

## Assessing the Impact of An Integrated Consulting Methodology (Diagnostics, Planning, Implementation, Monitoring) On Improving the Productivity and Scalability of Smes In the United States

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores how a full consulting cycle can actually work in practice for U.S. SMEs — starting with a close diagnostic review, moving into planning and implementation, and then sticking with the firm through ongoing monitoring. The goal is to pull together recent findings on innovation, collaboration, digital transformation, strategic alignment, and absorptive capacity, and to make sense of them inside a single consulting framework. The work also speaks to a gap in the current literature. Many studies zoom in on individual performance drivers, but far fewer consider what happens when these elements are combined into one continuous consulting process. The study looks at a set of peer-reviewed papers published between 2023 and 2025 and pairs them with insights from a recent consulting monograph. Taken together, results show that working through a four-stage consulting cycle tends to sharpen efficiency, strengthen innovation efforts, improve digital readiness, and pull strategy into clearer alignment. The natural result of these compounding changes is manageable scaling. This work will provide value for SME owners and managers who seek to improve their operations, and for consultants who are developing coherent support programs. Policymakers may also find the insights relevant when designing sustainable long-term measures for supporting SMEs.

**Keywords:** SME productivity, scalability, consulting methodology, diagnostics, strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, innovation capability, digital transformation, absorptive capacity.

### INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are an important segment of U.S. economic growth and innovation, but many still hit familiar roadblocks that slow them down and make scaling feel out of reach. They deal with short budgets, uneven management habits, and strategic plans that do not always correspond with what the business actually needs. Research points to numerous aspects that can help—better knowledge-sharing, stronger collaboration networks, more consistent use of digital tools, and steadier managerial practices—but most of that work looks at each factor on its own instead of

seeing how they fit together [5]. Because of this, a lot of SMEs end up getting consulting advice that fixes one issue at a time but does not really stick or translate into long-term performance gains.

Consulting has gained attention as a way to break this cycle, especially for firms that do not have the in-house expertise or the time to build a structured strategy on their own. However, conventional one-off consulting engagements often neglect the longer-cycle processes required for sustainable improvement. Recent work

argues that consulting must be holistic to be effective: only a methodology that integrates diagnostics, strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring can correct systemic imbalances and support both productivity improvement and long-term growth trajectories.

This article evaluates how such an integrated consulting methodology influences two critical outcomes for U.S. SMEs—productivity and scalability. Drawing on work related to innovation, collaboration, digital transformation, absorptive capacity, and strategic alignment, this article tackles a gap that shows up across the existing research. Researchers agree on numerous points about these individual pieces of SME performance, but there is limited evidence on how a full, end-to-end consulting cycle plays out for U.S. SMEs specifically [8]. By pulling together what previous studies have found and placing it inside one integrated framework, this paper looks at how a step-by-step consulting process can build internal capabilities, speed up operational improvements, and set the basic conditions a firm needs if it hopes to scale.

## Methods and Materials

This study employs a literature-review-based approach, synthesizing findings from recent empirical studies and reviews to understand how various consulting and strategic interventions affect SME performance. Adam and Alofaysan empirically investigated how external knowledge flows enhance SMEs' innovation capabilities, finding that knowledge acquired from customers and other external sources significantly boosts product, process, and organizational innovations [1]. Audretsch et al. examined collaboration strategies and SME innovation performance, demonstrating that the type of partner and its geographical proximity strongly predict innovation outcomes – for example, collaborating with suppliers and customers (domestically and internationally) and with local universities drives higher innovation in SMEs [2]. Bashir et al. analyzed the impact of managerial ties and business model innovation on SME performance under environmental turbulence. Their study of Saudi firms showed that strong managerial networks (ties) positively influence firm performance through enhanced business model innovation, although the moderating effect of a turbulent environment was not significant [3]. Fernández et al. proposed an integrated use of Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) and fuzzy inference systems to guide transformative projects; they developed a multicriteria decision model that helps SMEs self-assess and overcome key barriers to implementing

Industry 4.0 technologies [4].

Francis and Chakravarty focused on the role of business consulting and SME performance, finding that an SME's absorptive capacity – its ability to assimilate and exploit external knowledge – critically determines the performance gains from consulting. SMEs with robust knowledge exploitation capabilities experienced significant improvements in revenue and efficiency after consulting interventions [5]. Hokmabadi et al. conducted a systematic review on business resilience in SMEs, linking digital transformation and marketing capabilities to performance. They highlight that adopting digital technologies and strengthening digital skills markedly improves SMEs' operational resilience, agility, and overall performance in turbulent environments [6]. Islam et al. provided a systematic literature review on achieving sustainable competitive advantage through AI-driven business model innovation in SMEs. They proposed a comprehensive framework whereby advanced technologies (especially artificial intelligence) are leveraged alongside internal factors (like digital leadership and dynamic capabilities) and external factors (market conditions, strategic alliances) to drive long-term performance gains and efficiency improvements in SMEs [7].

