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 Research Article

## Enhancing SME Performance Through Integrated Business Consulting and Enterprise Architecture

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### ABSTRACT

Small and medium-sized enterprises represent the most dynamic and yet most structurally vulnerable segment of contemporary economies. Their capacity to survive, grow, and compete is increasingly dependent on the quality of strategic decision-making, the coherence of organizational architecture, and the effectiveness of business consulting interventions that translate abstract strategy into operational reality. Over the last several decades, scholarship on small and medium-sized enterprises has expanded dramatically, yet it remains fragmented across domains such as finance, strategy, information systems, and organizational theory. This fragmentation has produced a persistent relevance gap between academic research and the practical needs of enterprise owners and managers, a problem that was formally articulated in the early debates on strategic management and continues to challenge both scholars and practitioners today (British Journal of Management, 2001; Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Within this complex intellectual landscape, the emergence of comprehensive consulting models designed specifically for small and medium-sized enterprises represents a significant conceptual and practical advance. Among the most influential recent contributions to this area is the work of Kovalchuk (2025), who developed a complex model of business consulting that integrates theoretical, methodological, and practical dimensions into a unified framework. Unlike earlier consulting approaches that focused narrowly on financial performance or operational efficiency, this model emphasizes systemic alignment across strategic planning, organizational design, information architecture, and collaborative networks, thereby reflecting the increasingly interdependent nature of modern business environments (Kovalchuk, 2025).

This article builds on that foundation by situating complex business consulting within a broader theoretical and empirical framework drawn from strategic management, enterprise architecture, collaboration theory, and small firm finance. Through a detailed and interpretive methodological design that synthesizes qualitative and conceptual evidence from the existing literature, the study examines how strategic consulting architectures influence organizational learning, planning effectiveness, access to resources, and digital readiness in small and medium-sized enterprises (Brews and Hunt, 1999; Antlova, 2010; Allred et al., 2011). The research addresses a fundamental gap in the literature, namely the lack of integrative models that connect consulting practice to the multi-dimensional realities of small firm development in an era defined by technological convergence and global competition (Ayyagari et al., 2007; Bidan et al., 2012).

The findings suggest that consulting frameworks grounded in systemic logic, such as the model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025), enable enterprises to move beyond ad hoc decision-making toward a form of strategic coherence that enhances both resilience and growth potential. This coherence is achieved not through rigid planning but through the dynamic interaction between learning processes, network relationships, and information infrastructures, which collectively shape the strategic trajectory of the firm (Brews and Hunt, 1999; Borch and Arthur, 1995). At the same time, the article critically evaluates the limitations of such models, including their dependence on managerial capability, institutional context, and the availability of external support mechanisms such as finance and knowledge networks (Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013; Bryson, 1988).

By integrating these diverse strands of scholarship into a single analytical narrative, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of how strategic consulting can function as both a cognitive and organizational technology for small and medium-sized enterprises. It advances theory by demonstrating how complex consulting architectures mediate between abstract strategic intent and concrete operational practice, and it informs policy and managerial action by clarifying the conditions under which such architectures are most likely to generate sustainable value.

## KEYWORDS

Small and medium-sized enterprises; business consulting; strategic planning; enterprise architecture; collaboration capability; organizational learning

## INTRODUCTION

Autonomous Small and medium-sized enterprises occupy a paradoxical position in modern economies. On the one hand, they are widely acknowledged as engines of employment, innovation, and regional development, accounting for a substantial share of economic activity across both developed and emerging markets (Ayyagari et

al., 2007). On the other hand, they remain structurally constrained by limited resources, managerial capacity, and access to formal institutions of finance, knowledge, and technology, conditions that render them disproportionately vulnerable to market volatility and competitive pressure (Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013). This duality has long motivated scholars to investigate the determinants of small firm performance, yet



the cumulative body of research has struggled to produce integrative frameworks capable of guiding real-world managerial action in a coherent and sustainable way (British Journal of Management, 2001; Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

One of the most persistent challenges in the study of small and medium-sized enterprises is the gap between strategic theory and organizational practice. Strategic management literature has historically oscillated between rational planning models and emergent learning perspectives, with each school offering compelling insights but also imposing significant limitations when applied to the realities of small firms (Bracker et al., 1988; Brews and Hunt, 1999). Formal planning approaches emphasize the importance of goal setting, environmental analysis, and resource allocation, suggesting that disciplined strategic processes lead to superior financial performance (Bracker et al., 1988). However, empirical studies have repeatedly shown that many small firms lack the time, expertise, and data required to engage in such processes, leading them instead to rely on intuition, improvisation, and incremental learning (Brews and Hunt, 1999).

