

Theoretical and methodological foundations of comprehensive business consulting

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Abstract

The article examines issues related to the theoretical and methodological framework of comprehensive business consulting. Modern business conditions are characterized by high dynamism, significant complexity of market processes, and intensified competition. Consequently, there is an increasing need for an integrative approach as a tool for strategic management, optimization, and enhancing the competitiveness of economic entities. However, the absence of a unified approach to this field, as well as considerable divergence among scholars regarding its content, structure, and effectiveness, creates a methodological gap between conceptual propositions and the practice of consulting. The aim of the study is to systematize existing views on comprehensive business consulting in light of contemporary trends and challenges. During the research, contradictions related to the integration of various methodological approaches were identified. It was concluded that there is a necessity to develop a multilayered concept of business consulting that encompasses strategic, organizational, and technological aspects of the interaction between consultants and clients. The author's contribution lies in formulating recommendations for the further development of the theoretical and methodological framework and outlining a vision for the future of the field under analysis. The presented materials will be useful for scholars engaged in strategic management and consulting issues, practicing business consultants, company executives, and developers of educational programs in the fields of management and entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Integrative approach; Comprehensive business consulting; Consulting activity; Methodology; Entrepreneurship; Strategic management; Theory; Effectiveness

1. Introduction

In today's era of economic turbulence and accelerating digital transformation, business structures face the necessity of rapid adaptation to the ever-changing market conditions. This situation understandably creates a demand for highly qualified consulting support, which underlines the relevance of researching the phenomenon of comprehensive business consulting. According to statistical data, the global business consulting industry is valued at over 1 trillion USD and is forecast to grow at a compound annual rate of 8% by 2028 [3]. The key issue lies in the apparent contradiction between the fragmented nature of existing theoretical approaches in this field and the objective need to establish an integrated methodological framework for providing comprehensive consulting services. The absence of a systematic understanding of the conceptual and methodological foundations hampers the development of this field and significantly reduces the effectiveness of practical application of the corresponding mechanisms. This article is aimed at filling this gap.

2. Materials and Methods

In the scientific literature dedicated to this topic, it is appropriate to distinguish several groups of studies. For instance, R. Lee [6] examines the impact of consultant competencies and project leader skills on business performance through the quality of consulting services. The informative work of B. Mihailović, K. Radosavljević, and V. Popović [7] considers

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this field as a factor in improving human resource management knowledge. A number of studies focus on economic and organizational aspects. M. Stone and B. Parnell [10] analyze the business models of consulting firms, identifying key factors for their successful functioning and transformation under changing market conditions. A statistical review of the state of the industry [3] provides quantitative data on developmental trends through 2025 and beyond, helping to assess dynamics and structural changes.

In turn, I. Kogut, O. Derkutsa, and O. Falshovnyk [5] evaluate the role of information technologies in managing the consulting business, demonstrating how digital tools transform the working methods of specialists and increase project efficiency. In the realm of technological innovations, the publication by M. Contarino, P. Weritz, and I. Skute [4] is also noteworthy—the authors investigate how consulting companies adapt to new realities and develop innovative offerings for clients in a virtual environment.

A. Asadi [1] examines the role of the mental attitudes of small business owners in using these services, identifying psychological barriers and motivational determinants that influence the decision to consult, and suggests methods for overcoming cognitive biases and forming partnership relationships. U. Molina Piero Jesús, A. Ju. Guillén, M. B. Blanco, and E. Hernández-Runque [8] study the specifics of consulting for business startups, outlining particular approaches and methods for working with new entrepreneurs, emphasizing the importance of tailoring methods to the unique needs and limitations of startup projects. M. Radov [9] identifies and systematizes new trends in business consulting, forecasting the evolution of the industry (including a move toward comprehensive solutions) and changes in client demands. The research by I. V. Borysenko [2] raises contentious issues at the intersection of entrepreneurship, education, and consulting, forming an understanding of promising directions for scientific inquiry and methodological innovations.

