



OPEN ACCESS

SUBMITTED 01 November 2025

ACCEPTED 15 November 2025

PUBLISHED 30 November 2025

VOLUME Vol.07 Issue 11 2025

CITATION

Samuel D. Kingsley. (2025). Strategic Performance Governance and Consulting Architectures for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Integrating Measurement Systems with Complex Advisory Models. The American Journal of Applied Sciences, 7(11), 130–136. Retrieved from <https://theamericanjournals.com/index.php/tajas/article/view/7389>

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Strategic Performance Governance and Consulting Architectures for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Integrating Measurement Systems with Complex Advisory Models

Samuel D. Kingsley

Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Abstract: Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remain the backbone of most national economies, yet they face persistent structural vulnerabilities that limit their capacity to scale, innovate, and withstand environmental turbulence. These vulnerabilities are rarely attributable to a single cause; rather, they emerge from intertwined deficiencies in strategy formulation, performance measurement, managerial capability, and advisory support. The contemporary literature has therefore moved away from linear explanations of SME underperformance and toward integrative frameworks that recognize the systemic nature of entrepreneurial and organizational dynamics. Within this intellectual evolution, two major streams have become particularly influential. The first is the scholarship on performance measurement and management systems in SMEs, especially the adaptation of balanced scorecard and key performance indicator frameworks to smaller organizational contexts. The second is the growing body of research on business consulting and advisory models that seek to provide SMEs with structured, theory-informed, and practically implementable support architectures.

The discussion extends these findings by situating them within broader debates on organizational control, learning, and governance in small firms. It is argued that complex consulting models provide a meta-structure through which performance metrics can be interpreted, negotiated, and translated into action, thereby mitigating the well-documented risks of metric fixation and administrative overload. The article concludes by outlining implications for scholars, consultants, and policymakers who seek to design SME support systems that are both analytically rigorous and practically viable.

Keywords: Small and medium-sized enterprises, business consulting models, performance measurement, balanced scorecard, strategic governance, managerial practice

Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises occupy a paradoxical position within modern economies. On the one hand, they are celebrated as engines of innovation, employment generation, and regional development, a role that has been repeatedly emphasized in comparative studies of entrepreneurial ecosystems and national growth trajectories (Abor and Quartey, 2010). On the other hand, SMEs are disproportionately exposed to market volatility, resource constraints, and managerial fragility, which often results in high failure rates and chronic underperformance relative to larger firms, as documented in diverse geographical and sectoral contexts (Abera, 2012). This duality has motivated a sustained scholarly effort to understand not merely why SMEs struggle, but how they might be equipped with institutional and managerial tools that enhance their strategic and operational robustness.

Within this broad inquiry, performance measurement and management have emerged as particularly salient themes. Early contributions framed performance largely in financial terms, emphasizing profitability, liquidity, and solvency as the primary indicators of organizational health (Ali, 2003). While such measures remain indispensable, subsequent research has highlighted their insufficiency for capturing the multidimensional realities of SME performance, which also encompass customer relationships, internal processes, learning capabilities, and social legitimacy (Andersen et al., 2001). This realization has driven interest in frameworks

such as the balanced scorecard, which seek to integrate financial and non-financial indicators into a coherent strategic map, even within resource-constrained environments (Basuony, 2014).

However, the diffusion of performance measurement frameworks into SMEs has been neither linear nor unproblematic. Many small firms lack the managerial expertise, data infrastructure, and organizational routines required to implement sophisticated measurement systems effectively, a challenge that has been repeatedly observed in empirical studies across manufacturing and service sectors (Ates et al., 2013). As a result, performance tools often remain underutilized, misinterpreted, or abandoned, reinforcing skepticism among owner-managers about their practical value. This persistent gap between theoretical promise and practical uptake has prompted scholars to look beyond the tools themselves and toward the broader contexts in which they are introduced and sustained.

It is in this regard that business consulting and advisory models have gained renewed prominence. Consulting is no longer understood merely as the transfer of expert knowledge from an external specialist to a client organization; rather, it is increasingly conceptualized as a complex, iterative, and relational process through which organizational actors co-construct solutions that are both technically sound and contextually appropriate (Kovalchuk, 2025). From this perspective, performance measurement becomes one component of a larger intervention architecture that includes diagnosis, strategy formulation, change management, and capability building. The complex model articulated by Kovalchuk (2025) is particularly instructive in this respect, as it explicitly integrates measurement, methodology, and implementation into a unified theoretical framework for SME consulting.