This tension is further compounded by the increasing complexity of the competitive environment. The diffusion of digital technologies, the globalization of supply chains, and the rise of network-based forms of organization have fundamentally altered the conditions under which small and medium-sized enterprises operate (Antlova, 2010; Allred et al., 2011). In this context, traditional consulting models that focus on isolated functional improvements are no longer sufficient. What is required instead are systemic approaches that recognize the interdependence of strategy,

structure, information systems, and external relationships, an insight that is central to the complex consulting model articulated by Kovalchuk (2025).

Kovalchuk (2025) argues that business consulting for small and medium-sized enterprises must be understood not as a series of discrete interventions but as an ongoing process of organizational sensemaking and capability building. Drawing on systems theory and strategic management, this model conceptualizes the firm as a dynamic configuration of processes, resources, and relationships that must be continuously aligned with its environment. Such alignment is achieved through a structured yet flexible methodology that integrates diagnostic analysis, strategic design, implementation support, and performance monitoring into a coherent whole (Kovalchuk, 2025). This perspective represents a significant departure from earlier consulting paradigms that treated strategy formulation and execution as separate and sequential activities, often leading to what Bryson (1988) described as a disconnect between planning and action.

The relevance of this integrative approach becomes particularly evident when viewed through the lens of organizational learning. Brews and Hunt (1999) demonstrated that effective planning in small firms is not merely a matter of producing formal documents but of creating processes that facilitate learning about the environment, competitors, and internal capabilities. In this sense, planning and learning are not opposing logics but mutually reinforcing dynamics that shape strategic behavior over time. Kovalchuk's (2025) model can be interpreted as a practical instantiation of this theoretical insight,

providing a consulting architecture that embeds learning within the very fabric of strategic decision-making.

At the same time, the strategic trajectory of small and medium-sized enterprises is profoundly influenced by their position within networks of suppliers, customers, and knowledge partners. Borch and Arthur (1995) showed that strategic networks among small firms serve as critical mechanisms for accessing resources and reducing uncertainty, thereby compensating for the inherent limitations of scale. These networks are not merely transactional but are structured by patterns of trust, reciprocity, and shared understanding that evolve over time. A complex consulting model that fails to account for such relational dynamics risks producing strategies that are technically sound but socially unworkable, a critique that reinforces the importance of integrating collaboration capability into consulting practice (Allred et al., 2011).

The financial dimension of small firm development further underscores the need for holistic consulting frameworks. Access to bank credit remains one of the most significant barriers to growth for micro and small enterprises, particularly in developing and transition economies (Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013). Financial institutions typically evaluate firms on the basis of formal documentation, strategic clarity, and risk management practices, all of which are often underdeveloped in small firms. Consulting interventions that strengthen strategic planning, information systems, and governance structures can therefore have indirect but powerful effects on a firm's ability to secure external finance, a

relationship that is implicitly recognized in the integrated model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025).

Despite these converging lines of scholarship, the existing literature remains fragmented, with strategic management, information systems, and entrepreneurship studies often operating in parallel rather than in dialogue. Enterprise architecture frameworks such as TOGAF, for example, provide sophisticated tools for aligning information systems with business strategy, yet they are rarely adapted to the specific constraints and capabilities of small and medium-sized enterprises (Al, 2009; Bidan et al., 2012). Similarly, studies of innovation diffusion in small firms highlight the importance of contextual and relational factors but often lack a strategic framework for translating innovation into sustained competitive advantage (Choudrie and Culkin, 2013).

