

EXTRACT



Emerging Trends

EMERGING

How to talk to your
clients about value

Report

Sep 2025

Contents

<h2>1</h2>	<h2>2</h2>	<h2>3</h2>	<h2>4</h2>	<h2>5</h2>	<h2>6</h2>
<p>What really matters</p> <p>We identify the things that really matter for firms—a snapshot of the most important dynamics in the market.</p>	<p>Creating value in practice</p> <p>How do clients conceive of value? We explore what’s important to buyers, and whether firms are currently delivering on their expectations.</p>	<p>The impact of value on choice</p> <p>Reputation matters. We examine clients’ perceptions of firms and the value they create, and how that shapes their choice of advisor.</p>	<p>Value and technology</p> <p>We explore how technology helps, and complicates, value creation.</p>	<p>Communicating value in practice</p> <p>We identify when and how firms should talk about value to have the most impact.</p>	<p>Do what really matters</p> <p>Practical recommendations to help you understand and create the value that really matters to clients.</p>
<p>>> Pages 5-8</p> 	<p>>> Pages 9-16</p> 	<p>>> Pages 17-20</p> 	<p>>> Pages 21-24</p> 	<p>>> Pages 25-29</p> 	<p>>> Pages 30-32</p> 

About this report
 >> Pages 33-35

About us and other reports
 >> Pages 36-37

Introduction

Value—what is it when we talk about it in the professional services world?

For some buyers of consulting, value is financial, a simple and transactional return on their investment in fees, though that's not how firms tend to express it, with the creation and delivery of value common terms, though perhaps lacking a little in definition.

We've previously described value as the benefit of using consultants rather than internal resources, identifying five dimensions of value in professional services: Does a firm enable a client to tackle a problem **better, faster, more easily, more safely, or more cheaply** than they'd be able to themselves? Understanding what value means in practice helps firms and clients to speak the same language—it's not hard to imagine what problems arise if a firm comes in talking about value in terms of speed when their client is most concerned about costs.

The five dimensions of value



Better

Consultants help us to produce better project outcomes than we would be able to achieve ourselves



Faster

Consultants help us achieve results faster than we could ourselves



Easier

Consultants simplify the project delivery process and make it easier for us to make decisions



