HOW TO PROVE VALUE BEYOND PRICE

The ultimate guide to staying indispensable, even when client budgets are tight.

teamwork.com

IT ISN'T
JUST YOU

Clients are becoming way, way more demanding. With budgets shrinking — and AI at their fingertips — clients are pushing harder for cheaper rates, flirting with your competitors for a better deal, or debating taking things 'in house'.

But it's not just clients creating pressure — teams are being squeezed from both sides. Internally, you, your boss, and the people working on projects need clearer proof of profitability, utilisation, and impact.

If you can't prove value inside your business, it's almost impossible to defend it outside of it. And that's what causes clients to get twitchy. This report shows how to build a value pitch that holds up in your boardroom and in client meetings — and how to make yourself indispensable before cuts are on the table.

In this report, you'll get:

- Exclusive data on where pricing pressure is most acute
- A step-by-step guide to creating a compelling, defensible value story
- A breakdown of how roles are shifting, by industry and seniority
- A script to help refocus invoice queries on outcomes, not outputs

THE 'CAN AI DO IT' DOOM SPIRAL

Clients pushing harder lately (or not getting in touch at all)? Here's why.

AI use raises expectations
Clients see AI deliver "good enough" output. That becomes their new baseline.

Pricing pressure hits
They start to question time- and output-based models.

AI appeal grows
And so the cycle continues.

THE AI DOOM CYCLE

1

6

2

3

Clients shop around
They compare you to other options. The focus shifts entirely to cost.

5

4

Scrutiny increases
The work may be high-quality, but invoices become harder to justify.

Trust breaks down
Suspicion creeps in. Relationships and collaboration suffer.

It's easy to see why people think AI makes work cheaper. The reality is that it's a supercharger: it speeds up tasks and can make things more accurate (as long as you're not drawing a hand). But it doesn't inherently cut the cost of labor.
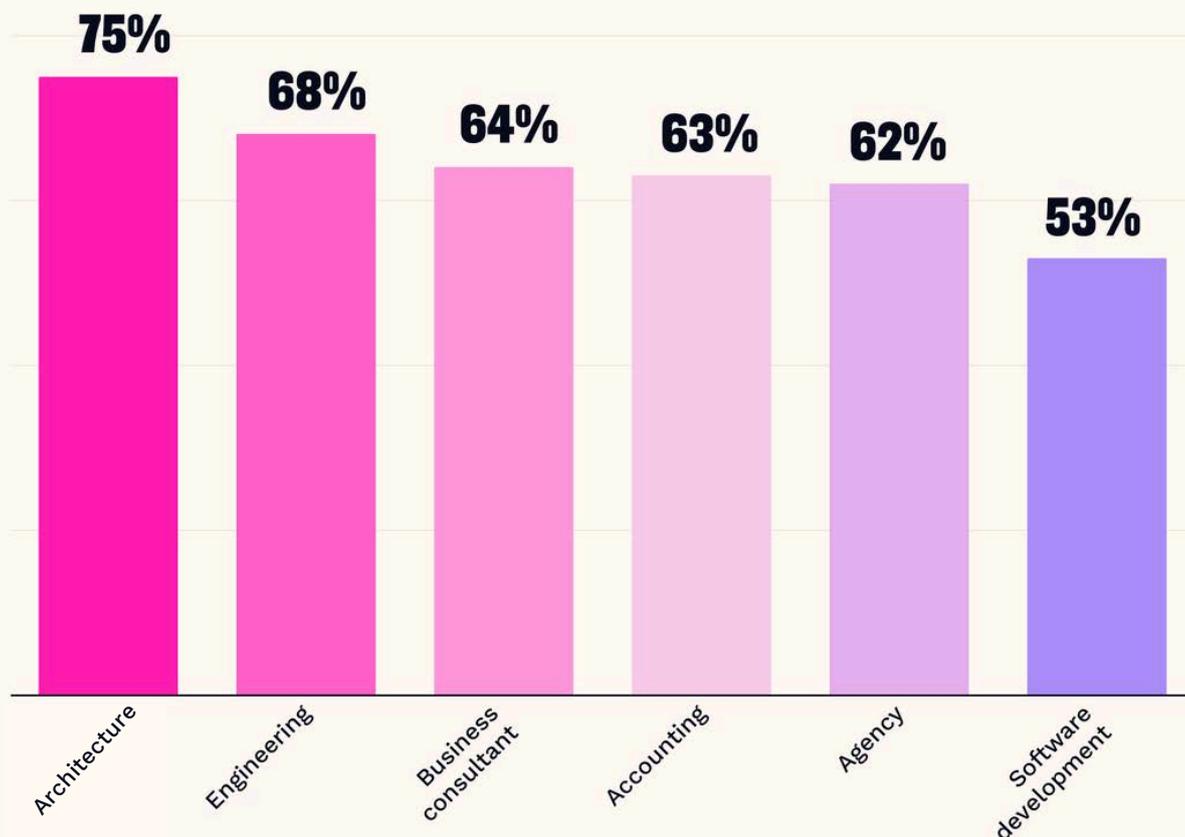
In healthcare, AI makes diagnostics faster, but that doesn't mean your consultation is cheaper. In consultancy, it might feed into scenario modelling, but an expert still needs to make a judgement call. In creative work, deliverables might have some AI support, but it's rarely the end result.

