

Why I Pivoted from External to Internal Consulting

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Having spent 10+ years in external strategy consulting, working for clients across many industries and geographies, candidates often ask both why I decided to shift into internal consulting and what the differences are. After my first 6 months in Liberty Mutual's Corporate Strategy & Research (CS&R) team, here are a few of my observations so far:

- **Better visibility into the impact of your work.** In internal consulting, you ultimately work for the same company as your client. This means that your project will have a direct impact on your company, and potentially even you. You're also far more likely to see the results of your project, whether that's seeing an internal announcement about a new initiative coming out of your recommendation, or getting a status update from a client you run into in the hallway (albeit the 'virtual' hallway, for the moment). Although I had a sense of the impact my work had for external clients, I am now able to see the impact of my work much more directly – which is motivating and rewarding.
- **Flexibility to adapt to changing client needs.** All consultants, whether internal and external, are measured on their ability to deliver exceptional client work. In external consulting, however, there are additional financial and operational metrics including sales targets, project profitability and utilization – and these become increasingly important as you rise through the ranks. These incentives can at times be at odds with each other, and because of the compensation model (which is typically fee-based, with a fixed team for a fixed period of time), it can be difficult to flex to support new client needs that arise over the course of the project. As a department, CS&R deploys our staff to the company's highest priority issues as determined by senior leadership. This means there is greater flexibility to add a resource or extend a project in order to meet our clients' needs, while keeping the workload manageable for teams. It also tends to be easier to have open and honest trade-off discussions with clients regarding scope, with less pressure to 'overdeliver' to win follow-on work. Finally, even once a project ends, the project team doesn't totally disappear, and can stay connected to help clients successfully implement the recommendations.
- **Access to information and stakeholders.** When I was working in external consulting, I had to 'get smart' quickly on a new industry and client for nearly every project I worked on. As much as I enjoyed the challenge, at times I felt that my depth of knowledge was somewhat superficial or limited, especially in the first 3-4 weeks of the project. Additionally, as an external consultant, it often took weeks (or even months) to get data that was critical to the project – e.g. org charts, financials, customer information – information that, as an employee of the company, I am able to access much more easily



or even pull directly. Now, I spend less time getting up to speed and tracking information down and more time solving the challenge at hand. Further, because CS&R is part of Liberty Mutual, our consultants have unrestricted access to key cross-functional stakeholders and a much deeper understanding of the culture, history, products, etc. This not only gives our teams credibility, but positions us to develop recommendations that will work for the organization and to build champions who will support implementation once the project concludes. Finally, because my clients are also my colleagues, I've found it much easier not only to get time with key stakeholders, but to have more candid conversations about the work and challenges faced, and to develop more genuine, personal relationships that extend beyond the duration of the project. In fact, many of our consulting staff go on to work for their clients after a 2-3 year 'stint' in CS&R.

- **Work/life balance and travel.** I was fortunate that, throughout most of my consulting career, I had very few 'burner' cases, which I attribute in large part to the partners and clients I worked with. Most of my friends in external consulting, however, haven't been as lucky. A healthy work-life balance tends to be much more achievable in internal consulting; in addition to the reasons mentioned previously (aligned incentives, scope management and resourcing, access to information and stakeholders, etc.), your client's office is generally down the hall rather than 1 (or even 2) flights away. Don't get me wrong, there were many aspects of being a 'road warrior' that I enjoyed: travelling to new cities, expensing nice meals, building up miles with major airlines and hotels. However, after years of experiencing the 'Sunday Scaries' ahead of a Monday morning flight, or missing out on a Thursday evening social event due to a travel delay, I was ready for a change of pace. Since I left external consulting, I've been able to sleep in my bed, cook my own meals, work out regularly, and (most importantly) get a puppy. Of course, some projects are certainly busier than others, but internal consulting is inherently structured to be more compatible with managing personal health and wellness.

One question I often receive from candidates is whether there are any major differences in terms of the diversity of work. One would naturally assume that – because you are working for a single company, in a single industry – there is less diversity of project experience in internal consulting. I would argue that the breadth and depth of experiences you get depends greatly on the nature of the consulting firm or internal strategy group you work for. Most large external consulting firms are organized by a sector, or potentially by capability / issue, and over time you tend to specialize in a particular area. At Liberty Mutual, CS&R ultimately serves our CEO and Executive Leadership Team, which often entails working across a wide range of issues and challenges (market assessment, strategy development, data and analytics transformation, operating model design, etc.), across our business units, and even outside of the industry to the sectors we serve ('mobility', energy, to name a few). In the past 6 months, I've worked on challenges that I might never have had an opportunity to work on in external consulting.



I am incredibly grateful for my time in external consulting – I learned a tremendous amount, was able to travel the world, and built relationships with mentors, teammates and clients that I will carry with me through my career. And for many people, especially those who enjoy sales and aspire to become a partner one day, external consulting can be a wonderful and fulfilling career. For me, though, internal consulting offers the ‘best of’ what I loved about external consulting: solving complex challenge challenges at the highest level of the organization; working with motivated, talented teams to deliver exceptional outcomes; and a deep commitment to coaching and mentorship – with what I love about working in industry: being an employee of the company; visibility into the impact of my work; increased depth of knowledge and stronger client relationships; and better work/life balance.

If you’re debating between the two, or considering a similar switch, I’d encourage you to think deeply about what motivates you professionally, which option will help you get to where you ultimately want to go, and what matters to you on a personal level – and seek to optimize for your ‘best of both.’

