



THE PRESSURE INDEX

A Partnership Between:

**MAX
TRAYLOR**

and

Inkblot Analytics

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INTRODUCTION

The consulting industry has been listed as one of the preferred industries for job hunting for new graduates and well-established industry professionals alike. Reasons range from rapid income growth to the promise of a good personal life. However, consultants often find themselves accountable to produce results regardless of the hours put into the strategy or deliverable, creating a high-intensity work environment. Oftentimes, this translates to late nights and few work-free weekends. For each project, they must actively collect data, analyze data, solve new problems, revise brand and business strategy, manage clients, run workshops, facilitate team discussions—the list is endless. A by-product of such high-intensity work is that consultants suffer physically and psychologically.

Max Traylor noticed over the past several years that some of his clients exhibited **distinct patterns of problematic behaviors**. More importantly, Max saw these behaviors becoming barriers to the individual's success. Having recognized this, Max made it his mission to help independent consultants develop **a series of manageable practices** designed to have a sizable impact on consultants' creative energy, burnout level, and other psychological characteristics.

To help turn these distinct patterns of problematic behavior into measurable and “diagnosable” profiles, Max collaborated with Inkblot Analytics, a research and analytics firm specializing in psychographics. The result of this partnership is this report: The Pressure Index.



The Pressure Index is a quarterly report that will give consultants an idea of how much pressure other consultants are feeling at the moment. This could mean personal pressures, market pressures, or other situational pressures. By sharing how other consultants are feeling, this report will also help identify potential solutions or manageable practices that can help consultants live healthier and happier working lives.

METHODOLOGY

For this first Pressure Index, we recruited consultants from across the United States. We were able to recruit **125 consultants** who completed an online survey.

Our online survey was divided into the following sections:

➤ Introduction and Consent Form

➤ Company Information

- Staff Information
- Work-life Balance
- Service/Products
- Pricing
- Client Management
- Company Administration

➤ Important Psychological Outcomes

- Creativity
- Burnout
- Job Satisfaction
- Life Satisfaction

➤ Consultant Profiles

➤ Demographics

This survey had both a quantitative portion and a qualitative portion. For the quantitative portion, we used a series of proprietary scales to measure the extent to which each person has a given **“Consultant Profile.”** If you are interested in the validity and reliability of our scales, we can send along a [whitepaper](#) on the psychometric qualities of our scales.



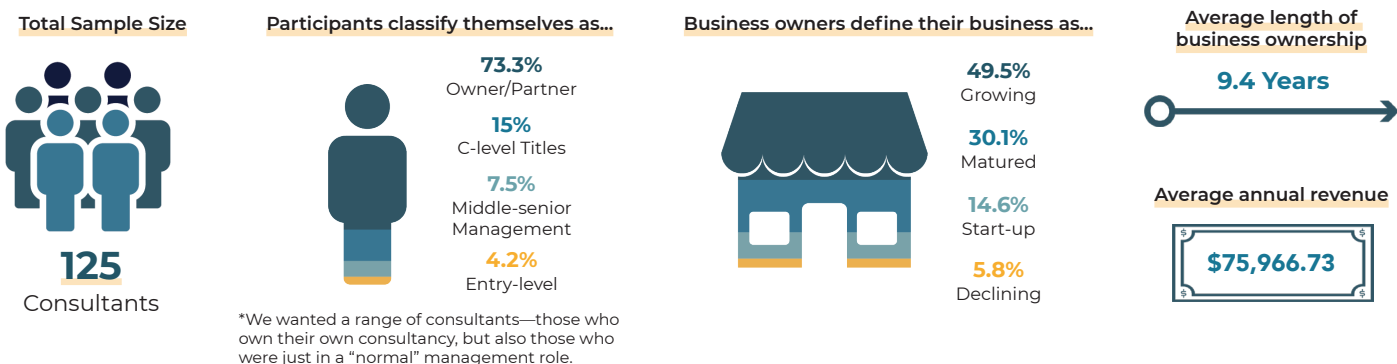
For the qualitative portion, we used our proprietary **“pressure points” question type**, powered by **Brand Blots**, Inkblot Analytics’ AI-enabled projective testing platform. If you are interested in the scoring and accuracy of this question type, please contact us for our alternative [whitepaper](#).