This fragmentation constitutes a critical gap in the literature. While individual studies have illuminated important aspects of small firm behavior, few have attempted to synthesize these insights into a comprehensive model that can guide both research and practice. The complex business consulting model developed by Kovalchuk (2025) represents a promising step in this direction, yet it has not been sufficiently situated within the broader theoretical and empirical context of small and medium-sized enterprise research. This article seeks to address that gap by integrating Kovalchuk's framework with established theories of strategy, learning, collaboration, and information systems, thereby producing a more robust and actionable understanding of how consulting can support small firm development.



The central argument advanced here is that strategic consulting for small and medium-sized enterprises must be understood as a form of organizational architecture in its own right, one that structures how information, decisions, and relationships are coordinated across the firm and its environment. By conceptualizing consulting in this way, it becomes possible to move beyond simplistic debates about planning versus emergence and toward a more nuanced appreciation of how strategic coherence is constructed in practice (Brews and Hunt, 1999; Kovalchuk, 2025). Such coherence is not imposed from above but emerges through the iterative interaction of diagnostic insight, managerial learning, and network engagement, processes that are inherently social and context dependent (Borch and Arthur, 1995; Choudrie and Culkin, 2013).

In framing the research problem, it is therefore necessary to ask not merely whether consulting works, but how and under what conditions it contributes to sustainable competitive advantage in small and medium-sized enterprises. This question is particularly salient in light of the increasing digitalization of business processes, which both expands the strategic possibilities available to small firms and raises the level of complexity they must manage (Antlova, 2010; Bidan et al., 2012). A consulting model that fails to integrate digital capability into its strategic logic risks producing recommendations that are obsolete or impractical, a risk that Kovalchuk (2025) explicitly sought to mitigate through the inclusion of information architecture as a core component of his framework.

The remainder of this article develops this argument in detail. The methodology section

outlines a qualitative and conceptual approach that draws on the existing literature to construct an integrative analytical framework, consistent with the interpretive traditions of organizational research (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The results section presents a synthesized set of insights into how strategic consulting architectures influence planning effectiveness, learning processes, and network engagement in small and medium-sized enterprises, grounded in prior empirical findings (Bracker et al., 1988; Allred et al., 2011). The discussion then situates these results within the broader theoretical debates, critically evaluating the strengths and limitations of complex consulting models and identifying directions for future research (Kovalchuk, 2025; British Journal of Management, 2001). Through this comprehensive analysis, the article aims to contribute to a more integrated and practice-relevant understanding of strategic consulting in the small firm context.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodological orientation of this study is grounded in an interpretive and integrative research tradition that seeks to build theoretical understanding through the systematic synthesis of existing scholarly work rather than through the collection of primary quantitative data. This approach is particularly appropriate for the study of small and medium-sized enterprises and business consulting, domains characterized by high contextual variability, complex social dynamics, and the coexistence of multiple theoretical perspectives (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). By drawing on a wide range of conceptual and empirical sources, the methodology enables a deep exploration of how strategic consulting architectures operate across different



organizational and institutional settings, an objective that aligns closely with the holistic model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025).

At its core, the methodological design reflects the recognition that small and medium-sized enterprises cannot be adequately understood through a single disciplinary lens. Strategic management, organizational theory, information systems, and finance each offer partial insights into the challenges faced by small firms, yet it is only through their integration that a coherent picture emerges (British Journal of Management, 2001). Accordingly, the study adopts a multi-theoretical framework that incorporates planning theory, organizational learning, network analysis, and enterprise architecture, drawing on seminal and contemporary contributions in each area (Bracker et al., 1988; Brews and Hunt, 1999; Borch and Arthur, 1995; Al, 2009).

The primary analytical strategy involves a structured literature-based synthesis, in which key constructs and relationships are identified, compared, and integrated into a conceptual model of strategic consulting for small and medium-sized enterprises. This process begins with the identification of core themes in the existing literature, such as strategic planning effectiveness, collaboration capability, digital readiness, and access to finance, all of which have been shown to influence small firm performance in different ways (Ayyagari et al., 2007; Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013; Antlova, 2010). These themes are then examined in relation to the complex consulting model articulated by Kovalchuk (2025), which serves as the central theoretical anchor for the analysis.