A review of the sources reveals several discrepancies and gaps in the scientific approaches. First, there is a disconnect between technological and psychological studies. In works focused on the application of new technologies, client acceptance aspects are rarely considered, and vice versa. Second, a dichotomy exists between viewing consulting as knowledge transfer and as a solution to specific business problems, reflecting a fundamental difference in understanding the nature of the activity. Third, there is a contradiction between the narrow specialization of consulting services and the growing need for comprehensive, integrated solutions.

The following problem areas remain insufficiently addressed: the methodological foundations for measuring the effectiveness of comprehensive business consulting; the integration of its various aspects into a single system; adaptation of approaches to national and cultural peculiarities; ethical aspects in the context of digitalization; and mechanisms for institutionalization and standardization.

This article employs the following methods: comparison, processing of statistical summaries, content analysis, analytical generalization, and a systemic approach.

3. Results and Discussion

Traditionally, business consulting is defined as professional assistance provided by external specialists to address an organization's problems [1, 4, 8]. However, this definition does not capture the specificity of a truly comprehensive approach. In this study, comprehensiveness is proposed to be understood as a multimodal expert support system that integrates a variety of tools—diagnostic, analytical, design, and implementation—into a single methodological framework aimed at optimizing the business processes of the client organization.

Comprehensiveness in this context manifests in several dimensions (see Fig. 1).

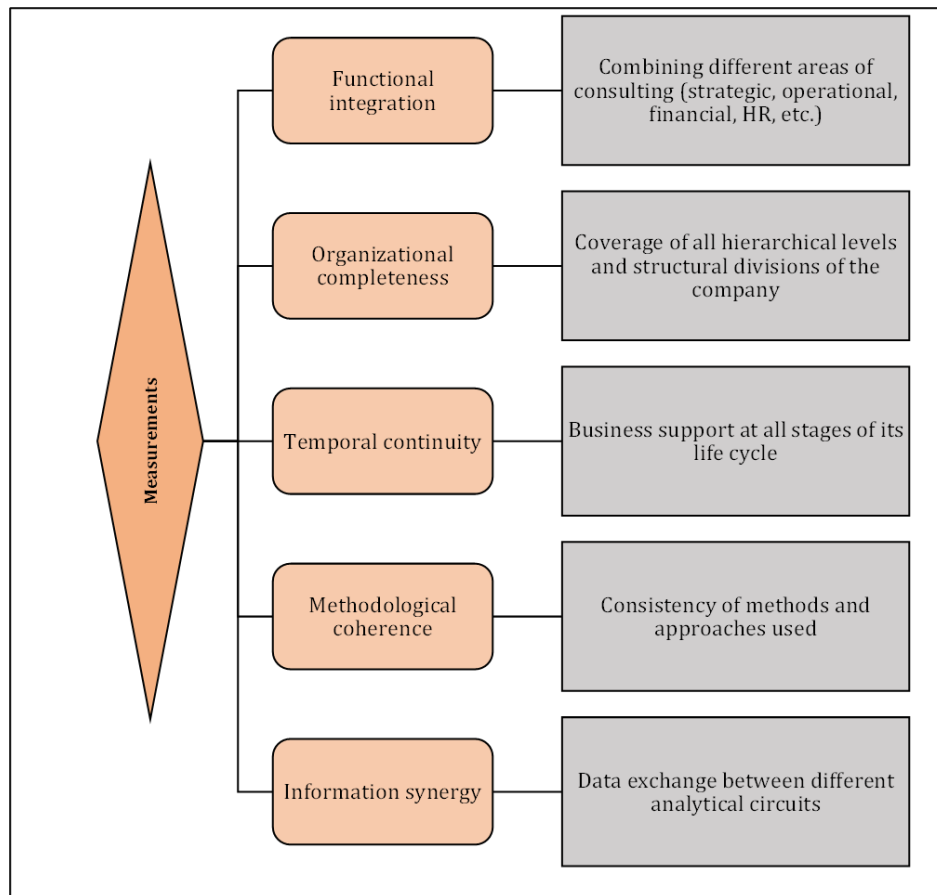


Figure 1 Measurement of complexity in business consulting (compiled by the author based on [2, 4, 5, 9])

The theoretical and methodological foundations are formed at the intersection of several scientific paradigms. From a systems perspective, the organization is viewed as an open system that functions in constant interaction with its external environment. Key principles include holism, hierarchy, and emergence, with consulting interventions directed at optimizing internal system linkages.

