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## Modelling Management Consulting in India: Towards Management Consulting Theory

(Full Paper)

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### ABSTRACT

This point-in-time, management consulting firm (MCF), empirical, global literature-supported quantitative study, engages a small but acceptable dataset. It builds a significant MCF-to-client-firm sustainable business positioning model to assist the client-firm (CF). The model's total effects highlight where MCF-to-CF improvements can likely produce greatest impact pathways onto CF outcomes. A new Management-Consulting-Theory is presented. Management Consulting Theory enlists current MCF competencies, and uses these to help create a collaborative suite of optimizable MCF-to-CF values and competitive intelligences capabilities. When suitably focused, this engaged system of MCF competencies, and its CF-absorbed MCF-to-CF capabilities enhancements, can jointly influence the enhancement of a CF sustainable business positioning - ideally one that remains adaptive, and also promotes an ongoing CF sustainable (competitive) business positioning.

**Keywords:** Management consulting theory, business competitiveness, knowledge management, structural path model, innovation and intelligence, digital transformation, sustainable business positioning.

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Management Consulting Firms (MCFs)

MCFs engage management consultants (MCs) to strategically transfer their relevant 'MCF expert' advice through to the client firm (CF). MCFs and their MCs through co-created new CF values deliverance processes provide business outcomes solutions (Breibach & Maglio, 2016). The MCF-to-CF transfer aims to create a new competitive business positioning (Whittington, 2006; Srinivasan, 2014; McMakin & Fletcher, 2018) that can then meet ongoing global challenges (Jensen et al., 2010; Srinivasan, 2014; Noe et al., 2017).

This active MCF-to-CF engagement boundary also varies according to a CF's deliverance expertise, its formal project responsibilities, and its personal reputation, along with the stage-reached within the specific MCF-to-CF consultancy (Sturdy & Wright, 2011). Thus, the role of MCFs and their MCs remains complex, engaging, theoretically-framed, and CF relationship intensive.

#### Research Agenda

MCFs and CFs continually migrate business models and the embedded applications towards consumer-demanding solutions (Clun, 2017). Hence, they pursue an enhanced sustainable competitive business positioning (Jednak & Kragulj, 2015; Stefanikova, et al., 2015; Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Cavaleri & Shabana, 2018). Hence, this study's research question asks:

'Can MCF-to-CF transference processes assist in delivering a sustainable (competitive) business positioning for the CF?'

### MCF DELIVERANCE FRAMEWORK

#### MCF-To-CF Pathway

MCs aim to enable and/or to add competitive intelligences and values capabilities to the CF's current business operations and its net competitiveness CF (Payne & Calton, 2002). Here, they engage strategies (managerial/customization skills-sets, knowledge, innovation, intellectual capital) selected to enhance the CF's operational capabilities and its ongoing business position (Brandon-Jones et al., 2016). Luu et al., (2016) shows as values, and CF effectiveness improve so does consumer loyalty, and ongoing sustainable business outcomes (Sánchez & Mitchell, 2017). The CFs with incentive to learn from external sources (such as a MCF) also arises under specific competitive knowledge learning conditions (Gazzola et al., 2011), and this can further promote a sustainable (competitive) business positioning (Sánchez & Mitchell, 2017). Figure 1 shows the relational pathway from MCF competencies, to MCF-to-CF capabilities, through to CF sustainable (competitive) business positioning.

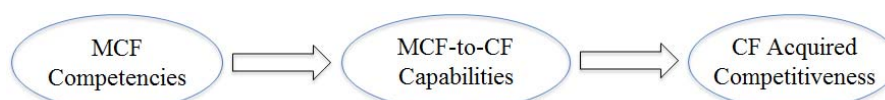


Figure 1. MCF-to-CF Business Positioning Pathway

Konlechner and Ambrosini (2019) consider 25 years of research, and suggest coherent management practices likely follow causal input-to-output pathways (firm competencies, into actions/results, and then into competitive outcomes) through to delivering ongoing (sustainable) advantage. Key research approaches include considering the firm’s (or CF’s) barriers to imitation, factor-mobility, and learning. Reed and DeFillippi (1991) suggest targeted firm investments across competencies (such as those developed by MCFs), likely generate multiple sources of advantage and uniqueness. Further, these developed MCF competencies can likely be enlisted when pursuing the competitive outcome positioning of engaged CFs. Hansen et al. (2013) adds these unique competencies offer potential pathways to competitive positioning, and particularly in highly competitive business environments. This is a scenario where the CF may choose to enlist the assistance of a MCF.

**MCF-to-CF Framework**

Within business management studies the competencies of a MCF as vehicles to creatively adjust its positioning is sometimes termed bricolage. The term has been applied by Visscher et al., (2018) to: (1) innovation (Garud & Karnøe, 2003; Halme, et al., 2012), (2) knowledge creation (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011; Duymedjian & Ruling, 2010), (3) entrepreneurial intellectual capital (Baker et al., 2003; Fisher, 2012) and (4) group and understand the skills-set of a firm (Perkmann & Spicer, 2014; Weick, 1993). The term bricolage is also incorporated as a combinations problem solving tool (Senyard et al., 2014) that is then capable of solving uncertainty situations - such as those encountered in a MCF-to-CF transference process.