Using a rigorous data cleaning and QA process, we ensured that the data was:

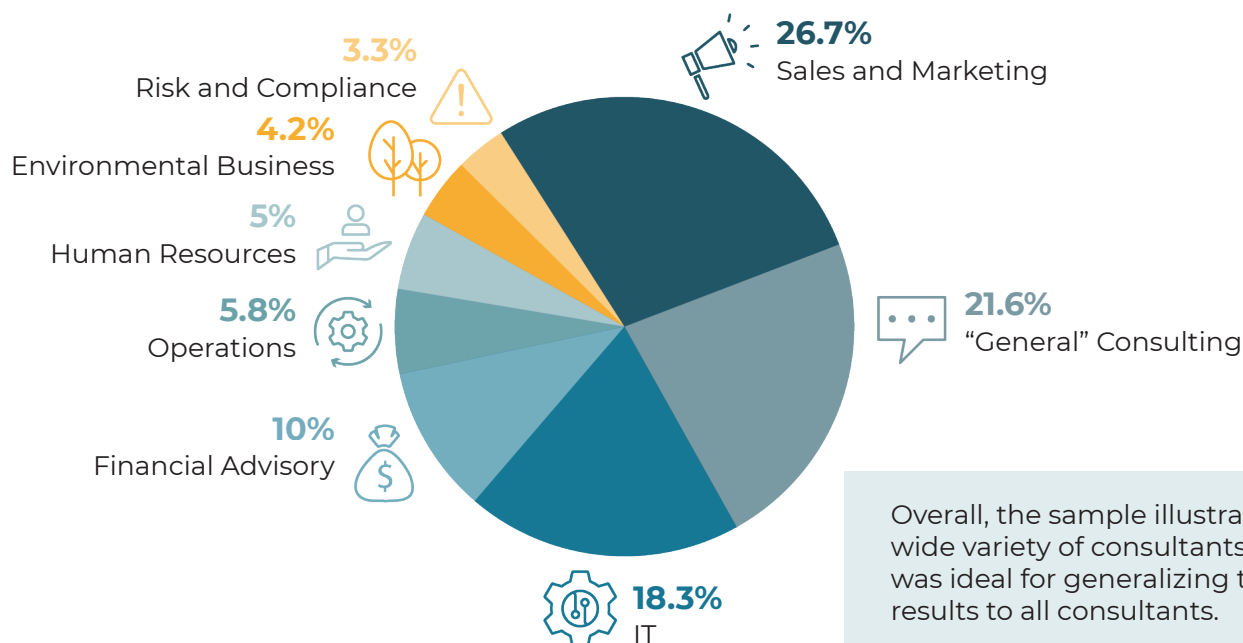
- Produced by real people (not bots)
- Produced accurately (not randomly answered)
- Entered thoughtfully (not someone rushing through it to answer as quickly as possible)
- In line with a long list of other QA measures

SAMPLE

To have a better understanding of who took this survey, the following is a detailed breakdown of the sample composition.



Industries



RESULTS

THE CONSULTANT BUSINESS • • •

- 46.7%** of consultants offer **only services**
- 23.3%** of consultants offer **only products**
- 30%** of consultants offer **services and products**

Consultants report an **average** of:



20

Active Clients
on hand at one time



3

Separate
Revenue Streams

- The typical contract length is around **14.5 weeks** (3 months or a quarterly engagement with a few weeks for contract negotiation).
- Consultants charge around **\$50,000** for an average client engagement.
- The typical client engagement is **billed by the project** (a one-time service fee) and not on an hourly basis.
- On average, consultants have around **one and a half months (46.5 days) of “runway.”** That is, they could keep their company in business for a month and a half before their quality of life begins to suffer.
- However, it would only take around **3 months (96.6 days) before having to close** the company for good.