Within the resource paradigm, attention is focused on the efficiency of allocating and utilizing material, financial, intellectual, and temporal resources of the organization. Consulting interactions emphasize identifying and activating the company's latent potential.

The cognitive-informational approach is based on the concept of the operating entity as a self-learning system that accumulates organizational knowledge. Consulting efforts are directed at improving the mechanisms for generating, transferring, and capitalizing corporate knowledge.

The process paradigm concentrates on the optimization of business processes, their reengineering, and adaptation to changing conditions. Consulting is focused on establishing effective operational algorithms.

Finally, drawing on the network paradigm, organizations are examined as nodes within a complex web of interorganizational interactions. Consulting work centers on establishing external connections and positioning the company within its industry ecosystem.

The integration of the approaches described above creates a multifaceted methodological foundation for developing solutions that take into account the multidimensionality of modern business. A distinctive feature of the methodological support for comprehensive business consulting is the principle of triangulation, which involves the application of various schemes to enhance the validity of the obtained results. The following forms of triangulation are distinguished (see Fig. 2).

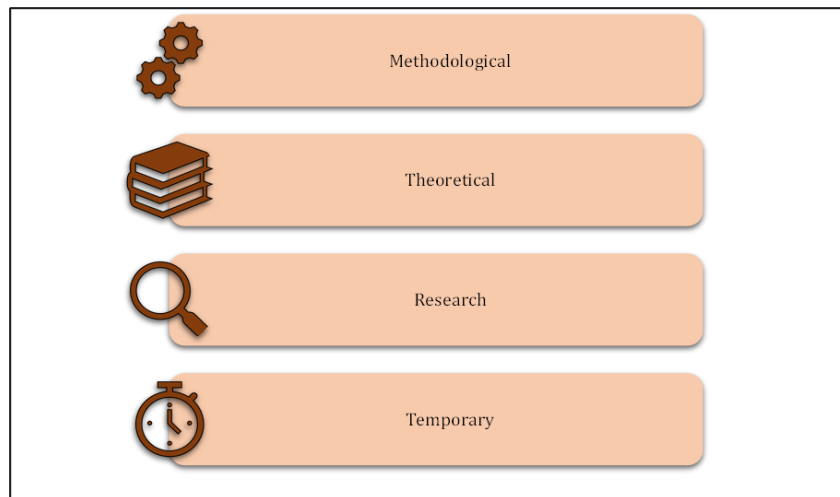


Figure 2 Forms of triangulation in the context of methodological support for integrated business consulting (compiled by the author on the basis of [2, 6, 9])

Thus, the methodological approach involves combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative methods (statistical and multifactor analysis, econometric modeling) allow for the identification of objective patterns in business functioning, while the qualitative methods (in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation) provide insight into the subjective aspects of organizational culture as well as informal interaction mechanisms.

Theoretical triangulation is manifested in the interpretation of the obtained data from various conceptual perspectives. For example, an analysis of organizational structure can be conducted from the standpoint of classical management theory as well as institutional economics.

The research triangulation form entails the involvement of several analysts with different professional specializations to interpret the same set of information. This approach helps to avoid professional bias and to form a multifaceted view of the problem.

Temporal triangulation involves studying the object within various chronological contexts—retrospective (analysis of historical data), current (diagnosis of the present state), and prospective (forecasting future trends).

The procedural model of integrated business consulting comprises several sequential phases (see Table 1).

