

# THE CONSULTING EXCELLENCE GUIDE

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This Guide sets out the Consulting Excellence Principles. It provides good practice exemplars that consulting firms may choose to adopt to illustrate their commitment to the Principles. In addition, it suggests ways in which MCA firms can communicate their commitment to these Principles.



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# THE NINE CONSULTING EXCELLENCE PRINCIPLES

#### **//ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR**

Consulting Excellence firms work with clients, partners, employees and other stakeholders in an ethical way. This means:

- 1. We are responsible and good citizens.
- 2. We conduct our business ethically.
- 3. We foster an ethical culture.

# //CLIENT SERVICE AND VALUE

Consulting Excellence firms promote the highest standards of client service and value. This means:

- 4. We provide excellent consulting services which deliver the outcomes clients seek and need.
- We are transparent with clients and respond to their concerns.
- 6. We always strive to improve the value we can deliver to our clients

# // PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Consulting Excellence firms develop the capabilities of their consultants, provide career development opportunities and support the welfare of all their employees. This means:

- 7. We undertake training and professional development planning each year.
- 8. We promote strong core consulting capabilities and specialisms in our consultants and teams.
- 9. We support our employees' career progression, professional development and welfare

# FOREWORD HOWARD TOLLIT, PRESIDENT MCA

Consulting Excellence is a great initiative for the consulting industry as a whole and for MCA member firms in particular.

Its origins lie in the determination of consulting firms to deliver excellent client service and value, recruit and train the best possible management consultants and behave in ways that live up to high ethical standards. By working together through Consulting Excellence, we can re-inforce the expertise that underpins the best in consulting and create additional benefits for all our firms and clients.

As the consulting industry adapts quickly to meet new needs and expand into new service areas, it is more important than ever that all our best firms identify, strengthen and promote their good practice in these areas. These are the core consulting skills and qualities that bring us together as an industry and enable us to continue to deliver value to clients and the wider economy.

The MCA's research with senior clients confirms that they will welcome this initiative and that it will help buyers identify and engage with 'consulting excellence' firms. At the same time, we have received extremely positive feedback from the Young MCA and their managers, who both see the benefits for individual consultants and the exciting and increasingly diverse career paths before them.

Indeed, one additional benefit of Consulting Excellence is that it is helping us to deepen our collective dialogue with our clients, consultants and other stakeholders.

As an industry professional association, we welcome all feedback and will be activity seeking it as Consulting Excellence becomes established in the consulting industry. We will keep the Principles under review and expect the scheme to evolve further in future years in the light of experience. We will consult on a first review of the Consulting Excellence scheme itself in mid-2017.

It is very exciting for me to be President of the MCA as we launch Consulting Excellence and celebrate the 60th anniversary of the MCA. I am grateful to all the other members of the MCA Board and Council, and to the MCA staff team, who have all worked hard to get us to this point.



Howard Tollit,
President MCA

# WHY CONSULTING EXCELLENCE?

The Consulting Excellence scheme has been devised and agreed by MCA member firms.

The scheme, supported by the wider Consulting Excellence campaign, will support clients in making better buying decisions. It will help MCA member firms to:

- Celebrate and communicate the achievements of the UK's best management consulting firms
- Explain and illuminate the contribution and value of UK management consulting to the UK economy and society
- Define and communicate the key elements of excellence in modern consulting
- Provide a hallmark of quality that is relevant to and increasingly recognised by clients, and which helps MCA member firms to grow
- Distinguish the work of quality management consulting firms from that of contractors and interims
- Highlight high-value, sustainable client outcomes as the hallmark of excellent consulting

- Encourage talented people to seek to become management consultants and to join MCA member firms
- Address reputational challenges to the consulting industry in an open and positive way
- Demonstrate that the consulting industry welcomes scrutiny and believes in transparency
- Stimulate debate and commitment to Consulting Excellence within the MCA membership and beyond, engaging a wide range of individual consultants in this activity.

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# CONSULTING EXCELLENCE: PILLARS, PRINCIPLES AND EXEMPLARS

MCA member firms adopt the Consulting Excellence Principles and use them to demonstrate their own high standards.

The Principles divide into three main pillars or headings: ethical behaviour, client service and value, and professional development.

