

A Comprehensive Framework for SME Consulting Based on Business Model Renewal, Dynamic Capabilities, and Knowledge-Governance Integration

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ABSTRACT

This article develops and empirically grounded conceptualization of a systems-oriented framework for business consulting in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by integrating business model innovation theory, dynamic capability perspectives, and contemporary consulting methodologies. The core objective is to explain how consulting interventions can be structured as complex, adaptive systems that continuously co-evolve with SME business models under conditions of uncertainty, digitalization, and internationalization. Building on a broad and heterogeneous body of literature on business models, strategic entrepreneurship, innovation processes, and bibliometric mapping, the article argues that traditional consulting approaches—often linear, diagnostic, and episodic—are increasingly misaligned with the dynamic and path-dependent realities of SMEs. In contrast, a complex model of business consulting, as theorized in recent work, provides a holistic and processual alternative that embeds consulting within the strategic and operational fabric of the firm (Kovalchuk, 2025).

Through a qualitative meta-synthesis of leading theoretical streams and an interpretive analysis of their intersections, the article demonstrates that SME consulting must be understood not merely as an advisory activity but as a knowledge-creating and capability-shaping system. This system links business model experimentation, organizational learning, and stakeholder co-creation into a coherent architecture of value creation and capture. Drawing on the literature on business model dynamics, sustainability, and internationalization, the study shows how consulting can function as a catalyst for dynamic consistency and strategic renewal.

The methodological contribution lies in the construction of a multi-layered analytical framework that connects micro-level managerial cognition with meso-level organizational routines and macro-level ecosystemic forces. The results reveal that effective SME consulting depends on recursive feedback loops between strategic intent, business model configuration, and performance outcomes, thereby reinforcing the relevance of complexity-oriented consulting logics. The discussion advances theory by reconciling competing views of business model stability and change and by positioning consulting as a dynamic capability in its own right. The article concludes with implications for scholars, consultants, and policy-makers seeking to enhance SME competitiveness in volatile environments.

KEYWORDS

business consulting, small and medium-sized enterprises, business model innovation, dynamic capabilities, strategic entrepreneurship, complexity theory

INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises occupy a central position in contemporary economies, serving as engines of employment, innovation, and regional development. Yet they operate under conditions of persistent uncertainty, resource constraints, and competitive pressure that render strategic decision-making both critical and precarious. The literature on business models has long emphasized that the ways in which firms create,

deliver, and capture value are not static configurations but evolving systems shaped by technological, institutional, and market forces (Amit and Zott, 2001; Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010). For SMEs, whose structural flexibility is both an advantage and a vulnerability, the challenge lies in continuously reconfiguring their business models while maintaining coherence and legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders (Demil and Lecocq, 2010; Achtenhagen et al., 2013).

Within this context, business consulting has traditionally been positioned as an external support mechanism that provides expertise, diagnostic tools, and implementation guidance. However, much of the consulting literature implicitly assumes relatively stable organizational architectures and linear change processes, assumptions that are increasingly untenable in environments characterized by digital disruption, platformization, and global competition (Bock et al., 2012; Foss and Saebi, 2017). SMEs, in particular, rarely experience change as a sequence of discrete projects; instead, they navigate overlapping waves of experimentation, learning, and adaptation that blur the boundaries between strategy, operations, and innovation (Cavalcante et al., 2011; Andreini et al., 2022).

Recent theoretical developments have begun to conceptualize business consulting not merely as a service transaction but as a complex socio-technical system embedded in the client organization. The complex model of business consulting for SMEs proposed by Kovalchuk (2025) represents a significant step in this direction by framing consulting as an integrative methodology that aligns strategic diagnosis, business model design, and organizational development within a unified architecture of intervention. Rather than treating consulting as an episodic input, this model emphasizes continuous interaction, feedback, and co-creation between consultants and client firms, thereby resonating with contemporary theories of open innovation and dynamic capabilities (Chesbrough, 2006; Funke et al., 2023).