The list is endless — but the common denominator is that AI offers speed and help with the low-value stuff, not cost cutting. Your client needs help understanding that, before it comes to budget time.

# WHERE PRICING PRESSURE IS MOST ACUTE

In Teamwork.com's recent research **66% senior leaders confirmed that clients are now more demanding but less willing to pay for work.** Here's a little bonus insight you won't have read there — a closer look at which sectors are feeling it most.

By industry: % who say clients are more demanding and less willing to pay

75% Architecture
68% Engineering
64% Business consultant
63% Accounting
62% Agency
53% Software development

The pressure is most acute in architecture, engineering, and business consulting, reflecting persistent scope creep, regulatory constraints, tighter budgets, and limited flexibility to reprice work. Agencies and accounting firms also feel the squeeze, though with slightly more variation, suggesting uneven client expectations and value perception.

What do these two sectors have in common? People are the product — which, with AI on the scene, is making clients challenge the cost vs value return.
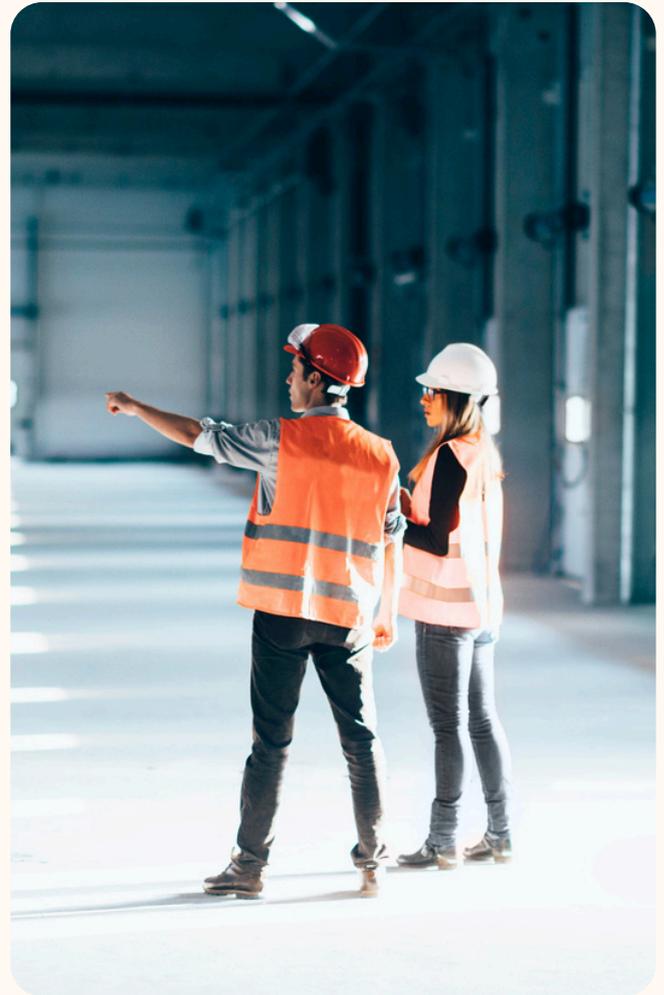
Now compare that to software development — the segment that is finding the least resistance from clients when it comes to paying for the work. This could suggest that they have successfully defended value through long-term or embedded models.

