9 PROFIT LEVERS YOU CAN CONTROL

This checklist is designed to help you lift profit in a controlled, repeatable way. Each lever shows you a target based on how the top performing consultancies in the UK&I are operating based on our Consultancy BenchPress survey, then gives you one action for each of the next 30, 60 and 90 days. Use it in your monthly leadership meetings: score where you are today, agree the next action for each lever, and hold yourselves to it next month.

Lever 1: Proposition and niche focus

Target: Join the 17% of 'highly differentiated' consultancies. These firms are twice as likely to achieve fast growth and high profitability.

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days**: Interview five new clients and five prospects who didn't buy from you. Ask them all, 'Why did you buy from us?' Document the primary measurable outcome they were looking for.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days**: Assess your services against the outcomes your clients are looking for and retire any and all services that do not support the achievement of your clients' most important outcomes.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days**: Publish three proof points that evidence your success in working with clients to achieve the promised outcome.

Lever 2: Pricing discipline and price realisation

Target: Become one of the 17% achieving a 61%+ gross margin.

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days:** Offer a 3-tiered proposal for your next project: a base option, a middle one, and a premium solution. Assign a value to each option not just a cost.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days:** Review discounts, write-offs and scope creep on your last ten projects. If discounting is a feature of how you sell, at a minimum start offering discounts in increments of 2.5% instead of 5%, with CEO approval required for any discount offered at 5% or more.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days:** Introduce a 'no discount without scope change' rule.

THE CONSULTANCY GROWTH NETWORK

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Lever 3: Artificial intelligence and automation

Target: Move from AI pilots to organisation-wide adoption to capture the 9% gross-margin uplift reported by firms who have fully deployed AI across their business.

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days:** Map ten repetitive workflows; select three pilot programmes where AI can improve workflow efficiency and run with them.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days:** Deploy your pilots across at least two business functions and record the hours you save and the volume of error reduction you've achieved.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days:** Scale to six of your most successful workflows. Integrate the outputs and conduct a monthly audit of the results.

Lever 4: Utilisation

Target: Improve non-partner utilisation. On average, a 1% improvement in utilisation results in a 20% improvement in operating profit (for a firm with around 20 staff).

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days:** Conduct a weekly resourcing meeting to flag under- and over-utilisation early.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days:** Write and implement your 'Bench Playbook' so that any spare capacity advances the business in a specific way.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days:** Publish a 12-week view of delivery capacity by consultant to act fast on over or under-utilisation before it becomes an issue.

Lever 5: Gross margin by role and by project

Target: Aim for at least 50% firm-wide. The top 17% are achieving 61%+.

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days:** Put a clear gross margin target on every live project and make it visible in your weekly updates.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days:** Start a weekly margin forecast by project and early-warning review.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days:** Shift the sales and marketing activity towards higher-margin services. Lead with those cases, offers and messages, and make them the default in proposals.

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Lever 6: Operating profit and overhead control

Target: Overheads are up and operating profit is down over the last year. Aim to join the 15% who are achieving 31%+ operating profit. The top 22% have more than 6 months of overheads as cash.

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days:** Set green, amber and red thresholds against project plans.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days:** Run a monthly review of all internal projects and discretionary spend. For each item confirm purpose, owner and cost to complete to approve or pause non-essential activity.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days:** Identify three of the more costly overheads, get new supplier quotes to identify potential savings and forecast your overheads against the new rates.

Lever 7: Pipeline flow and win rate

Target: Aim to join the top 31% of consultancies with a new business conversion rate of 61%+.

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days:** Define each buyer stage and set conversion targets and timescales for each one. Agree criteria for qualified leads.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days:** Review your most recent losses to identify and address the two most common sources of friction and document your best answers for handling objections.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days:** Add one repeatable campaign that generates qualified opportunities in your target sector. This could include a lead magnet, diagnostic and nurture sequence.

Lever 8: Team engagement and management practice

Target: Lift Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) to 61 or higher; firms at this level average 8% higher gross margin and operating profit.

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days:** Measure your eNPS and publish your actions based on the feedback.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days:** Create a one-page scorecard for each role, documenting the purpose, target outcomes and behaviours expected of the role and schedule monthly one-to-ones.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days:** Train managers in feedback and coaching.

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Lever 9: Tech stack

Target: Improve your resource planning and consolidate your key documents. Firms using a PSA average 4% higher non-partner utilisation.

- [ ] **Action in the next 30 days:** Map all tools and platforms, owners and overlaps. Combine any duplicate information into one master document.
- [ ] **Action after 60 days:** Consolidate resourcing, time and budget control into one system.
- [ ] **Action after 90 days:** Standardise dashboards for forward utilisation by consultant, gross margin, pipeline, work in progress and cash as a single source of truth.

Built on real consulting data

This is drawn from the latest Consultancy BenchPress insights. It reflects the data from 300 UK&I boutique consultancies. Not theory, just patterns that work.

About The Consultancy Growth Network

The Consultancy Growth Network is your consultancy's dedicated growth partner.

Through a combination of assessments, frameworks, workshops and expert input, we work with you and your senior leadership team to accelerate the maturity of your consultancy and help you build a commercially sustainable business.

Our aim is for you to achieve your desired outcome, be that building a forever business or working towards an exit. We can support you along the entire journey.