

An Integrated Model for Enhancing Strategic Flexibility and Advisory-Driven Change in SMEs

Prof. Miranda K. Halloway

Universite de Montreal, Canada

ABSTRACT

Small and medium-sized enterprises occupy a structurally pivotal position in contemporary economies, yet they face a uniquely intense convergence of uncertainty, technological disruption, competitive pressure, and institutional complexity. The rapid acceleration of digitalization, the volatility of global supply chains, and the fragmentation of consumer markets have rendered traditional managerial approaches insufficient for sustaining competitiveness and growth. Within this context, business consulting has emerged not merely as an auxiliary service but as a strategic partner in organizational transformation. However, the scholarly literature has remained fragmented between studies of strategic agility, organizational culture, innovation capability, and consulting practice, leaving an unresolved gap in understanding how these domains can be integrated into a coherent model tailored specifically to small and medium-sized enterprises. The comprehensive monograph of Kovalchuk (2025) offers a foundational attempt to resolve this gap by conceptualizing a complex, system-based model of business consulting that links diagnostics, intervention, and implementation within SME environments. Building on this priority reference, the present study develops an original, theory-driven framework that synthesizes strategic agility, organizational culture, dynamic capabilities, and consulting processes into a unified explanatory structure.

The central objective of this article is to articulate how consulting-led transformation can enable strategic agility in SMEs by aligning internal capabilities with external environmental dynamics. Drawing from a wide range of theoretical perspectives including the resource-based view, dynamic capability theory, organizational culture frameworks, and strategic foresight, the study advances a multi-layered conceptual model that positions consulting as both a diagnostic and a generative force within organizational evolution. In contrast to conventional consulting models that prioritize episodic interventions, the framework proposed here conceptualizes consulting as an ongoing co-evolutionary process between the firm and its environment, an idea that resonates strongly with the systemic orientation articulated by Kovalchuk (2025).

Methodologically, the study adopts an integrative qualitative design grounded in interpretive synthesis of the provided literature. Rather than treating the references as discrete empirical findings, the analysis reconstructs their underlying theoretical logics and situates them within a broader epistemological narrative about how organizations adapt, learn, and renew themselves. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how constructs such as strategic agility, organizational culture, leadership, foresight, and innovation media interact within the specific constraints and opportunities of SMEs. The results of this interpretive synthesis demonstrate that consulting interventions are most effective when they simultaneously address structural, cultural, technological, and cognitive dimensions of the organization, thereby enabling both short-term responsiveness and long-term adaptability.

The discussion section further deepens this analysis by engaging with competing scholarly viewpoints on agility, ambidexterity, and organizational change. It critically examines the tension between stability and flexibility, between exploitation and exploration, and between managerial control and emergent strategy. By embedding Kovalchuk's (2025) complex consulting model within these debates, the article shows how consulting can function as a mediating mechanism that translates abstract strategic intent into operational reality. The conclusion argues that future research and practice must move beyond linear models of consulting toward more recursive, learning-oriented frameworks that reflect the dynamic complexity of SME environments. In doing so, the article contributes a theoretically grounded and practically relevant perspective on how consulting can serve as a catalyst for sustainable strategic agility in small and medium-sized enterprises.

KEYWORDS

Strategic agility; business consulting; small and medium-sized enterprises; organizational culture; dynamic capabilities; strategic foresight

INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises have long been recognized as the backbone of most national economies, contributing disproportionately to employment generation, innovation, and regional development. Yet the same characteristics that make SMEs dynamic and entrepreneurial also expose them to heightened vulnerability in turbulent environments. Limited financial buffers, constrained managerial capacity, and dependence on narrow market segments mean that shifts in technology, regulation, or customer preferences can have existential consequences. Within such conditions, the ability to sense, interpret, and respond to environmental change becomes not merely a competitive advantage but a prerequisite for survival, a reality that has been repeatedly emphasized in studies of organizational environments and strategic choice (Child, 1972; Dess and Beard, 1984).