In operationalizing this synthesis, the study draws on the logic of comparative analysis, as articulated in strategic management research (Clark, 1997; Bryson, 1988). Rather than treating each source as an isolated piece of evidence, the methodology involves comparing how different authors conceptualize similar phenomena, such as planning, learning, or collaboration, and assessing the degree to which these conceptualizations are compatible or contradictory. For example, the formal planning perspective of Bracker et al. (1988) is juxtaposed with the learning-oriented view of Brews and Hunt (1999) to illuminate the conditions under which planning contributes to or detracts from small firm adaptability. This comparative approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of strategic processes than would be possible through a single theoretical lens.

A key feature of the methodology is its explicit attention to the role of information systems and enterprise architecture in shaping strategic outcomes. Studies of small firm information systems have shown that the alignment between business processes and technological infrastructure is a critical determinant of performance and innovation capacity (Bidan et al., 2012; Bajwa et al., 2009). However, these studies often lack a strategic context, focusing on technical integration rather than on how technology supports broader organizational goals. By incorporating the TOGAF framework and related architectural concepts into the analysis, the methodology enables a more holistic examination of how digital capabilities are embedded within strategic consulting architectures (Al, 2009; Kovalchuk, 2025).

The interpretive nature of the methodology also reflects an awareness of the social and institutional embeddedness of small and medium-sized enterprises. Research on strategic networks and collaboration capability emphasizes that firms are not autonomous entities but are situated within webs of relationships that shape their access to resources and information (Borch and Arthur, 1995; Allred et al., 2011). Consequently, the analysis does not treat consulting interventions as purely internal processes but examines how they mediate between the firm and its external environment, including banks, suppliers, and knowledge partners (Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013; Choudrie and Culkin, 2013).

The methodological rationale for this integrative approach is grounded in the recognition that complex phenomena require complex explanations. As Kovalchuk (2025) argues, the effectiveness of business consulting in small and medium-sized enterprises cannot be reduced to simple cause-and-effect relationships, because it is shaped by the interaction of strategic intent, organizational capability, and environmental conditions. A literature-based synthesis that brings these elements into dialogue is therefore not merely a pragmatic choice but a theoretical necessity.

Nevertheless, this methodology is not without limitations. One of the most significant constraints is its reliance on secondary sources, which means that the analysis is necessarily mediated by the assumptions, methods, and contexts of the original studies (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). While this approach allows for broad generalization and theoretical integration, it cannot capture the fine-grained dynamics of individual consulting

engagements or firm-level decision processes. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of small and medium-sized enterprises, in terms of size, sector, and institutional context, complicates any attempt to derive universal conclusions, a challenge that has been widely acknowledged in the entrepreneurship literature (Ayyagari et al., 2007; Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013).

To mitigate these limitations, the study emphasizes theoretical triangulation, drawing on multiple sources and perspectives to validate key claims. For example, the relationship between strategic planning and performance is examined not only through the lens of Bracker et al. (1988) but also through the learning-oriented framework of Brews and Hunt (1999) and the public and nonprofit planning model of Bryson (1988). Similarly, the role of information systems is assessed through both architectural and empirical lenses, integrating the insights of Al (2009) and Bidan et al. (2012). This triangulation enhances the robustness of the analysis by reducing the risk that any single theoretical bias will dominate the conclusions.

Another important methodological consideration concerns the normative dimension of consulting research. Studies of business consulting often oscillate between descriptive accounts of what consultants do and prescriptive recommendations about what they should do. The present study adopts a critical but constructive stance, recognizing that consulting models such as that of Kovalchuk (2025) are both analytical frameworks and normative guides. By subjecting these models to rigorous theoretical scrutiny, the methodology aims to clarify their assumptions, strengths, and limitations, thereby contributing to a more

reflective and evidence-informed practice of consulting in small and medium-sized enterprises.

In sum, the methodological approach employed in this article is designed to produce a rich, integrative understanding of strategic consulting architectures. By synthesizing insights from multiple strands of the literature and anchoring them in a comprehensive consulting model, the study provides a foundation for both theoretical advancement and practical application, consistent with the call to bridge the relevance gap in management research (British Journal of Management, 2001; Kovalchuk, 2025).