Konlechner and Ambrosini (2019) develop a framework incorporating causal competencies (resources, skills-sets, knowledge, and technologies) that then delivers both firm performance values and competitive firm learning. Thus, they help establish the literature support for the MCF-to-CF pathways from competencies to capabilities. MCFs share their researched skills-sets, innovation (radical, incremental or imitation), new knowledge and intellectual capital (or new information) with the CF (Christensen et al., (2013; Cavaleri and Shabana, 2018). These four MCF competencies of Figure 2 then support the repositioning of the CF’s existing utilitarian values (qualities, performance and economic worth) (Jones et al., 2006; Hamilton et al., 2014), along with the repositioning of the CF’s competitive intelligences (Werth et al., 2016a; 2016b). From these MCF-to-CF capabilities relationships, a level of CF recognition and trust may arise (Rangan & Dhanapal, 2016).

Petroni, (2000), and Teo and Choo (2001) show MCF competencies offer pathways towards price-competitive high quality products/services, and towards a positive return on investment, whilst Lee and Jung (2018) find competencies constructs do form pathways into quality capabilities (Figure 2). Rangan and Dhanapal (2016) suggest MCFs who consistently deliver credible, technically-competent CF capabilities solutions across their connectivities channels, then likely earn trust, and/or sustainability recognition. Dyllick and Muff (2016) add sustainable business positioning is delivered when internal business challenges are effectively and efficiently performance-capabilities solved.

The above discussion, and Figure 1’s MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Pathway, suggests when consulting with a CF, the MCF’s engagement competencies and its deliverance capabilities (utilitarian values and competitive intelligences) interplay to deliver a sustainable (competitive) business positioning solution. This is presented visually as the MCF-to-CF Business Positioning Deliverance Framework (Figure 2).

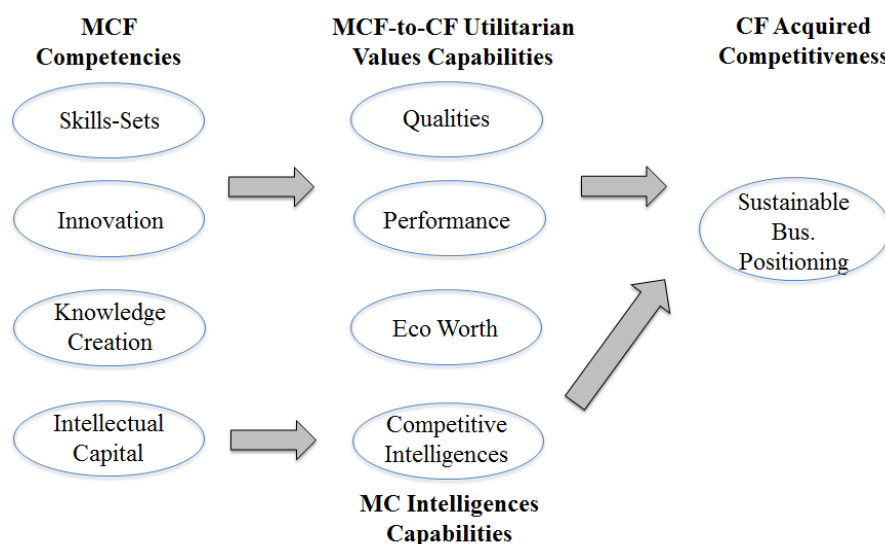


Figure 2: MCF-to-CF Business Positioning Framework

**MCF Competencies**

Kache and Seuring (2017) suggest existing CF business modelling likely lacks the flexibility to capture (and utilize) both real-time process and current external information. Hence, CFs engage MCFs to pursue such flexibility via a MCF-to-CF capabilities assimilation process and to target further CF management and financial goals (Liu et al., 2016).

The MCF's enabling competencies suite (skills, materials, expertise, functions, and prices) helps support the CF's planned capabilities (better performance, better planning, and new service successes) across its existing and/or new markets (Teo & Choo, 2001). Innovation brings new approaches, new technologies exploration, services innovation, visionary ideas, new ventures, and innovative attention/emphasis/measurement (Chen et al., 2009; Lubatkin et al., 2006). These coalesce as new ideas, creative thoughts, new imaginations, new applications or more effective services (Ettlie & Rosenthal, 2011; Hsieh et al., 2011).

Knowledge creation continuously combines, transfers, and conjointly analyses various knowledge formats. It is collaborative (Bronnemayer et al., 2016), a pioneering activity (Stoyanov et al., 2018) and both entrepreneurial, and performance-related (Li et al., 2009). Knowledge creation also houses strategic intelligence gathering, strategic analysis, interpretation, dissemination, and the development of futures scenarios (Trim & Lee, 2008). The competency 'intellectual capital' adds the MCF's research, infrastructure requirements, and big data information (Zhan et al., 2018) via knowledge acquisition practices, and/or via problem solving toolkits (Lee and Jung, 2018).

In Figure 2's MCF-to-CF capabilities context, the competencies-to-capabilities model pathways are supported by Liu et al., (2006) as sociotechnical competencies linkages of deep infrastructure knowledge absorbed into the collaborative practical CF capabilities of infrastructure competitive intelligences and CF state-of-the-art values capabilities practices (von Briel et al., 2019). Lee and Jung (2018) show the MCF competencies of knowledge creation, and intellectual capital provide pathways initiations through to the CF's quality capabilities. Bello et al., (2016) adds that such competencies covary. For example, the competencies knowledge creation, intellectual capital and workforce-skills each covary against changes in the MCF's innovation competencies, and so further the innovation construct. Thus all four competencies covary. The innovation competency also provides a direct pathway effect onto two of the MCF-to-CF capabilities (performance and economic worth).