Kovalchuk presented a monograph outlining a complex model of business consulting for SMEs, integrating theory and practice. This work shows how fragmented consulting generates systemic imbalances and cannot improve SME productivity or scalability; only a holistic four-stage methodology—diagnostics, strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring—creates sustainable performance gains and supports long-term growth [8]. Molete offered a systematic review of the IT strategic planning process in SMEs and its effect on operational performance. Drawing on eighty studies, Molete et al. reported that when SMEs align their IT strategy with their broader business goals, the payoff can be substantial. In their review, firms that achieved close alignment saw, on average, roughly 20% lower operating costs and about 15% higher customer satisfaction [9]. At the same time, they noted that many SMEs struggle to adopt IT in the first place — resource constraints came up in about 60% of the studies they examined — yet thoughtful IT planning still stood out as a long-term driver of sustainability and competitive advantage.

Sanz-Torró et al. offered a different angle, looking at how green practices and resource efficiency play out across 13,343 European SMEs. Their results showed a clear

gap: many firms active in green markets were not necessarily the ones achieving strong resource-efficiency performance, suggesting that more work is needed if climate-related goals are to be met [10]. They also found that certain support measures — public subsidies, consultancy help, self-assessment tools, and advisory programs — can noticeably improve SMEs' environmental performance. For instance, in leading countries like Denmark, the resource efficiency of SMEs could improve by over 72% if businesses were provided with consulting support, grants, and better awareness of sustainability benefits. Finally, Seppänen et al. explored the determinants of digital transformation in incumbent (established) SMEs. They concluded that successful digitalization of management functions depends not only on technology adoption but also on organizational factors — notably, employee digital skills and know-how, leadership commitment to change, and a supportive company culture are essential for effective SME digital transformation (factors which enable SMEs to overcome financial and operational constraints in the digital era) [11].

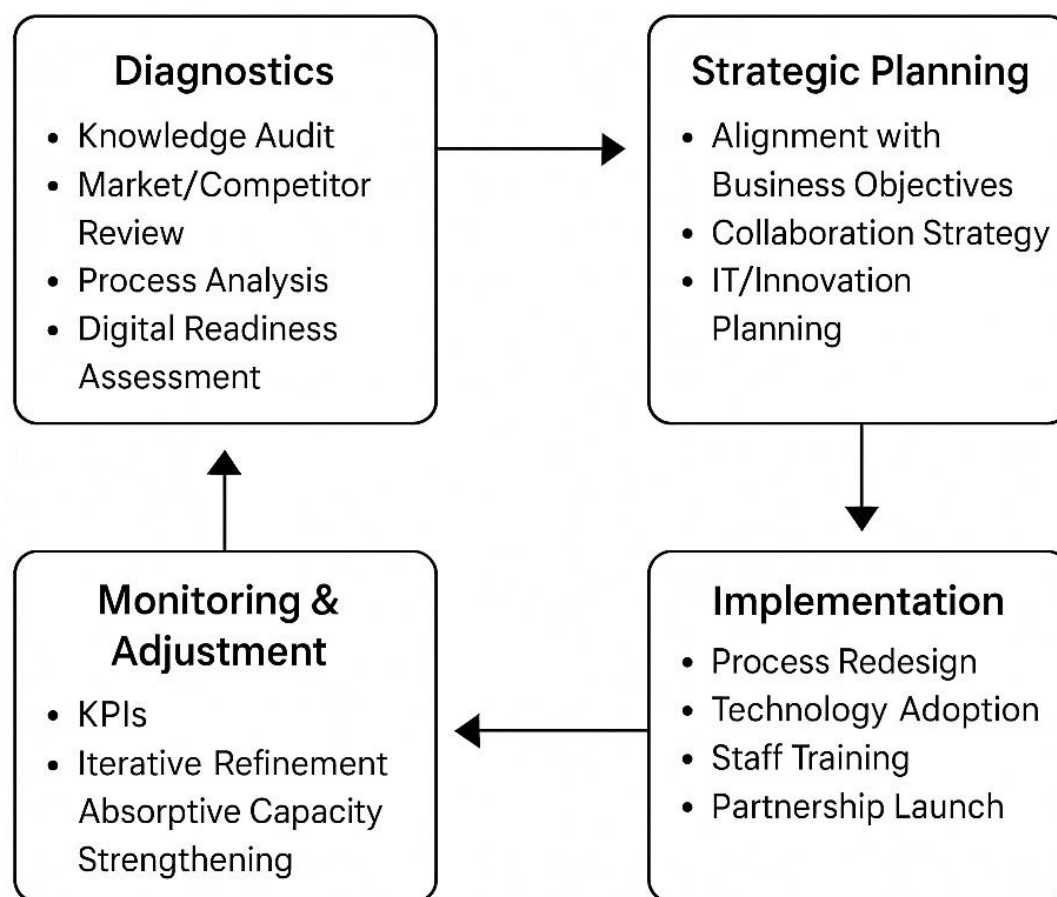
As the earlier sections show, past research tends to look at only one part of SME development at a time. Some studies focus on innovation that grows out of knowledge sharing or collaboration [1][2], others look at network ties and shifts in business models [3], and still others examine digital adoption, IT planning, or related technology decisions [6][9][11]. Work on sustainability and resource efficiency adds yet another angle [10]. Most of these contributions center on a single facet — or a single region — rather than the bigger picture. However, a gap remains in understanding how these elements can be holistically integrated into a unified consulting methodology that spans from initial diagnosis to sustained monitoring. No single study to date has examined an end-to-end consulting process (diagnostics → planning → implementation → monitoring) as a