Altogether, consultants build their business around quarterly engagements and therefore often have a 3-month runway before their business has to shut down. This is why many of them compare their work to a hamster on a hamster wheel. Consultants must keep “hustling” to get their next client or risk having to shut down their businesses. This kind of approach has a direct impact on their lifestyles.

THE CONSULTANT LIFESTYLE • • •



This study found that consultants **work around 42 hours per week and sleep about 6 hours per day**. But don't be fooled by the “average” 40-hour week.

- Consultants report that working from home means they're ALWAYS working and accessible to clients. Given the Covid-19 pandemic, the “9am-5pm” work schedule might be interrupted by house chores, childcare, or other unexpected events.
- As a result, they work from 7am to 11pm. **The workday is no longer condensed into an 8-hour block, it's extended for the whole day.** This kind of setup means consultants feel like they never get a break.



78.3% of consultants feel they can take a vacation at their current job. But while they say this is the case, it's not reflected in their behavior.

- A **third** of consultants haven't taken a vacation since before the Covid-19 pandemic and **over 10%** of consultants haven't taken a vacation in 5 or more years.
- Additionally, about half of consultants think a vacation means **going somewhere for a weekend or—at most—a long weekend away**. So even if consultants say they feel like they COULD take a vacation, most haven't taken one, and if they have, it's a relatively short vacation.



But a lack of vacations isn't their only problem. When asking consultants how often they **skip a meal or sacrifice their sleep** for work, **32.5% agree** that happens a lot, while only **15.8% never sacrifice** a meal for work. That means **twice as many people** skip activities imperative for their health as people who don't.

- This kind of behavior is expected, since about half (**49.2%**) of consultants admit they would put their clients' work above their personal health.

With these descriptions of how consultants live and work, it's easy to see how consultants begin to develop problems that affect their life satisfaction and job satisfaction.

HOW BUSINESSES BREED PROBLEMS • • •

In this study, we scored consultants on 4 different consultant profiles:



The Imposter always feels like they're not knowledgeable enough for clients to be paying them money



The Workaholic takes no breaks during the workweek, and might continue to work at night and on the weekends

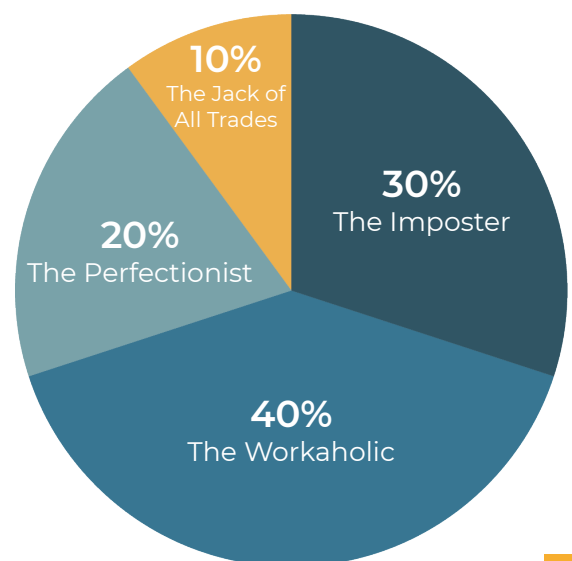


The Perfectionist always needs more time to make things perfect



The Jack of All Trades would rather do everything themselves since it's easier than delegating and teaching

Respondent Breakdown:





As we learned more about each of these profiles, we identified that there are different types of pressures pushing on each of the 4 consulting profiles.



Imposters are more likely to suffer under **situational pressures**. For example, Covid-19 dried up budgets for external vendors. Because of this, consultants had to work harder to capture revenue wherever they could—even if it wasn't their specialization. As a result, consultants felt like “imposters” when they were being paid for services they didn't normally specialize in.