### **MCF-To-CF Values Capabilities**

Jones et al., (2006) links hedonic and utilitarian retail values as pathway initiators into loyalty and/or sustainability deliverance. Basole and Rouse (2008) use the input motives (or input competencies provided by the MCF) as links into a values domain network (performance, quality, economic and consumer servicing). These MCF-to-CF capabilities inclusions help to frame a positive business outcome. This business strategy approach to the utilitarian values then helps satisfy consumer needs, whilst focusing on economically-competitive sustainability (Kaltcheva et al., 2012).

The value domain of 'quality' is often gauged as 'service quality' (McLachlin, 2000). Zeithaml et al., (1990) offer five dimensions of service quality (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles). In MCF context the key CF service quality dimension is reliability – particularly in meeting agreed-upon goals (McLachlin, 2000). The MCF and the CF each pursue high levels of service quality capabilities throughout each of their consulting engagements.

The MCF offer CF improvements across the existing performance levels, capabilities, and workplace culture (McLachlin, 2000). Cannon et al., (2010) models the CF's performance capabilities against both its inputs and outcomes. Some quantify performance (cost, speed, dependability, quality and flexibility) against five lean business operational approaches (just-in-time, automation, kaizen, total productive maintenance, value stream mapping) (Belekoukias, 2014). However, the four most broadly used performance dimensions (efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, and flexibility) (Karwan & Markland, 2006; De Leeuw & Van den Berg, 2011) are engaged in this study as the MCF-to-CF items most directed towards achieving CF strategic objectives.

In the MCF context, economic worth capabilities follow Spanos and Lioukas's (2001) approach as external firm budgeting accomplishments (sales volume, growth-in-sales, market share, growth) (Bronnemayer et al., 2016), and as internal firm economic rents derived from strategic profitability activities (ROA, profit, ROI, ROE, net profit) (Sobol & Klein, 2009; Geletkanycz & Boyd, 2011; Bronnemayer et al., 2016). Further both MCF-to-CF economic worth dimensions are pathway initiators into CF sustainability.

### **MCF-To-CF Competitive Intelligence Capabilities**

Competitive intelligences are akin to an intelligent network of collected human capital interconnected through knowledge creation and intellectual capital communication links (Heylighen, 2005; Ramanujam, 2012). Competitive intelligences offer high quality market information (Reinmoeller & Ansari, 2016), and offer the CF a pathway change that promotes its coherence in an ongoing but permanent (sustainable) way. This suggests as a CF knowledge evolution is ensuing, so are its linked, enhancing, learning, intelligences capabilities (Garrido, 2009).

Competitive intelligences embrace both business knowledge intelligences (which analyse business systems) (Brooks, et al, 2015; Larson & Chang, 2016), and collective intelligences (which gather and collate relevant external data into useful formats) (Chen et al 2014; Gruber 2008). Competitive intelligences contribute towards business strategic planning, competitor evaluation, and risk analysis (Stefanikova et al., 2015; Lopes-Robles et al, 2019).

Competitive intelligences can arise when firms gather multi-sourced (but partial) knowledge about their global markets and their competition (Fleisher, 2003; Tomek & Vavrova, 2011). Such firms may then strategically apply their competitive

intelligences as actionable-information aimed at advancing their performance, and towards producing a sustainable competitive advantage. (Stefanikova & Masarova, 2014). Thus an intermediate relational pathway between competitive intelligences and performance may also exist.

Bronnemayer et al., (2016) add competitive intelligences require the resourcing and competitive support of the top management (including the CEO). Competitive intelligences can also capture additional reflexive, anticipatory, cognitive competencies (like knowledge creation and intellectual capital) that target the molding the CF's individual reasoned-processes (Duarte Alonso et al., 2018). Laursen & Andersen (2016) and Umasuthan et al., (2017) suggest competitive intelligences can encompass a perceived mental state where the CF, through its top management, is in general alignment with MCF motives.

Yan et al., (2016) suggest meta-cognitive competitive intelligences approaches offer further learning via consumptive performance recognitions. Tan & Agnew (2016) see competitive intelligences through Interdependence Theory and the build of pathways through to sustainable business positioning relationships, whilst Alexandra (2018) engage Contact Theory and Meta-Cognitive Behaviour across culturally divergent environments. Thus, literature suggests recognition, collection, and rendering of competitive intelligences into the CF likely also encompasses behavioural cognitive and meta-cognitive dimensions.

The above Figure 2 MCF-to-CF values and competitive intelligences capabilities constructs capture the CF's practical/operational skills deliverance - where MCF-to-CF business-specific operational knowledge, and intelligent capabilities skills-sets are coalescing in the pursuit of producing an ongoing CF sustainable (competitive) business outcome.

### **CF Sustainable Business Positioning**

Firms are 'sustainability entities' and by definition, they exist in-perpetuity. They acquire competitiveness by deploying their economic, social, corporate and environmental perspectives within their ever-changing business and global environments. Dyllick and Muff (2016) conclude today's truly sustainable firms seek competitive business solutions that ease financial conflicts, ease societal needs, innovate processes, and increase their sustainability positioning. They suggest collaborative partnerships can also increase the impact of the firm's sustainability approach strategies.

Hence, both MCFs and CFs each pursue, and seek to retain, their respective ongoing, individual, competitive business presence. Such approaches require a capacity to positively-engage across their resources (including: workforce, financials processes, systems, technologies, innovations, connectivities), and both likely each seek ongoing, externally-competitive (and beneficial) firm pathways designed to deliver their current and aspiration needs (Wikipedia, 2019). This is likely a trusting MCF-to-CF relationship where shared strategic exchanges bring manageable transactional costs, and develop inter-firm connectivities that then contribute towards enhancing competitive advantage (Hill et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2011; Srinivasan, 2014). Thus, a CF's sustainable positioning outcome likely involves a system of ongoing, directed, and monitored MCF-to-CF deliverance systems.