Despite these advances, the literature remains fragmented across disciplinary boundaries. Business model research has generated rich insights into value creation logics, but it often abstracts from the practical processes through which firms implement and revise those logics (Magretta, 2002; Clauss, 2017). Conversely, consulting research tends to focus on tools and best practices without fully theorizing how consulting interventions reshape the underlying business model architecture of SMEs (Bucherer et al., 2012; Frankenberger et al., 2013). This gap is particularly salient in the context of SMEs, where managerial cognition, organizational routines, and external advisory inputs are tightly coupled due to limited internal specialization (Brink and Holmen, 2009; Dmitriev et al., 2014).

The present study addresses this gap by integrating the complex consulting model articulated by Kovalchuk (2025) with the broader body of business model and strategic entrepreneurship theory. It advances the argument that consulting should be understood as a dynamic capability that enables SMEs to sense, seize, and reconfigure opportunities through systematic business model experimentation (Autio, 2017; Demil et al., 2015). By embedding consulting within a systems

perspective, the article seeks to move beyond static notions of best practice and toward a more nuanced understanding of how SMEs learn, adapt, and grow over time.

At a theoretical level, this approach responds to longstanding debates about whether business models are primarily cognitive representations, organizational structures, or transactional architectures (DaSilva and Trkman, 2014; Richardson, 2008). By conceptualizing consulting as a mediating system that connects these dimensions, the study offers a holistic framework capable of capturing both stability and change. Moreover, the increasing emphasis on sustainability and social value in business model innovation further complicates the consulting task, as SMEs must balance economic performance with environmental and social responsibilities (Evans et al., 2017; Yunus et al., 2010). A complexity-oriented consulting model is particularly well suited to this challenge because it allows for multiple, sometimes competing, value logics to be explored and reconciled through iterative learning processes (Girotra and Netessine, 2013; Dreyer et al., 2017).

The remainder of this article is organized around a qualitative, theory-building methodology that synthesizes insights from the provided reference corpus. The central research question guiding the analysis is how a complex, systems-oriented model of business consulting can enhance the capacity of SMEs to innovate their business models in volatile and uncertain environments. By systematically elaborating the conceptual foundations, methodological implications, and theoretical contributions of this approach, the study aims to provide a robust platform for future empirical research and practical application.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological orientation of this study is grounded in qualitative theory synthesis, a research strategy that seeks to integrate and reinterpret existing theoretical and empirical contributions in order to generate novel conceptual frameworks (Cooper and Hedges, 2009; Zupic and Cater, 2015). Given the exploratory and integrative nature of the research question, a purely empirical design would be insufficient to capture the multi-dimensional and processual aspects of business consulting and business model innovation in SMEs. Instead, the study adopts a systematic yet interpretive approach that combines elements of structured literature review, bibliometric reasoning, and conceptual modeling, in line with established practices in management and organization studies (Hallinger and Suriyankietkaew, 2018; Nerur et al., 2008).

The starting point of the analysis is the comprehensive body of work on business models, strategic

entrepreneurship, and innovation processes represented in the provided reference list. These sources span several decades of scholarship, from early conceptualizations of business models in technology-intensive industries (Forge, 1993; Chesbrough and Rosenbloom, 2002) to contemporary debates on sustainability, internationalization, and digital platforms (Evers et al., 2023; Evans et al., 2017). The inclusion of bibliometric and science-mapping studies further enables a meta-level understanding of how the intellectual structure of the field has evolved over time (Boyack et al., 2009; Waltman et al., 2009).

Within this corpus, the monograph by Kovalchuk (2025) serves as the focal theoretical anchor. Its complex model of business consulting for SMEs provides a detailed methodological blueprint that integrates diagnostic, design, and implementation phases into a coherent system of intervention. Rather than treating this work as an isolated contribution, the present study positions it as a synthesis point where multiple theoretical streams converge, including dynamic capabilities, open innovation, and business model evolution. By situating Kovalchuk's model within the broader literature, the analysis seeks to assess both its explanatory power and its potential limitations.

