

Why Clients Don't Implement Consulting Recommendations?

Idea In Short

Clients often pay substantial fees for consulting advice but implement only about half the recommendations. Various factors contribute to this: organizational inertia, risk aversion, resource constraints, shifting market conditions, political dynamics, and change management challenges. Implementation is rarely all-or-nothing; partial adoption is common due to misalignment across roles and levels. Understanding and addressing these obstacles enables consultants to deliver more practical solutions and support clients in realizing tangible business results from their investment.

management consultants are expensive investments for companies. Clients pay millions of dollars for recommendations and dedicate significant organizational resources to support consulting projects. This includes participation in kick-off meetings, focus groups, interviews, working sessions, and status reports. Essentially, it becomes an all-hands-on-deck effort for both the client and the consultant.

Given this substantial investment, it's reasonable to question why clients sometimes don't implement the recommendations they've paid for. It's akin to visiting a doctor but not following their advice. Perhaps the client should have chosen a different consultant or saved their money and effort altogether.

Based on personal experience, clients implement recommendations about 50% of the time. This rate varies significantly by industry, project type (strategy, operations, IT), and the relationship between the partner and client.

A survey of consultants revealed that implementation rates vary dramatically. In fact, 10 out of 39 respondents reported that their clients implement less than 40% of recommendations. This may be surprising to those new to consulting, but seasoned professionals often expect this outcome.

Clients have various reasons for not fully implementing recommendations:

1. Decision-making flexibility: Clients value having choices about what to implement, when, and to what extent
2. Market changes and timing: Dynamic business environments, implementation challenges, or budget cuts can lead to postponement
3. Risk aversion and inertia: Organizational culture may resist change, finding it easier to maintain the status quo
4. Political factors: internal alignment issues or complex stakeholder dynamics can hinder implementation
5. Resource constraints: Lack of time, money, or skilled personnel can impede implementation efforts
6. Change management challenges: Implementing new strategies often requires significant changes in people and processes
7. Poor execution: Clients may skip crucial steps or fail to allocate sufficient time and resources for proper implementation
8. Organizational size: Larger corporations often face more barriers to implementation compared to smaller, more agile companies

It's important to note that implementation is rarely a binary yes or no decision. Partial implementation is common, often due to misalignment between top management and frontline staff. Some consultants stay on post-project to ensure compliance and drive change management.

Ultimately, the reasons for non-implementation are complex and multifaceted. They can include cost considerations, risk factors, effort required, internal politics, resource limitations, shifting priorities, and inadequate stakeholder management. Understanding these factors can help consultants better tailor their recommendations and support clients in overcoming implementation barriers.

Summary

Despite significant investment, many consulting recommendations go unimplemented. Reasons include limited resources, internal resistance, changing business priorities, and

stakeholder misalignment. In large organizations, complexity compounds these challenges, leading to incomplete or delayed execution. Successful consultants anticipate barriers and stay engaged post-project, focusing on practical change management. Non-implementation is seldom binary, often shaped by real-world constraints that influence which recommendations move from paper to practice.