Safer

Using consultants minimises the risks associated with the project



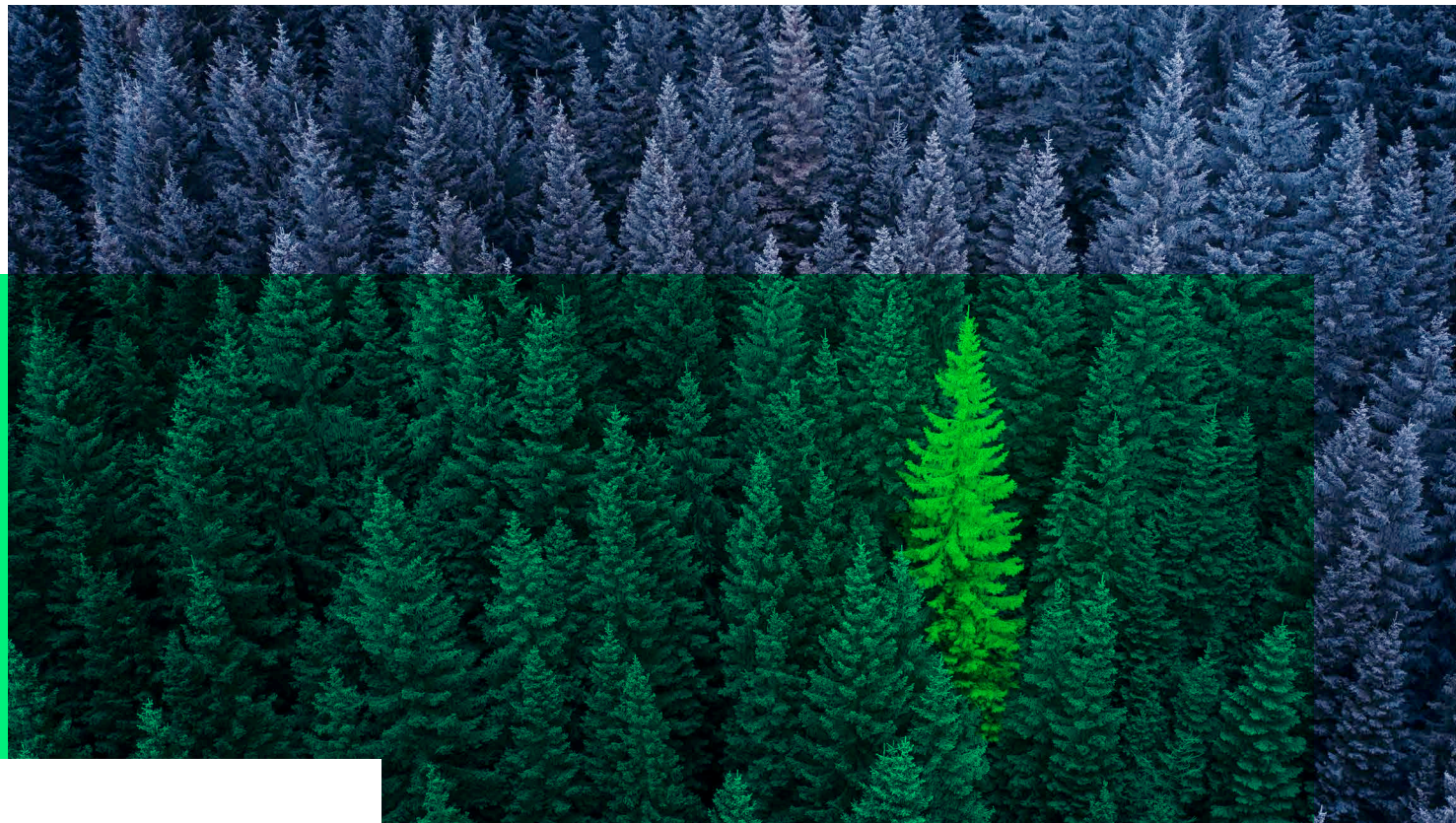
Cheaper

Using consultants is less expensive than completing projects with internal resources or using other types of service providers

Who is this report for?

For senior account managers and client & markets teams, this report reveals what value really means to your clients, busting common preconceptions and surfacing the concerns they wish you'd address. By aligning your conversations and deliverables with the client's view of value, you'll better meet their expectations, strengthen long-term relationships, and unlock growth.

For CMOs, this report helps you speak the same language as your clients when it comes to value, ensuring your messaging and materials remain relevant, resonant, and compelling.



“The kind of engagement we have with consultants has changed; they are much more focused on value adding at the top end.”

CFO, energy & resources

What really matters

- Every client is different.....6
- Technology could prove to be a significant risk to value, in more ways than one 7
- Firms need to talk about value at the right time, and, crucially, evidence it8

2



“The greatest value consulting firms provide is their industry knowledge—trends, competitors, disruptors.”

CMO, manufacturing

Creating value in practice

- Clients engage firms because they want “better” outcomes 10
- That better solution is likely to come from sector expertise, but it’s not guaranteed..... 11
- Key client groups are looking for something more than “better” 12
- Clients are broadly in agreement that projects are a success, although the benefits can take some time to appear..... 14
- Major strategy firms make the quickest impact, something other firms could emulate..... 15
- Clients also think they are getting long-term benefits—but there is a small, and possibly significant, group who aren’t happy with Big Four here 16

3



“If there’s value in there and we know we will get a return from the investment, then we will spend the money.”

