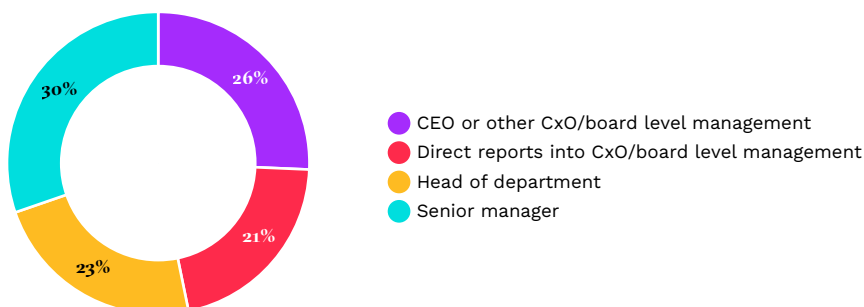


Figure 22

Respondents by sector

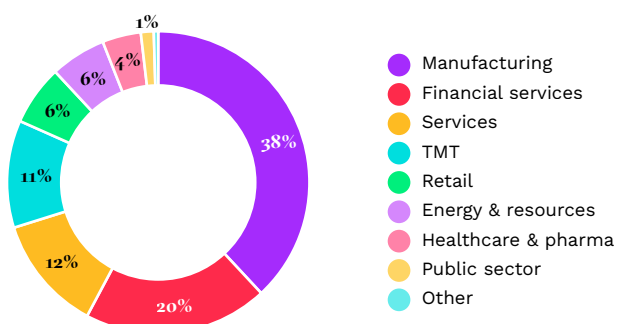


Figure 23

Respondents by function

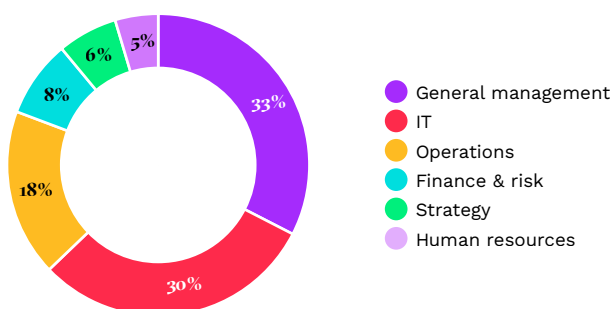
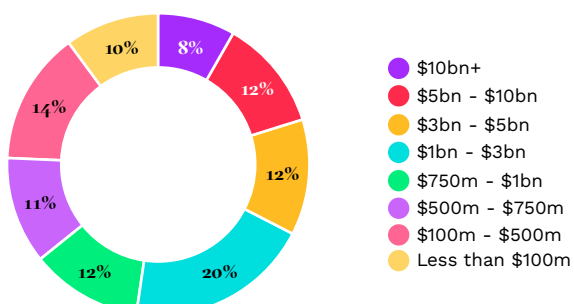


Figure 24

Respondents by organisation's revenue



## What did we ask them?

Each respondent was presented with a list of up to 14 leading consulting firms in China and asked to select three consulting firms whose brands they felt most able to comment on, even if haven't worked with those firms. We focus on the world's leading consulting firms to ensure we have sufficient responses to carry out a detailed analysis.

We calculate an aided **awareness score** based on which firms are selected. To give each firm an aided awareness score, we've looked at how quickly respondents selected any particular firm. It is "aided" in the sense that respondents are given a list of firms to choose from. The firm that reached the quota for responses first gains the top score (which is 100). All other firms are scored in comparison based on how many respondents have selected each firm relative to the quota. Think of it as firms racing each other to a finish line. We go on to ask further questions, focusing on the following areas:

- **Experience with the firms selected:** Whether respondents are aware of the selected consulting firm, but haven't shortlisted or used it, have shortlisted the firm, but not used it, have bought a small number of services from the firm (i.e., less than three), or have bought multiple services.
- **First choice:** If all other things were equal, which firm (from the list of 14 firms we ask about in China) they say would be their first choice to work with in each of 13 different consulting services
- In the firm-by-firm section, we chart the relative threats between a given firm and the other firms we look at. Where a higher proportion of the clients of other firms would select the given firm than the proportion of clients of the given firm who would select that other firm, then we consider the given firm to be a relative threat to that other firm. In such cases the chord is colored yellow. Chords in purple show where the proportion of the given firm's direct clients that would select that other firm is higher than the proportion of clients of that other firm who would choose the given firm as their first choice. In such cases, we consider the other firm to be a relative threat to the given firm. Where the proportions are equal, chords are colored in blue.
- **Quality:** How they rate the quality of work of each of the three firms selected in 13 different consulting services. Respondents are asked to rate quality on a five-point scale where 1 is very low quality and 5 is very high quality. They're also given the option to answer, "don't know". We calculate a quality score based on the proportion of respondents describing quality (overall) as either "high" or "very high". We calculate a **quality outshine score** as the difference between the proportion of direct clients describing quality as "high" or "very high" and the proportion of prospects describing the quality as "high" or "very high". A positive score means direct clients hold more favorable views than prospects, while a negative score means prospects think more highly of a firm's quality than its direct clients.
- **Value:** Their view of approximately how much value each of the three firms selected add in relation to the fees paid for its services, or if they haven't worked with the firm how much they would expect the typical value to be. Respondents are presented with five options: less than the amount paid, around the same as the amount paid, twice the amount paid, five times the amount paid, or 10 times or more the amount paid. We calculate a value score based on the proportion of respondents that value is in excess of fees to any extent. We calculate a **value outshine score** by determining the difference between the proportion of direct clients and the proportion of prospects describing the value added by the firm as worth twice, five times, or 10 times or more the fees paid. A positive score means direct clients hold more favorable views than prospects, while a negative score means prospects think more highly of a firm's value than its direct clients.
- **Attribute strength:** How they rate each of the three firms selected across a range of 17 attributes of what it's like to work with consulting firms. The full list of attributes is as follows (note that in many cases we shorten these for the sake of brevity):

  - Overall culture of the firm
  - The methodologies the firm uses
  - The firm's innovative approach
  - The firm's account management process
  - The breadth of the firm's services
  - The firm's ability to implement
  - The firm's brand and reputation
  - The firm's prices
  - The firm's overall speed of delivery
  - The firm's responsiveness and flexibility
  - The quality of the firm's thought leadership
  - The extent to which the firm puts suitably qualified people on your projects
  - The firm's environmental, sustainability, and corporate governance (ESG) credentials
  - The firm's global reach
  - The quality of the firm's subject matter experts
  - The quality of the firm's sector knowledge and expertise
  - The firm's alliances and partnerships with third parties

Respondents are asked to rate quality on a five-point scale where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good. They're also given the option to answer, "don't know". We calculate a score for an individual attribute based on the proportion of respondents describing the strength of the firm as either "good" or "very good". The attribute score overall is calculated as the average across all attributes of working with a firm. We calculate an **attribute outshine score** as the difference between the proportion of direct clients describing the strength of attributes of working with a firm as "good"

or “very good” and the proportion of prospects describing the strength of firms’ attributes as “good” or “very good”. A positive score means direct clients hold more favorable views than prospects, while a negative score means prospects think more highly of a firm’s attributes than its direct clients.

- **Attribute importance:** From the same list of 17 attributes, which two are most important when thinking about each of the three firms selected. We then aggregate their responses as the proportion of clients that gave each attribute as either their first or second most important attribute and rank each attribute from most to least important. Where two or more attributes have the same score, we take into account the share of clients who stated that the attribute was their first most important attribute. In the firm-by-firm section, we then overlay the ranking of the strength of the firm in each attribute over the relative importance in a chart to see where there’s alignment between the two measures.
- **Relevance:** From the list of 14 firms we ask about in China, which three firms have the most relevant offering, positioning, and content to help solve the issues their business faces.
- **Why they choose to work with consulting firms:** Why the respondent’s organisation works with consulting firms rather than completing projects with just internal resources. We ask them to rank the following reasons in order of importance: to achieve better outcomes than they could themselves, to minimise the risks associated with projects, because it’s simpler and easier to use consulting firms than to complete projects themselves, because it’s less expensive than using internal resources or other types of service providers, and to achieve results faster than they could themselves.
- **Why they choose to work with the firms selected:** For each of the three firms selected, why they worked with those firms—or if they haven’t worked with them, why they would want to—by ranking the same five reasons above.
- **Which topics are most pressing:** Which two topics are most pressing to the respondent’s organisation over the next two years, from a list of 12 broad areas. Respondents are also given the option of specifying their own option if one of the two most pressing issues to their organisation isn’t on the list.
- **Authority:** For the two most pressing topics selected, who clients think is the leading thinker or authority on those issues from the list of 14 firms we ask about in China.

