

Security Consultants and 'The Value Proposition'

What is the role of the security consultant in this day and age? What should it be, and what value do consultants bring to in-house professionals and host organisations? In answering these questions, David Gill encompasses the potential licensing of consultants and whether or not a baseline qualification to practise ought to be introduced alongside mandatory CPD



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The term 'security consultant' will mean different things to different people, with definitions varying from sector to sector. Unlike protected terms such as 'architect' or 'solicitor', calling oneself a 'security consultant' isn't regulated by either professional association or legislation.

Strange that, given the fact this term is frequently used in relation to a diverse range of disciplines, from securing IT infrastructure and networks through to protecting against cyber attack, developing integrated security systems, providing science-based advice on blast mitigation or designing the physical and operational layout of business facilities.

Today, security consultants may also be viewed as an external resource. Alternatively, they may perform an internal role providing sage input to the host organisation's overall enterprise risk management strategy.

In an ideal world, consultants – or perhaps 'advisors' – would be able to demonstrate expertise in their chosen specialist field through a combination of academic study, training and operational experience. Consultants not only require in-depth subject matter knowledge. They also need a host of other capabilities that include project and financial management expertise, acumen in conflict resolution, research abilities and myriad other business-related skills.

What value do consultants bring to in-house professionals and host organisations? We're talking about qualified expertise, experience, underpinning knowledge and objectivity.

An assessment of competency

Choosing an appropriate security consultant is a veritable minefield as there are few, if any, effective controls in place designed to protect service end users from the unscrupulous or simply incompetent practitioners out there.

Historically, there has been no recognised benchmark to assess a consultant's competence and consumers have been faced with something of a lottery when engaging a security consultant operating with few effective controls in place. Indeed, a number of security system installers employ in-house consultants who determine what a client requires in terms of cameras, detection systems and so forth, the concern being as to whether these are truly

independent assessments of need. When it comes to the unscrupulous installers, it will be the consumer that suffers as a direct result of potentially inappropriate, ineffective or otherwise 'over-sold' systems.

In order to address what many in the security sector felt was a huge void in terms of a professional, top level standing for security consultants, several of the leading industry associations have sought to self-regulate this element of the security business sector.

The Association of Security Consultants (ASC) was founded in 1991 and lives by a wide-ranging Code of Conduct requiring members to abide by certain obligations. For example, members must 'maintain a high standard of work' and 'act with integrity', yet there's no obligation for an individual to join the ASC or comply with its Code.

The Register of Security Engineers and Specialists (RSES) has been developed with the sponsorship of the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure to validate an individual's credentials and experience, primarily on Government projects. It perhaps shows the security sector's frustration at a lack of central regulation.

Knowledge and commitment

The Security Institute, which is recognised as the UK's premier security membership body, has worked in conjunction with The Worshipful Company of Security Professionals and a team of eminent academics to develop the Register of Chartered Security Professionals. Lord Alex Carlile QC CBE, the first President of the Register's Registration Authority, has described Chartered Security Professionals as being representative of 'The Gold Standard'.

Since the creation of the Register in 2011, 92 security professionals have been successfully admitted. The process is extremely robust. Applicants must have extensive experience and be able to demonstrate a high level of competence in five key areas: security knowledge, leadership, practice skills, communication and professional commitment.

Those who successfully pass the application process are then 'admitted' to the Register and thereafter referred to as 'registrants'. The majority of applicants hold a recognised degree. Those who do not are required to

submit a comprehensive written portfolio which is assessed at degree standard. Registrants are mandated to undertake Continuing Professional Development (CPD), adhere to a strict Code of Conduct and organise professional indemnity insurance cover. As is the case with the more established Chartered bodies, registrants can be suspended or even struck off.

A high percentage of registrants are security consultants, either working for consulting firms or as sole independents. The remainder occupy senior positions operating at a strategic level across a range of organisations within the private or public sector.

The process works. Importantly, there's now increasing evidence to suggest that the marketplace recognises the value of a security professional holding and demonstrating the CSyP post-nominal. Some top flight recruitment specialists are now specifying 'Chartered Security Professional preferred' on job advertisements. As the value of CSyP status becomes more recognised, the marketplace should dictate 'The Gold Standard' and the headhunters et al will be replacing 'preferred' with the word 'required' or 'essential'.

All that said, there's no obligation to apply for CSyP status.

What about some regulation?

There's a valid case to be made for the regulation of security consultants, or even some form of Government-backed registration system encompassing those providing security consulting services.

Professional security practitioners require a compliance framework to underpin the delivery of their services and thereby narrow the pool of practitioners through the establishment of a single and effective professional examining and compliance body.

A central register of security consultants divided into generic subject areas that verify identity and probity – and which records evidenced knowledge and expertise – may be a solution. This system would require a mandated level of CPD to ensure that consultants maintain currency with sanctions/penalties in place for those that transgress, ultimately resulting in their removal from the register if allegations are substantiated in fact.

Furthermore, any such system would require support from the likes of the Association of British Insurers who would seek to make it mandatory for their clients to use a registered security consultant.

Some might say the obvious body to administer and run such a centralised register



ought to be the Security Industry Authority (SIA). However, the SIA has seemingly chosen to leave the licensing of security consultants in the 'Too Difficult' file without even defining the term 'security consultant'.

This task doesn't seem to have been an issue in other jurisdictions such as Australia and New Zealand, for example, where defined systems and procedures are in place to regulate consultants' activities.

Completion of the regulatory circle of licensable security activities would close the existing loophole which currently allows dubious or simply incompetent operators to function under the mantle of 'security consultant'.

For my part, I've heard some cynical comments about the SIA's failure to grasp the 'consultant nettle', including reference to Lord Turner's remarks following his review some years ago of the UK's banking sector in which he made reference to the 'duck test'. In short, if it walks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck.

Defining a security consultant isn't that difficult. However, establishing what competencies, experience and qualifications are required for the role and how these are – or should be – tested does require close assessment and scrutiny to absolutely ensure that any risk posed to the consumers of security consultants' services is minimised.

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