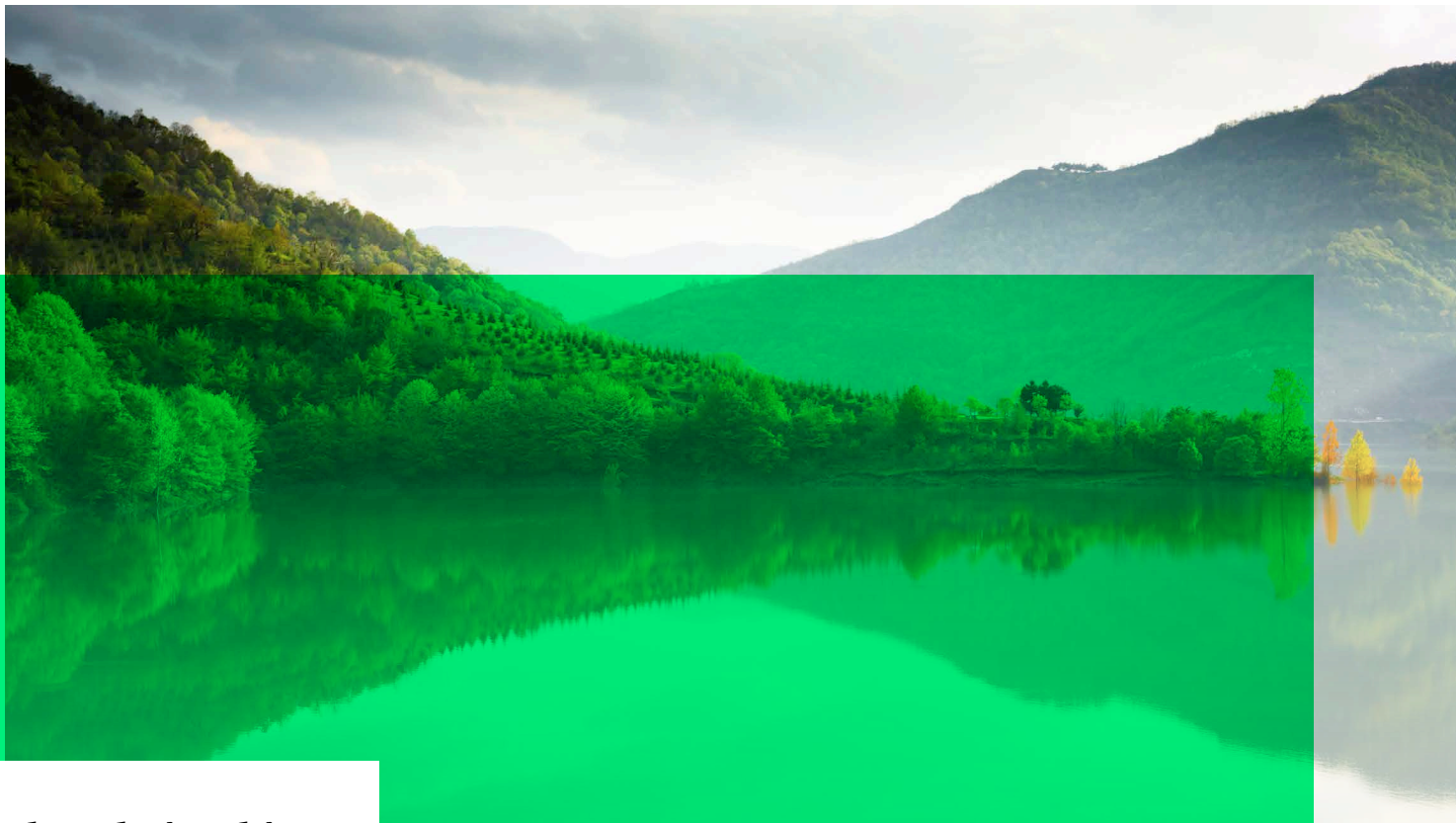
CTO, services

The impact of value on choice

Firms need to vocalise their contributions to success 18

Perceptions of firms, and the value clients are looking for, affect choice..... 19

4



“Value is all about the relationship you have with them, how they make you feel, how they help you, whether they are willing to go the extra mile. That’s what makes a huge difference.”

CDO, TMT

Value and technology

- Technology is changing the impact that firms can have22**
- Firms must call out the value of technology in their work as clients aren’t often seeing it in the return on investment.....23**
- Technology seems more responsible for value than the firm tasked with bringing it alive, and that brings significant risk.....24**

5



“I prefer work not to be budget driven. It’s really about the value we gain from the deliverables, how realistically we view that projection.”