The notion of strategic agility has emerged in this context as a central explanatory construct for understanding how firms navigate volatility. Strategic agility extends beyond operational flexibility to encompass the capacity of an organization to continuously reconfigure its strategy, structure, and resource base in response to evolving circumstances (Chakravarty et al., 2013; Chan and Muthuveloo, 2020). Unlike static notions of competitive advantage, strategic agility is inherently processual and dynamic, reflecting what D'Aveni et al. (2010) famously described as an age of temporary advantage in which firms must repeatedly create and erode their own positions in order to remain viable. For SMEs, this challenge is amplified by their relative lack of slack resources and formalized planning systems, making the cultivation of agility both more difficult and more essential.

Business consulting has traditionally been positioned as a mechanism through which organizations access external expertise to address specific problems, ranging from financial restructuring to information technology implementation. However, as the complexity of business environments has increased, consulting has evolved from a transactional service into a more strategic, relational, and system-oriented practice. Kovalchuk (2025) provides a particularly influential contribution in this regard by proposing a complex model of business consulting for SMEs that integrates diagnostic, methodological, and practical dimensions into a coherent whole. Rather than treating consulting as a discrete intervention, Kovalchuk conceptualizes it as an embedded process that shapes organizational learning, decision-making, and strategic orientation over time. This systemic view

aligns closely with contemporary theories of dynamic capabilities, which emphasize the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments (Hemmati et al., 2016).

Despite these conceptual advances, the academic literature remains fragmented across multiple domains. Research on strategic agility often focuses on large corporations or specific technological contexts, leaving open the question of how agility can be cultivated in resource-constrained SMEs (Ganguly et al., 2009; Mavengere, 2013). Studies of organizational culture and leadership highlight the importance of values, norms, and sensemaking processes in shaping performance, yet they are rarely integrated with consulting models in a systematic way (Denison and Mishra, 1995; Cameron and Quinn, 2006; Kitonga, 2017). Similarly, work on strategic foresight and innovation ecosystems underscores the role of anticipatory thinking and external networks in organizational adaptation, but often neglects the mediating role of consultants who translate foresight into actionable change (Kuosa, 2016; Leigh, 2003; Liang et al., 2018).

This disjunction creates a significant theoretical and practical gap. On the one hand, SMEs are increasingly encouraged to adopt agile, innovative, and foresight-driven strategies. On the other hand, the mechanisms through which these strategies can be implemented, particularly via consulting engagements, remain under-theorized. Kovalchuk (2025) addresses part of this gap by articulating a comprehensive consulting model grounded in systems thinking, yet the broader implications of this model for strategic agility, organizational culture, and performance have not been fully explored. The present article seeks to fill this gap by developing an integrative framework that situates Kovalchuk's model within the wider body of literature on strategic management, organizational theory, and innovation studies.

At a deeper level, the problem addressed in this study concerns the nature of organizational adaptation itself. Classical theories of strategic management, such as those articulated by Child (1972) and Daft et al. (1988), assumed a relatively stable environment in which managers could scan external conditions, formulate strategies, and implement them through hierarchical control systems. In contrast, contemporary scholars emphasize that environments are now characterized by discontinuity, ambiguity, and rapid feedback loops, requiring organizations to engage in continuous experimentation and learning (D'Aveni et al., 2010; Clauss et al., 2020). For SMEs, this shift implies a move away from rigid planning toward more emergent, iterative forms of strategy-making, a process that places new demands on both internal leadership and external consultants.

The role of organizational culture in this process cannot be overstated. Culture shapes how members interpret signals from the environment, how they respond to uncertainty, and how they balance competing demands for stability and change (Denison and Mishra, 1995; Cameron and Quinn, 2006). In agile organizations, culture tends to support openness, experimentation, and cross-functional collaboration, enabling rapid reconfiguration of resources and processes (McLean, 2005). However, in many SMEs, deeply ingrained routines and founder-centric norms can inhibit such flexibility, creating resistance to externally driven change initiatives. Consulting, when informed by a nuanced understanding of culture, has the potential to act as a catalyst for cultural transformation, aligning shared values with strategic imperatives as suggested by Kovalchuk (2025).

The literature on information technology and strategic agility further complicates this picture. Digital infrastructures have become both enablers and drivers of agility, allowing firms to sense market changes, coordinate activities, and innovate at unprecedented speed (Chakravarty et al., 2013; Mavengere, 2013). Yet technology alone does not guarantee agility; it must be embedded within appropriate organizational processes

and capabilities (Gibson, 2009). Consultants often play a critical role in this embedding process, translating technological possibilities into organizational routines and strategic options. Kovalchuk's (2025) model explicitly recognizes this integrative role, positioning consulting at the intersection of technology, strategy, and human capital.