The three pillars each contain three principles, giving the Nine Principles of Consulting Excellence. It is up to each member firm to show how they uphold the Nine Principles, and all members are encouraged to do this in ways that are most appropriate to their own circumstances.

To help, the MCA provides exemplars for each principle (set out in pages 8 to 14). Exemplars are practical steps that put Consulting Excellence Principles into practice. The exemplars are drawn from member firms' own statements or client suggestions. But they are voluntary. Members may demonstrate support for Consulting Excellence Principles in other ways, using other exemplars or suitable amendments of those set out here.

# WHAT CONSULTING EXCELLENCE IS AND IS NOT

The Consulting Excellence scheme is explicitly principles-based. It is designed so that individual member firms will adopt, use and promote it in the way that suits them best. It is not a system of regulation or an inspection regime.

It does not rely on compliance machinery or prescription. Firms should view Consulting Excellence as a stimulus to action and a platform for communication with their clients, employees and wider stakeholders.

# WHAT DO MCA MEMBER FIRMS DO?

All MCA member firms must adopt the Consulting Excellence principles.

Member firms should then decide for themselves how they express their support and adherence to the Consulting Excellence principles, provided they also supply the MCA with a public report which explains and evidences their approach (as set out in Annex 2).

For instance, many firms maintain their own Codes of Ethics, sometimes as a part of a wider corporate identity. Firms may choose to satisfy themselves that their Codes are consistent with and support the principles set out in Consulting Excellence. They could then make a general statement of support for the relevant Consulting Excellence Principles and evidence their commitment by pointing to the existing detail of their Codes, with some appropriate adjustment if necessary. They should then make this clear in their communications with staff, clients and the public.

Other firms will want to use the Consulting Excellence Statements of Principles directly and evidence their own commitment to them. They may do this using the exemplars in this document, their own adaptations of them, specific undertakings of their own, or some combination of all these elements.

# ANNEX 1: APPLYING CONSULTING EXCELLENCE PRINCIPLES: THE EXEMPLARS

MCA firms support the Consulting Excellence Principles and apply them to their own business. It is the responsibility of each firm to ensure that the Principles are made relevant and appropriate to their own circumstances.

Each firm's approach will reflect amongst other things their size, range of consulting work and heritage. Smaller firms, for instance, will focus only on the commitments that are most appropriate for their business. Many firms will be able to draw on their existing practice and published material.

This section of the guide, drawn from the existing statements of Consulting Excellence firms, from client feedback, and from other research, sets out some of the good practice exemplars firms may choose to adopt to illustrate their commitment to the Consulting Excellence Principles 9 | THE CONSULTING EXCELLENCE GUIDE MCA



# ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR



## WE ARE RESPONSIBLE AND GOOD CITIZENS.

- Observe all laws and regulations, both in letter and in spirit
- Respond constructively to legal, professional and related challenges
- Encourage diversity pro-actively
- Strive to be free of all discrimination or bias on the basis of gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability
- Develop a firm-specific commitment to sustainability
- Develop a firm-specific commitment to the public interest
- Avoid work that is inconsistent with these commitments or which could damage the consulting industry's reputation
- Encourage and support the active involvement (when appropriate) of employees in communities where they live and work
- Work, where appropriate, with other Consulting Excellence firms and the wider consulting industry to promote the profession and support the public interest





## WE CONDUCT OUR BUSINESS ETHICALLY.

#### Exemplars might include commitments to:

- Be open and honest about professional relationships (in a way that is consistent with other regulatory and commercial confidentiality requirements)
- Avoid inappropriate gifts or entertainment
- Disclose relevant commercial interests or preferences (in a way that is compatible with other regulatory and commercial confidentiality requirements)
- Provide the best and most objective advice that we can
- Treat competitors and others with respect
- Ensure wherever possible that the legal or contractual permissibility of behaviours is not used to mask their unethical nature
- Strive as far as possible to protect clients' interests and reputations
- Use confidential client information only for agreed purposes
- Striving to ensure that staff maintain high standards of personal conduct

