

ON THE CRITICAL PATH

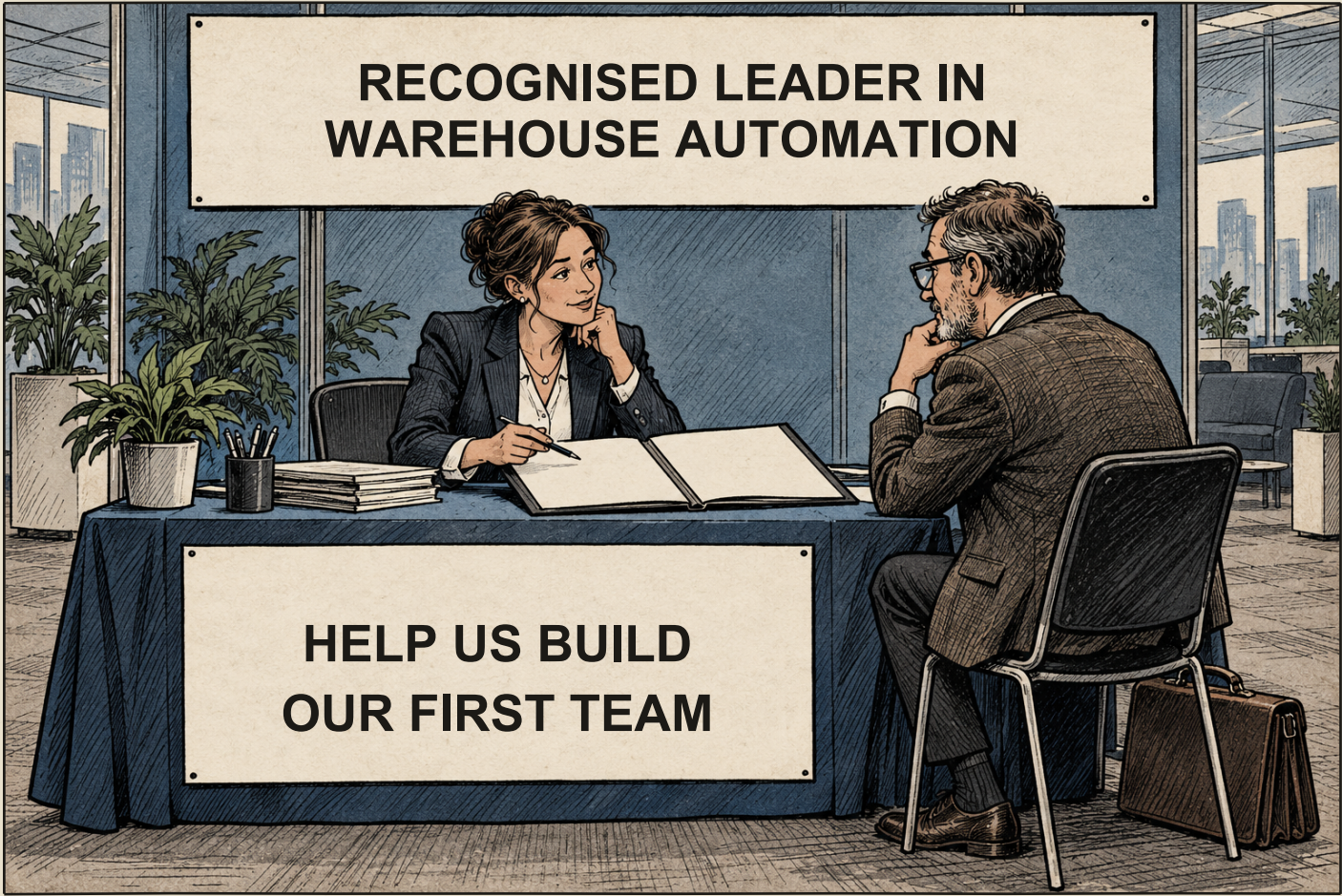
A Day in the Life of a Technology Consultant

ISSUE 0113

FRIDAY 16 OCTOBER 2026

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

The Firm’s newest specialism is already attracting enquiries. Recruitment will follow.



The Firm has identified a promising new market after an AI search service recommended it for warehouse automation. The recommendation describes an experienced team, a practical approach and a strong record of implementation. Business Development has circulated it internally to establish who should take the call.

The Firm advises on technology strategy, including for logistics businesses. It does not currently design automated warehouses. The distinction is clear on its website, although less clear in the answer that brought the prospective client there.

Marketing initially proposed a correction. A test using more precise wording removed The Firm from the recommendation altogether. The original answer has therefore been retained in the opportunity record while colleagues consider how to improve its accuracy without losing its usefulness.