Another important strand of literature concerns the external orientation of firms, particularly through mergers, acquisitions, and alliances. Brueller et al. (2014) show that different forms of corporate restructuring can facilitate strategic agility by enabling access to new resources and markets. While SMEs engage in such activities less frequently than large corporations, they increasingly participate in innovation ecosystems and collaborative networks that serve similar functions (Liang et al., 2018). Consulting can support SMEs in navigating these complex inter-organizational relationships, enhancing their ability to leverage external knowledge for internal renewal, a process again anticipated in Kovalchuk's (2025) holistic perspective.

Taken together, these literatures suggest that strategic agility in SMEs is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to any single factor such as leadership, technology, or culture. Rather, it emerges from the dynamic interaction of internal capabilities and external conditions, mediated by processes of learning, sensemaking, and strategic choice. Business consulting, when conceptualized as a systemic and relational practice, offers a powerful lever for shaping these interactions. However, without a coherent theoretical framework, consulting risks becoming a series of disconnected interventions that fail to produce sustained transformation.

The present study therefore advances a comprehensive framework that integrates Kovalchuk's (2025) complex consulting model with established theories of strategic agility, organizational culture, and dynamic capabilities. By doing so, it aims to provide both scholars and practitioners with a richer understanding of how SMEs can harness consulting to build resilient, adaptive, and innovative organizations. The following sections elaborate this framework through a detailed methodological approach, a descriptive and interpretive presentation of results, and an extensive discussion that situates the findings within ongoing scholarly debates.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological orientation of this study is grounded in interpretive synthesis, an approach that seeks to integrate diverse theoretical and empirical insights into a coherent conceptual framework. Rather than generating new primary data, the study draws exclusively on the provided references, treating them as a corpus of authoritative knowledge about strategic agility, organizational culture, innovation, and consulting. This choice is consistent with the objective of producing a theory-driven, integrative analysis that builds on the depth and diversity of existing scholarship, a strategy also implicit in the comprehensive, system-based approach advocated by Kovalchuk (2025).

The first step in the methodological process involved a close reading and thematic coding of all the references. Each text was analyzed to identify its core constructs, underlying assumptions, and theoretical contributions. For example, works on strategic agility such as Chakravarty et al. (2013), Chan and Muthuveloo (2020), and Clauss et al. (2020) were examined for how they define agility, what mechanisms they propose, and what contextual factors they emphasize. Similarly, texts on organizational culture and leadership, including Denison and Mishra (1995), Cameron and Quinn (2006), and Kitonga (2017), were analyzed to extract their insights into how values, norms, and leadership practices shape organizational outcomes.

In parallel, literature on environmental scanning, foresight, and innovation ecosystems, such as Daft et al. (1988), Kuosa (2016), Leigh (2003), and Liang et al. (2018), was coded for its treatment of uncertainty, anticipation, and external engagement. Finally, studies focusing on consulting, information technology, and performance measurement, including Gibson (2009), Chaker et al. (2017), and Kovalchuk (2025), were examined to understand how external expertise and analytical frameworks support organizational decision-making.

Thematic codes were then clustered into higher-order categories that reflect the multidimensional nature of strategic agility. These categories included environmental sensing, organizational learning, cultural alignment, technological enablement, and strategic reconfiguration. The relationships among these categories were explored through constant comparison, a qualitative technique that allows patterns and tensions to emerge from the data (Hemmati et al., 2016). This process revealed both convergences and divergences in the literature, providing a basis for constructing an integrative model.

A key methodological principle guiding this synthesis was theoretical triangulation. By juxtaposing different theoretical perspectives, such as the resource-based view, dynamic capability theory, and organizational culture theory, the analysis sought to avoid the limitations of any single framework (Ismail et al., 2010; Madsen, 2007). Kovalchuk's (2025) complex consulting model served as a unifying lens through which these perspectives could be integrated, as it explicitly acknowledges the interdependence of strategy, structure, and human agency.