Workaholics and **Perfectionists** suffer more under **personal pressures**. For them, they need to maximize value for their clients, which means they are more likely to put pressure on themselves.



Lastly, the **Jacks of All Trades** usually experience **market pressures**. For example, for marketing consultants, their clients have increasingly expected that all marketing consultants can offer all services. This means consultants have to learn a little of everything rather than specializing in one area.

In our research, it's clear that these consultant profiles are on a spectrum and every person is a mix of all four of these profiles. However, at any given time, one of these profiles is likely causing the bulk of the problems.

Our approach is meant to identify a person's score on all profiles, and to detect the one profile that is the primary source of a consultant's issues.

For example, the Perfectionist is successful because they provide perfect, detail-oriented work to their clients. It becomes a problem when their need to be perfect dominates interactions with their clients. For such consultants, delivery to clients suffers.

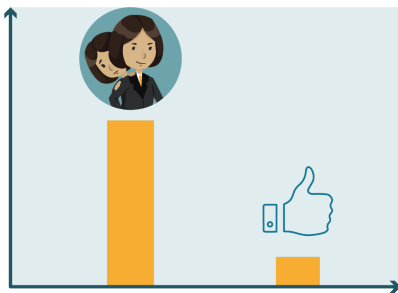
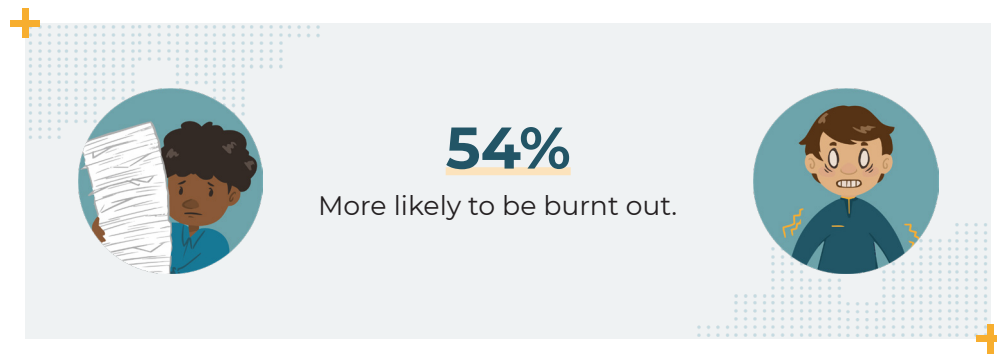
Our approach here is not to get rid of the traits of a perfectionist, but to apply limits so that the perfectionist doesn't spiral out of control. **For us, it's all about balance.** Without a way to balance the good and bad parts of a perfectionist (or any profile), you're bound to experience some negative outcomes.



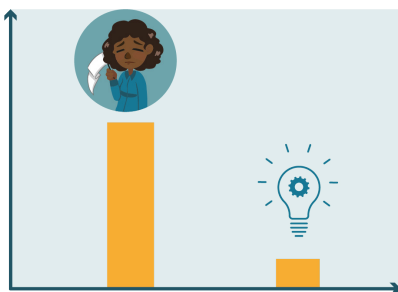
BAD PROBLEMS HAVE BAD OUTCOMES • • •

We knew from the outset that consultants experience things like burnout—negative psychological outcomes that affect business performance and general wellbeing. We wanted to see if each consultant profile, if left unchecked, would catalyze negative outcomes, like burnout. If the profiles did lead to similar psychological outcomes, then we wanted to measure to what extent they had a relationship. This would help us identify a “**risk level**” for each consultant.

Most people who scored high on **The Perfectionist** or **The Workaholic** were feeling **extremely burnt out**. In fact, they were 54% more likely to be burnt out than the other profiles.



Consultants who scored high on **The Imposter** felt **more dissatisfied with their jobs**. This makes sense given that the situational pressures they experienced were making them take on other services they didn't normally do (and that they don't enjoy doing).



