



Eden McCallum –
Twenty years on
Consultant survey findings

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Eden McCallum was founded just over twenty years ago, offering a new approach in the apparently mature and settled consulting market. It was to be “a consulting firm without any consultants on the payroll”, as one strategy guru described it¹. This was innovation with a purpose: to make consulting better for both clients and consultants.



The concept was clear: a pool of talented, independent consultants would be deployed to advise clients, free from the organisational burdens, constraints, and fixed costs that are an inevitable part of life in traditional consulting firms. The idea was to offer clients top quality consultancy, but more flexible and tailored, and at a price that represented great value for money; and to offer consultants the ability to focus on what they love most: delivering real impact for clients.

Twenty years later, the firm has a pool of over 2,000 experienced independent consultants, clients that include many of the global Fortune 500 and top private equity firms, and completed projects numbering over 2,500 across all sectors and geographies.

The last twenty years have seen a maturing in people’s perceptions of the Eden McCallum business model. Where once being a “freelance consultant” might have been seen as an interim role, or something inferior to being a full-time employee of a consulting firm, today attitudes are very different. Becoming independent is a serious and sustainable career choice, and is recognised as such. This represents a structural shift. Independent consultants’ own views (and experiences) have also developed considerably.

To test where sentiment now lies, Eden McCallum and London Business School surveyed around 300 independent consultants and 150 employed consultants to ask them about their working life today to compare their attitudes and experiences.

The headline finding is that independent consultants are highly satisfied with their professional lives overall and on key dimensions that are most important to them, particularly when compared to their employed peers. Crucially, a key part of this satisfaction is the knowledge that they are doing better work for their clients, work that is valued and has greater impact.

¹ Birkinshaw, Julian et al. *Making the Firm Flexible*, Business Strategy Review, 1 March 2007

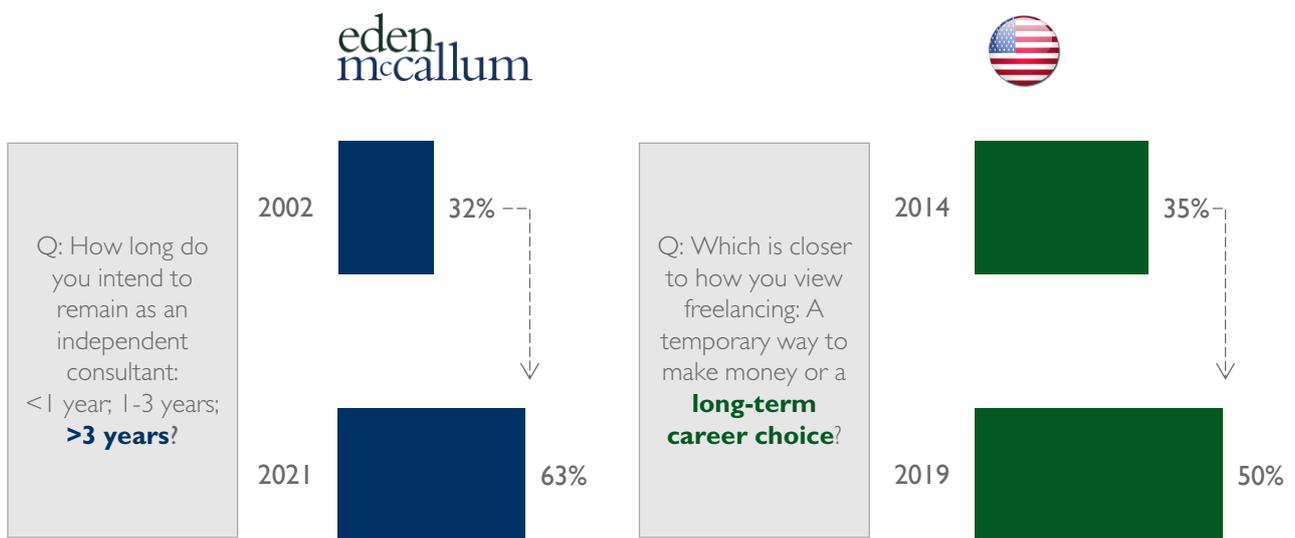
Key findings from the Consultant Survey

Career choice

Nearly two-thirds of today's independent consultants (ICs) expect to remain as an IC for more than the next three years. That figure has doubled since Eden McCallum first asked ICs about their future plans in 2002, indicating a marked shift in the way freelancing is perceived, with most now viewing it as a career move. This is similar to findings in the Freelancers Union survey, done in America over the past several years.

ICs are confident in the quality of the work they are doing and derive a great deal of satisfaction from it. 78% of independent consultants are satisfied with their professional life, with 87% viewing themselves as successful. By comparison, 68% of employed consultants say they are satisfied with their professional life – a ten percentage point gap.

