

emlyon's 1st Consulting & AI barometer: widespread adoption, but a business model under pressure

With 55% of emlyon graduates pursuing careers in audit, consulting, finance, banking and insurance, the School set out to conduct an in-depth study of how artificial intelligence is being used across the consulting industry. This first Consulting & AI Barometer explores how AI has become a core workplace infrastructure for consultants. Yet beyond productivity gains, the study reveals a profession facing three major challenges: capturing the value created by AI, preserving collective intelligence, and rethinking how consulting expertise is developed and transmitted.

Study methodology

The study was led by Jean-Baptiste Vaujour, Director of the Master in Strategy and Consulting and Senior Professor of Practice at emlyon business school, with the support of his team, students and faculty contributors.

It is based on an anonymous survey conducted between October 2025 and January 2026, completed by more than one hundred professional consultants.

Key findings

72% of consultants use AI every day, and **65%** report significant productivity gains. Respondents estimate that **70%** of a junior consultant's workload remains non-substitutable.

43% anticipate the emergence of an "obelisk-shaped" consulting model: narrower at the base, with a greater concentration of experts, managers and solution architects.

Conclusion: the consultant's value increasingly lies in what they choose not to delegate: judgement, contextual understanding, trusted client relationships and the ability to make decisions under uncertainty.

Widespread adoption, but collective value remains uncertain

In consulting, AI has moved beyond experimentation. Research, synthesis, idea structuring, deliverable preparation and drafting are now embedded in daily workflows, saving consultants considerable time: **72% use AI every day.**

These productivity gains are widely recognised, with **65% of respondents reporting significant improvements in efficiency thanks to AI**. Yet the question of value creation remains unresolved. The Barometer shows that these benefits are still perceived primarily at the individual level: **62% of respondents identify consultants themselves as the main beneficiaries, ahead of both clients and firms**.

The transition from usage to mastery is also far from complete. While **83% of consultants work in firms that have formalised AI policies, only 18% report having shared and consistently applied team-level standards to review AI-generated deliverables**. In a context where errors are becoming harder to detect, consultants see themselves as augmented while remaining vulnerable in one critical area: their ability to calibrate trust in the technology. The challenge has shifted. A year ago, the priority was AI adoption; today, it is AI governance.

Collective intelligence: the blind spot of AI-augmented consulting

The study reveals that AI does not enhance every dimension of teamwork equally. According to the Barometer, it is more effective at helping teams reason, generate options and test hypotheses than at strengthening shared memory or collective attention.

Another key finding is that only **11% of respondents believe AI significantly helps their teams prioritise information, identify weak signals or determine what truly matters in an engagement**. Yet in consulting, producing analyses faster is not enough to create strategic value. A team's strength also lies in its ability to prioritise information, make sound judgements and deliver distinctive recommendations.

The Barometer therefore highlights a more subtle risk: the homogenisation of perspectives. By relying on the same models and generative logics, teams may produce analyses that appear richer but are ultimately more uniform. The challenge for consulting firms is to integrate AI without weakening critical debate, attention to weak signals and collective decision-making.

Anticipated restructuring and a redefinition of the profession

AI is not only changing how consulting engagements are delivered; it is also reshaping the structure of consulting firms themselves. By automating parts of research, synthesis and preliminary analysis, AI makes the emergence of an "obelisk-shaped" organisation

increasingly plausible: narrower at the junior level, but denser in expert, managerial and solution architecture roles.

This transformation is already anticipated by **43% of respondents**. It challenges the traditional consulting apprenticeship model, where tasks assigned to junior consultants also served as a foundation for learning the profession, developing analytical reasoning and building critical thinking skills.

At the same time, only **46% of managers currently consider AI training programmes to be effective**, suggesting that the conditions required for a successful transition have yet to be fully established.

The real risk is not the disappearance of junior positions, but the disappearance of the situations through which expertise is built. The Barometer identifies what it calls an **“apprenticeship gap”**: consultants who may be more productive in the short term, yet less exposed to the experiences that develop expertise over time. As AI increasingly generates, synthesises, structures and accelerates work, the consultant’s value shifts toward what remains uniquely human: judgement, contextual understanding, trusted client relationships and the ability to make decisions under uncertainty.

The Barometer also reminds us that not everything will be delegated to machines. While AI accelerates production, **70% of a junior consultant’s workload remains non-substitutable**, as it involves supporting transformation, fostering collective intelligence and managing interpersonal relationships. The defining competency of AI-augmented consulting is therefore neither technical nor purely analytical. It is **epistemic calibration**: knowing how far to trust AI—in other words, exercising human judgement.

“AI has become a core infrastructure of consulting work. The challenge now lies in governance and value-sharing. A consulting firm’s relevance will increasingly be measured not by the quantity of its deliverables, but by the quality of the judgement its teams apply to what AI produces. Fundamentally—and paradoxically—AI is putting humans back at the centre of the consulting value proposition.”

Jean-Baptiste Vaujour, Director of the Master in Strategy and Consulting, Senior Professor of Practice and lead researcher of the study.

“The findings of this Barometer confirm the relevance of emlyon’s educational choices: training students to understand and master technologies so they can become active contributors to their development and use. The School is also committed to fostering essential capabilities such as critical thinking, analytical rigour, nuanced judgement, the ability to turn ideas into action and to work collectively. These skills are more vital than ever and lie at the heart of emlyon business school’s vision and of the future emlyon tech school.”

Isabelle Huault, Executive President and Dean of emlyon business school.