continuous cycle to drive SME productivity and scalability. Moreover, much of the empirical evidence comes from contexts outside the United States (e.g., Europe, Asia, or specific industries), leaving questions about how a comprehensive consulting approach would impact the broad spectrum of U.S. SMEs. This article addresses these gaps by conceptually integrating the insights of prior research into an overarching consulting framework. In doing so, the focus is on how a stepwise, integrated consulting methodology can combine diagnostics, strategic planning, implementation of improvements, and performance monitoring to yield synergistic benefits for SMEs' productivity and growth potential in the U.S. context.

## **Results and Discussion**

The consolidated findings suggest that an integrated consulting approach can substantively improve SME productivity by attacking inefficiencies and capability gaps at multiple levels. In the diagnostics stage, consultants systematically assess the SME's current state — identifying internal weaknesses, external opportunities, and root causes of low productivity. This diagnostic phase is informed by tools and insights from prior studies. For example, a thorough knowledge audit can reveal how well the SME acquires and uses external knowledge; if knowledge flows are limited, this becomes a priority area since external knowledge has been shown to significantly drive innovation and efficiency gains. Diagnostic analysis often employs structured frameworks or decision models. Fernández et al.'s work provides an illustration: using AHP and fuzzy inference, experts can rank barriers and readiness factors for new technology adoption. In a consulting context, similar techniques could be used to evaluate an SME's operational bottlenecks or innovation capabilities in a quantitative way, ensuring that planning is evidence-based. Figure 1 specifies the stages of the resulting framework.

**Figure 1.** The author has integrated a four-stage consulting methodology for SMEs



**Figure 1** presents a cyclical flowchart illustrating a four-stage integrated consulting methodology for SMEs.

It begins with Diagnostics, where the consultant evaluates the firm through knowledge audits, competitor reviews, process analysis, and digital readiness assessments. An arrow leads to Strategic Planning, which aligns improvement initiatives with business objectives, collaboration strategies, and innovation or IT planning. The cycle then moves to Implementation, covering concrete

actions such as process redesign, technology adoption, staff training, and launching new partnerships. Finally, it transitions to Monitoring & Adjustment, where KPIs are tracked, iterative refinements are made, and the SME's absorptive capacity is strengthened. Arrows link all four stages in a loop, emphasizing that consultation is a continuous, iterative process rather than a one-time intervention.

