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What makes a great consultant

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Consultants are employed for two reasons: their expertise and their advice. But what distinguishes an excellent consultant from a mediocre one? Well, first of all, there is a lot of expertise around, with nearly everyone knowing something that others value. However, giving good advice is more difficult, since it requires the delicate skill of connecting your expertise to a client's concerns and offering real-world solutions. An average consultant offers advice, while a great consultant offers precision, perception, and encourages action. HKA Associate Director – Iryna Akulenska is just such a consultant, with a track record that places her at the top of her profession.

Iryna's aspirations, intelligence and accomplishments make her stand out in a fiercely competitive industry. Over the past 12 months alone, she has been promoted twice, first to the position of Senior Consultant, HKA, and then to Associate Director. Over the course of 2021, Iryna undertook six projects worth billions of dollars in total value across six different countries in the MENA region, Gulf, and Europe. In addition, Iryna has been elected to the Chair of the UAE Branch of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (CI Arb).

An effective communicator and motivator who identifies and leverages assets to reach organizational goals, Iryna is a potent decision-maker and outstanding client relationship builder. She has extraordinary skills in planning and thinking laterally too, and has a formidable sense of curiosity, which helps her seek out new opportunities. Rather than settling for the status quo, Iryna asks challenging questions and explores different avenues.

“We develop a lot of our services through identifying what the market is missing or what isn't being done correctly. Then, we look at what our customers want and what the industry requires. We've been successful by taking into consideration our clients' perspectives and soliciting feedback,” Iryna explains.

Besides being an Associate Director at HKA, Iryna takes on several external roles, underlining the fact that she is a lifelong learner committed to staying on top of the best current and emerging business practices and wants to pass on this knowledge to her colleagues and peers.

Talking about Iryna taking the Chair in the UAE Branch of the CI Arb, Kate Blotskaya, Director at FTI Consulting, said: “She keeps inspiring me, and I believe all members, to further develop, and provides motivation for undertaking new challenges. In addition, she promotes diversity and the empowerment of women in the industry.”

Iryna is also one of the ambassadors/leadership board members of the HKA Africa Training Academy initiative

Broad Expertize

Iryna has a long track record of achievements, including many in the past year that have fuelled not only the success of HKA but also that of many individuals and organizations throughout the world.

For instance, there is clear evidence that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) impacts bottom line profits, and as a member of the EDI committee at HKA, Iryna is one of the key movers behind launching the HKA Internship Program. Working on internship programs. Working on internship programs and the moot competitions has seen her build and develop mutually beneficial relationships with the British University in Dubai (BUiD) and the Middlesex University Dubai.

Iryna is also one of the ambassadors/leadership board members of the HKA Africa Training Academy initiative, which operates as an extension to HKA's global claims and dispute business. Her expertise and passion have helped support the launch of the Academy, which includes various course offerings, webinars and masterclasses.

In addition, Iryna is one of the champions and regional representatives of the CRUX report, which provides valuable insight into claims and dispute causation from major capital projects around the world. Iryna co-authored the Middle East chapter of 2021 CRUX report 'Operating in Uncertain Times: A Regional Analysis of Claims and Dispute Resolution'. On 23 February 2022, Iryna took part in a panel discussion on the topic of 'How can the Middle East construction industry adapt to a 'new normal?' organized by RICS World Built Environment Forum, HKA and moderated by Heriot-Watt University Dubai.

Iryna asks challenging questions and explores different avenues

In March 2022, Iryna took part in the Middle East Economic Digest market talks with MEED Editorial Director Richard Thompson, to discuss the future of claims and dispute resolution and the role of digital data in reshaping that environment.

Away from HKA, Iryna undertakes several external roles, including Chair of the CIArb UAE Branch, and a member of the Global Advisory Board, ICDR Young & International (Y&I). In this latter role, Iryna primarily organizes events/webinars on the salient topics in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). She has prepared a number of events, and in November 2021 co-organized and co-moderated a panel on 'Delay, Disruption and Acceleration', with another webinar series on construction arbitration underway in 2022.

Attention to Detail

Over 2021 alone, Iryna has taken on a number of commissions for HKA, including: a major oil refinery, a five star resort, a major power

plant, airport facilities, a mix-use project, and a portable water supply project.

The latter project was of significant importance to the client and crucial for the supply of drinking water to the airport facilities in a sustainable way. This was the first project built for the client based on a PPP structure between the airport authorities and the private sector. Iryna was able to prepare several persuasive claims advanced under a very complex concession contract.

These included an extension of time and associated costs, other financial claims, and a claim for deemed completion on a specific date.

Mr Majeb Alodayani, CEO of the client's organization, said: "Ms Iryna, being the right person who understands the construction phase very well in all project stages, did great help in achieving to complete the project claim in the right time and manner. It helped us to save more than SAR 80 million".

Other clients have been equally effusive about Iryna's abilities, with external counsel on a 5-star project in Dubai commenting: "Iryna is a great technical expert who can digest complex technical information and distil it into simple written evidence. She is excellent, responsive, capable of getting to grips of technical issues, and pays careful attention to detail."

If you want a succinct description of a great consultant, that's probably it.

"It helped us to save more than SAR 80 million"

About HKA

HKA is the world's leading consultancy of choice for multi-disciplinary expert and specialist services in risk mitigation and dispute resolution within the capital projects and infrastructure sector.

We also have particular experience advising clients on the economic impact of commercial and investment treaty disputes and in forensic accounting matters. In addition, HKA supports companies that conduct business with the US Federal Government, providing them with consulting services on complex government contracting matters.

As trusted independent consultants, experts and advisors, we deliver solutions amid uncertainty, dispute and overrun, and provide the insights that make the best possible outcomes a reality for public and private sector clients worldwide.

HKA has in excess of 1,000 consultants, experts and advisors in more than 40 offices across 18 countries.

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