## RESULTS

The integrative analysis of the literature reveals a set of interrelated patterns that illuminate how strategic consulting architectures influence the development and performance of small and medium-sized enterprises. These patterns do not emerge as isolated findings but as mutually reinforcing dynamics that collectively shape organizational capability, strategic coherence, and environmental alignment, consistent with the systemic perspective articulated by Kovalchuk (2025).

One of the most salient results concerns the relationship between strategic planning and organizational learning. Empirical research has long suggested that formal planning processes can enhance financial performance in small firms by clarifying goals and guiding resource allocation (Bracker et al., 1988). However, this relationship is contingent on the extent to which planning is embedded within a broader learning process that allows firms to adapt to changing conditions (Brews and Hunt, 1999). The literature indicates

that consulting interventions that focus solely on producing strategic plans often fail to generate sustained benefits, because they do not alter the underlying cognitive and organizational routines through which managers interpret and respond to their environment (Bryson, 1988; British Journal of Management, 2001).

In contrast, the complex consulting model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025) emphasizes the iterative interaction between diagnosis, strategy formulation, and implementation, thereby institutionalizing learning within the consulting process itself. This approach aligns with the findings of Brews and Hunt (1999), who demonstrated that firms that use planning as a learning tool, rather than as a control mechanism, are better able to cope with uncertainty and complexity. The result is a form of strategic coherence that is both disciplined and flexible, enabling small and medium-sized enterprises to pursue long-term objectives while remaining responsive to short-term challenges.

A second key pattern concerns the role of collaboration and network relationships in amplifying the impact of consulting interventions. Research on strategic networks among small firms has shown that such networks provide access to resources, information, and legitimacy that individual firms cannot easily obtain on their own (Borch and Arthur, 1995). The literature on collaboration capability further suggests that the ability to form and manage partnerships is itself a strategic asset that contributes to competitive advantage (Allred et al., 2011).

The analysis indicates that consulting architectures that explicitly incorporate network dynamics are more effective in supporting small firm



development than those that treat the firm as a closed system. Kovalchuk's (2025) model, with its emphasis on external environment analysis and stakeholder engagement, reflects this insight by positioning consulting as a bridge between the firm and its network context. This is particularly important in the diffusion of innovation, where the adoption of new technologies and practices often depends on relational trust and knowledge exchange, as illustrated in the qualitative study of Choudrie and Culkin (2013).

A third significant result relates to the integration of information systems and enterprise architecture into strategic consulting. Studies of small and medium-sized enterprises have shown that information and communication technologies can function as strategic tools by enhancing coordination, data-driven decision-making, and market responsiveness (Antlova, 2010; Bajwa et al., 2009). However, many small firms struggle to realize these benefits because their information systems are fragmented and poorly aligned with business processes (Bidan et al., 2012).

The synthesis reveals that consulting models grounded in architectural principles, such as TOGAF, provide a valuable framework for aligning technology with strategy, but only when they are adapted to the scale and capabilities of small enterprises (Al, 2009). Kovalchuk (2025) addresses this challenge by embedding information architecture within a broader consulting methodology, thereby ensuring that digital initiatives are guided by strategic priorities rather than by technical considerations alone. The result is an increase in digital readiness and organizational integration, which in turn supports innovation and growth.

A fourth pattern concerns the financial implications of strategic consulting. Access to bank credit is a critical constraint for many small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in developing regions where financial institutions rely heavily on formal documentation and risk assessments (Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013). The literature suggests that firms with clear strategies, transparent governance structures, and reliable information systems are more likely to secure external finance, because they reduce information asymmetry and perceived risk.

Consulting interventions that strengthen these dimensions therefore have indirect but significant financial benefits. By helping firms articulate their strategic intent, formalize their processes, and generate credible data, consulting architectures enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of lenders and investors (Bryson, 1988; Kovalchuk, 2025). This finding underscores the multi-dimensional value of consulting, which extends beyond immediate operational improvements to encompass broader institutional relationships.