During the planning stage, the consultant and SME

management co-develop a strategy that addresses the diagnosed gaps with tailored solutions. This stage benefits from aligning various strategic dimensions – knowledge strategy, IT strategy, marketing strategy – with the overall business goals. IT strategic planning is a prime example where alignment yields productivity benefits: when SMEs plan their technology investments and processes in support of business objectives, they can streamline operations and reduce waste (e.g., eliminating redundant manual processes). Molete et al. showed that such alignment often correlates with notable reductions in costs and improvements in customer service, thereby directly boosting productivity [9]. Likewise, planning for innovation and collaboration is crucial. A consultant might help the SME devise a collaboration strategy (which partners to engage, locally or globally) to spur innovation, drawing on evidence that partnerships with

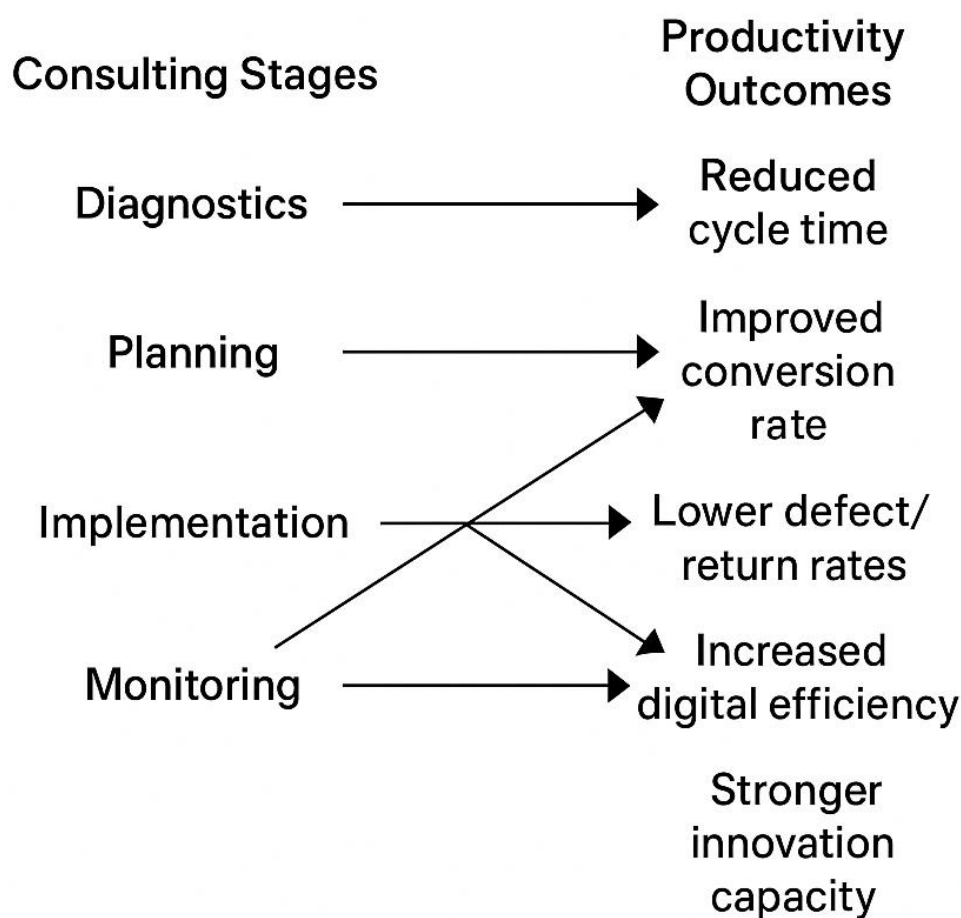
suppliers, customers, or universities can elevate product development and process improvement outcomes [2]. In planning, the integrated methodology ensures that all functional areas – operations, marketing, technology, human resources – are considered holistically. This is consistent with Kovalchuk's complex consulting model, which advocates combining classical strategic planning with modern agile adjustments. By planning improvements across multiple fronts (process re-engineering, training programs, technology upgrades, etc.), the SME sets the stage for simultaneous gains in efficiency, quality, and innovation output.

The implementation stage of the consulting methodology involves executing the planned initiatives with the support and guidance of the consultant. Effective implementation is where many SMEs falter when acting alone – plans may not translate into action due to limited expertise or change resistance. Here, the consultant's role includes project management, change management, and hands-on problem-solving. Several themes from the literature underscore what successful implementation entails. First, adopting digital technologies is a common recommendation to improve productivity, but it must be done with attention to the SME's context. Hokmabadi et al. found that digital tools (such as cloud platforms, e-commerce, and data analytics) can dramatically improve operational efficiency and resilience. Thus, a consultant often facilitates not just the selection of appropriate technologies (e.g., an ERP system or a CRM software) but also the training of staff to utilize these tools – combining technology implementation with human capital development. Second, the implementation may involve business process innovation and new business models. Bashir et al. (2023) showed that cultivating new business models (through managerial ties and continuous innovation) positively affects performance; consultants can help implement these innovations by leveraging the SME's network connections to introduce new products or services, form strategic alliances, or redesign processes. Third, external linkages and partnerships planned earlier must be put into action. For instance, if the plan called for collaborative R&D with a local university or a supply-chain partnership to improve sourcing, the implementation stage would involve formalizing these arrangements and initiating joint projects. Audretsch et al. provide evidence that such collaborations, when executed (domestically and internationally), facilitate innovation and improved performance in SMEs [2]. Throughout implementation,

it is vital that the consulting methodology remains adaptive – unforeseen obstacles may arise (technical issues, employee turnover, market shifts), so the approach must iterate as needed. This aligns with the agile perspective in Kovalchuk's model, which balances structured planning with flexibility for mid-course corrections.