### 3 //

## WE FOSTER AN ETHICAL CULTURE.

- Aiming to ensure staff and consulting teams support their firm's commitments to sustainability and the public interest, including high standards of ethical behaviour
- Asking staff in their working lives to test the firm's and their own behaviour against those standards and to provide feedback as appropriate
- Promote internal discussion on ethical issues, including their relationship with business practices
- Avoid requiring staff, where reasonable, to work in conflict with their own ethical beliefs
- Encourage and enable staff and others to raise ethical concerns confidentially
- Investigate and respond to concerns and take appropriate and timely action
- Zero tolerance of retaliation against any internal or external colleague who speaks up

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## CLIENT SERVICE AND VALUE



#### 4 //

#### WE PROVIDE EXCELLENT CONSULTING SERVICES WHICH DELIVER THE OUTCOMES CLIENTS SEEK AND NEED.

- Discuss and agree on the outcomes clients seek, where possible before work begins, or as part of a mutually understood, transparent process thereafter
- Listen carefully to clients to understand fully their needs and ways of working, and determine how the firm can maximise value for them
- Deliver the consulting services that they commit to and aim to meet or exceed their clients' expectations
- Advise clients when the firm believes their requirements are not in the clients' interests
- Suggest alternative approaches and solutions, where appropriate, including, where the firm intends to stand down, other providers
- Challenge clients, where necessary, and deliver difficult messages, backed by evidence
- Work or continue to work on projects only where the firm is confident of achieving successful outcomes and generating real value, has the right skills and competencies, and believes it can provide objective and impartial advice
- Work openly with partners and subcontractors, where appropriate, to meet client needs
- Transfer knowledge, skills and experience to clients
- Ask clients to identify and promote cases where the firm has delivered excellence





# WE ARE TRANSPARENT WITH CLIENTS AND RESPOND TO THEIR CONCERNS.

Exemplars might include commitments to:

- Give clients full access to relevant information about their firm and how it is organised
- Clarify who is accountable to clients for each consulting assignment
- Respond positively to client demands for information
- Be open about the capabilities and competence of the firm, consultants and teams
- Ensure clients are served by skilled and expert consultants, always explaining who will be working with them and why
- Consult clients and agree next steps when team composition needs to change
- Accept responsibility for the performance of partners and particularly any suppliers the firm manages as the prime contractor, ensuring those partners and suppliers adhere to principles of ethical behaviour and client service, and disclose their capabilities and competence
- Ensure contract terms are designed with client input, access and understanding, and promote high-value outcomes
- Avoid changing project scope or length without clients' explicit understanding and agreement
- Protect client confidentiality, data and IP
- Make it easy for clients to raise concerns and maintain a clear and accessible system for investigating and resolving complaints
- Communicate in clear, unambiguous language

## 6 //

# WE ALWAYS STRIVE TO IMPROVE THE VALUE WE CAN DELIVER TO OUR CLIENTS.

- Being a learning organisation, capturing the lessons from assignments as a basis for future improvement
- Monitor the performance of consultants on projects regularly to support them and help them and the firm improve
- Welcome feedback, negative and positive, and structure working relationships to ensure clients have opportunities to provide it
- Value and seek to promote innovation
- Invest in research
- Identify and implement good practice from within the firm (and where appropriate from beyond)
- Participate in professional networks and industry bodies, to improve continuously the firm's understanding of the consulting industry and the sectors and clients the firm serves

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## PROFESSIONAL 7/ DEVELOPMENT



#### WE UNDERTAKE TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING EACH YEAR.

- Prepare an annual professional development plan that focusses on the appropriate training of individual consultants
- Develop attractive consulting careers
- Create well-organised and effective teams
- Provide a thorough and comprehensive induction programme for recruits
- Assess periodically the performance of all consultants and provide constructive feedback
- Encourage consultants to reflect honestly on their performance, capabilities and development
- Encourage consultants to provide feedback on the firm's culture and performance, and commit to respond openly to suggestions for improvement

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#### WE PROMOTE STRONG CORE CONSULTING CAPABILITIES AND SPECIALISMS IN OUR CONSULTANTS AND TEAMS.