Freelancing as a long-term career choice



Source: Eden McCallum Consultant Survey 2021; "Freelancers Union: Freelancing in America:"

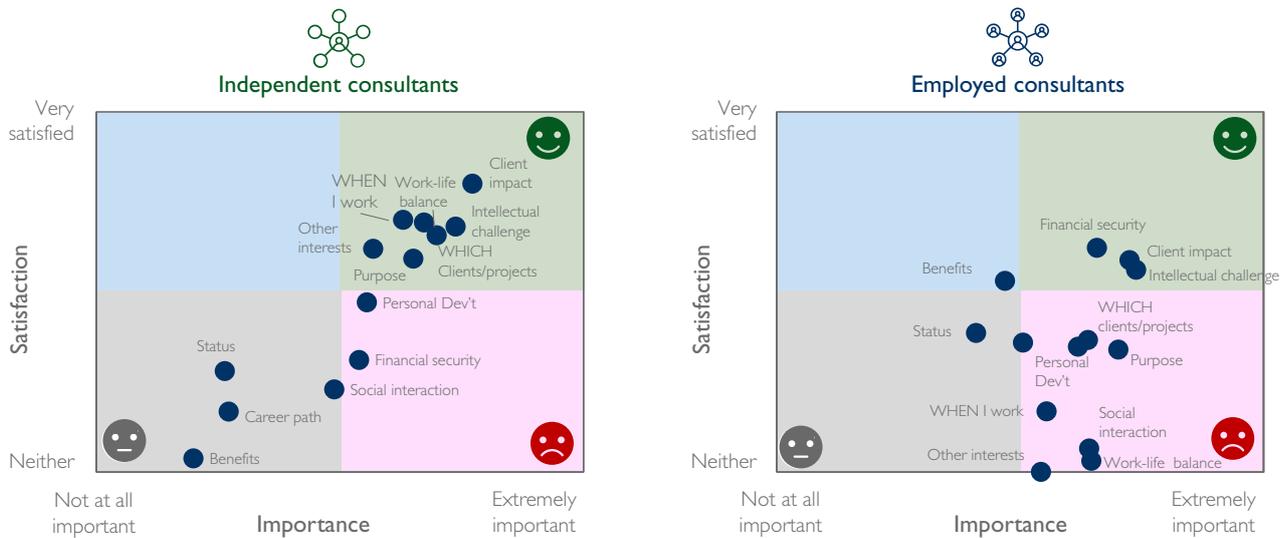
Quality of working life

“Working with Eden McCallum gives me the freedom to choose the projects that suit me and allows full focus on the project. This inevitably leads to better quality work, combined with a healthy work-life balance.”

In closer detail, ICs say that the way they work now is rewarding. They are very happy with the positive impact their work has with their clients, it is intellectually stimulating, they appreciate their healthy work-life balance, they feel their work has purpose, and they value the control they have over the clients they serve and the work they do. They are less concerned about their status and lack of employee benefits. As one consultant summed it up: “Working with Eden McCallum gives me the freedom to choose the projects that suit me and allows full focus on the project. This inevitably leads to better quality work, combined with a healthy work-life balance.”

Employed consultants, by contrast, are notably less satisfied than ICs under a number of headings, but most significantly as far as client impact, intellectual challenge, control over the work they do and work-life balance are concerned.

Importance of and satisfaction with career factors



Financial security

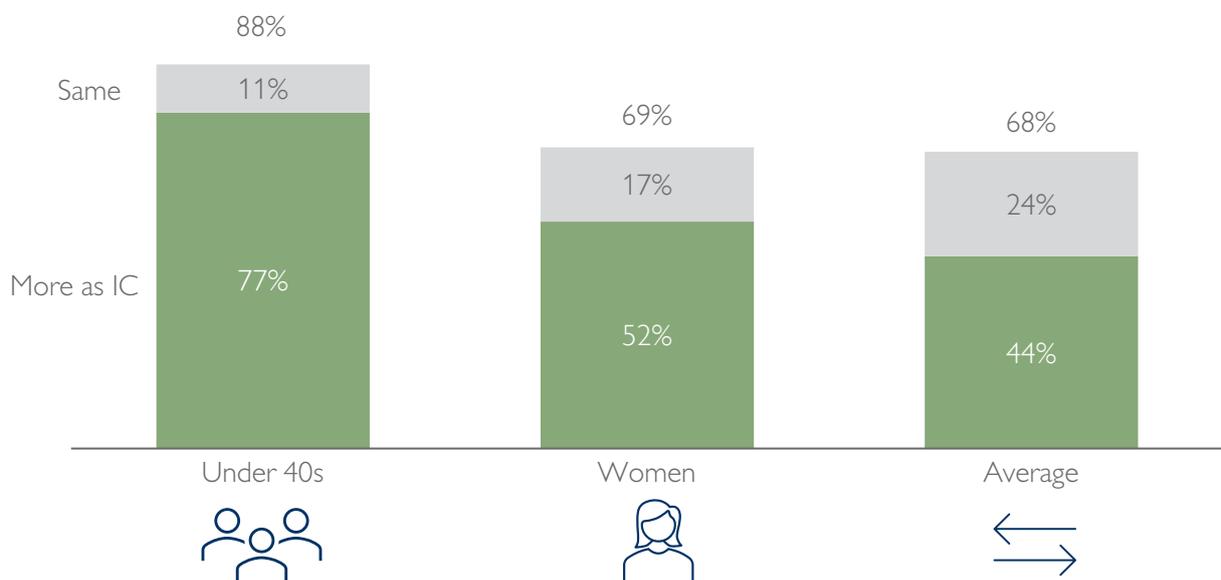
While overall, employed consultants see financial security as more important and are also more satisfied with it than their independent peers, on actual earnings, ICs are faring well.