In other words, where value is tangible, defensible, and hard to unbundle, clients are less price elastic. Where a clear product exists (beyond expertise alone), even more so — especially in a world where clients fear disruption.

STEP 1:
(RE)DEFINE YOUR OFFER

Even the GOATs had to deal with clients asking for money off. Take Picasso. At a Paris market, he was asked to do a quick sketch on a paper napkin. In minutes, he produced a drawing and asked for a million francs. The buyer balked. "A million? That took you five minutes!" Picasso's reply? "No — it took me forty years to do it in five minutes."

But Picasso didn't have a CEO breathing down his neck. The client sitting opposite you on a Zoom call does. They also have a CFO demanding how the project contributes to pipeline. A CMO pushing for earlier go-live dates. A Department Head demanding measurable ROI. Or a bunch of investors scrutinizing profit margins.

Which means you need to show the Csuite what business impact your people and services bring to the table. The most effective way to do that? Stop charging for what your business used to be and start charging for what it is now (spoiler alert: we'll be telling you how to do that further down).

Teamwork.com research found **an overwhelming majority (58%) say their role has changed — but into what, they don't really know.** So how do you bill for that?
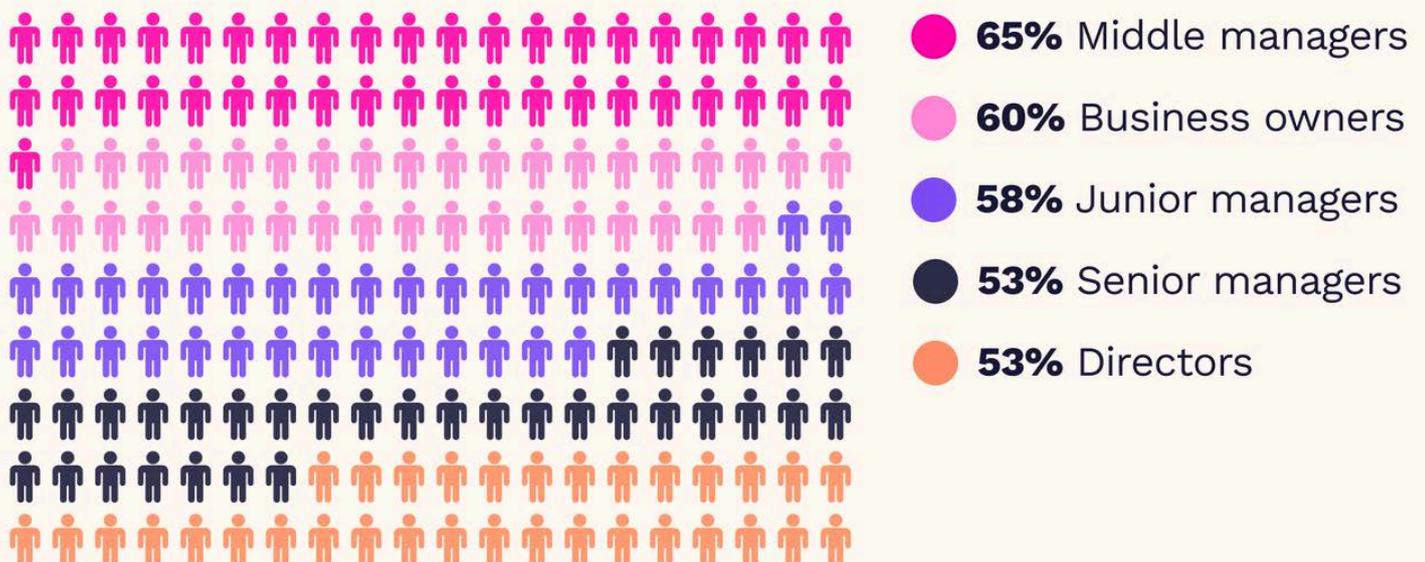
58%

say their role has changed, but they don't know into what

This is the gap most teams get stuck in: they don't know how to translate change into a clear value story. But that's exactly where a get-in-early strategy makes all the difference. Don't give twitchy clients a window to question spending money on your services. Position on value, with a clear USP, and communicate that often.