Exemplars might include commitments to:

- Ensure consultants are qualified to work at the level of seniority to which the firm appoints them and have the skills to be successful in their role
- Review their capabilities against current and emerging client needs and adapt training accordingly
- Encourage all consultants to pursue relevant and valuable professional qualifications and awards, and support them in doing so
- Provide consultants with opportunities and incentives to update their specialist knowledge and expertise and to acquire new skills throughout their career
- Foster a culture that emphasises team-working
- Equip consultants with the skills to work in high-performing teams

### 9 //

# WE SUPPORT OUR EMPLOYEES' CAREER PROGRESSION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE.

**MCA** 

- Creating a culture and organisation that ensure consultants are not just managed and assessed against commercial targets, but are also supported in the development of their careers and their welfare
- Treat individual consultants fairly and without bias
- Encourage staff to participate in relevant professional networks
- Welcome requests where appropriate for flexible and alternative ways of working

## ANNEX 2:

# COMMUNICATING THE CONSULTING EXCELLENCE PRINCIPLES

#### SIGNALLING SUPPORT

The Consulting Excellence scheme is not a new regulatory standard for the industry. Rather, it sets out the goals and aspirations of member firms. And it will have most power and resonance when member companies confirm their support for Consulting Excellence in public.

The MCA is providing art work and other material that will enable all firms to signal support for Consulting Excellence, including a suite of templates for firms to use.

Wherever possible, firms should signal their support for Consulting Excellence on their websites and in all other appropriate communications.

The phrase Consulting Excellence will be trade-marked by the MCA and we do not permit any non-member management consulting firms to use it

# CONFIRMING THE CONSULTING EXCELLENCE PRINCIPLES

The MCA will post evidence and some details of each member firm's commitment to Consulting Excellence in the member firm directory on the MCA website. The MCA will provide templates which firms can use if they so wish for this

purpose. It is the responsibility of MCA member firms to ensure that their entry in the member firm directory, including competence by service line and sector, is accurate and up-to-date.

# DEMONSTRATING SUPPORT FOR THE CONSULTING EXCELLENCE PRINCIPLES

Member firms should share their commitment to the Consulting Excellence principles with clients, employees and the general public. It is also the responsibility of individual firms to decide how they will demonstrate their support for the Consulting Excellence principles, both internally and externally.

#### Demonstrations of Consulting Excellence commitment might include:

- Incorporating material about the Principles in induction programmes, recruitment literature and on intra-nets
- Re-circulating copies of the Principles to all staff annually, and check that consultants and Associates are aware of them through regular surveys and other means
- Incorporating information about the Principles in bids for work or in promoting capabilities to potential clients
- Building procedures consistent with the Principles into the management of client relationships and projects
- Sharing evidence of capabilities and attainments, in the form of testimonials and skills audits with clients (and, where practicable, more widely)
- Sharing their criteria for selecting consulting partners and subcontractors with clients (and where practicable more widely)
- Publishing evidence of their commitment to the Consulting Excellence Principles via their website including any relevant data or case studies
- Publishing more detailed statements that give additional information about how their particular firm upholds the Consulting Excellence principles

- Publishing their approach to training and staff development, both internally via intranets and, in more general form, externally to provide information for potential recruits
- Introducing management practices focused on career progression, personal development and employee welfare, in addition to commercial and project linemanagement
- Publishing an annual Consulting
   Excellence report and action plan which
   explains the steps their firm has taken
   in line with the Consulting Excellence
   principles and any related outcomes,
   including relevant findings from the
   MCA Annual Consulting Excellence
   surveys (see below)

Note: The MCA's traditional Annual Declaration currently submitted by all member firms will be abolished. Instead, member firms will produce or update their short and public Consulting Excellence Declaration, comprising a general statement of commitment to Consulting Excellence and links to the evidence and procedures set out above.



# THE MCA CONSULTING EXCELLENCE SURVEYS

The MCA will undertake two annual surveys to provide essential support for Consulting Excellence:

- i. a survey of clients covering excellence in client service and relationships
- ii. a survey of consultants working for MCA member firms - covering professional development and ethical behaviour.

These research surveys and the resulting analysis will provide invaluable evidence of the impact of Consulting Excellence, both within the consulting industry and beyond. The MCA will only publish aggregate data covering the Consulting Excellence firms as a whole.