Director of transformation, healthcare

Communicating value in practice

- Firms are talking about value in terms of value add delivered...26
- ... but that’s not necessarily what clients want firms to focus on..... 27
- Clients notice when firms fail to follow through on early conversations about value.....28
- Despite it being challenging, clients still need to measure value, which means understanding it and explaining it29

6

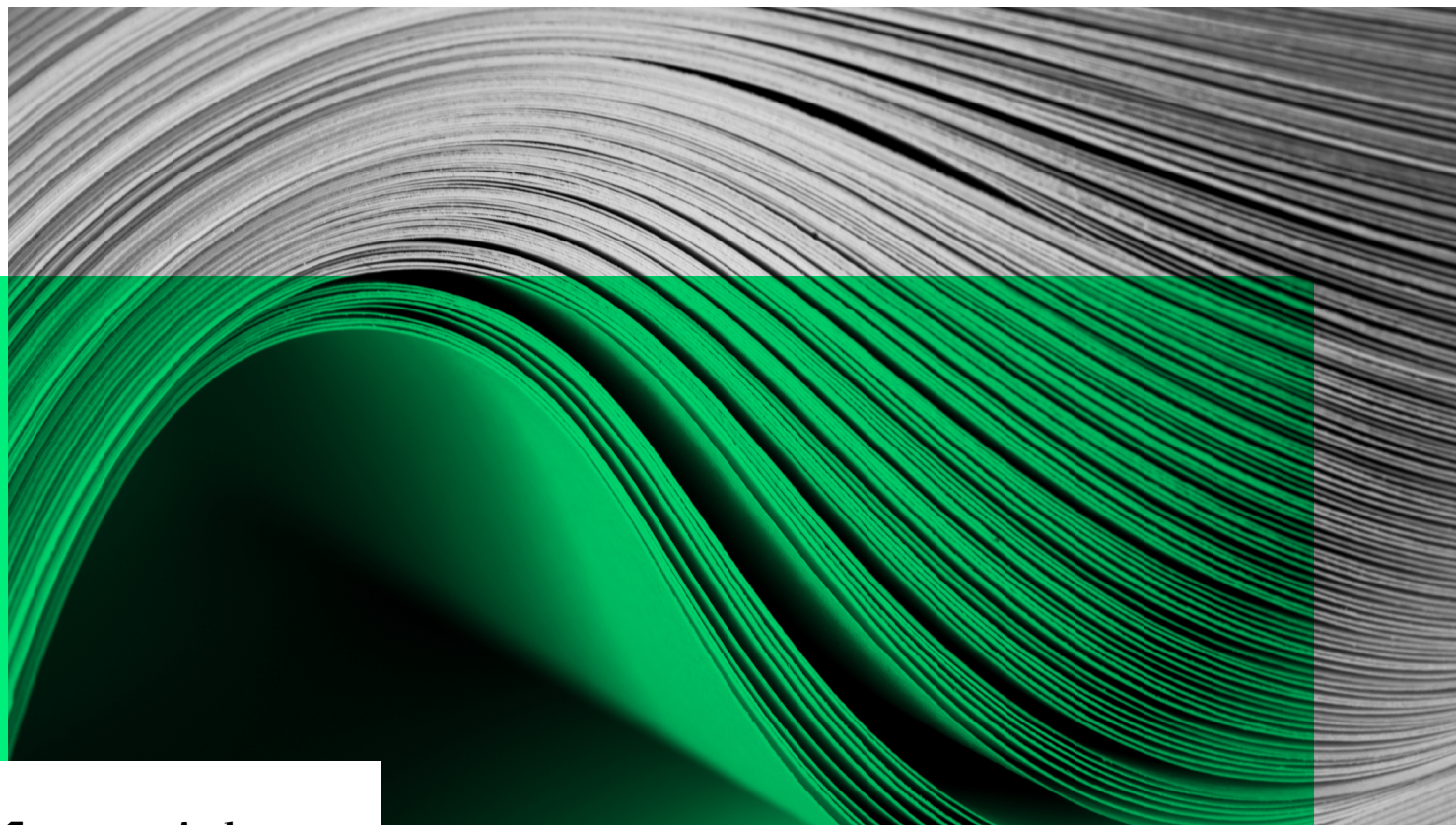


“The finance team would say we could do this for cheaper ourselves. But it’s a huge distraction. Concentrating on the value add makes a lot more sense.”