ICs under 40 are particularly happy about their financial security: they are earning more than they did when employed by consulting firms (77% say so)

and have greater control over the work they do and have time for other projects – often entrepreneurial ventures.

There are also notable differences between the sexes when it comes to pay. 52% of women say they earn more as an independent consultant compared to when they were employed in a traditional consulting firm, as opposed to 42% for men. Women ICs are also happier with their financial security working independently than men are.

Earnings as an IC vs. when employed



“Working with Eden McCallum I can give my complete attention to delivering an excellent result for the client. It allows me total clarity of purpose.”

Control and Flexibility

Independent consultants value the control and flexibility as well as the freedom from internal politics that their careers now offer them. ‘Control’ was the top reason cited when asked what factors led them to becoming independent, followed by work-life balance and working with clients differently. “Working with Eden McCallum I can give my complete attention to delivering an excellent result for the client. It allows me total clarity of purpose.”, says one. Another feels able to “focus on results delivery instead of office politics”.

Clients observe the difference as well, and benefit from ICs having chosen each project that they do. As one Eden McCallum client noted, “The people that we’ve worked with ... seem to be particularly engaged in what they do.”

Better for Clients

A startling 92% of ICs say that their work now constitutes better value for money for their clients compared with the work they did as employed consultants. Three-quarters say they are now more efficient and the work is more gratifying, while two-thirds say that collaboration with clients is better and their recommendations are more likely to be implemented. Six in ten say the projects have more impact now.

Rating of current project work as an IC vs. when employed



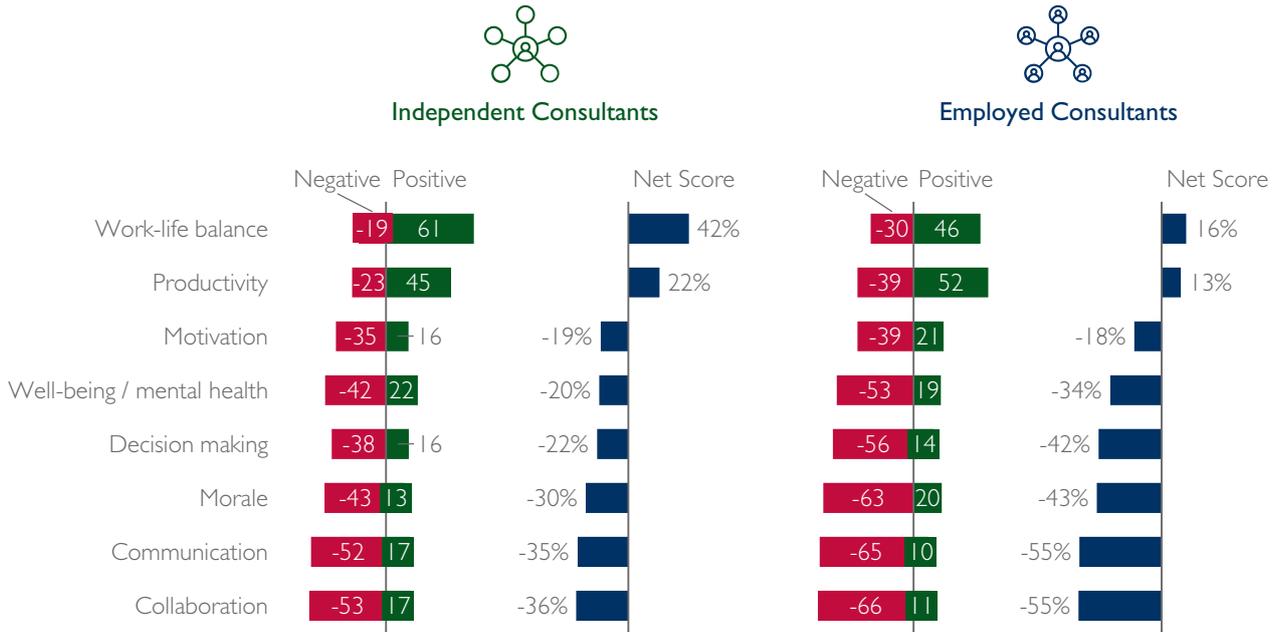
This is all consistent with independent consulting being seen as more mainstream and better received by clients than was the case when Eden McCallum first launched. ICs are also optimistic about the future, with 71% believing the number of independent consultants will increase and 62% saying the amount of work available will increase as well.