Finally, the results highlight the importance of contextual and institutional factors in shaping the effectiveness of consulting. The heterogeneity of small and medium-sized enterprises, in terms of industry, market maturity, and regulatory environment, means that no single consulting model can be universally applicable (Ayyagari et al., 2007; Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Nevertheless, the integrative logic of Kovalchuk's (2025) framework provides a flexible template that can be adapted to different contexts by adjusting the emphasis placed on particular components, such as network development or digital transformation.

Taken together, these results support the conclusion that strategic consulting architectures grounded in systemic and learning-oriented principles are more effective in promoting sustainable small firm development than fragmented or purely technical interventions. This conclusion is consistent with the broader literature on strategic management and organizational design, which emphasizes the need for coherence, alignment, and adaptability in complex environments (Brews and Hunt, 1999; British Journal of Management, 2001).

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this integrative analysis invite a deeper theoretical and critical examination of the role of strategic consulting in small and medium-sized enterprises. At the heart of this discussion lies a fundamental question: how can consulting architectures mediate between the abstract ambitions of strategy and the concrete realities of organizational life in firms that are simultaneously resource-constrained and opportunity-rich? The complex model articulated by Kovalchuk (2025) provides a compelling starting point for addressing this question, yet its implications extend far beyond the boundaries of any single framework.

From a strategic management perspective, the synthesis reinforces the view that the long-standing dichotomy between planning and learning is both conceptually misleading and practically counterproductive. Early studies of small firm planning emphasized the positive relationship between formal strategy and financial performance, suggesting that disciplined analysis and goal setting were key drivers of success (Bracker et al., 1988). Subsequent research,

however, highlighted the limitations of rigid planning in dynamic environments, arguing that small firms thrive through experimentation, improvisation, and emergent strategy (Brews and Hunt, 1999).

The complex consulting architecture proposed by Kovalchuk (2025) can be interpreted as a reconciliation of these perspectives. By embedding planning within an iterative process of diagnosis, action, and reflection, the model transforms strategy from a static blueprint into a living practice of organizational learning. This aligns with Bryson's (1988) argument that strategic planning in public and nonprofit organizations succeeds only when it is linked to implementation and feedback, a logic that is equally applicable to small and medium-sized enterprises. The theoretical implication is that consulting should not be evaluated solely on the quality of its analytical outputs but on its capacity to reshape the cognitive and social processes through which managers make sense of their world.

The discussion of collaboration and networks further deepens this theoretical insight. The literature on strategic networks among small firms has consistently shown that competitive advantage is increasingly derived from relational rather than purely internal resources (Borch and Arthur, 1995). Allred et al. (2011) extended this argument by conceptualizing collaboration capability as a dynamic asset that enables firms to reconfigure their partnerships in response to changing opportunities and threats.

Within this context, consulting architectures that focus narrowly on internal efficiency are likely to underperform, because they ignore the relational embeddedness of small firms. Kovalchuk's (2025)

emphasis on external environment analysis and stakeholder engagement reflects an implicit recognition that strategy is co-constructed through interaction with others. The critical implication here is that consulting must be understood not merely as a technical service but as a social process that shapes and is shaped by networks of trust, power, and knowledge (Choudrie and Culkin, 2013).

The integration of information systems and enterprise architecture into strategic consulting raises equally profound theoretical questions. Traditional enterprise architecture frameworks such as TOGAF were developed in the context of large organizations with significant resources and formal structures (Al, 2009). Their application to small and medium-sized enterprises has therefore been uneven, with many firms adopting isolated technological solutions without achieving strategic alignment (Bidan et al., 2012).

The complex consulting model of Kovalchuk (2025) addresses this gap by embedding architectural thinking within a broader strategic and organizational context. This suggests a reconceptualization of digital capability in small firms, not as a collection of tools but as an integrated system of processes, data, and decision rights. The theoretical implication is that digital transformation in small and medium-sized enterprises is less about technological sophistication than about architectural coherence, a view that resonates with Antlova's (2010) emphasis on the strategic use of information and communication technologies.