Table 1 Phases of the procedural model of integrated business consulting (compiled by the author based on [1, 2, 5, 8, 10])

Phase	Description
Pre-diagnostic Stage	Initial contact with the client, formation of a consulting alliance, definition of project boundaries, and alignment of expectations between parties. At this stage, a preliminary hypothesis regarding the problematic situation is formed, and information sources and key project stakeholders are identified.
Multi-faceted Diagnosis	A comprehensive examination of the organization is conducted across multiple areas.
Integral Analysis	Diagnostic information is synthesized, causal relationships between different aspects of the company's activities are identified, and a comprehensive model of the problematic situation is constructed. Methods such as systems, correlation, and factor analysis, as well as cognitive mapping, are applied.
Intervention Design	A set of interrelated measures is developed to address the identified problems. A "road map" for change is formulated, specifying concrete steps, required resources, responsible persons, and control points.

Implementation Stage	The developed solutions are implemented with the support of consultants. A key aspect is overcoming resistance to change, which requires the application of specific methods of organizational development (information dissemination, engagement, training, and incentives).
Control and Evaluation Stage	The implementation of the adopted solutions is monitored, their effectiveness is evaluated, and adjustments are made. Metrics and indicators are developed to objectively assess the success of the consulting project.
Institutionalization	The achieved changes are consolidated, and knowledge and competencies are transferred from the consultants to the client organization's employees. Mechanisms for long-term support are established.

The methodological arsenal of integrated business consulting includes a variety of analytical and design tools:

- Diagnostic tools (financial and economic analysis, strategic analysis, process modeling, organizational diagnostics, market research);
- Analytical tools (statistical methods, simulation modeling, multicriteria optimization, expert evaluation);
- Design tools (business process reengineering, organizational design, financial and investment planning, strategic planning and road mapping);
- Implementation tools (change management methods, organizational development, project management, training and personnel development).

Modern integrated business consulting relies on information-analytical systems that ensure the collection, processing, and interpretation of large volumes of data. Figure 3 presents the key technological platforms.