ROLE SHIFT ISN'T JUST 'A GEN-Z PROBLEM'

The challenge right now is that AI is upending what a lot of roles in project, resourcing, and financial management look like on a day-to-day basis. This isn't just an issue for Gen Zers or more junior parts of the workforce — it's common across managers, directors, and business owners too.

Rank of roles experiencing most shift

- 🔴 **65%** Middle managers
- 🔴 **60%** Business owners
- 🔵 **58%** Junior managers
- ⚫ **53%** Senior managers
- 🟠 **53%** Directors

Our data suggests those closest to delivery and commercial outcomes (usually middle managers and business owners) are feeling the pressure most. However, the most senior roles report slightly less shift — suggesting that the impact is most acute for those closest to the frontline or day-to-day delivery, where changes tend to be felt first.

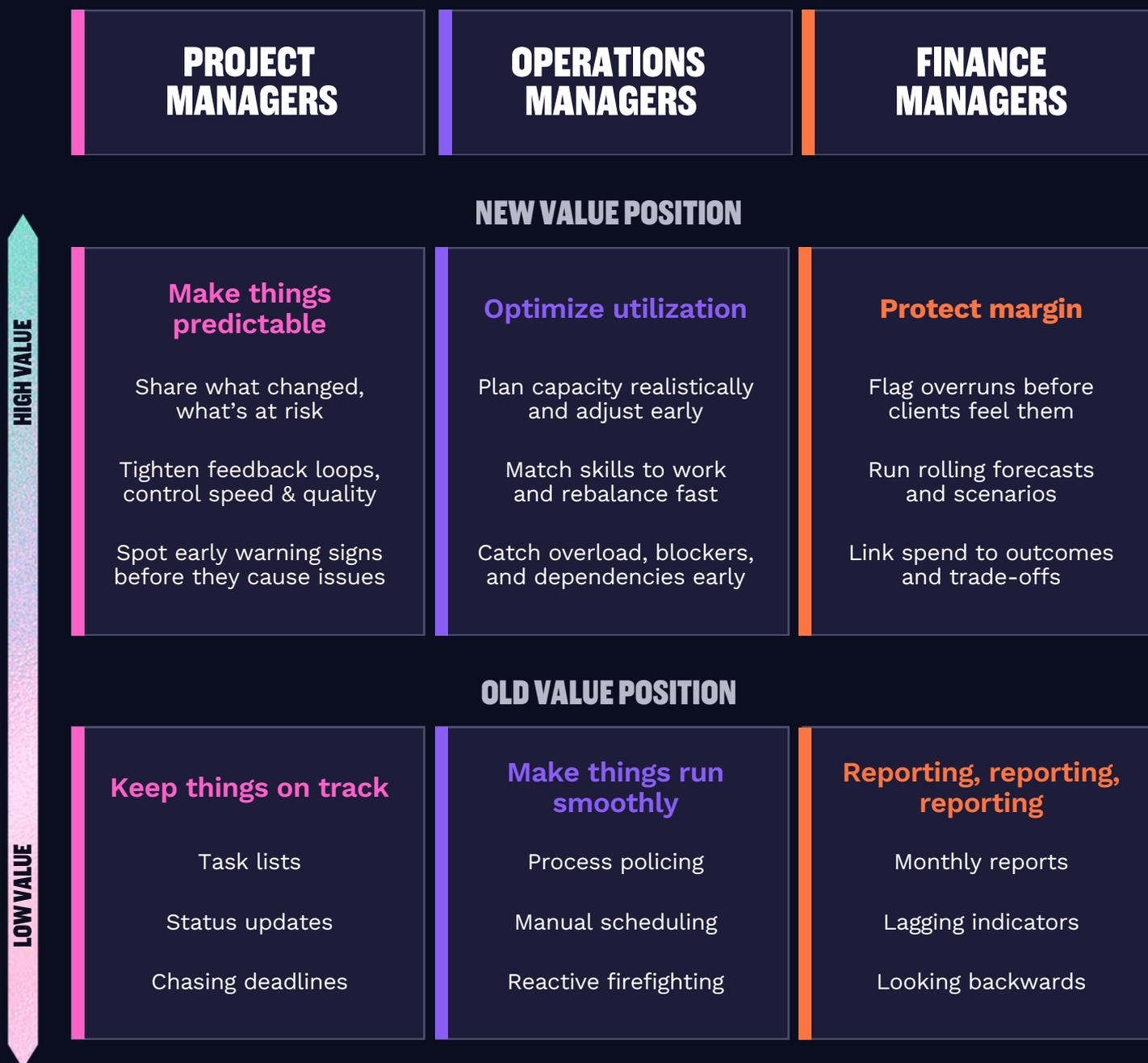# ROLE UNCERTAINTY HIGHEST IN KNOWLEDGE-BASED SECTORS

