

CONSULTATION AS A PROCESS OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: MANAGEMENT TRAINING AND DECISION-MAKING IN SMALL BUSINESSES

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Abstract: The present study carries out a systematic review of the literature on the role performed by business consultancy as a mechanism for transferring knowledge focused on management training and decision-making processes in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The investigation, based on scientific publications from the period 2021-2025, examines the processes through which consultancy enables the acquisition and application of knowledge of a tacit and explicit nature, exerting influence on the development of managerial skills and improvement of decision making strategic. The research highlights the centrality of absorptive capacity (ACAP) as fundamental theoretical construct for understanding how SMEs internalize and explore knowledge from external sources, fostering innovation and organizational competitiveness. The review findings indicate that the consultancy, associated with transformational leadership and the incorporation of digital technologies, constitutes catalyzing element of organizational learning and performance improvement business in contexts marked by dynamism and resource constraints. The discussion articulates the themes of management training, decision making, learning organizational and digital transformation, outlining the challenges and opportunities that arise present to SMEs in the search for sustainable growth by taking advantage

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of external knowledge.

Keywords: Business consultancy. Knowledge transfer. Small and medium companies. Management training. Decision making.

INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute a structuring element of the fabric contemporary economic economy, accounting for a significant portion of the generation of jobs, the production of innovations and economic growth on a global scale.

According to data consolidated by international organizations, these organizations represent more than 90% of total companies in most developed economies and in development, highlighting its socioeconomic relevance (BIANCHINI; LASHERAS SANCHO, 2025).

Despite their importance, SMEs are characterized by facing a set of specific challenges that differentiate them from large corporations. The literature specialized experts point out as the main obstacles the scarcity of financial resources and qualified human resources, difficulties in accessing markets and sources of financing, in addition to the intense competitive pressure exerted by larger organizations, which they have more favorable economies of scale and scope (HAFEEZ et al., 2025).

In this context of structural limitations, the search for knowledge of external origin is configured as a fundamental strategy for survival and development sustainability of these organizations. Among the various mechanisms available for acquisition of external knowledge, business consultancy stands out as privileged instrument, providing SMEs with access to skills specialized services, established management methodologies and organizational practices that, in otherwise, they would remain beyond their reach (FRANCIS; CHAKRAVARTY, 2025).

The main objective of this article is to carry out a systematic review of the recent scientific production on the topic, investigating how consultancy operates as a process of knowledge transfer,



with particular attention to its effects on management training and the quality of decision-making processes in SMEs.

The problem that guides this investigation can be summarized in the following question: research: how consultancy contributes to the development of skills management and to improve decision-making processes in small companies, considering the specificities and constraints of the work environment contemporary business?

To answer this question, a systematic review was carried out covering scientific publications from the 2021-2025 five-year period, exploring conceptual articulations between consultancy, knowledge transfer, absorptive capacity, training management, decision making, organizational learning and digital transformation.

The structure of the text is organized into thematic sections that examine each of these dimensions, converging to an integrative discussion of the findings and their implications for management practice and for the future research agenda.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The methodology used in this systematic review followed a structured protocol search, selection and analysis of scientific literature, according to consolidated guidelines for studies of this nature.

Search strategy

The collection of bibliographic material was carried out in the Scopus and Web of databases. Science, recognized as reference repositories for scientific literature in administration and related areas. The coverage period covered the years 2021 to 2025, temporal delimitation justified by the intention of capturing developments recent studies in the field.

Search terms

The descriptors used in the searches included combinations of the following terms, in Portuguese and English: “consultoria” (consulting), “transfer of knowledge” (knowledge transfer), “small business” (SME), “managerial training” (managerial training, managerial development), “making decision” (decision-making), “absorptive capacity” (absorptive capacity), “organizational learning” and “organizational learning” digital” (digital transformation).

Selection criteria

Articles that met the following criteria were selected: (a) approach to interrelationship between consultancy and knowledge transfer; (b) focus on the context of small and medium-sized companies; (c) publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals pairs; (d) availability of full text for analysis.

Analysis procedures

The selected corpus was subjected to thematic analysis, a procedure that allowed identification of recurring patterns and the construction of a conceptual framework articulated around the thematic axes that organize the subsequent sections of this paper.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Consulting as a process of transferring information knowledge

Business consultancy is characterized in specialized literature as a process systematic knowledge transfer, in which an agent external to the organization — the consultant — works in collaboration with members of the client company to identify problems, develop solutions and improve organizational performance.

This conceptualization transcends the merely instrumental view of consultancy as provision of specific services, positioning it as a learning mechanism interorganizacional (FRANCIS; CHAKRAVARTY, 2025).