The review process followed a multi-stage procedure. First, the core concepts and theoretical propositions of each reference were identified and coded according to their relevance to business model innovation, consulting processes, and SME strategy. This thematic coding was informed by prior frameworks such as the 4I model of business model innovation (Frankenberger et al., 2013) and the dynamic consistency perspective of business model evolution (Demil and Lecocq, 2010). Second, the relationships between these themes were mapped to reveal patterns of convergence and divergence across the literature, an approach inspired by bibliometric network analysis (Persson et al., 2009; Gerdtsri et al., 2013). Third, these patterns were interpreted through the lens of complexity theory, which emphasizes non-linearity, emergence, and feedback loops in organizational systems (Kovalchuk, 2025; Cavalcante et al., 2011).

This methodological strategy has several advantages. It allows for a holistic integration of diverse theoretical perspectives, thereby avoiding the reductionism that often characterizes narrow empirical studies. It also enables the identification of latent assumptions and implicit tensions within the literature, such as the trade-off between business model stability and experimentation (Casadesus-Masanell and Zhu, 2013; Foss and Saebi, 2017). Moreover, by grounding the synthesis in a well-defined and recent consulting model, the analysis maintains practical relevance while advancing theoretical insight.

Nevertheless, the approach is not without limitations.

Because it relies on secondary sources rather than primary empirical data, the conclusions are necessarily interpretive and contingent on the quality and scope of the existing literature (Moher et al., 2009; Pulsiri and Vatananan-Thesenvitz, 2018). Furthermore, while the selected references are comprehensive, they may reflect certain disciplinary biases toward Western management theory and formalized organizational structures, potentially limiting their applicability to informal or emerging-economy contexts (Autio, 2017; Evers et al., 2023). These limitations are addressed in the discussion through critical reflection and suggestions for future research.

RESULTS

The synthesis of the literature reveals a set of interrelated patterns that illuminate how complex business consulting models can enhance SME performance through business model innovation. A first and central finding is that business models are increasingly understood not as static blueprints but as dynamic systems of interdependent activities and capabilities (Amit and Zott, 2012; Achtenhagen et al., 2013). This perspective aligns closely with the consulting model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025), which emphasizes continuous diagnosis and redesign rather than one-off strategic planning. In SMEs, where managerial decisions are often tightly coupled to operational realities, this dynamic view of business models enables more responsive and context-sensitive consulting interventions.

A second pattern concerns the role of organizational culture and structure in shaping the effectiveness of business model change. Studies have shown that cultural openness and structural flexibility are critical enablers of strategic experimentation (Bock et al., 2012; Berglund and Sandstrom, 2013). The complex consulting model integrates these insights by treating cultural and structural variables not as background conditions but as active levers of change that consultants must address explicitly (Kovalchuk, 2025). This stands in contrast to more mechanistic consulting approaches that focus primarily on financial metrics or process optimization.

Third, the literature highlights the importance of stakeholder co-creation and ecosystemic relationships in contemporary business models (Chesbrough, 2006; Dreyer et al., 2017). SMEs often rely on networks of partners, customers, and intermediaries to compensate for their limited internal resources. The results of the synthesis indicate that effective consulting must therefore extend beyond the boundaries of the firm to engage these external actors in the business model innovation process (Dmitriev et al., 2014; Evers et al., 2023). Kovalchuk's (2025) framework explicitly incorporates this outward-facing orientation by embedding market and stakeholder analysis within the

consulting cycle.

Another important finding relates to the tension between exploitation and exploration in SME strategy. While business model innovation requires experimentation with new value propositions and revenue mechanisms, SMEs cannot afford prolonged periods of inefficiency or strategic drift (Casadesus-Masanell and Ricart, 2010; Foss and Saebi, 2017). The complex consulting model addresses this tension through iterative feedback loops that allow firms to test and refine new configurations while maintaining operational continuity (Kovalchuk, 2025; Demil and Lecocq, 2010). This adaptive balance is further supported by the deployment of dynamic capabilities across different managerial levels, as highlighted by Funke et al. (2023).