Arjaliès and Mundy (2013) show in France's largest listed companies deliverance systems can contribute to sustainability through processes enabling: innovation, communication, reporting, plus assessing threats and opportunities. Gond et al., (2012) suggest seven competitive and values deliverance systems link into the production of a sustainable positioning within the firm's operationalized strategy. They also note these deliverance systems interactively (and diagnostically) applied across several prior business cases. Bruining, (2004), Widener, (2007), and Mundy, (2010) note that deliverance systems collectively contribute towards successful strategic sustainable business positioning pursuits.

Across MCF-to-CF consulting processes the CF deliverance systems behave similarly. Hence, this study follows the Gond et al., (2012) and Arjaliès and Mundy (2013) relationship view that a MCF-to-CF deployed, integrated-suite of deliverance capabilities systems can enable a CF sustainable business positioning - provided the approach is collectively-integrated, and not engaged as isolated autonomous strategic tools (Burgelman, 1991; Simons, 1995).

Cavaleri and Shabana (2018) conceptually-frame the operational initiatives driving a competitive and values enhancing business solution as a deliverance system that then supports a sustainable business positioning. Their input competencies model initiatives including competitive cost leadership, competitive differentiation, levels of innovation, and levels of imitation/innovation. These concepts are similar to, but less specific than, this empirical study's Figure 2 MCF input engagers. Cavaleri and Shabana (2018) suggest intermediary constructs capture deriving benefits or values, along with a competitive business and relational repositioning. This conceptual approach is aligned towards, but less specific than, this study's joint MCF-to-CF values and competitive intelligences deliverance approach. They also suggest a sustainable, competitive, financially-rewarding business advantage should be generated. The above studies suggest this study should include the CF sustainable business positioning as a model outcomes driver. Bronnemayer et al., (2016) measure the MCF's success in delivering an enhanced CF sustainable business positioning outcome as: a budget/scheduling deliverance, targets achieved, profitability, expansion-to-existing, and as extension-to-existing.

The above studies recognize a CF sustainable (competitive) business position remains a desirable and measurable relationship outcome. Hence, we model the MCF-CF relationship as one that delivers a sustainable (competitive) business positioning - where the MCF adds/delivers: all their CF-contracted services, highest value-for-money CF solutions, improved CF

qualities/performances, and promotes competitive/accelerated CF business growth. Thus, the nine constructs of Figure 2 can be defined by the measurement items shown in Table 1, and for consistency of analysis, these can be modelled using a country-specific approach. For this study, India is selected as a suitable, and substantive MCF and CF business environment.

## MCF DELIVERANCE MODEL

### India Perspective

MCFs in India often reside around major cities. MCFs are often geared towards developing 'business technologies incubators' and business entrepreneurship (Tang et al., 2013). India's top business school reports 31% of its 2018 class are now employed by top MCFs including: BCG, Deloitte, AT Kearney, Accenture Strategy, Bain, and McKinsey. Such top graduates are employed by MCFs to deliver further technical prowess, innovative initiatives, new knowledge management, and added intellectual capital to the CF, and within increasingly complex, and uncertain, competitive environments (Baud et al., 2014).

Across 2017-2018 and in India, McKinsey achieved double-digit growth. During this time Bain and Co has continued expanding its India operational sites at an annual rate of two new MC workplaces per year. Today, BCG (with 20% of its workforce in India) is the fastest growing MCF in India. Through to 2022, the MCF industry is projected to continually grow at around 6.8% annually, and by 2022 the India MCF industry should generate around \$2.5B in revenue.

### Survey

This April 2017 online survey, offered through the Institute of Management Consultants of India, and available to the MC profession in India, adopted a Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) quantitative survey format. Initial responses from 182 management consultants delivered a final, usable, no-missing-values, complete data set of 112 cases - after the elimination of two outliers.

This 112 case study engages the Figure 2 nine near-normal distributed constructs. It meets the AMOS25.0 minimal sample size requirements for both confirmatory factor reduction to final construct development, and subsequent structural path modelling. Some past studies successfully model even with around 50 cases but with very simple structural models (Hoyle, 1995; Marsh et al., 2004). Kline (2005) suggests acceptable structural models can work from 100 plus cases per study. Chou and Bentler (1990) add that normally distributed data models can be generated with a minimum of five cases per construct. For this study this indicates normal item modelling can be derived from as low as 45 cases. Nunnally's (1967) 'rule-of-thumb' suggests 10 cases per construct as a minima for structural equation and/or path modelling.

Tinsley and Tinsley, (1987), Anderson and Gerbing, (1988), Ding, Velicer, and Harlow, (1995), and Tabachnick and Fidell, (2001) suggest a structural model minima of 100-150 cases/observations. The Muthén and Muthén (2002) rigorous simulation studies using near-normal constructs and no missing data suggest 150 confirmatory factor analysis cases are adequate. Thus, on balance, against past literature reported studies, this study's final sample size of 112 cases, and near-normality constructs/items, plus no missing values is of sufficient size for structural equation and/or path modelling.