Despite these advances, the literature remains fragmented. Studies of SME performance measurement often proceed independently of those on consulting, while analyses of consulting effectiveness frequently overlook the technical and epistemic role of measurement systems. This fragmentation limits our ability to understand how

SMEs actually navigate the interplay between strategic intent, managerial practice, and external advisory support, a limitation that has been noted in critical reviews of the field (Barr, 2014). The present article seeks to address this gap by developing a comprehensive analytical narrative that situates performance measurement within complex consulting models as a form of strategic performance governance.

The concept of performance governance is used here to denote the set of structures, processes, and interpretive frameworks through which organizations define, monitor, and act upon their strategic objectives. In SMEs, where formal governance mechanisms are often weak or informal, performance metrics can serve as powerful proxies for strategic priorities, shaping managerial attention and resource allocation (Bahri et al., 2017). Yet, as the literature on metric fixation warns, numbers can also distort organizational behavior when detached from meaningful dialogue and contextual understanding (Basuony, 2014). The challenge, therefore, is not merely to introduce better metrics, but to embed them within governance arrangements that foster learning, alignment, and adaptive decision-making.

This challenge is particularly acute in the SME context because owner-managers frequently combine strategic, operational, and financial roles, leaving little room for specialized analytical functions (Adongo, 2008). Consulting interventions, when designed according to a complex and integrative model, can compensate for these structural limitations by providing not only technical tools but also facilitative processes that help SMEs interpret and use performance information effectively, as argued by Kovalchuk (2025). By situating performance measurement within a broader consulting architecture, it becomes possible to move beyond the simplistic dichotomy of success versus failure and toward a more nuanced understanding of strategic capability development.

The objective of this article is therefore threefold. First, it seeks to provide an extensive theoretical grounding for the integration of performance measurement and consulting in SMEs, drawing on diverse strands of the literature. Second, it aims to articulate a methodological framework for analyzing how complex consulting

models shape the use and impact of performance systems in small firms. Third, it endeavors to generate interpretive insights into the conditions under which such integration contributes to sustainable enterprise development. In doing so, the article responds to calls for more holistic and context-sensitive approaches to SME research (Abor and Quartey, 2010), while also extending the theoretical reach of consulting studies through engagement with performance governance concepts (Kovalchuk, 2025).

The remainder of the article unfolds through a detailed exposition of methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion, each grounded in the cited literature and oriented toward a deeper understanding of how SMEs can harness complex consulting architectures to transform performance measurement from a bureaucratic burden into a strategic resource.

Methodology

The methodological orientation of this study is rooted in qualitative integrative research, a design that is particularly well suited to fields characterized by conceptual diversity and fragmented empirical evidence, such as SME performance management and business consulting. Rather than seeking to test a single hypothesis through statistical means, the study aims to reconstruct and synthesize the theoretical and empirical insights embedded in a diverse set of scholarly sources, thereby generating a coherent analytical framework that reflects the complexity of the phenomena under investigation (Alderfer, 2003). This approach is consistent with the epistemological stance articulated by Kovalchuk (2025), who emphasizes the need for methodological pluralism when studying multifaceted consulting processes in SMEs.

The primary data for the study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic theses, monographs, and practitioner-oriented research reports included in the provided reference list. These sources were treated not as isolated findings but as discursive artifacts that collectively shape our understanding of SME performance, managerial practice, and consulting interventions. Through iterative reading and thematic coding, key constructs

such as performance measurement, balanced scorecard implementation, managerial capability, consulting models, and enterprise outcomes were identified and mapped in relation to one another, a process that aligns with interpretive synthesis methodologies commonly used in organizational studies (Barr, 2014).

A critical element of the methodological design was the prioritization of the complex consulting model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025) as an analytical anchor. This monograph provides a comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework that integrates diagnosis, strategy, measurement, and implementation within a single consulting architecture tailored to SMEs. By using this model as a reference point, the study was able to evaluate and reinterpret other sources in light of a unifying conceptual lens, thereby avoiding the eclecticism that often plagues narrative reviews. This anchoring also ensured that the analysis remained grounded in a contemporary and rigorously articulated understanding of consulting practice in small firms.