When it is possible for either survey to provide data about an individual firm's performance, this will only be made available privately to each firm at their own request.

All MCA members will be asked to identify suitable clients for the Annual Client Consulting Excellence Survey and to provide access to their individual consultants for the Annual Survey of Management Consultants.

The MCA will publish a report on the findings of each survey, along with an analysis of trends and implications for the consulting industry.

Where appropriate, Consulting Excellence firms are encouraged to develop their own response to the findings of each of the surveys, setting out the steps they intend to take in response.

# ANNEX 3: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED



# YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

### What was the inspiration for Consulting Excellence?

The MCA's member firms wanted a more powerful way of demonstrating their professionalism and high standards, particularly in the three areas of ethical behaviour, client service and professional development. The new scheme is part of a broader MCA campaign to promote the best in management consulting.

#### What will my firm commit to?

Firms will adopt the nine principles of Consulting Excellence. It will then be up to each firm to decide how they ensure that they adhere to them, and how they communicate their support.

#### Are there benefits for clients?

Our research with clients confirms that they think the answer is YES! The Consulting Excellence principles will help improve the buying of consulting and give clients enhanced confidence in what they can expect from MCA firms. Firms can use the principles to showcase how they deliver the high-value outcomes, transparency and collaborative conduct that clients demand.

#### Are there benefits for MCA firms?

The Principles will distinguish MCA members from other consulting firms and, in particular, from the contractor market. They will also provide new and potential recruits with compelling evidence that consulting is a great profession with enriching and rewarding careers. The recent survey of Young Consultants identified that while many great young professionals are drawn to consulting, more could be done to promote the virtues of consulting as a vocation. Consulting Excellence will help fill that gap.

### Are there benefits for individual consultants?

Many consultants have told us thev are proud to work for a firm which is committed to being amongst the best in the industry, does the right things for its clients and plays an active role in the future of the industry. They are also looking out for a strong commitment to professional development, a key element of Consulting Excellence. The Young MCA survey identified some of the skills needs of consultants. The MCA will supplement its understanding of this area with a survey of all MCA consultants every year. This will be used to enhance and adapt the framework, especially the principles in pillar 3, and the findings can be deployed by member firms to enhance their own training and development programmes.

#### Are there benefits for the consulting industry?

The Consulting Excellence principles are powerful because they show that the leading firms in our industry are confident of their integrity and value. The best firms will use them to set out their own standards of excellence, and therefore influence others. They set a benchmark for the whole industry and give everyone something to aim for. At a time when pollsters report declining public trust in business in general, MCA member firms are getting on to the front foot and helping to shape the future of our industry.

## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

### What does my firm have to do to prepare for Consulting Excellence?

Before going public, we advise that firms take time to ensure that they are committed at a senior level to supporting and evidencing commitment to Consulting Excellence. It is also important to work with consulting colleagues and others internally to work through the nine principles. MCA member firms also nominate a Consulting Excellence champion to drive this agenda internally and also to liaise with the MCA team.

## What can firms to do promote Consulting Excellence internally?

Each firm will decide its own best strategy for working with its consultants on Consulting Excellence and sharing its approach with clients.

Consulting Excellence Champions should be in regular contact with the MCA to arrange events and promotions and take a lead on communicating the Consulting Excellence message to colleagues and clients. This should include (where applicable) creating a Consulting Excellence page on intranets and websites explaining why your firm supports the scheme. You should also be working with your Council member on how you will be demonstrating support for the principles. The MCA team provides suggestions and ideas for how you can promote the scheme and demonstrate support.

### What can firms to do promote Consulting Excellence with their clients?

Firms can share the Consulting Excellence principles and their commitment with them to clients in ways that suit them. This could include inclusion of detail of their commitment to the scheme within bid documents and presentations. The principles in Pillar 2 of Consulting Excellence commit member firms to providing value and transparency for clients. Where firms have adopted specific exemplars setting out how they will do this, they should inform clients of those undertakings and work with them to evidence the commitment.

Each year the MCA will conduct an anonymous, cross-industry survey of clients on the success of the Consulting Excellence scheme. Member firms should work with the MCA to maximise client participation in the scheme.