Strategy director, retail

Do what really matters

- Listen to clients and change the value conversation 31**
- Turn value blockers into value drivers.....32**



**“When we ask firms to pitch,
it’s a judgement of the ideas and
knowledge they bring. The decision
might include price, but it’s really
about the value they bring.”**

CRO, life sciences

About this report

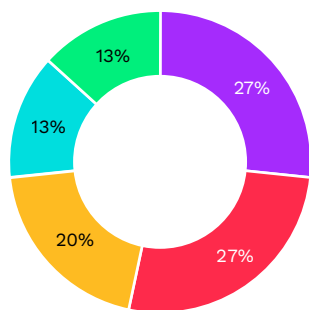
- Methodology 34
- Meet the experts.....35
- About us.....36
- Publication schedule 2025 37

Methodology

We surveyed 150 senior buyers of consulting in June 2025. Respondents worked in five geographies, all of which are important in terms of scale and/or growth potential—the US, UK, Germany, France, and the GCC. They were also drawn from a representative mix of sectors and functions. Approximately two thirds came from organisations with more than 5,000 people.

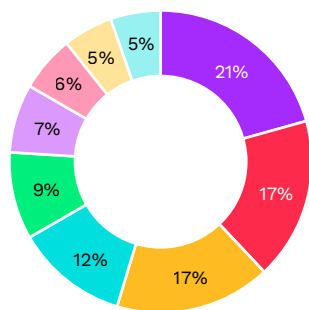
We have also drawn on the findings of our 2025 global Client Perceptions survey of 3,868 senior buyers of consulting where useful, and particularly for the insights shared in Figures 1-3 and Figure 6.

Respondents by geography



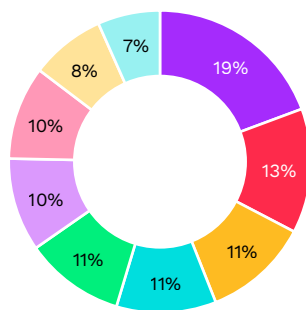
- UK
- US
- GCC
- France
- Germany

Respondents by sector



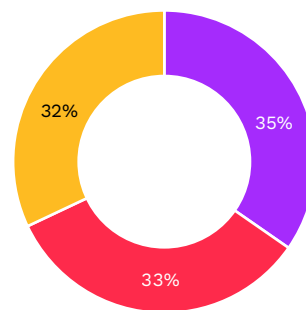
- Financial services
- Manufacturing
- Retail
- Energy & resources
- Services
- Healthcare
- Pharma & life sciences
- Public sector
- TMT

Respondents by function



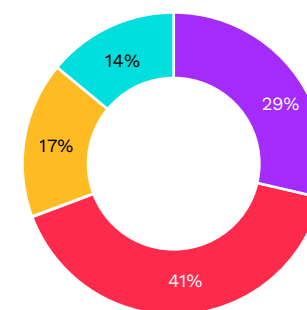
- IT
- General management
- Finance
- Procurement
- Sales & marketing
- Human resources
- Operations
- Risk/compliance
- Strategy

Respondents by responsibility



- Head of department
- Direct report into CxO/board-level management
- CxO/board-level management

Respondents by headcount



- 1,000-4,999 people
- 5,000-9,999 people
- 10,000-19,999 people
- 20,000+ people

Meet the experts

Catherine Anderson

Catherine is Director of Market Trends & Analysis. She turns qualitative and quantitative data into meaningful, strategic insights on topics across the professional services market, from sustainability to managed services, guiding leadership teams in their decision making.

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Martin is a Principal Consultant in our Client & 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.

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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 2025

2025	Market Trends Reports	Market Trends Briefings	Client Perceptions Studies	Emerging Trends Programme	White Space Reports	White Space Insights
Q1	January		UK US GCC France			Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	February			Pricing: Expectations vs. Reality		
	March				Quality Ratings Report (QRR)	
Q2	April	India South America	Germany Australia China Japan Retail Energy & Resources Financial Services Technology, Media & Telecoms	What's next for people, HR & change consulting?		Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	May					
	June			Client attitudes to AI and barriers to implementation today	Client Perceptions of Thought Leadership	
Q3	July	Healthcare & Pharma	Risk Tax			Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	August			How to talk to your clients about value		
	September				Thought Leadership Innovation	
Q4	October	Public Sector	Audit Technology	New opportunities for firms: the impact of macroeconomic trends and tariffs		Featured thought leadership (monthly) Quarterly webinar series
	November					
	December			ET6	Hot Topic Report	