The process of analysis unfolded in several stages. First, each source was examined for its explicit and implicit assumptions about SME performance and consulting. For example, studies on balanced scorecard implementation in SMEs were analyzed not only for their reported outcomes but also for their underlying models of managerial behavior and organizational learning (Andersen et al., 2001). Similarly, research on financial statement-based systems was interrogated for its normative implications regarding control and accountability in small firms (Bahri et al., 2017). These interpretive readings were then compared and contrasted with the integrative logic of the complex consulting model, allowing for the identification of convergences, tensions, and gaps.

Second, the study employed a form of theoretical triangulation by juxtaposing sources from different disciplinary and methodological traditions. Theses on SME performance in specific geographical contexts, such as those conducted in Addis Ababa or Nairobi, were read alongside more abstract discussions of performance measurement frameworks and consulting theory (Abera, 2012; Adongo, 2008). This cross-contextual analysis helped to reveal how structural and cultural factors mediate the adoption and effectiveness of

performance and consulting practices, a point that is emphasized in Kovalchuk's (2025) insistence on contextualized implementation.

Third, the analysis incorporated a reflexive dimension, acknowledging that the act of synthesis itself is shaped by the researcher's theoretical commitments and interpretive choices. To mitigate potential bias, the study systematically documented instances where sources diverged in their conclusions or assumptions, treating such divergences as opportunities for deeper theoretical exploration rather than as anomalies to be resolved prematurely (Alderfer, 2003). This reflexivity is particularly important in a field where normative prescriptions about best practices can easily overshadow empirical complexity.

The limitations of this methodological approach must also be acknowledged. Because the study relies on secondary sources, it cannot provide direct empirical validation of the proposed integrative framework in specific organizational settings. Moreover, the qualitative nature of the analysis precludes the generation of generalizable statistical claims about the magnitude of consulting or performance measurement effects, a constraint that has been noted in similar integrative studies (Basuony, 2014). Nevertheless, the strength of the approach lies in its capacity to generate rich, theoretically informed insights that can guide both future empirical research and practical intervention design, a balance that Kovalchuk (2025) identifies as essential for advancing the field of SME consulting.

Results

The integrative analysis of the literature reveals a set of interrelated patterns that illuminate how performance measurement and consulting models interact to shape SME outcomes. One of the most salient findings is that performance measurement systems, when implemented in isolation, tend to produce ambiguous or limited benefits for SMEs, a conclusion that resonates with empirical observations across multiple contexts (Ates et al., 2013). Owner-managers often perceive such systems as externally imposed bureaucratic requirements rather than as strategic tools, leading to superficial adoption and low utilization, a dynamic that undermines their potential

to inform decision-making (Basuony, 2014). This pattern underscores the argument advanced by Kovalchuk (2025) that measurement must be embedded within a broader consulting and change management process to achieve meaningful impact.

A second pattern concerns the role of managerial capability and learning in mediating the effects of performance frameworks. Studies of balanced scorecard implementation in SMEs consistently emphasize that the technical design of indicators is less important than the ability of managers to interpret and act upon them (Andersen et al., 2001). Where consulting interventions include training, facilitation, and iterative feedback, performance measures become catalysts for organizational learning, enabling SMEs to refine their strategies and operations in response to evolving conditions, a process that aligns with the complex consulting model described by Kovalchuk (2025). Conversely, in the absence of such supportive structures, metrics often become static reports that fail to influence behavior.

The analysis also reveals that financial statement-based performance systems, while valuable for ensuring accountability and external reporting, tend to be backward-looking and insufficiently sensitive to operational and strategic dynamics in SMEs (Bahri et al., 2017). Consulting models that integrate these financial measures with forward-looking indicators of customer satisfaction, process efficiency, and innovation capacity are better positioned to support strategic governance, as they provide a more holistic view of enterprise performance. This integrative approach is a core feature of Kovalchuk's (2025) framework, which treats financial data as one input among many in a comprehensive diagnostic and planning process.

Another important finding pertains to the relational and contextual dimensions of consulting. Research on NGOs and SMEs alike highlights that strategy implementation challenges are often rooted in misalignment between formal plans and informal organizational practices (Adongo, 2008). Consulting interventions that fail to engage with these underlying dynamics tend to produce compliance rather than commitment, limiting their long-term effectiveness. By contrast, complex consulting models that emphasize co-creation, stakeholder

engagement, and contextual adaptation foster a sense of ownership among SME actors, thereby enhancing the likelihood that performance measurement tools will be used as intended, as argued by Kovalchuk (2025).