The interpretive nature of this methodology also required attention to context, particularly the specific characteristics of SMEs. Unlike large corporations, SMEs often operate with informal structures, personalized leadership, and limited formalization of processes. These features influence how concepts such as agility, culture, and consulting manifest in practice (Ganguly et al., 2009; Ganiyu, 2017). The analysis therefore remained sensitive to scale, recognizing that theoretical constructs developed in large-firm contexts must be adapted to the realities of smaller organizations.

One limitation of this methodology is that it relies on secondary sources, which may reflect particular disciplinary biases or methodological constraints. However, the breadth and depth of the provided references mitigate this risk by encompassing multiple fields and perspectives. Moreover, the use of Kovalchuk (2025) as a central integrative reference ensures coherence, as that work itself synthesizes theory, methodology, and practice in a comprehensive manner.

Another limitation concerns the absence of empirical validation within this study. While the interpretive synthesis yields a rich conceptual framework, it does not directly test hypotheses or measure outcomes. Nevertheless, this limitation is consistent with the study's objective of advancing theory rather than providing immediate empirical generalizations. As argued by Gary et al. (2012), robust mental models and conceptual clarity are essential precursors to effective empirical inquiry and strategic decision-making.

Through this methodological approach, the study produces a layered, nuanced understanding of how consulting-led transformation can foster strategic agility in SMEs. The results of this synthesis are presented in the following section, where the emergent framework is described and interpreted in relation to the existing literature.

RESULTS

The interpretive synthesis of the provided literature yields a multifaceted framework in which strategic agility emerges as the outcome of interacting organizational, technological, and cognitive processes, all of which can be shaped by consulting interventions. Central to this framework is the insight that agility is not a singular capability but a dynamic configuration of sensing, seizing, and transforming activities, a pattern that resonates with the dynamic capability perspective articulated by Hemmati et al. (2016) and further elaborated in Kovalchuk's (2025) complex consulting model.

One of the most salient results of the synthesis is the identification of environmental sensing as a foundational component of strategic agility. Daft et al. (1988) and Dess and Beard (1984) demonstrate that organizations differ in their ability to scan and interpret environmental signals, with significant implications for performance. In SMEs, this sensing function is often concentrated in a small number of individuals, typically founders or senior managers, which can both accelerate decision-making and create blind spots. Consulting, as conceptualized by Kovalchuk (2025), introduces an external perspective that can broaden and systematize environmental scanning, reducing cognitive biases and enhancing strategic awareness.

A second key result concerns the role of organizational culture in enabling or constraining agility. Denison and Mishra (1995) and Cameron and Quinn (2006) show that cultures characterized by adaptability, involvement, and a shared sense of purpose are more likely to support innovation and change. The synthesis reveals that consulting interventions that ignore cultural dynamics often fail to produce lasting impact, whereas those that explicitly address values, norms, and identity can catalyze deep transformation. Kovalchuk (2025) emphasizes this point by integrating cultural diagnostics into the consulting process, thereby aligning strategic recommendations with the lived realities of organizational members.

Technological enablement emerges as a third pillar of the framework. Studies by Chakravarty et al. (2013) and Mavengere (2013) demonstrate that information technology competencies enhance agility by facilitating real-time data analysis, coordination, and innovation. However, the synthesis also reveals that technology is only as effective as the organizational processes that support its use. Consulting plays a critical role in bridging this gap, translating technological investments into new ways of working and decision-making, a process again highlighted in Kovalchuk's (2025) model.

A fourth result pertains to strategic reconfiguration, the ability of firms to realign resources, structures, and partnerships in response to change. Brueller et al. (2014) and Clauss et al. (2020) show that firms that can balance exploration and exploitation achieve superior performance in volatile environments. For SMEs, this balance is particularly challenging due to resource constraints, yet consulting can provide both analytical tools and experiential learning opportunities that support ambidextrous strategies, as suggested by Kovalchuk (2025).

Finally, the synthesis underscores the importance of strategic foresight and external engagement. Kuosa (2016) and Leigh (2003) argue that organizations must anticipate multiple possible futures rather than extrapolate from the past. Liang et al. (2018) further demonstrate that user-driven innovation and ecosystem participation enhance strategic agility. Consulting, in this context, serves as a conduit through which foresight and external knowledge are integrated into organizational practice, reinforcing the systemic orientation of Kovalchuk's (2025) approach.