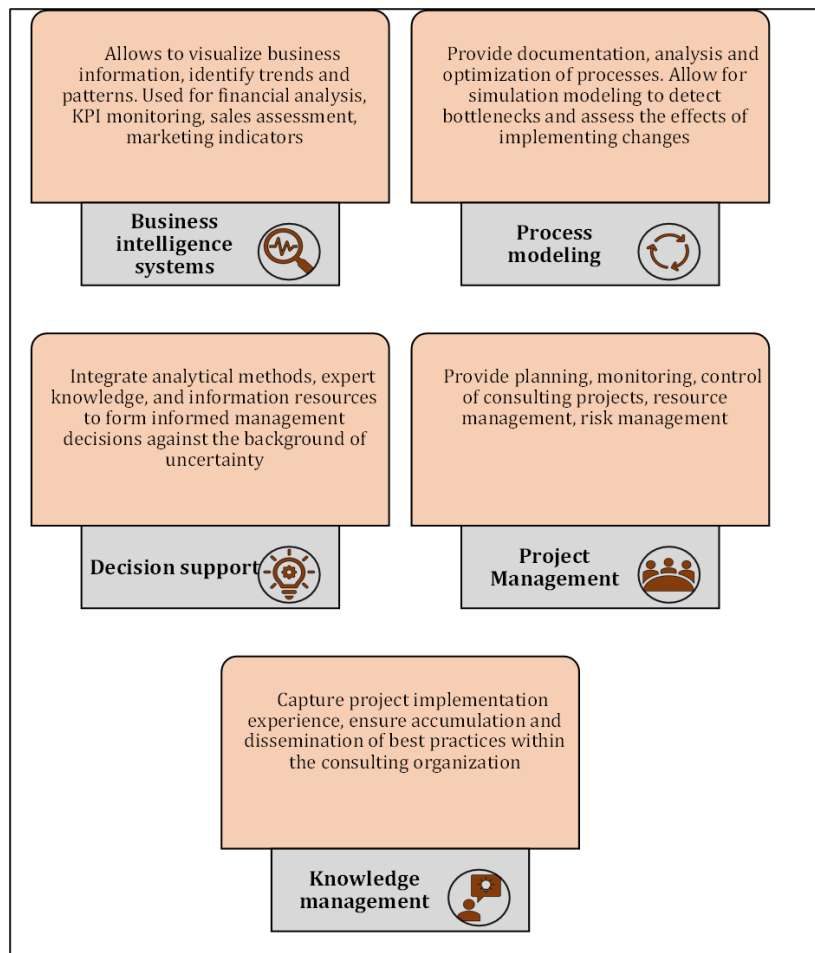


Figure 3 Systems of Technological Platforms of Complex Business Consulting (compiled by the author on the basis of [2, 4, 7, 9])

Integration of the systems presented in the diagram forms a unified digital ecosystem that enhances the speed and quality of analytical work. The development of this field as a professional institution relies on the creation of the corresponding infrastructure: professional associations and unions (which ensure the development of standards, ethical norms, and certification mechanisms for integrated consultants); educational programs (which establish a system for training and continuous development of consultants, ensuring the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills); methodological centers (which develop, test, and refine methods, adapting foreign methodologies to national specifics); research platforms (which conduct scientific investigations in business consulting, consolidate practical experience, and enrich the theoretical foundation); expert communities (which bring together specialists from various fields to solve interdisciplinary tasks and facilitate experience exchange); and industry clusters (which concentrate specialized consulting resources in specific economic sectors, forming unique competencies). The development of these institutional structures contributes to the legitimization and professionalization of integrated business consulting and to the improvement of service quality.

Based on the conducted theoretical and methodological analysis, the author proposes the following recommendations (see Table 2).

Table 2 Recommendations for the Development of the Theoretical and Methodological Base of Integrated Business Consulting (compiled by the author)

Areas	Proposals
Methodological Support	Develop integrated methodological frameworks that combine various consulting approaches; create adaptive diagnostic tools that take into account the industry-specific nature of the business; implement validation mechanisms for methods based on scientific criteria for evaluating their effectiveness.
Professional Training	Establish interdisciplinary educational programs that integrate knowledge from various business fields; introduce project-oriented training formats based on real case work; develop mechanisms for the supervision of novice consultants by experienced mentors; create a system for continuous professional development.
Organization of Consulting Activity	Develop models for forming interdisciplinary consulting teams; establish internal coordination mechanisms for consultants from diverse profiles; create platforms for knowledge and experience exchange; introduce quality standards for comprehensive services.
Client Interaction	Develop mechanisms for determining a client organization's readiness for comprehensive changes; prepare tools to engage the client organization's employees in the consulting process; implement methods for assessing satisfaction with the results; design formats for long-term support.
Institutional Development	Establish professional standards for integrated consultants; create mechanisms for certification and accreditation; develop the content of an ethical code related to this field; provide platforms for dialogue between the consulting and scientific communities.

It appears that the implementation of these recommendations will foster the development of integrated business consulting as a scientifically substantiated professional practice that meets the contemporary requirements of the entrepreneurial environment.

4. Conclusions

The theoretical and methodological foundations of integrated business consulting are formed as an integrative scientific and practical area that unites concepts and methods from various disciplines. This approach overcomes the limitations of traditional, narrowly specialized forms of consulting and enables the effective resolution of problems. Its key components include: a multiparadigmatic theoretical base that integrates systems, resource, cognitive, process, and network approaches; methodological triangulation that ensures a multifaceted analysis and increases the validity of results; a procedural interaction model that structures the sequence of consulting efforts; a diverse methodological toolkit that encompasses diagnostic, analytical, design, and implementation methods; technological platforms that provide information-analytical support for the activity; and institutional infrastructure that supports the development of consulting as a professional field.

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