Across industries, AI-driven role shifts are widespread. Consulting, IT, and accounting are feeling the most pressure. Creative agencies and architecture show more mixed responses — indicating less clarity, resistance, or uneven impact depending on role or specialization.

By industry: % reporting significant role shift

Industry	%
Consultant	63%
Accounting	62%
Engineering	54%
Software	53%
Architecture	52%
Agency	48%
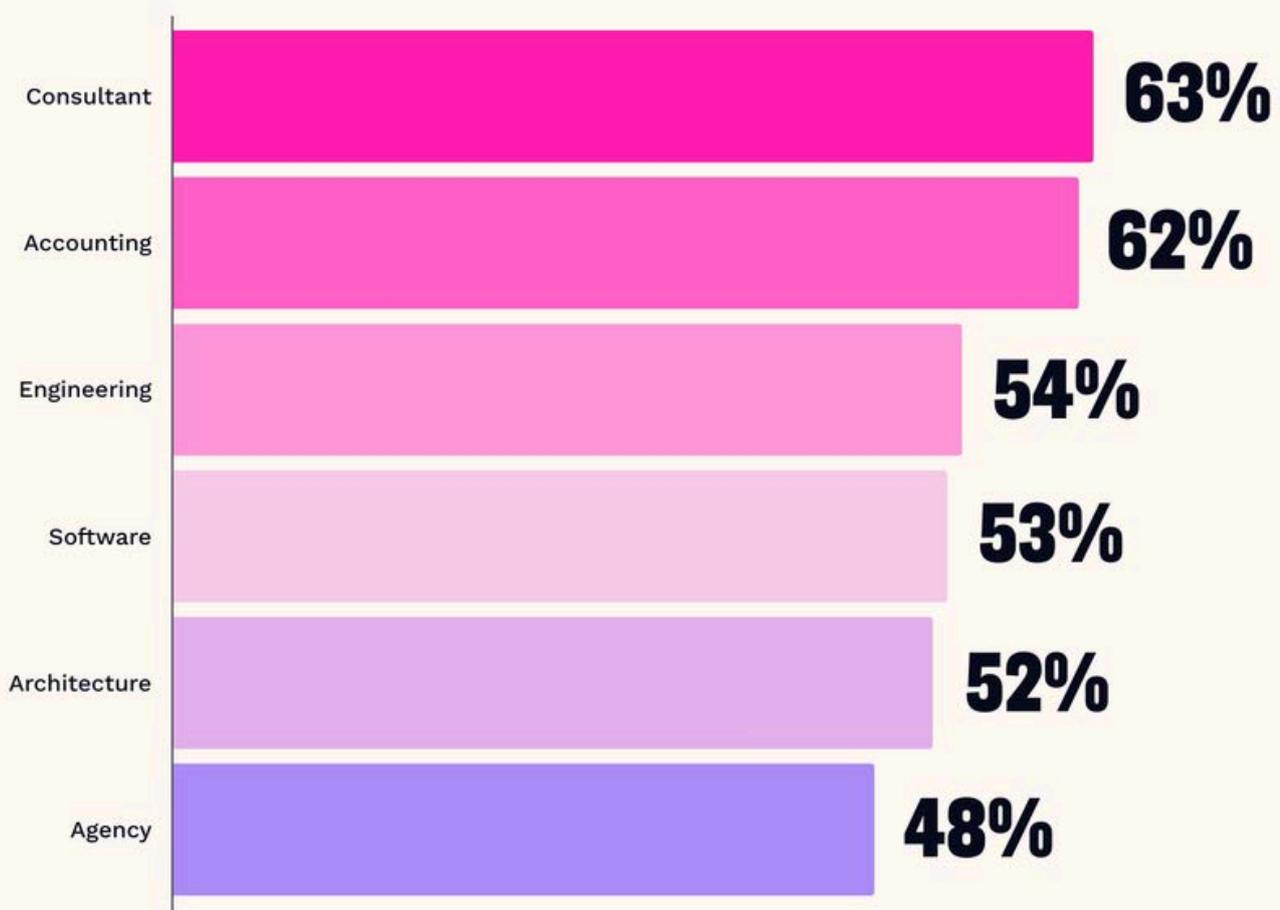
STEP 2:
REFOCUS ROLES USING THE VALUE SHIFT LADDER