Together, these results form a coherent picture of consulting-led strategic agility as a complex, multi-level

phenomenon. The following discussion elaborates this framework in relation to broader scholarly debates and explores its implications for theory and practice.

DISCUSSION

The integrative framework developed in this study invites a rethinking of both strategic agility and business consulting as mutually constitutive processes rather than separate domains. At the theoretical level, it aligns with the view that competitive advantage in contemporary environments is transient and must be continually recreated through organizational learning and adaptation (D'Aveni et al., 2010; Madsen, 2007). Kovalchuk's (2025) complex consulting model provides a crucial bridge between this abstract insight and the concrete practices through which SMEs attempt to navigate uncertainty.

One of the central debates in the literature concerns the tension between stability and change. Organizational culture scholars argue that shared values and routines provide coherence and identity, yet these same elements can inhibit responsiveness when environments shift (Denison and Mishra, 1995; McLean, 2005). Strategic agility scholars, by contrast, emphasize flexibility and experimentation, sometimes at the expense of continuity (Chakravarty et al., 2013; Chan and Muthuveloo, 2020). The framework proposed here, informed by Kovalchuk (2025), suggests that consulting can mediate this tension by facilitating reflective dialogue within organizations, allowing them to reinterpret their cultural foundations in light of new strategic challenges.

Another important debate concerns the locus of strategic agency. Classical theories of strategic choice emphasize managerial discretion (Child, 1972), whereas more recent perspectives highlight distributed cognition and emergent strategy (Gary et al., 2012). In SMEs, where leadership is often personalized and informal, this debate takes on particular significance. Consulting, when practiced as a collaborative and learning-oriented process, can democratize strategic thinking, enabling a broader range of organizational members to participate in sensemaking and innovation, a dynamic explicitly recognized in Kovalchuk's (2025) participatory approach.

The role of technology further complicates these issues. While digital tools can enhance agility, they can also create new dependencies and rigidities if not integrated thoughtfully (Gibson, 2009; Chakravarty et al., 2013). The consulting-led framework emphasizes the importance of aligning technological investments with strategic intent and cultural readiness, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of technology-driven determinism. This alignment is a core element of Kovalchuk's (2025) systemic methodology, which treats technology as one component of a broader organizational ecosystem.

From a practical perspective, the framework suggests that SMEs should view consulting not as a one-off expense but as a strategic partnership oriented toward continuous capability development. This perspective challenges traditional procurement models and calls for new forms of relational contracting and trust-building, themes that resonate with the relational view of competitive advantage implicit in Clauss et al. (2020) and Brueller et al. (2014). By embedding consultants within ongoing processes of learning and foresight, SMEs can enhance their ability to anticipate and respond to change.

The limitations of the present study, including its reliance on secondary sources and conceptual synthesis, point to fruitful avenues for future research. Empirical studies could test the proposed framework in diverse SME contexts, examining how different consulting practices influence strategic agility and performance over time. Comparative research could also explore how national and institutional environments shape the effectiveness

of consulting-led transformation, an issue only indirectly addressed in the current literature (Ismail et al., 2010; Ganiyu, 2017).

In theoretical terms, future work might further integrate insights from complexity theory, innovation studies, and organizational learning into the consulting-agility nexus. Kovalchuk's (2025) monograph provides a strong foundation for such integration, but there remains much to be done in articulating how micro-level interactions among consultants and organizational members give rise to macro-level patterns of strategic adaptation.

CONCLUSION

This article has advanced a comprehensive, theory-driven framework for understanding how business consulting can foster strategic agility in small and medium-sized enterprises. By synthesizing a diverse body of literature through the unifying lens of Kovalchuk's (2025) complex consulting model, it has shown that agility emerges from the dynamic interplay of environmental sensing, cultural alignment, technological enablement, strategic reconfiguration, and foresight-driven learning. For SMEs facing unprecedented uncertainty, consulting offers not merely technical solutions but a pathway toward deeper organizational resilience and adaptability. Future research and practice must build on this insight to develop more holistic, participatory, and learning-oriented approaches to consulting and strategic management.

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