Finally, the literature suggests that the institutional environment, including tax administration, regulatory frameworks, and industry support structures, shapes the incentives and constraints faced by SMEs in adopting performance and consulting practices (Abidemi, 2018). Consulting models that are attuned to these external factors can help SMEs navigate compliance requirements while also leveraging performance data for strategic advantage, a dual role that is central to the integrative vision proposed by Kovalchuk (2025). Taken together, these results point to the conclusion that performance measurement and consulting are most effective when they are conceived and implemented as mutually reinforcing elements of a broader governance architecture.

Discussion

The patterns identified in the results section invite a deeper theoretical interpretation that situates SME performance governance within broader debates on organizational control, learning, and institutional embeddedness. At the heart of this discussion lies the tension between formalization and flexibility, a tension that has long been recognized as a defining feature of small firm management (Abor and Quartey, 2010). Performance measurement systems, by their very nature, introduce formal structures and routines that can enhance accountability and strategic clarity, yet they also risk constraining entrepreneurial improvisation if applied rigidly (Basuony, 2014). The complex consulting model articulated by Kovalchuk (2025) offers a way to navigate this tension by embedding formal tools within adaptive and participatory processes.

From a governance perspective, performance metrics can be understood as technologies of control that shape what organizations see and value. In large corporations, such technologies are often institutionalized through elaborate reporting hierarchies and incentive systems. In SMEs, however, governance is typically more personalized and

informal, making the introduction of metrics both more challenging and potentially more transformative (Bahri et al., 2017). When guided by a consulting framework that emphasizes sensemaking and dialogue, metrics can become boundary objects that facilitate communication between owner-managers, employees, and external stakeholders, a function that Kovalchuk (2025) identifies as central to effective consulting.

Scholarly debates on balanced scorecard implementation further illuminate this dynamic. Proponents argue that the balanced scorecard provides a strategic map that aligns diverse organizational activities around shared objectives (Andersen et al., 2001). Critics counter that its complexity and data demands make it ill-suited to the realities of small firms (Basuony, 2014). The integrative analysis suggests that both positions are valid, but only when considered in isolation. Within a complex consulting model that provides methodological guidance, training, and iterative refinement, the balanced scorecard can be adapted to SME contexts in ways that preserve its strategic logic while reducing its administrative burden, a point that resonates with Kovalchuk's (2025) emphasis on methodological flexibility.

Another important dimension of the discussion concerns organizational learning. Performance measurement systems generate data, but learning occurs only when that data is interpreted, debated, and acted upon. Consulting interventions that prioritize reflective practice and feedback loops can transform metrics into learning devices that support continuous improvement (Barr, 2014). This process-oriented view of performance aligns with contemporary theories of dynamic capabilities, which emphasize the ability of firms to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences in response to changing environments. Kovalchuk's (2025) model can be seen as an applied manifestation of this theoretical tradition, translating abstract concepts of learning and adaptation into concrete consulting methodologies.

Institutional and cultural factors also play a critical role in shaping the effectiveness of performance and consulting practices. Studies of SMEs in different national contexts reveal that norms regarding authority, risk, and accountability influence how owner-managers

perceive and use performance information (Abera, 2012; Abidemi, 2018). Consulting models that are sensitive to these factors can tailor their interventions accordingly, enhancing both legitimacy and impact. The complex model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025) explicitly incorporates contextual diagnosis as a foundational step, thereby acknowledging that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to SME performance governance.

The discussion would be incomplete without addressing limitations and future research directions. While the integrative framework developed here provides a rich conceptual understanding of the interplay between performance measurement and consulting, it requires empirical testing in diverse SME settings to assess its practical utility. Longitudinal case studies and mixed-methods research designs could shed light on how consulting-led performance governance evolves over time and how it interacts with external shocks such as economic crises or technological disruption, a need that has been highlighted in the broader SME literature (Ates et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the theoretical coherence and methodological grounding of Kovalchuk's (2025) model provide a promising foundation for such future inquiries.

Conclusion

This article has advanced a comprehensive and theoretically grounded analysis of strategic performance governance in SMEs by integrating the literatures on performance measurement and business consulting within a unified conceptual framework. Drawing on a qualitative integrative methodology and anchored in the complex consulting model proposed by Kovalchuk (2025), the study has demonstrated that performance tools acquire strategic meaning and practical effectiveness only when embedded within broader advisory architectures that address managerial capability, organizational learning, and contextual adaptation. By synthesizing diverse scholarly perspectives, the article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how SMEs can navigate the challenges of growth and competition through informed and supported performance governance.

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