

David Nelissen on boosting your career in Consulting

In 2008 VA did a search for Accenture in Belgium. The Management Consulting team was keen to grow the Resources practise on Senior Manager level. We screened the Belgian market and met David Nelissen, he was then working for GDF-Suez/Trasys. I was impressed with his entrepreneurial style and his career until that point. We agreed to introduce him to Accenture. David started at Accenture soon after on Senior Manager level, and was promoted to Managing Director in 2012. David moved to Singapore with his family in 2013.

How do you reflect on the last few years?

The start at Accenture was competitive but also fair. The model towards Managing Director drives you to perform relatively better than your colleagues; being good is not enough. Secondly you need to find your way around in a highly matrixed organisation of 275,000 employees in 56 countries. My advice to people who join Accenture or any other consultancy firm, is to invest in building a team because you're an entrepreneur. You need to have a differentiated offering to sell, a strategy to grow and a team to deliver. Obviously building a team when you arrive is not easy. People must start to recognise you as a person who brings expertise and a person who will be the next Managing Director in the firm. Bringing expertise alone is not enough, you need to make use of the operating model of the firm you are joining. Joining Accenture, or any other consulting firm, later in your career does not affect your chance of making it to Managing Director level but clearly you need to leverage on the extra expertise you bring from outside.

What would you advise people to ask when interviewing for a consultancy firm?

A job is open for a reason, generally a consultancy wants to grow in a certain domain; you need to know what the bigger plan behind the role-description is. Be very specific in your questions, what is the exact role, what are the expectations for this role, what is the next level of expectations, what do I need to do to fulfil these, who are the decision makers, who is in the matrix. When interviewing don't take the angle "I want to be your 275001st employee", take the angle of an entrepreneur assessing how your expertise could be leveraged in a new company; what is your ambition and how in line is this with the company you're interviewing with.

You're based in Singapore now and have been based in Belgium for a long time too, are there more career opportunities in Asia?

Both offer lot's of interesting challenges. Obviously there is more economic growth in Asia but doing business in Asia is very different from Europe. In terms of personal living standards Asia, and particularly Singapore, is great and has nothing to envy in Europe. In Asia a lot of practical issues like developing legal framework, getting visa's and transport to move around are very time-consuming. The level of professional experience or education of the people you are dealing with in Asia is also very different from country to country. I am therefore careful in stating that there are a lot of career opportunities for Europeans in Asia as the conditions for success are very different. It remains to be seen how many Europeans will be successful in Asia. Its important to

be thoughtful and have an open mind leveraging on true expertise.

David Nelissen is a Managing Director at Accenture and leads the Plant Optimisation APAC team as well as the global team for Health, Safety Security and Environment for Accenture's Chemicals, Natural Resources, Energy and Utilities clients within Accenture's Plant and Commercial Solutions Business Service. David has more than 15 years of experience in strategy consulting and has worked with packaged application implementations in different discrete and resource industries. David holds a MSc Engineering degree from ULB-Brussels (Solvay) and a Master in Business from Unil-Lausanne (HEC).

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