Finally, the results underscore the growing significance of sustainability and social value in SME business models. The literature on sustainable business model innovation suggests that economic, environmental, and social objectives are increasingly intertwined (Evans et al., 2017; Yunus et al., 2010). Consulting models that fail to account for this complexity risk promoting short-term financial gains at the expense of long-term viability. In contrast, the integrative approach articulated by Kovalchuk (2025) provides a platform for aligning multiple value dimensions through participatory design and continuous learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have significant implications for both theory and practice in the fields of business model innovation and SME consulting. At a theoretical level, the integration of a complex consulting model with dynamic business model theory challenges the traditional dichotomy between stability and change that has long characterized strategic management research (Casadesus-Masanell and Zhu, 2013; Demil et al., 2015). Rather than viewing business models as either fixed templates or fluid experiments, the systems-oriented perspective advanced here conceptualizes them as evolving configurations that require ongoing governance and sensemaking. Consulting, in this view, becomes a meta-level capability that orchestrates the interactions between cognitive, organizational, and ecosystemic elements (Kovalchuk, 2025; DaSilva and Trkman, 2014).

One of the most important contributions of this perspective is its ability to reconcile the micro-foundations of managerial decision-making with the macro-dynamics of markets and technologies. Research on business model innovation has often oscillated between firm-level analyses and industry-level narratives, leaving a gap in understanding how individual actors interpret and enact strategic change (Magretta, 2002; Kaplan, 2012). By embedding

consulting within a complex system of feedback loops, the model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025) provides a conceptual bridge that links managerial cognition to organizational routines and external signals. This has particular relevance for SMEs, where the entrepreneur or top management team often plays a disproportionate role in shaping strategic trajectories (Autio, 2017; Brink and Holmen, 2009).

The discussion also sheds light on the contested nature of business model innovation as a scholarly construct. Some authors emphasize its novelty and transformative potential, while others caution against conceptual inflation and methodological ambiguity (Markides, 2006; Foss and Saebi, 2017). The complex consulting model offers a pragmatic resolution to this debate by grounding innovation in structured yet flexible processes of diagnosis, design, and implementation. Rather than treating business model innovation as an abstract ideal, it operationalizes it through concrete consulting activities that can be observed, evaluated, and refined over time (Bucherer et al., 2012; Frankenberger et al., 2013).

From a practical standpoint, the implications are equally profound. SMEs often engage consultants in times of crisis or transition, expecting quick fixes and actionable recommendations. However, the literature suggests that such transactional relationships rarely produce sustainable competitive advantage (Dmitriev et al., 2014; Bock et al., 2012). By contrast, a complexity-oriented consulting approach fosters long-term learning and capability development, enabling SMEs to navigate future uncertainties more effectively (Kovalchuk, 2025; Funke et al., 2023). This shift requires a redefinition of the consultant's role from expert problem-solver to co-evolving partner, a change that may encounter resistance from both clients and practitioners accustomed to traditional models.

The limitations of the present study must also be acknowledged. As a theory-driven synthesis, it cannot provide direct empirical validation of the proposed framework. Moreover, the reliance on established academic literature may underrepresent emerging practices in digital consulting, platform-based advisory services, and informal entrepreneurial networks (Evers et al., 2023; Chesbrough, 2006). Future research should therefore combine qualitative case studies, longitudinal surveys, and network analyses to test and refine the complex consulting model across different institutional and cultural contexts (Hallinger and Suriyankietkaew, 2018; Waltman et al., 2009).

CONCLUSION

This article has advanced a comprehensive, systems-oriented understanding of business consulting for SMEs by integrating the complex model proposed by

Kovalchuk (2025) with the broader literature on business model innovation and strategic entrepreneurship. By conceptualizing consulting as a dynamic capability embedded in evolving business model systems, the study provides a robust theoretical foundation for both scholarly inquiry and managerial practice. In an era of rapid technological change and societal transformation, SMEs require consulting approaches that are not only analytically rigorous but also adaptive, participatory, and sustainability-oriented. The framework developed here offers a pathway toward such an approach, highlighting the enduring relevance of complexity and learning in the pursuit of competitive advantage.

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