Consultants who scored higher on **The Jack of All Trades** scored **lower on creativity**. This makes sense for this profile, given that the consultant is spending more time doing all of the work, and not spending time creatively making new systems or services for their business. They're stuck in an endless execution loop.

Again, each consultant profile experiences a different type of pressure. As expected, each pressure “pushes” on a different kind of problematic outcome. The good news is that if we can identify the pressure and the problem, we can also identify practices that can prevent us from experiencing things like burnout.

MANAGEABLE PRACTICES • • •

One of the main goals of this research was to identify core practices that could help consultants decrease their risk of negative outcomes, such as burnout. But we found a few unexpected caveats to implementing these **preventative practices**.



For example, if a **Workaholic** tries to change the **mindset of “more work equals more value,”** we see a **23% reduction in job satisfaction**. Our interpretation of this after looking at the data is as follows: the Workaholic is driven by **personal pressures**—they feel they have to continually produce work to deliver value to their client. Their whole mindset revolves around this personal drive to deliver **more** to others in their life, and this mindset is deeply tied to their identity.

Telling them to change this mindset is a lot like telling a professional football player to stop playing football. That's who they are. That's what they love doing. They can't change that. So the lesson for us is that telling an individual who is driven specifically by personal pressures to change that mindset will backfire. They won't be happy in their job anymore because they no longer see the **value** in what they're doing. The key is to teach them how to put **limits** on their perfection, not tell them to no longer be a perfectionist. This is where our approach comes into play.

We believe managing these “problem” consultant profiles is **not about changing who you are, but about learning the manageable practices** that help put limits on what you're doing. This will allow you to still use those traits that are driving your success, while not allowing them to get out of control.



Let's talk about another example. Those consultants who were classified as **Imposters** saw a **20% increase in job satisfaction just by networking**. The interesting point here is Imposters can often be consultants who have just started their own company or consultants who have switched industries or roles. They're new at what they're doing. They're unsure if they're doing it right.

Being exposed to other individuals who are feeling the same way can help normalize this experience. Once these normalizing experiences become frequent enough, The Imposter starts to realize that **everyone is an imposter**. Everyone starts a new service at some point. You don't have to have several years of experience. You just need to offer value to the client.



Last but not least, consultants classified as **Jacks of All Trades** saw a **31% increase in job satisfaction if they changed the mindset that their clients need a firm that can do everything** (this mindset is more malleable because it is based on market pressures and not personal ones).

By changing this mindset, The Jack of all Trades slowly learns to return to a specialized approach. This specialization is usually something the consultant loves doing, and as a result they see a huge spike in job satisfaction. With the extra time, they can also refocus on the business, developing systems and services that can help make the business more money. Because of this, we see a **27% increase** in creative energy.

No matter what profile we're talking about, there are simple mindset changes and limits we can put in place to help us “tame” those inner consultant profiles. Overall, we found there were 3 core categories of manageable practices that could cure the symptoms of each problem profile:



Time Behaviors

- Set limits on the amount of time one dedicates to learning new things
- Prioritize spending time doing things outside of work



Client Behaviors

- Make sure to check in with the clients and find out what both parties find valuable
- Set limits on the number of clients one takes at any given time



Mindset Reinforcement

- Spend time thinking about the sacrifices one makes
- Be intentional about the sacrifices one makes for work



NEXT STEPS

This report is only the tip of the iceberg. We live in a tumultuous time—we're coming out of a global pandemic, and we may be heading into a recession. Consultants have had to invent and reinvent themselves again and again to adapt to the times. If there are topics that interest you, we'd be happy to include them in our next round of research. Just let us know by contacting us at ken.faro@inkblotanalytics.com.

If you're interested in more in-depth insights on what we found, please reach out to us at max@maxtraylor.com.

If you'd like a free consultation about your own consultancy and problems you're currently facing, please feel free to schedule something [here](#).