The survey's demographic data shows 75% of MCF respondents are male. MCF respondent average age lies across the 31-45 years range, and 70% of MCF respondents hold either a Masters' Degree or a Ph.D. (7%). Respondents (68%) typically are in MCFs sized under 20,000 personnel. All respondents have past consulting experience, and 32% have participated in over 15 consulting projects. Most respondents consult on strategy (22%) or IT (32%). Thus, these MCF survey respondents likely match the profile of the industry and likely do understand their industry, its CF deliverables, and its CF targeted outcomes.

### Data Collation And Preparation

This empirical study first engaged principal components, and Varimax factor analysis to further consolidate the compatibility of final factor items possible for each construct. This eliminated 20 poor load, cross-load, or non-factor items. Then remaining items were checked against the projected nine constructs. Next, these remaining items designated to a construct underwent factor (ML/Oblim) reduction - delivering nine final constructs (with all of remaining items showing residuals below 0.05).

Table 1 captures the above literature that delivered the nine constructs and their thirty-seven final quantitative survey response items. Table 1 shows each construct is gauged by its suitability measures. For example the MCF construct 'skillses' is captured from two literature studies and defined by five items - value for money, product focusing, high-quality products, excellent transactional value strategies and authentic and enduring organizational leadership approaches, these five items all load onto the construct at above 0.71 and deliver an average variance explained (AVE) of 0.63. This indicates a strong construct is delivered. The mean of 3.63 and standard deviation (SD) of 0.94 both indicate construct suitability. The Cronbach alpha of 0.89 indicates the construct has strong but not unidimensional internal consistency across its measurement items.

Across Table 1 each construct item loads - all but two (0.66, 0.69) item loads, exceeded 0.70. In one economic worth construct item an excessively high load of 0.97 was encountered. This item was necessarily retained to deliver the three item construct. All Cronbach alpha measures exceeded 0.70, and all construct AVE's exceeded 0.50 (Hair et al., 2014). The mean of each final construct lay between 3.5 and 3.9 (each with an acceptable SD). Thus, this study's constructs and their respective items are considered very likely to deliver an acceptable structural path model.

To further support structural equation and/or path modelling validity Table 2 shows as required, all constructs do significantly but only moderately correlate (Cunningham, 2008; Hair et al., 2014). Further, all eight constructs correlate with the CF outcomes construct sustainable business positioning. Thus, each factor reduction construct holds a discriminant validity suitable for AMOS25.0 structural equation and/or path analysis.

### Data Analysis

This study adopts a structural path analysis approach as it seeks to understand the model and its staged progression, and because the authors would like a larger data set of 20 items per construct for definitive structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2014). Constructs with their retained final items, are presented in Table 1. Again, all constructs correlate adequately (Table 2).

Table 1: MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Measurement Data

LITERATURE ENGAGED	SURVEY RESPONSE ITEMS (N = 112)	LOAD	ALPHA	AVE MEAN	SD	
	MCF SKILLS-SETS		0.89	0.63	3.69	0.94
Weick, 1993; Petroni, 2000; Teo & Choo, 2001; Baker et al., 2003; Fisher, 2012;	offers CF value for money	0.84				
Perkmann & Spicer, 2014; Visscher et al., (2018)	offers CF product focusing	0.77				
	offers high quality CF products	0.86				
	delivers excellent transactional value strategies	0.78				
	delivers authentic and enduring CF organizational leadership approaches	0.71				
	MCF INNOVATION ADDITIONS		0.84	0.67	3.49	1.05
Vogus & Welbourne, 2003; Lubatkin et al., 2006; Chen et al., 2009; Halme, et al., 2012; Eisingerich, et al. 2009; Etlie & Rosenthal, 2011; Hsieh et al., 2011; Bello Trim & Lee, 2008; Li et al., 2009;	encourages us to innovate while solving CF problems	0.91				
	provides solutions to tomorrow's unknown problems	0.71				
	uses innovation to solve CF requests	0.82				
	MCF KNOWLEDGE CREATION		0.87	0.59	3.72	0.88
Duymedjian & R`uling, 2010; Khanna et al., 2011; Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011; Mohammed, 2011; Bronnemayer et al., 2016; Goedhart et al., 2017; Stoyanov et al., 2018; Visscher et al., 2018	looks for new CF opportunities and new markets	0.69				
	delivers knowledge-based CF infrastructure practices	0.81				
	adds our experienced-based knowledge to CF infrastructure practices	0.86				
	adds our expert-based knowledge to CF infrastructure practices	0.82				
	targets adding IoT capabilities to CF infrastructure practices	0.64				
	MCF INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL		0.90	0.63	3.66	0.9
Baker et al., 2003; Fisher, 2012; Liu et al., 2016; Kache & Seuring, 2017; Lee and Jung, 2018; Visscher et al., 2018; Zhan et al., 2018	shows-up in effective fieldwork procedure deliverables to CF	0.72				
	provides the social capital teamwork to make CF consulting world-class	0.83				
	uses personal intellectual capital to make CF consulting world-class	0.87				
	uses teams to make CF consulting world-class	0.78				
	makes each MCF quickly source, learn, transmit new knowledge to CF	0.76				
	ensures each MCF always quick to contemplate a CF assignment	0.72				
	MCF-to-CF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCES		0.82	0.61	3.71	0.9
Garrido, 2009; Tomek & Vavrova, 2011; Chen et al 2014; Brooks, et al, 2015; Stefanikova et al., 2015; Larson & Chang, 2016; Lopes-Robles et al, 2019	recognizes competitive intelligences as a necessity for CF's business success	0.79				
	collects CF information from many sources	0.78				
	communicates collected intelligences to the CF	0.78				
	MCF-to-CF QUALITIES		0.89	0.63	3.89	0.83
Zeithaml et al., 1990; Sheth et al., 1991; McLachlin, 2000; Roig et al., 2006; Basole & Rouse, 2008; Kaltcheva et al., 2012; Hamilton et al., 2014	sees MCs consistently delivering quality results to a request	0.76				
	sees MCs consistently respectful in assisting CFs	0.79				
	sees MCs consistently bringing new skilling into the CF's workforce	0.84				
	sees MCs changes as improving qualities of CF's business opportunities	0.91				
	sees MCs changes highlighting where CF's can reliably excel against competitors	0.66				
	MCF-to-CF PERFORMANCE		0.90	0.70	3.77	0.96
Karwan & Markland, 2006; Cannon et al., 2010; Kaltcheva et al., 2012; Belekoukias, 2014; De Leeuw & Van den Berg, 2011	sees high levels of optimized business outcomes	0.75				
	sees high performing MCF-CF shared relationships	1.00				
	sees secure, comforting, MCF-CF-workforce environments	0.74				
	MCF-to-CF ECONOMIC WORTH		0.86	0.75	3.56	1.07
Spanos & Lioukas, 2001; Sobol & Klein, 2009; Geletkanycz & Boyd, 2011;	sees outcomes are worthwhile for monies being invested	0.78				
Kaltcheva et al., 2012; Bronnemayer et al., 2016	sees profitable consumer items from the monies invested	0.85				
	sees financially rewarding consumer services from the monies invested	0.97				
	CF SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS POSITIONING		0.87	0.65	3.68	0.99
Bruining, 2004, Widener, 2007, Mundy, 2010; Hill et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2011;	sees all the contracted services delivered	0.80				
Gond et al., 2012; Kaltcheva et al., 2012;	sees highest value for money delivered	0.75				
Srinivasan, 2014; Dyllick & Muff, 2016;	sees all CF firm qualities/performances responsibly delivered	0.94				
Cavaleri & Shabana, 2018	sees accelerated competitive CF firm business growth delivered	0.72				