The enquiry is unusually well qualified. The client has a budget, a site and a date by which it would like the equipment working. Most encouragingly, it has already been

persuaded of The Firm’s credentials by a source independent of The Firm.

A delivery director has explained that the work would require a specialist hire and an engineering partner. Commercial colleagues have asked whether these could be secured once the opportunity is more certain. The client would find certainty easier after meeting the specialists.

Recruitment has drafted a senior vacancy. It offers the successful applicant an opportunity to establish a new capability within a recognised market leader. Both descriptions have been checked with the relevant teams.

The first conversation with the client will be exploratory. No delivery commitment will be made. The account partner will explain that The Firm brings together the right expertise for each assignment, which remains the intention.

The client has asked to meet the team behind the reputation. Recruitment is treating this as the job description.

ONE WHOLE COLLEAGUE

A new assignment is fully staffed, in aggregate.

Resource Planning has filled a five-day role using spare capacity from five colleagues. Each brings a day, and between them they have all the required skills. The allocation avoids both an external hire and leaving small amounts of internal capacity unused.

The colleagues will work on successive days. Monday’s specialist will establish the approach; Tuesday’s will develop it. Both are experienced and would welcome a handover. Monday’s specialist is committed elsewhere on Tuesday. Tuesday’s is committed elsewhere on Monday.

The team has proposed written notes. Each day now begins with reading and ends with preparation for the next colleague. The client will receive a useful record of the work, including several questions whose author will next be available after the person answering them has left.

There is no dispute about responsibility. Monday’s specialist is the lead and remains accountable throughout the week. Her allocation has been increased to accommodate questions, reducing the time she can spend on Monday’s work. The role is now over-resourced but requires some additional capacity.

The client has asked whether it could pay slightly more to have two of the people at once. Resource Planning is checking whether this would count as a second role.

A FUTURE FOR THE PAST

How a database replacement became an investment in artificial intelligence.

The engineer responsible for the internal project database has spent two budget rounds explaining why it needs replacing. The application still works. Keeping it that way requires a small number of people who know which parts must not be updated at the same time.

Her first request described the risk of losing those people. The response asked for a business benefit. Her second described the hours they spent keeping the application available. The response asked whether those hours could be reduced without replacing it. They could not. The application remained available.

This month, a proposed AI service needed access to project records. Its team discovered that the database could not reliably supply them in the required form. The engineer was invited to explain the problem. She brought the same diagram.

The replacement is now a foundation for AI-enabled delivery. The engineer has been asked whether it can be

completed faster. She has also been offered the additional specialist she requested last year. With that person, it can.

The approved scope is largely unchanged: migrate the records, remove duplicate entries and retire the old application. The AI team will build its service separately. Nobody has asked the engineer to pretend that a database is intelligent. It simply needs to be necessary to something that is.

The investment paper contains a new benefits section. Time previously spent repairing failed overnight jobs will be released by the AI programme. The engineer asks whether this saving should belong to the database work. Finance explains that the programme is funding the database work. She confirms the estimate.

There is a small difficulty with the success measures. The replacement must demonstrate that it enables AI, while the AI service must demonstrate value beyond having a better database.

Colleagues are working on measures that can distinguish the two without separating the funding.

The engineer is not troubled by the title. She has a signed budget, a start date and someone to cover the application while she replaces it. Asked whether the new emphasis has improved the proposal, she says it has considerably improved the approval.

Her original maintenance request is still open. The service desk has offered to close it because another project now covers the work. She would prefer to leave it open until the replacement is running. The service desk agrees.

For now, the same work appears in two reports. One shows a strategic investment proceeding to plan. The other shows how long it has been waiting.

A LITTLE MORE PRECISION

From the Editorial Board

There is much to welcome in a recognised specialism, a fully allocated team and an approved technology investment. Each is a useful thing to have before starting work. We congratulate the colleagues who have secured them.

We would also welcome a little more precision about what each includes. A team may contain everyone required without containing a moment when they can speak. An investment may acquire a future while the work retains its original age.

This need not complicate the announcement. A short second sentence should suffice. Colleagues preparing announcements are invited to submit the second sentence separately. The first has already been approved.

TOP TIPS

Practical advice from The Firm

To make feedback actionable, ask for a specific example. Then explain why that example was exceptional.

For a credible estimate, ask the person doing the work. For an estimate you can use, ask when they are in another meeting.

When the agenda is full, move your item to “Any other business”. People will agree to almost anything with their coats on.

BRING YOURSELF

Colleagues attending a session on bringing their whole selves to work have been invited to bring an object that represents life outside the office. Security has confirmed that musical instruments, sporting equipment and pets cannot be admitted. The organiser suggests a photograph. It can be uploaded in advance so that nobody needs to bring anything.

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