AI is redefining most roles, but for managers in particular it's critical to understand where to focus on going forward.

PROJECT MANAGERS	OPERATIONS MANAGERS	FINANCE MANAGERS

NEW VALUE POSITION

HIGH VALUE

Make things predictable	**Optimize utilization**	**Protect margin**
Share what changed, what's at risk	Plan capacity realistically and adjust early	Flag overruns before clients feel them
Tighten feedback loops, control speed & quality	Match skills to work and rebalance fast	Run rolling forecasts and scenarios
Spot early warning signs before they cause issues	Catch overload, blockers, and dependencies early	Link spend to outcomes and trade-offs

OLD VALUE POSITION

LOW VALUE

Keep things on track	**Make things run smoothly**	**Reporting, reporting, reporting**
Task lists	Process policing	Monthly reports
Status updates	Manual scheduling	Lagging indicators
Chasing deadlines	Reactive firefighting	Looking backwards

STEP 3:
PROVE VALUE IN CLIENT CONVERSATIONS

Here's some simple ways you can add real value that clients will be willing to pay for.

1. ESTABLISH WHAT 'VALUE' MEANS TO CLIENTS

In the era of AI, the important thing to get across is that value is about more than just price. But 'value' is subjective. The fastest way to figure out what it means to your client is by having candid conversations upfront. Ask questions that surface priorities, fears, and trade-offs, not just goals:
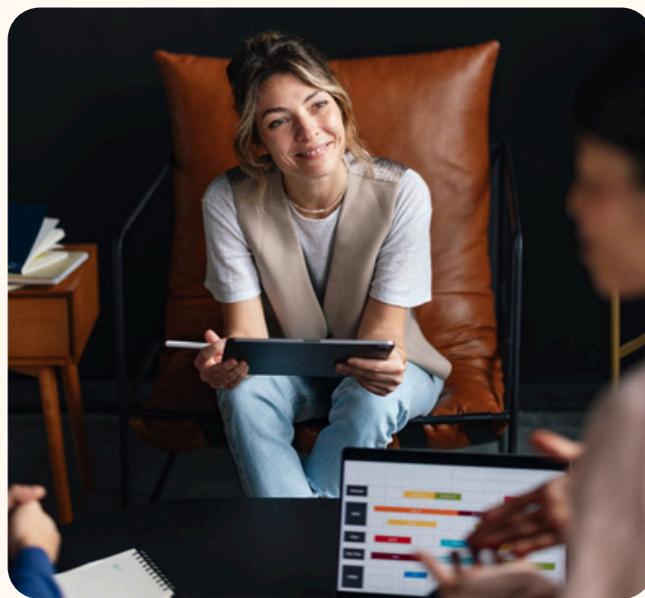
FRAME IT:

Risk: *"What's the biggest thing you're worried about going wrong?"*
Friction: *What's falling short — speed, quality, visibility, etc?*
Focus: *If we could improve just one metric, what would move the needle?*
Boundaries: *What part of this do you not want automated — and why?*
Outcome: *"What's the most important thing that we need to do for you? And what's the most important thing your stakeholders want us to achieve?"*

2. REFRAME THE WORK AROUND IMPACT (NOT OUTPUTS)

Clients think they buy deliverables. What they're *actually* buying is expertise. This might sound obvious, but when client work is hectic, it's all too easy to fall into the 'one and done' trap: handing over deliverables without regularly communicating to clients what's actually happening behind the scenes.

TOP TIPS:

Don't just explain what's been shipped, explain how it solves their business problem or why it's transformative.

Paint a picture of the situation *without* your help.

Communicate in commercial terms. What does their CFO care about? Their CMO? If your client shares KPIs or evidence your work has made a positive impact, take note and bank it.

Bring the receipts ahead of time — don't wait to be asked. This is key.

Value becomes real when it's visible, measurable, or felt. This framing makes work harder to compare — and easier to charge for. But to do it you need a platform that helps you get ahead of the game for this. Not just reporting, but forecasting — that's your new superpower.

3. DO WHAT OTHERS CAN'T

Price pressure thrives in sameness. Differentiation kills it. Be explicit about what makes your team hard to replace, and dodge the price wars:

Build relationships beyond your day-to-day contact, bring fresh ideas and identify risks proactively, and position yourself as a strategic partner rather than a vendor.

Capitalize on your familiarity with your client. You know their ways of working, their brand, or their people.

The ability to flag risks early — and act on them.

Proof from past outcomes, not hypothetical capability.

4. USE AI OPENLY TO ACCELERATE TRUST AND RESULTS

AI should make value clearer, not more suspicious. When it's hidden, clients question it. When it's explained, they trust it. Be transparent about:

Call out AI misconceptions (cheaper costs) and set clients straight.

Where it speeds up analysis or surfaces insights earlier.

How it improves accuracy, reduces risk, or shortens time-to-value.

Where humans stay firmly in control: strategy, validation, ethics, QA.

The goal isn't to sell AI use. It's to sell better decisions, faster confidence, and stronger outcomes — with AI as an enabler, not a cost-cutter.

5. SPELL IT OUT

Right now, your biggest threats aren't just your competitors, AI tools, and in-house teams pinching your projects. It's also the perception that you're a 'nice to have' line item that can get cut when budgets get squeezed. Use this script to defend your invoices and prove to clients that they can't — and shouldn't — do without you.

DEFENDING COSTS

"You're using AI to get work done faster. So why is our invoice the same?"

Answer:
It's a fair question. AI isn't doing the whole thing (if it was, you'd know). It's making us faster at low-value stuff like admin, reporting etc — and freeing up more time and attention for high-value stuff. What you're paying for is quality outcomes, not the speed of the production process.

Answer:
No. We still own discovery, direction, validation, risk management, stakeholder alignment, and delivery. AI increases the level of thinking and iteration we can apply — which improves outcomes. The fee reflects that.

DEFENDING COSTS

"Are you charging for hours you didn't work?"

POSITIONING AGAINST ALTERNATIVES

"Why can't we just use AI ourselves and do this internally?"

Answer:
You absolutely can use AI tools. The difference is application. Knowing which problems to solve, what good looks like, how to validate outputs, and how to connect work to commercial impact takes experience. AI generates options. Our expertise turns that into results.

Answer:
Your in-house team knows the business deeply — that's a strength. We bring pattern recognition from across markets, objectivity, and dedicated focus. We also absorb delivery risk and capacity pressure so your team can stay focused on core priorities.

POSITIONING AGAINST ALTERNATIVES

"Surely our in-house team could handle this instead?"

JUSTYFYING TIME

"If AI speeds up production, why does the project timeline still matter?"