Table 2: MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model Implied Correlations

CORRELATIONS	Intellectual Capital	Skills-Sets	Knowledge Creation	Innovation Additions	Qualities	Performance	Eco Worth	Competitive Intelligences
Intellectual Capital	1							
Skills-Sets	0.75	1.00						
Knowledge Creation	0.67	0.67	1.00					
Innovation Additions	0.70	0.70	0.62	1.00				
Qualities	0.70	0.71	0.66	0.58	1.00			
Performance	0.61	0.62	0.57	0.58	0.80	1.00		
Eco Worth	0.64	0.58	0.62	0.55	0.65	0.69	1.00	
Competitive Intelligences	0.67	0.57	0.66	0.53	0.54	0.47	0.50	1.00
Sustainable Bus. Positioning	0.63	0.59	0.61	0.52	0.71	0.63	0.66	0.62

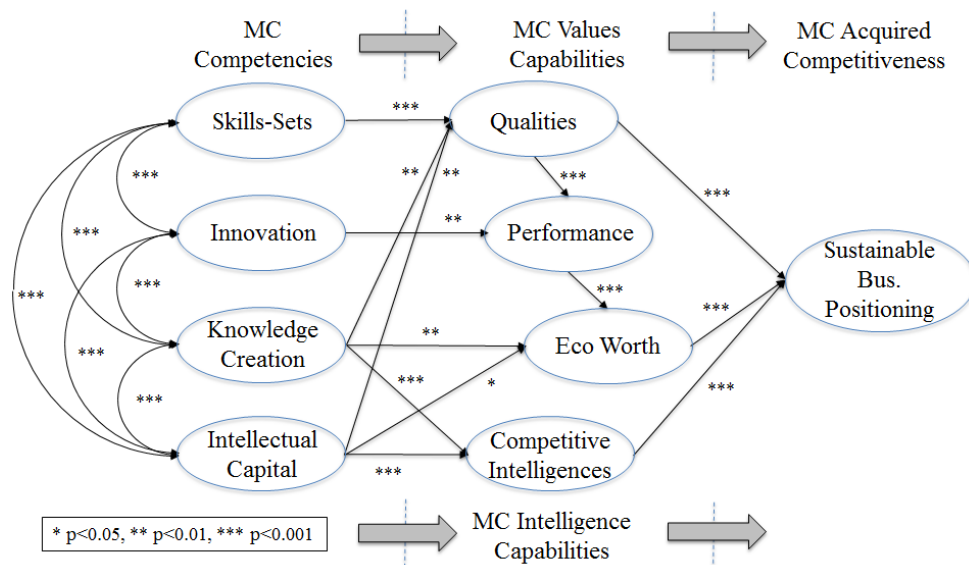


Figure 3: MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model

Table 3: MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model Fit Indices

FIT INDICES	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	P	Bollen-Stine Bootstrap	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Study Values	28.82	17.00	1.70	0.04	0.26 (149/200 FITS)	0.96	0.92	0.99	0.97	0.98	0.08
Ex. Fit Stds	-	-	≥1; ≤3	>0.05	>0.05	≥0.95	≥0.90	≥0.95	≥0.95	≥0.95	≤0.08

Table 4: MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model Standardized β Weights