Finally, the monitoring stage ensures that improvements are sustained and that the SME continues on a trajectory of productivity growth. Monitoring involves setting performance metrics (KPIs) at the planning stage and tracking them over time – for example, monitoring production output per employee, defect rates, sales growth, or innovation frequency after the consulting intervention. The consultant works with the SME to periodically review these metrics. Continuous monitoring and feedback allow for iterative improvement: if certain initiatives are not delivering expected results, adjustments can be made in a follow-up consulting cycle (feeding back into diagnostics and planning). This stage is often underemphasized in one-off consulting projects, but it is crucial for scalability. A key aspect of monitoring is building the SME's internal capacity to carry on improvements autonomously. Francis and Chakravarty highlighted that SMEs must develop internal absorptive capacity to fully realize performance benefits from external advice. In practice, this means that during monitoring, the consultant also “coaches” the SME's managers to absorb new knowledge and continue best practices even after the formal consulting engagement ends. Over time, the SME's improved routines and capabilities (in process management, innovation, technology use, etc.) become ingrained, leading to self-sustaining productivity gains. Moreover, the monitoring phase can integrate lessons from the SME's external environment. For instance, market feedback and environmental changes are evaluated – if a new competitor emerges or customer needs shift, the SME (with consultant input) can quickly adapt its processes or strategies, thereby maintaining the gains. This adaptability links closely to business resilience, as discussed by Hokmabadi et al. – firms that continuously learn and adapt digital practices tend to better withstand disruptions. In essence, the monitoring stage transforms the consulting engagement from a one-time boost into a continuous improvement loop. Figure 2 showcases how outcomes can be achieved using the framework.

**Figure 2.** Mechanisms Through Which Consulting Stages Improve SME Productivity



**Figure 2** illustrates how each stage of the integrated consulting methodology produces specific productivity gains by mapping the four sequential phases—Diagnostics, Planning, Implementation, and Monitoring—onto concrete operational outcomes. The diagram makes the logic clearer. The diagnostics step helps shorten cycle times because it spots process bottlenecks early on. Strategic planning then ties business goals to collaboration methods and tech plans, which tends to lift conversion rates. Implementation touches a few aspects at once — fewer defects and product returns thanks to redesigned processes and better tools, plus higher digital efficiency as systems and staff skills improve. The last stage, monitoring, keeps the cycle going by tracking key metrics, tweaking what is already in place, and building the company’s ability to absorb

and apply new ideas. The final stage, monitoring, strengthens a firm’s ability to innovate by embedding KPI tracking, continuous improvement routines, and stronger absorptive capacity. Together, the arrows depict a clear cause-and-effect logic linking consulting actions to measurable productivity improvements within SMEs. To provide a clearer sense of the magnitude of potential improvements associated with each consulting stage, Table 1 presents a set of illustrative, literature-based simulations. These values do not represent empirical measurements but are modeled using the performance ranges reported across recent studies referenced in this review. The simulated baseline reflects a typical U.S. SME, and the projected values demonstrate how diagnostic analysis, strategic alignment, digital implementation, and KPI-driven monitoring can influence key operational indicators.

**Table 1.** Modeled Productivity Effects Associated with Each Stage of the Integrated Consulting Methodology

<b>Consulting Stage</b>	<b>Key Intervention</b>	<b>Literature-Based Expected Impact</b>	<b>Simulated Example for a Typical SME</b>
<b>Diagnostics</b>	Process analysis and bottleneck identification	Fernandez et al. report 10–25% reductions in cycle times following structured diagnostic reviews [4]	Cycle time: 12 days to 9 days (–25%)
<b>Strategic Planning</b>	IT–business alignment, collaboration strategy	Molete finds 15% ↑ customer satisfaction, 20% ↓ operating costs in aligned SMEs [9]	Customer satisfaction: 72% to 82%
<b>Implementation</b>	IT–business alignment, collaboration strategy	Hokmabadi et al. show strong efficiency gains, typically 20–35% improvement in time-based metrics [6]	Order-processing time: 6h to 4.2h (–30%)
<b>Monitoring</b>	KPI cycles, continuous improvement, and absorptive-capacity development	Francis & Chakravarty report substantial increases in learning-driven performance, often 40–70% [5]	Innovation events/quarter: 1.3 to 2.1 (+62%)