### Is Consulting Excellence available to non-member firms?

No. Consulting Excellence is only available to MCA member firms. If a non-member firm wants to demonstrate support for the scheme, they should apply to join the MCA in the normal way.

#### Is Consulting Excellence regulation/ enforceable in law?

No. Consulting Excellence is voluntary. The intention is for member firms to be bold in demonstrating their support for the scheme. Consulting Excellence is unique opportunity for leading firms in the UK to demonstrate their commitment to excellence.

## How will the MCA support Consulting Excellence?

The MCA provides a Guide to Consulting Excellence along with a communications toolkit. The MCA website promotes Consulting Excellence and provide a platform for all member firms to evidence their support and commitment to the nine principles. Additionally, the MCA office is open for drop-in sessions for any of your staff who want to find out more about the scheme

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# ANNEX 4: LANGUAGE, SOCIAL MEDIA & VISUAL IDENTITY



# HOW TO TALK ABOUT CONSULTING EXCELLENCE

Firms are encouraged to use specific language when referring to Consulting Excellence.

Consulting Excellence can be referred to as a:

- Scheme
- Framework
- Campaign

All firms can use the phrase 'Committed to Consulting Excellence' in their communications. The MCA will trademark it to prevent non-members from passing themselves off in this way.

Firms can also refer to Consulting Excellence in terms of:

- Scheme: The three pillars of consulting excellence
- Principles: The nine principles of consulting excellence

#### Firms can also refer to themselves as:

- Supporters of Consulting Excellence
- Recognised for commitment to Consulting Excellence
- Recognised for demonstrating Consulting Excellence

## SOCIAL MEDIA

The MCA will be running a social media campaign promoting the Consulting Excellence Scheme. You can follow the MCA on Twitter at @TheMCA\_UK and on LinkedIn under Management Consultancies Association.

Firms and individuals are encouraged to promote their commitment to Consulting Excellence via their own social media channels. The MCA will be engaging with firms and individuals and highlighting their posts.

Please mention @TheMCA\_UK and use the hashtag #ConsultingExcellence when posting and link back to both your own and MCA content about the scheme.

Firms can use Consulting Excellence brand imagery in posts. Any adaption of the imagery should be within the MCAguidelines.

#### **Example Posts:**

- FirmName have been recognised by @ TheMCA\_UK for their commitment to #ConsultingExcellence
- FirmName demonstrates the high standards of quality through its commitment to #ConsultingExcellence @TheMCA\_UK
- As part of #ConsultingExcellence, FirmName is recognised as part of the best in consulting @TheMCA\_UK
- FirmName Are proud to be leading the UK consulting industry with #ConsultingExcellence @TheMCA\_UK
- FirmName have been recognised for commitment to the highest standards of client service & value.
   #ConsultingExcellence @TheMCA\_UK
- As part of #ConsultingExcellence, FirmName are committed to high standards of ethical behaviour
   @TheMCA\_UK



# VISUAL IDENTITY

The MCA provides artwork and other materials to all firms to help them signal their support for Consulting Excellence.

As well as general campaign imagery, the MCA can provide lock-up artwork for your specific firm's identity, as illustrated below:

# PROPAGANDA° MCA // consulting

#### PROPAGANDA "CONSULTING EXCELLENCE

Firms are also welcome to adapt the Consulting Excellence logo using their branding as long is this done within MCA guidelines. Firms are free to use the campaign imagery across a wide range of promotional collateral as long as this is within MCA guidelines:

- As part of employee email signatures and footers
- Firm's wider email communications and newsletters
- Firm's website e.g. homepage slider, footer and dedicated
   Consulting Excellence page
- As part of presentations and pitching documents
- As part of any promotional material and thought leadership
- Billboards, posters, stands and banners
- · Social media promotional imagery



"Consulting Excellence is a great initiative for the consulting industry as a whole and for MCA member firms in particular. By working together through Consulting Excellence, we can re-inforce the expertise that underpins the best in consulting and create additional benefits for all our firms and clients."

Howard Tollit, President MCA.



Management Consultancies Association 5th Floor, 36-38 Cornhill, London, EC3V 3NG

www.mca.org.uk

T: +44 (0) 20 7645 7950 E: info@mca.org.uk Twitter: @TheMCA\_UK