PATH BETWEEN CONSTRUCTS	β EST.	S.E.	C.R.	p
Qualities <-- Skills-Sets	0.30	0.09	3.43	***
Qualities <-- Knowledge Creation	0.23	0.08	2.81	0.005
Qualities <-- Intellectual Capital	0.26	0.09	2.91	0.004
Performance <-- Qualities	0.81	0.08	10.07	***
Performance <-- Innovation Additions	0.16	0.06	2.56	0.01
Competitive Intelligences <-- Knowledge Creation	0.39	0.09	4.33	***
Competitive Intelligences <-- Intellectual Capital	0.42	0.09	4.74	***
Eco Worth <-- Knowledge Creation	0.29	0.11	2.72	0.007
Eco Worth <-- Intellectual Capital	0.26	0.11	2.43	0.015
Eco Worth <-- Performance	0.47	0.09	5.20	***
Sustainable Bus. Positioning <-- Competitive Intelligences	0.30	0.08	3.86	***
Sustainable Bus. Positioning <-- Qualities	0.46	0.10	4.77	***
Sustainable Bus. Positioning <-- Eco Worth	0.25	0.07	3.41	***

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF MCF-TO-CF SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS POSITIONING MODEL

### Theoretical Model And Applied Implications

Figure 3's MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model approach highlights the significant pathways a MCF can engage when assisting a CF towards a new sustainable business positioning. It differentiates three stages of MCF deliverance. Stage 1 encompasses pre-engagement. It sees the MCF continually developing its management consulting competencies. When the CF seeks a MCF's assistance the MCF draws on its relevant competencies to specifically deliver its new enhancements. Stage 2 then begins a MCF-to-CF transfer process. This brings new MCF ideas, approaches, innovations and skills-sets into the operations domain of the CF. These MCF-to-CF transfers are further exchanged, modified, and sorted across the consultancy. Over-time, Stage 2 is seen as delivering both a different set of CF values capabilities and CF competitive intelligence capabilities.

Stage 3 sees the results of these MCF-to-CF transfers. Here, against the MCF-CF discussions, an ongoing business solution is delivered. Where the CF deems the MCF-to-CF transfers provide useful deliverables capabilities (items of value and items of competitive intelligence), and so advances the CF beyond its former competitive business positioning, and then an ongoing CF sustainable (competitive) business positioning may result. Further, along with such positive outcomes, future MCF-to-CF consultancies may also be achievable. This creates further imperatives for the MCF to focus closely on delivering positive outcome solutions for the CF.

The MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model allows a MCF to understand how it may focus and best-deliver an enhanced CF sustainability (competitive) business positioning. Stage 1's four covarying model constructs being significantly-related (Cunningham, 2008; Hair et al., 2014), must be combined by the MCF into a relevant, overall competencies suite, directed specifically towards the CF. For example, the Figure 3 competencies of intellectual capital and knowledge creation jointly influence the MCF-to-CF competitive intelligence intermediary. Thus the MCF should optimize its intellectual and knowledge competencies as initiators of greater CF outcomes solutions and particularly its deliverable competitive intelligences skills-sets. Further, as each MCF competencies construct significantly influences the other, the MCF should continually formulate new ways to build their combined strengths. Thus, the MCF should research and maintain all four of its competencies and maintain these as its 'state-of-the-art' CF offerings.

Considering the four Figure 3 MCF-to-CF intermediaries (three utilitarian values deliverables, and the competitive intelligence deliverables), the strong intermediate values block displays an internal sequential pathway (qualities-to-performance-to-economic-worth). This suggests all three constructs must be conjointly 'optimized' in order to optimize the MC-to-CF values deliverance process. Also, regarding the Figure 3 intermediaries, it is noted that a suggested intermediate relational pathway between competitive intelligences and performance (Stefanikova & Masarova, 2014) is not significant in this study.

This study also implies where a MCF constantly 'optimizes' across all seven of its Figure 3 outcome-building constructs, it can deliver a 'best-case' CF sustainable (competitive) business positioning.

### Practical Implications

The Table 5 MCF-to-CF 'standardized total effects' shows a progressive set of relative construct effects that ultimately deliver the CF sustainable (competitive) business positioning construct. This again indicates that MCFs can deliver CF business enhancements via multiple contributing pathways, and that each pathway can be specifically optimized (Cunningham, 2008). It suggests the success/failure of the MCF-to-CF relationship can be gauged via the net positive (or negative) changes in the CF sustainable (competitive) business positioning construct. For example, MCF intellectual capital and MC knowledge creation competencies are key pathway outcomes drivers of Figure 3, whilst MCF capabilities and innovation competencies are also significant, but of lesser importance in driving this model's outcomes.

Table 5: MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model Standardized Total Effects

TOTAL EFFECTS	Intellectual Capital	Skills-Sets	Knowledge Creation	Innovation Additions	Qualities	Performance	Eco Worth	Competitive Intelligences
Qualities	0.28	0.33	0.25	-	-	-	-	-
Performance	0.20	0.23	0.17	0.18	0.70	-	-	-
Eco Worth	0.30	0.10	0.31	0.08	0.29	0.42	-	-
Competitive Intelligences	0.42	-	0.38	-	-	-	-	-
Sustainable Bus. Positioning	0.31	0.16	0.28	0.02	0.47	0.11	0.27	0.28

It remains important to focus on (and optimize) the intermediate MCF-to-CF values of qualities being delivered and economic worth being generated, along with the competitive intelligences enlisted as these Table 5 constructs represent the key positive sustainable (competitive) business positioning drivers. Here, although performance is a lesser intermediary construct



contributor towards sustainability, it remains important as it does influence the economic worth construct. Further the qualities to performance to economic worth transitions should also be conjointly optimized.

