

Working from home poses career risks for consultants

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The remote working experiment could stymie the career aspirations of consultants as they miss out on valuable relationship-building opportunities.

Junior consultants are especially at risk from the shift because it hampers opportunities for in-person collaboration and the ability to learn from senior partners, says Pierre Briand, the founder of consulting-focused mergers and acquisitions firm SCD Advisory.

"It could slow the learning curve of junior staff by limiting their shared experiences within the firm," Mr Briand said.

"Intermediate consultants aspiring to become partner may lose that involvement in client relationship management and access to the partner network. *When it comes to the internal politicking game, face-to-face will always work better than Zoom.*

"Management could lose their connection with junior staff and the ability [to] be a role model, while partnerships will find their culture is diluted. It will be a case of 'kill the office, kill the culture'."

It was critical to build strong relationships both within the firm and with clients because the sector is fundamentally a people business, Mr Briand said.



"The opportunity to improve efficiency, transform operations, accelerate digitisation and reinvent the consulting model during the 'working from home' era should also be balanced with the fundamental risks posed to the sector."

Mr Briand added that video conferencing could not replace the need for face-to-face interaction.

His warnings came as the large consulting firms take different approaches to working from home amid the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of firms have gone completely remote, others are partially working in the office and some, where allowed by health authorities, are back in the office.

Mr Briand warned that while the four traditional consulting models would remain the same, the delivery of consulting services had changed amid COVID-19.

"The four traditional business models and their strategic positioning – ultra-specialism based on expertise, strategy consulting based on experience, process implementation based on methodology, and outsourcing based on efficiency – will not change dramatically but their delivery modes will," he said.

The risk for clients was that they would miss out on the creative advice that results from directly collaborating with consultants.

"Clients will end up with pre-formatted intellectual property rather than the imaginative and out-of-the-box advice resulting from teamwork and collaboration."