Covid, digital and the future

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the skills and attributes of ICs have been tested. Around three-quarters of ICs say they are resilient, able to bounce back from setbacks and can handle stressful situations. Indeed, when comparing the responses of ICs and employed consultants to the experience of working through the pandemic, ICs seem to have fared better. Morale, well-being and collaboration have suffered less among ICs than their employed peers – although it has been challenging for all. Earnings have also held up well for ICs even in the pandemic.

The pandemic will be over, eventually, but the future of work will reflect what it has taught us about flexibility, remote working and the role of the office. Here, too, ICs are ahead of the game, having worked flexibly and without the seeming comfort of an HQ for some time. The future of work, for talented knowledge workers, will quite likely look a lot like the way ICs have been working for years.

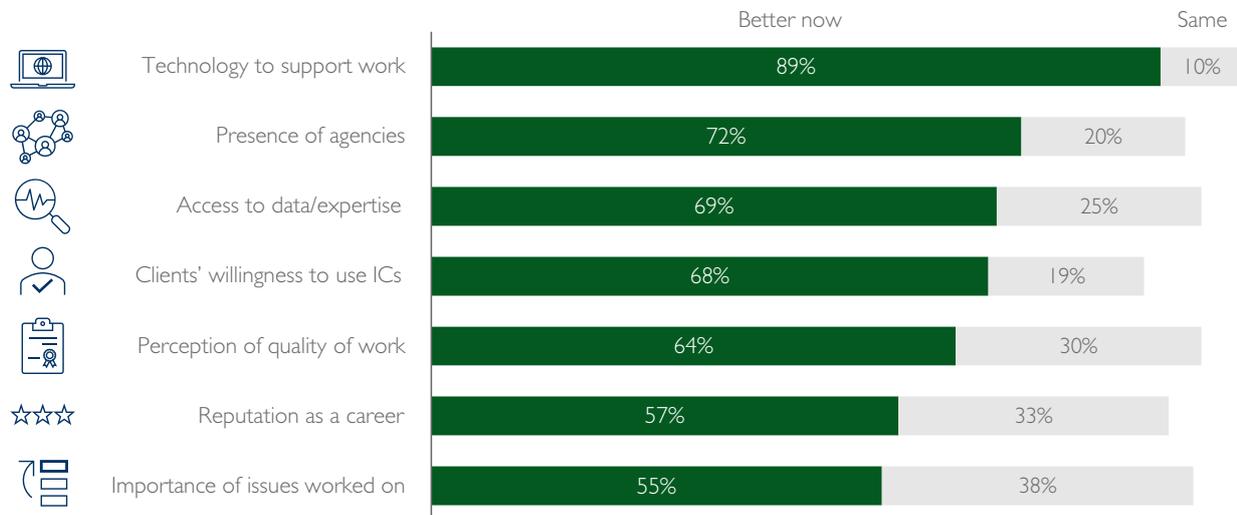
Covid-19 pandemic – impact of remote working



Consulting has changed for the better

Twenty years ago, some of the changes that have taken place in business and working life could not have been fully anticipated. Digital technology was still relatively new, freelancing was not a career path, and flexibility was more talked about than actually practised. Today things look very different. As the ICs we surveyed acknowledged, much has changed for the better – including access to technology and data, the way clients perceive their value and quality, the importance of the work they do, and the presence of firms, like Eden McCallum, who help support their careers.

Changes to working as an IC over the past 5-10 years



Eden McCallum has brought disruptive innovation to professional services, influencing the way consultancy is delivered, as the late Clay Christensen of Harvard Business School predicted². A new market category was first imagined, then established, then grown – and looks set to grow more. We believe this has indeed made consulting better for clients and better for consultants.

² Christensen, Clayton et al, *Consulting on the Cusp of Disruption*, Harvard Business Review, October 2013