## Our MegaModel

In order to forecast how fast the market for the 13 services we ask about will grow over the next three years, we rely on our MegaModel. This will be familiar to readers of our [Market Trends Programme](#), which is underpinned by this data.

Our MegaModel is our unique model of the global professional services market. Rather than making high-level assumptions, this model has been built from the bottom up, sizing the market capability by capability—assessing how much work a firm earns delivering each professional capability within each sector and country. For this report, we then aggregate capabilities together to align with the 13 consulting services we ask about. This results in a robust view of the size of the supply-side market.

We limit our market sizing and analysis to what we at Source call “big consulting”—work done by mid- and large-sized firms (those with more than 50 people). Please note that we don’t track the long, thin tail of work done by contractors and very small firms, as most readers of this report would not seek or be able to compete in this part of the market.

The data in our MegaModel is calibrated through extensive interviews with, and surveys of, professional services firms and their clients, allowing us to discuss broader trends in the market alongside detailed dimensions such as headcount. These interviews and surveys are supplemented with desk research, which allows us to assess the impact of wider macroeconomic trends on professional services. This, combined with our detailed modelling, results in a long-term view of the market that is able to support both historic and forecast data.

# Meet the expert

## Martin White

Martin is a Principal Consultant in our Client and Brand Insights team. He is an experienced writer and analyst specialising in client perceptions, and helps professional services firms to understand how they are perceived in the market across multiple lines of business including consulting, risk advisory, tax advisory, and audit. His recent work with Source includes not only authoring a number of our Client Perceptions Studies and Market Trends reports, but also leading on brand benchmarking exercises, message testing projects, and conducting research involving extensive interviews and surveys. He regularly appears on the Source podcast, *The Future of the Firm*, and has been quoted in publications including Accountancy Today and the Financial Times.

Prior to joining Source in 2019, Martin spent more than 11 years as an economic and financial consultant in a variety of roles at FTI Consulting and LECG.

### Martin White

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## About us

**We help professional services firms  
understand what really matters when  
facing decisions of vital importance.**

The best decisions are based on evidence, objectivity, and a willingness to change. That's why, at Source, we tell you what you need to hear, rather than what you want to hear.

We draw upon our deep roots within the professional services sector to provide firms with a clear picture of their clients' worlds. Through comprehensive research and meticulous analysis, we pinpoint what truly matters and deliver actionable insights that help firms map out the right way forward.

We believe in thriving individually and succeeding together. And we would love to help your firm crack its latest conundrum.

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# Publication schedule for 2023

| Reports 2023 |           | Market Trends Reports  | Market Trends Presentations          | Client Perception Studies                                       | Emerging Trends Programme  |
|--------------|-----------|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Q1           | January   | Forecasts for 2023<br>UK<br>GCC<br>France  | India                                | US<br>UK  | Offshoring<br>Consulting Services  |
|              | February  |  |                                      | Germany<br>Financial Services                                   |  |
|              | March     |  |                                      | GCC<br>France<br>Retail   |  |
| Q2           | April     | Nordics<br>US<br>DACH<br>Sustainability<br>Australia<br>East Asia<br>South East Asia |                                      | Australia<br>Energy & Resources<br>Technology, Media & Telecoms | Crisis Fatigue: How Much More Can Clients Take?  |
|              | May       |  |                                      | China<br>Japan  |  |
|              | June      |  |                                      |   |  |
| Q3           | July      | Africa<br>Energy & Resources<br>Financial Services<br>Technology, Media & Telecoms   | South America<br>Healthcare & Pharma |   | Staff Augmentation: Focusing on the Opportunity<br><br>The Rise of the Technology Challenger |
|              | August    |  |                                      | Risk<br>Tax   |  |
|              | September |  |                                      | Audit<br>Technology   |  |
| Q4           | October   | Tax<br>Risk<br>Planning for Growth in 2024   |                                      |   | Account Management Revisited   |
|              | November  |  |                                      |   |  |
|              | December  |  |                                      |   |  |

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