The financial dimension of consulting also warrants critical reflection. While access to credit is often treated as an exogenous constraint on

small firm growth, the literature indicates that it is deeply intertwined with strategic and organizational factors (Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013). Firms that lack clear strategies, reliable information, and formal governance structures are perceived as riskier by lenders, regardless of their underlying potential. Consulting interventions that enhance these attributes therefore function as a form of institutional signaling, communicating credibility and competence to external stakeholders (Bryson, 1988; Kovalchuk, 2025).

This insight challenges the narrow view of consulting as a cost to be minimized and supports a more strategic perspective in which consulting is an investment in organizational legitimacy and long-term capability. At the same time, it raises questions about equity and access, as firms with greater resources are more likely to afford high-quality consulting, potentially reinforcing existing disparities within the small business sector (Ayyagari et al., 2007).

Despite these strengths, the complex consulting model is not without limitations. One potential critique concerns its reliance on managerial agency. The effectiveness of any consulting architecture ultimately depends on the willingness and ability of managers to engage with the process, learn from it, and implement its recommendations. Small and medium-sized enterprises are often led by owner-managers whose identities and personal values are deeply intertwined with the business, a factor that can both enable and constrain change (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Consulting models that do not adequately account for these human dimensions risk producing technically sound but socially resisted interventions.

Another limitation relates to institutional context. The majority of the literature on strategic planning, enterprise architecture, and collaboration has been developed in settings with relatively stable legal and financial systems (British Journal of Management, 2001; Al, 2009). In many regions, however, small firms operate in environments characterized by regulatory uncertainty, weak infrastructure, and limited access to formal finance (Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013). The transferability of complex consulting models to such contexts therefore requires careful adaptation, an issue that Kovalchuk (2025) acknowledges but does not fully resolve.

Future research should build on these insights by examining how consulting architectures are enacted in specific organizational and institutional settings. Qualitative case studies, for example, could illuminate how owner-managers interpret and negotiate consulting interventions, shedding light on the micro-level processes through which strategic coherence is constructed (Choudrie and Culkin, 2013). Comparative studies across regions and industries could further reveal how contextual factors shape the effectiveness of different consulting approaches (Ayyagari et al., 2007; Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013).

Theoretically, there is also scope to deepen the integration between strategic management, information systems, and network theory. While the present analysis has demonstrated the value of such integration, much work remains to be done in articulating the mechanisms through which architectural alignment, collaboration capability, and learning processes interact to produce sustainable advantage (Allred et al., 2011; Bidan et al., 2012). Kovalchuk's (2025) model provides a

valuable heuristic, but it should be viewed as an evolving framework rather than a definitive solution.

In this sense, the discussion returns to the broader challenge of relevance in management research. The special issue on bridging the relevance gap highlighted the need for theories that speak to the lived experiences of managers while retaining analytical rigor (British Journal of Management, 2001). By grounding strategic consulting in a complex, multi-dimensional architecture, scholars and practitioners alike can move toward a more nuanced and impactful understanding of how small and medium-sized enterprises navigate the uncertainties of contemporary markets.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this article has sought to develop a comprehensive and theoretically grounded understanding of strategic consulting architectures in small and medium-sized enterprises. By integrating insights from strategic management, organizational learning, collaboration theory, enterprise architecture, and small firm finance, the study has demonstrated that effective consulting is not a matter of isolated interventions but of systemic alignment and continuous learning (Brews and Hunt, 1999; Borch and Arthur, 1995; Antlova, 2010).

At the center of this integrative perspective stands the complex consulting model articulated by Kovalchuk (2025), which provides a coherent framework for linking diagnosis, strategy, implementation, and evaluation into a unified process. The evidence reviewed here suggests that such models enhance strategic coherence, digital readiness, and institutional legitimacy, thereby

supporting both the short-term resilience and long-term growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (Boateng and Abdulrahman, 2013; Bidan et al., 2012).

While no single framework can capture the full diversity of small firm contexts, the systemic and learning-oriented logic of complex consulting architectures offers a powerful lens through which to understand and improve the practice of management in resource-constrained yet opportunity-rich environments. By continuing to refine and empirically test these models, scholars and practitioners can contribute to a more inclusive and dynamic economy in which small and medium-sized enterprises are not merely surviving but thriving.

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