The Consulting Diaspora

Idea In Short

Ex-management consultants scatter across every industry and geography, much like tight-knit immigrant diasporas, yet keep a shared language, training and allegiance to their consulting roots. Seven traits explain the pattern, and two important differences explain where the analogy breaks down.

A Diaspora, Reconsidered

The Economist has written about immigrant diasporas, overseas Chinese, Indian and Jewish communities among them, as tight-knit, highly educated, geographically dispersed groups that generate outsized leverage through trust, ambition and innovation.1 One striking Economist line: there are more Chinese people living outside China than there are French people in France. The comparison to ex-management consultants is not a perfect fit, but it is closer than it first sounds.

Scattered but Connected

Ex-consultants who left large firms now populate nearly every industry and geography imaginable, having started together in the same training programs.2 LinkedIn data on one major firm's starting class showed that nine years after joining, only about a third remained in consulting, with two-thirds having moved into corporate roles. Many of those alumni feel more camaraderie toward their consulting roots than toward their current employer, an allegiance that can read as arrogance, since corporate environments rarely move at the speed or intensity of a consulting firm, which trains people to be client-focused, educated, ambitious and articulate by default.

A Shared Tribe, Not a Shared Industry

Consultants are trained to think a particular way: highly logical, inductively reasoned, built

on an apprenticeship model where experienced practitioners teach junior ones by doing the work alongside them. Two consultants from wildly different specialties, process improvement in oil and gas versus marketing strategy for retailers, will still share a great deal: similar views on managing clients, a persistent undercurrent of intellectual curiosity and comparable stockpiles of frequent flyer miles.

Seven Reasons the Diaspora Label Fits

Several traits explain why ex-consultants resemble a diaspora more than a typical professional alumni network. Job movement is common, since consulting attracts ambitious people already comfortable with change. International backgrounds are common too, as consulting firms have historically sponsored a large share of skilled-worker visas for international MBA graduates. Diverse client exposure across industries and functions gives consultants unusually portable skills. Extensive graduate education creates broad networks tied to multiple alma maters spanning geography. Heavy travel, often 150 or more days a year, eventually pushes many consultants toward more grounded lifestyles elsewhere. A habit of networking, built from years of staffing conversations and proposal work, carries over into post-consulting careers. And a shared vocabulary, deliverables, scope, leverage, root cause analysis, lets former consultants recognize each other instantly regardless of industry.3

Two Reasons the Analogy Breaks Down

The comparison is not exact. Consultants generally lack direct access to capital the way financiers do; despite earning good money and often working alongside private equity clients, consultants are not part of the money class themselves. And unlike immigrant diaspora communities frequently built on real risk-taking, consultants tend to be comparatively risk-averse with their own time and money, comfortable giving advice and optimizing other people's businesses while relying on a steady paycheck for their own.

Why the Metaphor Resonates With Alumni

Ask a room of former consultants whether they identify more with their current employer or their old firm, years after leaving, and the honest answer skews toward the old firm more often than corporate loyalty theory would predict. That is unusual, since most professionals eventually anchor their identity to wherever they currently work. The diaspora framing

explains the anomaly better than a simple alumni-network framing does, because it captures something closer to a shared formative culture, the kind that shapes how people think long after they have stopped practicing it daily, rather than a purely transactional professional connection.

The Alumni Directory as Infrastructure

Most large consulting firms formalize this instinct into an actual alumni network, complete with directories, regional events and job boards that route opportunities specifically to former employees. That infrastructure matters more than it might seem, because it lowers the cost of staying in touch below what an informal diaspora usually manages on its own. Immigrant diaspora communities rely on family ties, religious institutions and neighborhood clustering to sustain their networks across generations; consultants get something more deliberate and more portable, a firm-sponsored structure that keeps working even after someone has moved industries, countries and job titles several times over.

Reinvest in the Network Deliberately

Estimates of how many people call themselves consultants in the United States run into the hundreds of thousands, a definition almost certainly too loose, while a major global firm's actual headcount of management consultants runs closer to the tens of thousands. However tightly the circle gets drawn, management consultants form a genuinely networked group that benefits from continual, deliberate reinvestment: joining alumni networks, practicing case interviews with current students, hiring former colleagues and reaching out to old contacts with real work to do together. The network does not sustain itself automatically. It requires the same deliberate effort that built it in the first place.

- 1Diaspora
- 2Management Consulting
- 3Corporate Jargon

Summary

Consultants scatter into corporate roles across every industry, yet keep a shared language,

training and loyalty to their consulting roots, closer to a diaspora than a simple alumni network. Reinvest in that network deliberately; it rarely reconvenes on its own.