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The Consultant to Trusted Advisor Journey

Part 1 – Why Trusted Advisor Skills Are the New Competitive Advantage in the AI Era

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Future-Proofing Consulting

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This two-part white paper series is designed to help Professional Services organizations and delivery practitioners thrive in the AI era. Part 1 explores the critical journey from transactional consultant to trusted advisor, highlighting the advanced consultative skills required to make that transition. Part 2 provides practical insights into how these skills can be developed through modern, effective training approaches that drive lasting behavioral change.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a distant concept, it's here, reshaping industries and redefining how work gets done. From predictive analytics to automated workflows, AI is poised to transform professional services by streamlining processes, accelerating decision-making, and delivering unprecedented efficiency. For PSOs, this means routine tasks can be increasingly handled by technology, leaving consultants to focus on what machines cannot replicate: building trust, influencing decisions, and delivering strategic value.

This shift raises a critical question: What will differentiate consultants in a world where technology handles the transactional? The answer lies in the evolution from consultant to trusted advisor.

The Rise of AI and the Human Imperative

AI excels at processing data, identifying patterns, and automating repetitive tasks. It can generate insights faster than people can and can predict outcomes with remarkable accuracy. But AI cannot replace the human ability to empathize, interpret nuance, and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics. It cannot build trust, inspire confidence, or understand the unspoken priorities that shape business decisions.

As technology increases its presence in the "what" and "how" of what we do, clients will increasingly look to consultants for the "why" and "what's next." They want partners who understand their business context, anticipate challenges, and guide them toward strategic success. This is where trusted advisor skills become indispensable.

From Consultant to Trusted Advisor: The Essential Skill Set

Skills development is a vital ingredient to success in any professional services organization. Delivery practitioners must continuously learn and evolve to remain effective in the roles they perform every day. A recent Deloitte Insights study found that 92% of companies believe human capabilities—soft skills—matter as much or more than technical skills in today's business world. The journey from consultant to trusted advisor underscores this reality: it requires far more than technical knowledge. It demands mastery of advanced interpersonal and strategic capabilities that enable consultants to move beyond transactional interactions and become indispensable partners in their client's success.

So, what does this evolution require? It calls for a set of core capabilities that define trusted advisors—skills that go beyond execution and position consultants as strategic partners who deliver insight, influence, and long-term value. These include:

- **Strategic Relationship Building:** Trusted advisors know how to deepen client relationships beyond the project level. This means understanding business drivers, building credibility, and fostering trust that lasts through change and uncertainty.
- **Influence and Executive Presence:** Consultants must learn to communicate with confidence and authority, tailoring their approach to different stakeholders and influencing decisions at all levels of the organization.
- **Advanced Communication Skills:** From active listening to delivering difficult messages with clarity, trusted advisors excel at adapting their communication style to their audience, running effective meetings, and ensuring alignment across complex engagements.
- **Value Articulation and Insight Delivery:** Trusted advisors don't just complete tasks, they connect solutions to strategic outcomes. They articulate value in terms that matter to the client and deliver insights that shape future decisions.
- **Opportunity Identification and Consultative Solutioning:** Moving beyond transactional work requires the ability to uncover unmet needs, ask critical questions, and position solutions that create long-term impact, not just short-term fixes.
- **Adaptability and Continuous Learning:** In a rapidly evolving PS environment, trusted advisors embrace change, learn quickly, and apply innovative approaches to stay relevant and effective.

The Risk of Standing Still

Consultants and other delivery practitioners who fail to evolve beyond transactional roles risk being commoditized. When technical expertise becomes table stakes and AI delivers efficiency at scale, the value of a consultant who simply executes tasks diminishes. Organizations that do not invest in advanced interpersonal and analytical capabilities will struggle to differentiate their services, retain client loyalty, and sustain growth. The future will not belong to those who know the most about technology, but to those who can combine technical knowledge with influence, insight, and trust.

The Trusted Advisor Advantage

Trusted advisors do more than deliver solutions, they shape decisions. They understand their client's business drivers, align recommendations with strategic objectives, and foster relationships built on credibility and confidence. These capabilities require mastery of skills that AI cannot replicate: active listening, empathy, critical thinking, and consultative problem-solving.

In an era of automation, these human-centered skills are not optional, they are the new competitive advantage. They enable consultants to move beyond project execution and become indispensable partners in their client's success.

The evolution from consultant to trusted advisor is not a trend, it's a necessity. Organizations that prioritize the development of these advanced skills will future-proof their workforce, strengthen client relationships, and unlock new opportunities for growth. Those that don't will find themselves competing on price and speed, areas where technology will win.

The question is no longer whether to invest in trusted advisor capabilities. The question is how quickly you can make the shift.

About the Author: Ryan Childers, RMCP®

Ryan Childers is a Partner and Practice Leader for RTM Consulting. With 20 years of experience in PS strategy, operations, delivery, and management in technology services, Ryan has a proven track record of helping services organizations drive operational improvements and develop the consultative skills of their delivery teams. He has specific expertise in PS strategy, global resource management (GRM), Just-in-Time-Resourcing®, and developing delivery methodologies.

Ryan also serves as the Managing Director of the Resource Management Institute (RMI). With specific expertise in Global Resource Management, Ryan was an early adopter and implementer of the Just-in-Time Resourcing® brand of human capital management solutions. His passion for the resource management discipline is central to his role leading this important industry institute.

Prior to joining RTM Consulting, Ryan spent several years at Finvi (formerly Ontario Systems), where he held leadership positions in Professional Services and corporate strategy. His professional experience also includes working in systems deployment at Accenture. Ryan holds an MS in Information and Communication Sciences and BS in Management from Ball State University. Ryan has been a frequent speaker and panelist at Technology Services Industry Association (TSIA) events.

About RTM Consulting

Specializing in in resource, workforce, and project management, service business optimization, digital transformation, and consultative skills development, RTM Consulting helps project-based service providers deliver better business outcomes and customer success for their clients. RTM Consulting helps IT hardware, software and support services organizations achieve the benefits associated with successful services portfolios. With its unique Just-in-Time Resourcing® solutions, Business Acceleration Services, and training solutions, RTM Consulting helps large, medium, and small firms move beyond theory to practical application of industry best practices and achievement of exceptional results in the shortest possible period of time.