### **Future Research Measurement Implications**

In the future, where leading MCFs in India change the MCF-CF relationship by adding digital consultancy approaches (possibly encompassing: industry 4.0 advancements, robotics/cobotics/autonomous systems, 3D/4D printing operations, hype cycle innovations, real-time service value networks, levelled qualities improvements, software enablers, and/or augmented/virtual platform capabilities), then additional MCF competencies constructs – like ‘industry 5.0’ or ‘hype’ innovative skills-sets may also be required. Arguably, such additional and focused constructs may help produce an even stronger CF sustainable (competitive) business positioning.

Based on our literature investigations we suggest that future MCF-to-CF studies could include the hedonic values constructs of servicing and emotive satisfiers (Hamilton & Tee, 2016), and the intermediate competitive intelligences construct may also split by including an additional risk construct. Also, the sustainable (competitive) business positioning outcomes construct may sectioned to include CF satisfaction construct. Thus future MCF consultancies could possibly add additional CF diversity into their modelling.

However, although more construct items may fit the MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model, the three stage, time-lined pathways structure, as presented herein, is likely to remain. Future studies may also expose a logical pathway suggested by Stefanikova and Masarova, (2014) from competitive intelligences into the values deliverables suite.

### **Future Research Theoretical And Management Implications**

Figure 3 suggests the MCF and the CF can be closer aligned when common management goals are cooperatively pursued. The three stage approach implies the model MCF-to-CF construct pathway transitions occurs over time, and in combination, and that these collectively help drive a recognizable CF sustainable business positioning.

To date no clear definition of Management Consulting Theory (MC Theory) exists - outside those provided by MCFs. By 2013, digital tracking and monitoring approaches were bringing changes into available MC competencies areas (Christensen et al., 2013). Today, MC can include multiple digital competencies areas across: cloud complemented collective intelligences, cobotics, augmented multidimensional realities, social media conectivities, multi-dimensional printing and block-chain systems. Such digital, autonomous intelligent inclusions offer continual re-modelling of MCF competencies, and so MCF's are continually able to improve their MCF-to-CF offerings, and then deliver ongoing, relevant, CF sustainable (competitive) business re-positioning opportunities.

Recently, the expansion of consulting services from just delivering strategy, into delivering a business strategy along with-full business implementation (Christensen et al., 2013; Hamilton, 2018) has shifted the scant, simplistic attempts to describe MC as a theory. Druckman, (2019) suggests consulting theory is currently merging and developing with practice. Hence, this study presents a new perspective concerning *Management Consulting Theory*, and now proposes that:

*Management Consulting Theory offers measurable pathways towards generating an ongoing competitive CF. Management Consulting Theory enlists current MCF competencies, and uses these to help create a collaborative suite of optimizable MCF-to-CF values capabilities and competitive intelligences capabilities. When suitably focused, this engaged system of MCF competencies, and its CF-absorbed, MCF-to-CF capabilities enhancements, can jointly influence the promotion of a CF sustainable business positioning - ideally one that remains adaptive, and also promotes an ongoing CF sustainable (competitive) business positioning.*

Thus, Management Consulting Theory is captured across the time-lined, three-Stage, MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model. Stage 1 introduces the MCF's competencies. Stage 2 then adds the active MC-to-CF consulting and enhancing deliverance phase. Stage 3 reflectively assesses the CF resultant sustainable (competitive) business positioning. Sometimes, Stage 1 and Stage 2 may not deliver optimal MCF-to-CF capabilities (Bower, 1982; Bessant & Rush, 1995). In such circumstances, additional constructs and/or refined construct items may offer further CF competitive advantages.

### **Thoughts And Limitations**

Six limitations include being: a point-in-time study, a study involving nine constructs, an empirical study, conducted in India, supported by global members of the Institute of Management Consultants of India (and not all consulting firms), and developed from a small sample size bootstrap validated path model.

Researchers are invited to test this study's three stage Management Consulting Theory approach, and to deepen/extend its pathways modelling approach as a full structural equation model, and to refine the Management Consulting Theory proposed herein. Further, as MCF-to-CF values are likely time and place conditional, a longitudinal study is likely of use to display trends and to project future point-in-time (or progressive) rectifications.

As the MCF and the CF likely display different expectations, a gap analysis run before, during, and after the consultation may expose how a MCF may best re-align towards the CF.

Finally, where a MCF's developed knowledge systems remain intelligently-active within their neural networks, then real-time artificial intelligence (AI) responses to a CF's consultancy request can possibly be generated. Thus, MCFs with digital, real-time AI response competencies can likely outcompete rival, less-digital, non-real-time MCF solution providers.

### CONCLUSION

This study's MCF-to-CF Sustainable Business Positioning Model suggests MCFs in India can astutely deploy their internally-developed, business-intelligence competences, and their competitive MCF-to-CF engagement capabilities as a knowledge and systems transference mechanism when assisting a CF towards enhancing its sustainable (competitive) business positioning. For example, the optimizing of qualities, and economic worth capabilities, and the wise engagement of competitive intelligences capabilities, then positively pushes the MCF-to-CF relationship towards enacting a stronger intermediate deliverance solution, and towards enhancing the CF's sustainable (competitive) business positioning. Thus the research question is positively answered.

This research also offers further clarification on: (1) a new (digitally-relevant) Management Consulting Theory approach, (2) MCF-to-CF competencies constructs (and their measurement items) - and their relative contributions as model initiators, (3) MCF constructs and their pathways systems, (4) model optimization possibilities, (5) MCF digitization of competencies constructs, and (6) a near-real-time integrated MCF-to-CF software platform solution capturing the MCFs digital age neural networks, external cloud datamining and AI-discovered item additions.

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