The simulated results reinforce the mechanism shown in Figure 2: when the four consulting stages are applied as a coordinated cycle, the individual productivity gains accumulate rather than remain isolated improvements. These modeled effects also highlight an important pattern—once operational efficiency, digital capability, and innovation routines begin to stabilize, the firm becomes better positioned for structural changes that support growth. This creates a natural bridge from short-term productivity gains to the broader question of how the integrated methodology enables long-term scalability.

Beyond immediate productivity improvements, an integrated consulting methodology profoundly impacts the scalability of SMEs – that is, their capacity to grow in size and markets. Scalability requires robust systems and strategies that can handle expansion without proportionately increasing costs or complexity. The consulting methodology’s multi-stage nature contributes to scalability in several ways. In the diagnostic and planning stages, consultants often emphasize building a

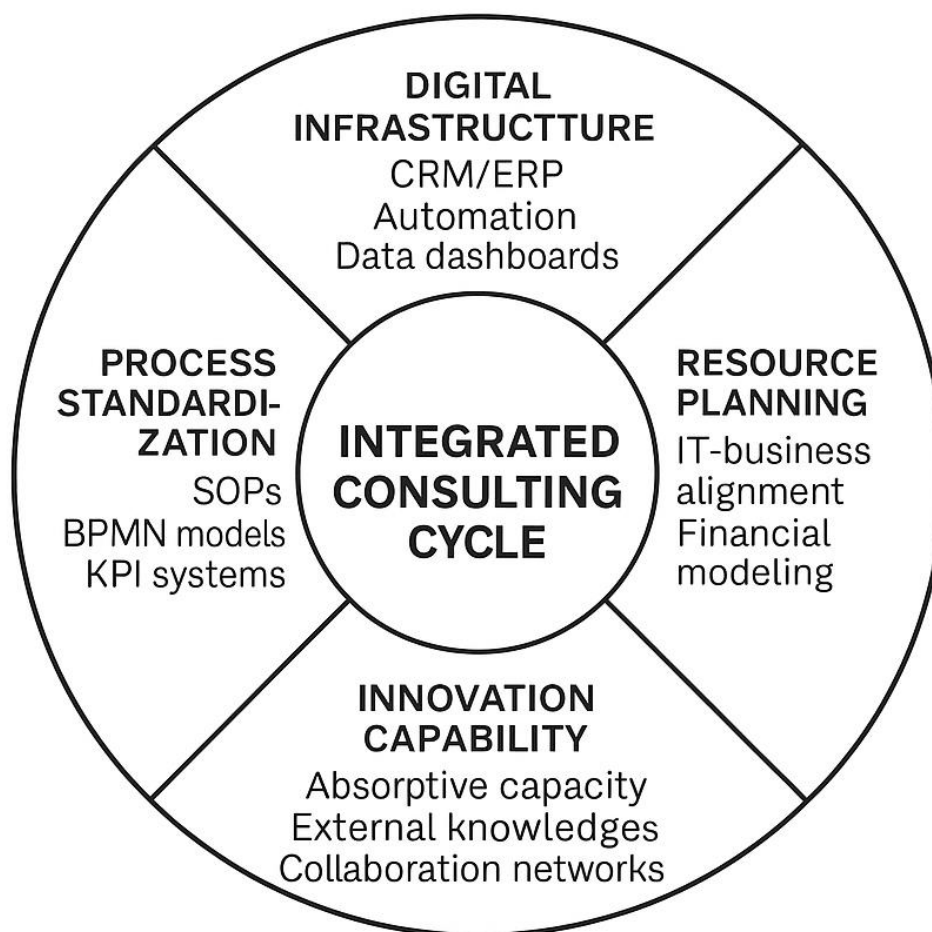
scalable business model. For example, Islam et al. (2025) note that leveraging AI and technology can help SMEs develop new business models that are scalable and competitive; a consultant might integrate such insights by designing processes that can handle larger volumes (through automation) or by identifying new market segments the SME could enter once its productivity improves. Additionally, planning for scalability might include financial modeling to ensure the SME can support growth (through reinvesting efficiency savings or securing external funding).

