


CAPABILITY

— is —

THE NEW CURRENCY
of CON\$ULTING

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A photograph of three business professionals in a meeting. A man in a suit and glasses is on the left, a woman in a blue shirt and dark jacket is in the center, and a man in a suit is on the right holding a laptop. They are all looking at the laptop screen. The background is a large window with a grid pattern. The image is overlaid with a dark, semi-transparent filter.

Throughout history, advisors have played an important part in shaping the strategies of rulers and leaders. When the Industrial Revolution came, they moved from royal courts to factory floors, helping managers master the machinery and organise their labour. Across the 20th century, consulting grew beyond purely technical guidance to take in management and finance. Later, as technology advanced through the 1980s and 1990s, the focus moved toward systems and information technology. The 2000s brought further specialisation, with generalists, specialists, and niche firms emerging to offer capability centres, business excellence teams, and transformation offices. Today, the rise of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies places consulting at another critical juncture.

History shows that consulting reliably adapts and thrives whenever it meets a new challenge. In India, this path aligns closely with the Atma Nirbhar Bharat vision, as homegrown firms build capabilities that are local, scalable, and exportable. Understanding the core elements that will drive the future success of consulting is therefore essential.

The global consulting industry, worth more than \$5 trillion, has long run on a time-based business model in which value was measured in billable hours. For years, firms hired top talent, offered their expertise, and charged clients by the hour, tying value directly to the time spent. That approach now faces challenges it has never encountered before. With the arrival of Generative AI, the relationship between effort and output has fundamentally changed: algorithms can now complete in minutes what once demanded a great deal of human labour. As a result, clients are less and less willing to accept inefficiency, and their attention has turned to concrete outcomes. The key question is no longer "How long did you work?" but "What did you build?"



The Economic Obsolescence of “Renting Brains”



Consulting in India is changing. Rather than simply handing over advice, firms are becoming genuine strategic partners that help clients strengthen entire sectors. The shift lets consultants work side by side with organisations not just pointing out problems, but building lasting skills and capabilities so that clients can go on to succeed on their own.

In practice, that means co-creating solutions, embedding knowledge within client teams, and making sure organisations not only grasp the changes they need to make but also gain the skills and systems to sustain those changes on their own. The focus has moved from handing over reports to driving real transformation.

Firms now offer end-to-end advisory services that cover both strategy and execution, drawing on deep domain expertise and contextual judgement to tackle business challenges. Because this model transfers capabilities to the client, it strengthens the organisation and reduces its reliance on outside consultants. Clients come away with more than a workable plan, they also gain greater internal capacity, skilled teams, and adaptable frameworks. Increasingly, success is judged by how durable those capabilities prove to be, not by the polish of the presentation materials.

Future Skills That Will Define Consulting Excellence

The kind of skills consulting demands is changing. The World Economic Forum estimates that nearly 44 percent of worker's core skills will change by 2027, as technological progress, economic shifts, and changing organisational priorities reshape the field. That evolution is driving a move away from fixed expertise and towards adaptive capabilities. A consultant today has to combine critical thinking with a systems view, linking policy, technology, social, and economic dimensions to design integrated, long-term solutions.

Digital and data fluency matters just as much, since tools such as analytics, artificial intelligence, and cloud platforms now sit at the heart of effective decision-making. Consultants have to read the insights that data provides and use them to guide strategic action in an increasingly digital world. Learning agility, meanwhile, has become a defining capability, giving professionals the means to keep adapting and growing. And as consulting becomes more collaborative and more embedded in client systems, emotional intelligence and leadership, built on communication, trust-building, and empathy, are starting to count for as much as technical expertise. Finally, sustainability and long-term value creation are climbing the list of priorities: research shows that organisations with a sustainability focus are not only more resilient but also perform more strongly over the long run, especially in the public and infrastructure sectors.



Speaking from both a human capital perspective, as a former CHRO and drawing on over 20 years in the consulting industry, I see consulting at an inflection point. This is the era of specialisation, particularly as AI has made general knowledge far more accessible.

Clients today are looking for partners who strengthen their institutions rather than extend their dependency. As one of the six co-founders who has spent the past six years building Primus through our collective capabilities, we are seeing this shift firsthand – from advice to enablement, and from delivery to building durable capability. The CULT lens brings much-needed rigor to this transition, and the CULT Index has the potential to redefine how the industry measures relevance, impact, and long-term value creation.

Aarti Harbhajanka

Co-founder and Managing
Director at Primus Partners



From Advice to Enablement The Future of Consulting

The future of consulting lies in a fundamental shift from solving problems to building lasting capability. Instead of leaning on constant outside support, the industry is turning its attention to helping institutions develop their own capacity for long-term resilience. This evolution calls for moving away from transactional service delivery towards deep, long-term partnerships in which consultants work alongside their clients. By putting co-creation first, firms can make sure knowledge is effectively transferred, encourage internal ownership, and embed capability so that it outlasts the engagement itself.