The knowledge transfer process via consultancy involves two distinct types of knowledge, according to the classic typology of Nonaka and Takeuchi. The knowledge explicit corresponds to that which can be systematized, codified and transmitted by through documents, reports, manuals and formalized procedures.

The tacit knowledge, in turn, has a more subjective nature, being based accumulated experience, intuition and mental schemes that resist full coding. Effective transfer of tacit knowledge requires interaction prolonged observation, joint practice and socialization processes between consultants and members of the client organization.

The effectiveness of knowledge transfer through consultancy is conditioned, to a significant extent, by the absorptive capacity (ACAP) of the company receptora. Este constructo, originalmente proposto por Cohen e Levinthal (1990), refere to the organizational ability to recognize the value of information and knowledge external knowledge, assimilate them to pre-existing knowledge and apply them for specific purposes productive and commercial.

Francis and Chakravarty (2025) advance the operationalization of this concept, proposing analytical model that distinguishes four interdependent dimensions of capability absorptive: acquisition (identification and obtaining relevant external knowledge), assimilation (interpretation and understanding of acquired knowledge), transformation (combination of new knowledge with existing organizational knowledge) and exploration (application of transformed knowledge to generate value). The authors empirically demonstrate that SMEs that develop the four dimensions, with particular

emphasis on exploration capacity, achieve improvements in statistically significant performance.

Management training and skills development

Consulting plays an important role in the development of managerial skills in SMEs, contributing to the qualification of strategic management processes. The systematic interaction with consultants with diverse experience provides small business managers the opportunity to broaden their business horizons understanding the business environment, appropriating tools and methodologies consolidated management and develop leadership capabilities adapted to the demands contemporâneas (JABBOUR AL MAALOUF; EL ACHI; BALOUZA, 2025).

Among leadership approaches, transformational leadership has been identified as critical factor for the success of innovation initiatives in SMEs. Jabbour Al Maalouf, El Achi and Balouza (2025), in an empirical study with a sample of European SMEs, demonstrate that transformational leaders — characterized by the ability to articulate visions. inspiring, intellectually stimulate your employees and pay attention individualized to the development needs of each team member — exert a positive influence on both exploration activities (search for unprecedented knowledge and opportunities) as well as exploration activities (efficient use of knowledge and resources already available), resulting in higher levels of organizational performance.

The development of managerial skills provided by consultancy is not It is limited to aspects of a technical or operational nature. Order skills cognitive and behavioral, such as strategic thinking, ability to adapt to contexts of accelerated change, emotional intelligence and effective communication, reveal are equally important and can be improved through consultancy processes adequately conducted. Yang et al. (2025) show that leaders with orientation transformacional they tend to create organizational environments characterized by support. psychological and openness to participation, in which employees feel encouraged to express ideas and suggestions, configuring conditions conducive to the emergence of innovations.



Decision making in small businesses

Decision-making processes in SMEs are often marked by high degree of uncertainty and significant resource constraints. The managers of these organizations find themselves compelled to adopt strategic decisions in environments of dynamic and intensely competitive businesses, often having access to information incomplete and limited access to sophisticated analytical instruments (JOHANSON et al., 2024).

Molina-Abril et al. (2025) examine how heuristic strategies, techniques metaheuristics and machine learning algorithms can be employed to support decision-making in SMEs, particularly in situations that involve optimization problems with multiple objectives simultaneously considered. The authors argue that the combination of different approaches decision-making — intuitive and analytical — can increase the quality of decisions in contexts of complexity and uncertainty characteristic of the small business environment.

Consulting offers multiple possibilities for contributing to the improvement of decision-making processes in SMEs. Firstly, consultants can introduce tools and methodologies for collecting, organizing and analyzing data, enabling managers to base their decisions on more robust informational bases and reliable. Secondly, the experience accumulated by consultants in different sectors and organizational contexts constitute a valuable source of insights that can help in reducing the uncertainty inherent in strategic decisions.

Johanson et al. (2024) highlight the relevance of the institutional context as a variable moderator in the relationship between decision-making strategies and performance of SMEs, highlighting the need to calibrate decision-making approaches to the characteristics specific to the environment in which the organization operates. This contingency perspective reinforces the importance of consultancy as a knowledge transfer mechanism contextualized, capable of assisting managers in adapting management practices to particularities of their operating environment.

Organizational learning and absorptive capacity

Organizational learning can be conceptualized as the process by which a organization acquires, disseminates internally and uses knowledge with a view to improving its performance and developing new capabilities. The consultancy functions as a catalyst for organizational learning, facilitating influx of external knowledge and stimulating processes of critical reflection and change in established practices.

The distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge assumes particular relevance in context of organizational learning mediated by consultancy. While the explicit knowledge can be transferred through documents, reports technicians and structured training programs, knowledge transfer tacit demands more intensive and prolonged forms of interaction, involving joint work, observation, mentoring and socialization between consultants and members of the client organization.

Absorptive capacity constitutes the central mechanism that enables the effective occurrence of organizational learning. As previously explained, this construct comprises the dimensions of acquisition, assimilation, transformation and exploration of knowledge, configuring a cumulative process in which the knowledge base organization's pre-existing conditions condition its ability to incorporate and use new knowledge.

Cheng et al. (2024), in a study on the adoption of technologies associated with Industry 4.0, demonstrate that investment in knowledge management practices and the promotion of Organizational learning contributes significantly to effective incorporation new technologies, establishing a positive relationship between knowledge management and organizational performance. This finding reinforces the importance of approaches integrated solutions that combine consultancy, organizational learning and technological modernization.

Innovation and digital transformation

Innovation is a critical factor in sustaining the competitiveness of SMEs in business environments characterized by accelerated technological change and intensified competition. Consulting can boost the innovative capacity of small businesses in multiple ways, from identifying opportunities for untapped markets until the development of new products, services and organizational processes.

Digital transformation has occupied a prominent position on the consultancy agenda business in recent years, reflecting the growing relevance of digital technologies for organizational competitiveness. Hafeez et al. (2025), in a systematic review of literature on knowledge management and digital transformation in SMEs, identify two main collaborative mechanisms for the digitalization of these organizations: collaborations in the value chain and in inter-organizational networks, and collaborations based on innovation ecosystems. The study also highlights the role of actors external parties — customers, suppliers, intermediaries and governments — as facilitators of digital transformation journey for small businesses.

Bianchini and Lasheras Sancho (2025), in a technical report produced within the scope of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), characterize the digitalization as an enabling factor for the competitiveness of SMEs, providing expanded access to markets, gains in operational efficiency and new possibilities for interaction with customers and business partners. The document emphasizes the importance of consultancy and specialized external support for the successful conduct of digital transformation processes, particularly in organizations that lack internal competencies in this field.

DISCUSSÃO

The integrative analysis of the reviewed literature allows us to identify consultancy as

multidimensional process that transcends the restrictive characterization of mere provision of technical services. Consulting operates, fundamentally, as a channel of knowledge transfer, enabling SMEs to develop management skills, improve the quality of their decision-making processes and strengthen their capacity for innovation in business contexts marked by complexity growing.

Absorptive capacity emerges from the review as a theoretical construction of explanatory centrality, offering conceptual foundations for understanding how SMEs can effectively internalize external knowledge and convert it into sources of competitive advantage. The literature converges in indicating that the potential benefits of consultancy are conditioned by the prior existence of capabilities minimum organizational requirements that enable the company to recognize, assimilate, transform and explore transferred knowledge.

The interrelations between the themes examined are particularly dense. THE management training, driven by consultancy, constitutes a condition for development of transformational leadership styles which, in turn, configure an environment conducive to the emergence of innovations. Strategic decision making, when supported by analytical tools and the accumulated experience of consultants, provides SME managers with expanded cognitive resources for navigating environments characterized by uncertainty and volatility. Organizational learning, made possible by the absorptive capacity, constitutes the underlying mechanism that sustains the continuous improvement processes and organizational adaptation.

Digital transformation, from this perspective, is not reduced to the mere adoption of technological artifacts, configuring itself as a process of cultural and organizational change that demands a deliberate strategic approach. Consultancy specializing in Digital transformation helps SMEs overcome barriers related to resources and skills, making it possible to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the digital economy.



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This systematic literature review confirms the relevance of consultancy as a process knowledge transfer with significant impacts on training management and decision making in small and medium-sized companies. By providing access to knowledge of a tacit and explicit nature, consultancy enables SMEs to develop skills, improve their organizational processes and innovate in a sustainable way.

Absorptive capacity, transformational leadership and digital transformation configure key elements that enhance the benefits derived from consultation, indicating that the results of this process depend not only on the quality of the transferred knowledge, but also the organizational conditions that enable its effective incorporation and use.

From the point of view of managerial implications, the findings of this review suggest that the investment in consultancy can produce significant returns for SMEs, since these organizations are prepared to absorb and productively apply the acquired knowledge. For consulting professionals, the results show the need for action that transcends the role of technical specialist, assuming function of facilitating organizational learning.

As a limitation of the present study, it is recognized that the review privileged international literature, which may restrict the immediate applicability of the findings to the Brazilian context, marked by its own institutional and business specificities. It is suggested, for future research, the development of empirical investigations aimed at understanding the particularities of consultancy for SMEs in Brazil, as well as longitudinal studies that allow evaluating the long-term impact of consultancy on the performance of these organizations.

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