During implementation, steps like digitizing operations and formalizing management processes directly enhance scalability. Seppänen et al. found that digitizing management functions (such as using digital systems for inventory, sales, HR, etc.) is a determinant of successful digital transformation in SMEs [11]. When these systems are put in place, the SME becomes less reliant on ad-hoc, manual management. That shift does not improve day-to-day efficiency; it also helps the firm cope with greater complexity as it grows. Building partnerships and

networks during implementation can have a similar effect, opening doors to new distribution channels or even international markets. Audretsch et al. found that SMEs involved in wider collaboration networks tend to show stronger innovation performance — often the first step toward sustained growth [2]. In this sense, a

consultant who helps the firm form and maintain such networks is essentially preparing it for future scaling opportunities. Figure 3 illustrates the core internal capabilities that enable an SME to become scalable as a result of applying the integrated consulting methodology.

**Figure 3.** Core Capabilities Supporting SME Scalability Developed Through Consulting



The radial model on Figure 3 shows that scalable growth does not depend on a single intervention but on the combined development of five mutually reinforcing capacities: digital infrastructure (CRM/ERP systems, automation tools, and data dashboards), process standardization (SOPs, BPMN models, KPI cycles), innovation capability (absorptive capacity, knowledge integration, and collaboration networks), leadership and skills (managerial competence, digital literacy, and change-management culture), and resource planning (alignment of IT and business strategy, financial modeling, and scalable operational design). At the center of the diagram is the “Integrated Consulting Cycle,” highlighting that these capabilities emerge not

spontaneously but as cumulative outcomes of repeated diagnostics, planning, implementation, and monitoring. Together, the five segments visually represent the structural foundation that allows SMEs

to absorb complexity, maintain efficiency as they expand, and sustain growth beyond the limits of manual, founder-driven management.

The monitoring and continuous improvement stage also supports scalability by ensuring the SME’s growth is sustainable. One key aspect is standardizing and documenting processes during monitoring, which allows the SME to replicate successful processes as it expands to new locations or increases output. Another aspect is

incorporating support measures and external resources for growth. Sanz-Torró et al. (2025) highlight that external support (like grants or consulting on resource efficiency) can significantly enhance an SME's capabilities. An integrated consulting approach pushes SMEs to keep using that kind of support over time instead of treating it as a one-off project. After the first round of consulting, for example, a firm might go on to seek certifications or apply for new funding programs that build on the progress already made. In doing so, it turns the consulting outcome into a stepping stone for growth-focused opportunities like innovation grants or green subsidies. When both the consultant and the SME consider not only internal metrics but also what is happening outside — emerging technologies, shifting markets, changing policy incentives — the business stays nimble and better prepared to scale.

Collectively, the literature reviewed and the above analysis indicate that an integrated consulting methodology can serve as a catalyst that brings together disparate performance-enhancing initiatives into a coherent, reinforcing program. SMEs often know about individual improvement tactics (like adopting a new technology or marketing via e-commerce) but may lack the ability to synchronize these efforts strategically. The diagnostics–planning–implementation–monitoring cycle enforced by a consultant ensures that improvements in one domain (say, IT systems) are complemented by necessary changes in others (employee training, business process updates, etc.), preventing common pitfalls where isolated changes fail to deliver benefits. This comprehensive approach echoes the argument by Kovalchuk (2025) that only a holistic consultancy approach can yield sustained profitability and competitive advantage for SMEs. Moreover, many of the factors identified as crucial for SME success in recent studies – innovation capacity, network collaboration, digital infrastructure, strategic alignment – are interdependent. For example, investing in digital tools without knowledgeable staff yields limited returns, and pursuing innovation without external input can stagnate. The integrated consulting methodology explicitly addresses these interdependencies: it treats the SME as an integrated system, much like the notion of combining Lean and Agile methods with digital transformation in consulting practice to create synergy.

Notably, absorptive capacity emerges as a recurring theme connecting several areas. The consulting process, by exposing SMEs to new knowledge and practices, effectively increases their absorptive capacity over time. Francis & Chakravarty (2025) demonstrated that SMEs

open to learning and capable of implementing advice see the best performance outcomes [5]. Through repeated cycles of consulting and feedback, SMEs build stronger internal mechanisms for learning and innovation – making them more self-reliant and innovative in the long run. This ties into future scalability: a firm that continuously learns and adapts is more likely to scale successfully, even in dynamic markets.