Answer:
Because production isn't the real constraint. The real bottlenecks are often alignment, approvals, integration, adoption. AI accelerates the parts we control so we get results faster — but strategic work still requires collaboration and sign-off to land properly.

Answer:
Shorter learning cycles. You're testing sooner, spotting issues earlier, and reducing cost-of-delay. That means fewer expensive pivots later and faster time-to-impact — even if the overall timeline looks similar on paper.

JUSTYFYING TIME

"If we're not seeing dramatic time savings, what are we gaining?"

PROVING VALUE

"What extra value do we get by using you?"

Answer:
A continuous improvement loop. We help you measure → learn → optimize — so our value shows up continuously, not just at renewal or on a deliverable date. We flag risks earlier, offering you stronger options, faster iteration, and higher quality. Ultimately that means less friction, fewer dead ends, and less rework.

Answer:
We tie work to KPIs (conversion, retention, cycle time, error rate) and show what we tested, what changed, and what improved.

PROVING VALUE

"How do we know this wasn't just "more output," not better results?"

ADDRESSING RISKS

"Isn't AI risky from a compliance/accuracy perspective?"

Answer:
We use it with controls: human review, privacy, legal/compliance checks, and documented decisions. We're confident that this reduces the risk of errors and keeps outputs defensible.

Answer:
Nothing goes live without expert review and brand alignment. AI supports the process; it doesn't replace accountability. We stand behind the work exactly as we would without AI — with governance and auditability built in.

ADDRESSING RISKS

## "How do we know this won't damage our brand or introduce errors?"

KEY TAKEAWAY

As budgets tighten, services get scrutinized — and you don't want to become just another line item on a spreadsheet. The way to avoid that is to be clear on what you bring to the table, and make it easy for them and their C-suite to consider you as indispensable.

The way to win for your business right now — and always — is to be on top of your profitability, utilisation, and impact.

Where this all comes together is in how you run the work.

Teamwork.com helps client service businesses defend value in an AI-pressured world by making outcomes visible, risks predictable, and roles easier to explain. Using AI, we give project, operations, and finance leaders a shared system to spot issues early, prove utilization, forecast margin impact, and link effort to results clients actually care about.
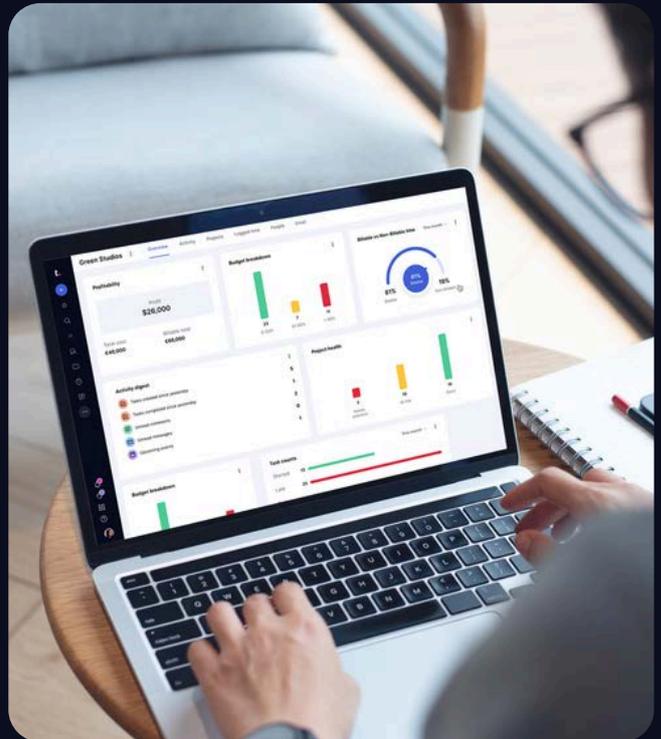
So instead of arguing over hours or outputs, you're equipped to lead value-based conversations — with clarity, confidence, and proof.

Meet the AI tools built for client service teams
AI Project Wizard, AI Smart Scheduler, AI Forecaster

Watch a demo