Technology sits at the centre of this change. AI-powered tools and workforce analytics help organisations make better, data-driven decisions on their own. Generative AI, for instance, could add as much as USD 4.4 trillion to the global economy, a sign of how large this opportunity is. Even so, technology needs the backing of wider systems, such as partnerships between government and industry, flexible learning programmes, and public-private collaborations that can drive large-scale change.



Enduring impact comes from embedding knowledge. When teams begin to lead independently, transformation becomes real. This is the paradigm shift required... from problem-solving to capability creation at scale. The future of consulting belongs to those who build, not just those who recommend. Our legacy will be measured less by projects completed, and more by systems strengthened.

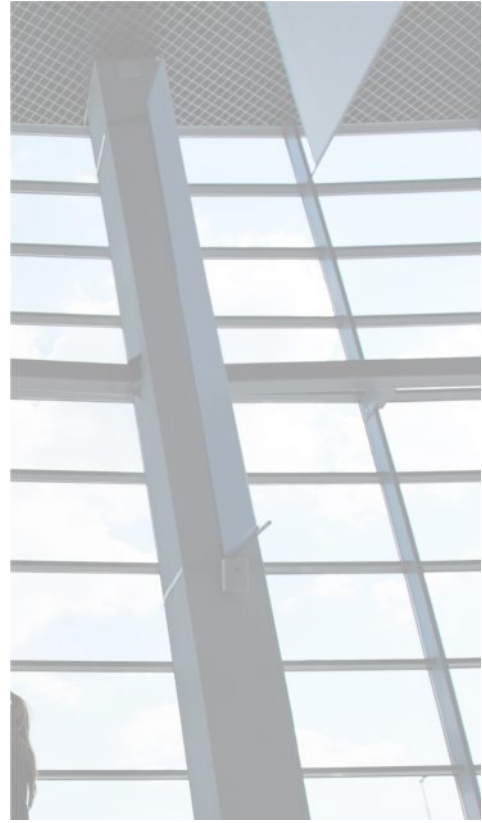
Davinder Sandhu
Co-founder and Chairman
at Primus Partners



From practice came a simple question

How do we tell whether a consultancy is truly building lasting capability or merely supplying capacity?

The answer came not from theory but from repeated experience in the field: workshops that left junior staff able to lead programmes, cross-functional teams that kept initiatives going without help, and leaders who multiplied capability rather than hoarding it. Those patterns took shape as a practical, repeatable framework: the CULT Index. It measures Capability, Understanding, Leadership and Transformation. The CULT Index is a practitioner's compass, not a slogan. It is designed to diagnose where real strength exists, prescribe targeted interventions, and track whether capability is compounding over time.



The CULT Index operates on three practical levels



1

Diagnosis: compact rubrics score technical skills, institutional processes, learning systems and cultural habits that enable change.

2

Prescription: modular interventions from context-rich immersion programmes and rotational placements to governance tweaks and learning pathways close gaps identified by the diagnostic.

3

Tracking: a small set of repeatable indicators measures whether capability is growing, sticking, and scaling across projects and sites. For Indian consultancies, especially those aiming to be global leaders, the Index provides a locally grounded way to prove impact beyond utilisation metrics.



What matters most is that the Index is not a rigid standard but a tool that adapts to sectoral contexts, firm sizes, and national priorities. It helps turn India's sovereign ambitions into everyday firm practice: building modular learning systems, designing cross-sector secondments, and rewarding leaders who multiply capability. By moving incentives away from billability and towards durable public value, the CULT Index brings firm-level behaviour into line with national goals.

The future of consulting is about equipping people, institutions, and systems to achieve enduring impact. As India moves towards a \$5 trillion economy, the firms that shape what comes next will be the ones that deliver sustainable value, far beyond billable hours. This high-tech, low-cost, asset-driven model, grounded in public infrastructure, is ready to be shared with the world. As other nations look for new models of development, India's journey offers proof that the shift from billability to capability is the essential route to relevance, trust, and transformative, lasting impact. In the end, the true measure is not the time we spend, but the legacy we build.

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PRIMUS

PASSION

for providing solutions to help clients achieve their goals

RESPECT

for all and alternate viewpoints

INTEGRITY

of thoughts and actions

MASTERY

of our chosen subject to drive innovative and insightful solutions

US

representing the Primus collective, where each individual matters

STEWARDSHIP

for building a better tomorrow



PRIMUS PARTNERS®

Solutions for Tomorrow

Primus Partners has been set up to partner with clients in 'navigating' India, by experts with decades of experience in doing so for large global firms. Set up on the principle of 'Idea Realization', it brings to bear 'experience in action'. 'Idea Realization'— a unique approach to examine futuristic ideas required for the growth of an organization or a sector or geography, from the perspective of assured on ground implementability.

Our core strength comes from our founding partners, who are goal-oriented, with extensive hands-on experience and subject-matter expertise, which is well recognized in the industry. Established by seasoned industry leaders with extensive experience in global organizations, Primus Partners boasts a team of nearly 400 consultants and advisors, showcasing some of the finest talent in the nation.

The firm has a presence across multiple cities in India, as well as UAE, USA and KSA. In addition, the firm has successfully executed projects across Africa, Asia Pacific and the Americas.

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