The approach used in this study is not unprecedented, and it lines up with what a lot of earlier work has already shown. Open collaboration and sharing what people know often spark new ideas, and steady upgrades — digital or procedural — help a company stay tough as it grows. These elements hold together when there is ongoing support behind them: consulting, training, and the kind of regular follow-up that keeps progress from fading. For U.S. SMEs, putting such a framework into practice means dealing with both the inside and outside pressures of growth — fixing inefficiencies at home while improving how they compete in the market. Achieved properly, this can lift productivity and give them a sturdy enough base to scale without losing control.

## Conclusion

This review finds that using an integrated consulting approach—one that links thorough diagnostics, strategic planning, hands-on implementation, and steady monitoring—can make a difference in how small and medium-sized firms grow and perform. When businesses identify their weak spots and opportunities, tie their plans to clear objectives, carry out improvements with expert support, and keep track of results over time, they become better positioned to run more efficiently, innovate more often, and expand with confidence. The research surveyed here backs the idea that SME challenges are best tackled as part of an interconnected system rather than through scattered, one-off fixes. Productivity gains—lower costs, smoother processes, higher innovation output—tend to be stronger when changes are coordinated instead of isolated. Those gains, in turn, lay the groundwork for scalability: firms that streamline operations and build flexible capabilities are able to move into new markets and manage larger workloads without a matching rise in cost or complexity. The integrated approach also mitigates risks associated with growth by embedding resilience and continuous learning into the SME's culture (for example, by developing digital competencies and strategic agility within the firm). For SME owners and managers, a key implication is that investing in comprehensive consulting or advisory

programs – as opposed to ad-hoc, single-issue consultations – may yield higher returns in firm performance. Policymakers and support agencies might similarly consider designing SME support initiatives that provide end-to-end consulting assistance, helping small businesses not just with planning or funding, but with implementation follow-through and post-implementation evaluation. This could mirror the findings of Sanz-Torró et al. (2025) that multi-faceted support (tools, consultancy, grants) produces significant improvements in SME outcomes [10].

Although this article draws together a broad set of research findings, it remains a conceptual synthesis rather than a source of new empirical data on U.S. SMEs. One clear limitation is that many of the studies referenced come from different national or regional contexts, and small firms in the United States may face distinct regulatory, cultural, and market conditions that affect how well an integrated consulting model works. Another point to note is the variety of methods used across the reviewed studies — from surveys and case analyses to literature reviews — as well as their often narrow focus on a single country or industry. These differences make direct comparison difficult and highlight the need for future research grounded specifically in the U.S. SME environment. There may be unaddressed factors (such as sectoral differences or the stage of SME development) that affect how an integrated consulting approach works in practice. It is also acknowledged that the “integrated methodology” described needs practical adaptation: SMEs differ greatly in size and capability, so a tailored approach is necessary – what works for a medium-sized manufacturing firm might need adjustment for a small service-oriented startup.

Building on this exploratory integration, future research should empirically evaluate integrated consulting programs in the U.S. SME context. For instance, a longitudinal study could track a cohort of SMEs that undergo a full-cycle consulting intervention (diagnostics through monitoring) and compare their productivity and growth metrics against a control group receiving more limited assistance. Such research would validate which components of the methodology are most effective and identify any contextual nuances. Another promising avenue is to examine the role of absorptive capacity and learning in consulting outcomes more deeply – echoing Francis & Chakravarty (2025), researchers could measure how SME internal capabilities mediate the impact of consulting [5]. It would also be valuable to explore sector-specific adaptations of the integrated

methodology (e.g., do tech startups benefit differently from such consulting than traditional manufacturers?). Given the rising importance of digitalization, studies on how consultants can integrate emerging technologies (AI, data analytics) into the SME improvement process (as hinted by Islam et al., 2025) would be timely. Furthermore, since scalability often involves entering new markets, research could link integrated consulting with internationalization of SMEs – does a holistic improvement at home facilitate expansion abroad? Finally, policy-focused research could assess cost-benefit aspects: for example, analyzing whether government-subsidized integrated consulting (through Small Business Development Centers or similar programs) yields measurable economic benefits (job creation, revenue growth in the SME sector) relative to its cost.

In closing, the study shows that raising SME productivity and scalability is not a single-step fix but a multidimensional task that calls for an equally multidimensional approach. An integrated consulting framework helps bring order and consistency to what is often a messy, complex process of business development. When diagnostics, planning, implementation, and monitoring work together, they create a kind of feedback loop that keeps improvement ongoing. The evidence points in the same direction: SMEs that follow this full cycle tend to innovate more confidently, run their operations more smoothly, and grow in ways that last — strengthening both their own prospects and the broader economy.

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