https://doi.org/10.52326/csd2025.24

THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS CONSULTING IN ACCELERATING ORGANIZATIONAL DIGITALIZATION

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Abstract. Digital transformation has become a key determinant of competitiveness and sustainable growth. In Republic of Moldova, however, a significant gap persists between digital awareness and implementation, particularly among SMEs. This study explores how business consulting acts as a strategic accelerator of organizational digitalization by transforming intent into capability. Drawing on data from EBRD, AMCOR and ODA, the paper analyzes both macro-level policies and micro-level realities to identify systemic and behavioral gaps. A new model – MACD-TM (Moldova Affordable Consulting-Driven Digital Transformation Model) – is proposed, emphasizing efficiency, innovation, and adaptability as drivers of sustainable change. The findings highlight consulting's pivotal role in bridging strategic vision and operational practice, reinforcing the idea that digital transformation is as much cultural and organizational as it is technological.

Keywords: *consulting, digital transformation, SMEs, competitiveness, change management, innovation, strategy.*

JEL code: *M15, M21, O33*

Introduction

The digital transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Republic of Moldova remains one of the most visible yet paradoxical developments of the past decade. Although almost all entrepreneurs – 97%, according to recent studies, declare that digitalization is essential to remain competitive, only 17% effectively implement advanced digital solutions, and fewer than 15% possess a clear strategy in this regard. This discrepancy between intention and action defines what may be termed the digitalization paradox: the willingness exists, yet the means and confidence to pursue transformation are lacking.

Previous research by the authors [1] has demonstrated that the main obstacle is not resistance to change, but rather the inability to convert intentions into concrete processes. The ADKAR model (Awareness – Desire – Knowledge – Ability – Reinforcement) and Kotter's change management framework (particularly the stages of creating urgency, building coalitions, and anchoring change) elucidate this stagnation: most Moldovan firms remain in the early stages, where practical knowledge, implementation skills, and financial resources are insufficient to advance toward effective action.

Against this backdrop, business consultancy assumes a strategic role: it becomes the mechanism that translates digital intent into operational reality. Through diagnosis, guidance, and reinforcement, the consultant acts as an intermediary between the entrepreneur's vision and the complexity of technological processes.

The present study is based on the analysis of empirical data from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD Study on SME Digital Engagement and Adaptation in Moldova [2], complemented by two market analyses – the Management Consulting Market in the Republic of Moldova [3] and The Market Study on Consulting and Mentoring Services [4]. These sources offer an integrated view of the local consulting ecosystem: a growing market (€47.2 million in 2023, with 765 active firms), yet fragmented and largely dependent on donor-funded projects, where only 19% of SMEs use consulting services for digital planning.

This article aims to expand the analytical focus from diagnosis to intervention, from understanding why SMEs fail to digitalize to exploring how consulting can become the driving force accelerating this process. The structure of the paper follows a progressive logic: analysis of the micro- and macro-context of digital transformation in Moldova; clarification of the role of business consulting as an instrument of change; evaluation of the benefits, barriers, and implications of consulting for SMEs and development of a proprietary intervention model – MACD-TM (Moldova-Affordable Consulting-Driven Digital Transformation Model), based on the synergy among efficiency, innovation, and adaptability.

In an economic context positioned at the intersection of European aspirations and local realities, this research argues that digital transformation is not merely a technological process but also an organizational and cultural one, and that consulting thus represents the invisible infrastructure enabling sustainable change.

Current state of digital transformation in the Republic of Moldova

Digital transformation (DT) represents the systematic integration of digital technologies across all organizational processes, aiming to enhance efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness. In the Republic of Moldova, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute approximately 97% of all entrepreneurial activity [2], and the aspiration toward digital transformation is nearly universal: 97% of entrepreneurs express the intention to digitalize their businesses in order to remain competitive [1]. However, the empirical reality reveals a notable gap – only 17% currently employ advanced digital solutions (e.g., ERP, AI), while merely 15% have developed a coherent digitalization strategy [2].

Digital transformation in the Republic of Moldova thus emerges as both a strategic imperative and a structural challenge. As a nation progressively aligning its economic and governance systems with the European Union’s Digital Single Market, Moldova has embarked on a comprehensive modernization trajectory through the National Digital Transformation Strategy 2023–2030 [5]. This strategic framework envisions a digital, innovative, and resilient society, structured around six strategic pillars: digital society, ICT competitiveness, innovative economy, efficient governance, cybersecurity, and Moldova’s positioning as a digital nation [5].

The overarching vision of this national framework transcends the mere digitization of processes; it seeks to redefine the relationship between institutions, enterprises, and citizens with technology. By 2030, Moldova aims to ensure that over 80% of the population possess basic digital skills, 60% of SMEs adopt digital technologies, and that the ICT sector contributes more than 10% to the national GDP [5]. Nevertheless, the pace and depth of digital adoption remain uneven, revealing significant disparities between the macro level (national and infrastructural transformation) and the micro level (enterprise and organizational adaptation).

This contextual duality frames the so-called digitalization paradox: while the intent and awareness of digital transformation are widespread, the translation of these intentions into actionable strategies remains limited. Within this dynamic, business consultancy acquires a pivotal function, serving as the intermediary mechanism that bridges strategic intent with operational capability. Through diagnostic assessment, process guidance, and capacity reinforcement, consultants play a decisive role in converting Moldova’s digital aspirations into tangible outcomes of modernization and competitiveness.

The macro-level landscape: digital economy and governance

At the macroeconomic level, the Republic of Moldova has achieved substantial progress in developing a robust and adaptive digital ecosystem. The information and communications technology (ICT) sector currently contribute between 6% and 8,1% of GDP, representing a threefold increase since 2015, and is projected to exceed 10% by 2030. According to UNDP [6], Moldova now ranks within the “Very High” category of the E-Government Development Index, a position that reflects sustained improvements in telecommunications infrastructure, the automation of public services, and national levels of digital literacy.

The implementation of flagship initiatives such as EVO, EVOSign, and MWallet has transformed more than 50% of public services into fully digital formats, with the strategic objective

of achieving 100% online access to key services by 2030. Internet penetration has reached 80.2% (2.42 million users), underpinned by 98% 4G coverage and initial 5G deployment extending across approximately 5% of the national territory [7]. Furthermore, Moldova has aligned its regulatory environment with the European Union's Electronic Communications Code, thereby enabling the "Roam Like at Home" principle and enhancing cross-border digital integration.

Economic indicators likewise underscore the consolidation of Moldova's digital economy. In 2022, IT service exports totaled USD 501.85 million, while over 2,370 ICT enterprises were registered within the Moldova Innovation Technology Park (MITP). The ecosystem continues to expand dynamically, generating approximately 200 new tech startups annually. This sector contributes significantly to value creation and supports the emergence of regional innovation hubs, including the Digital Innovation Centers scheduled for launch during 2026-2027.

Nevertheless, a series of structural vulnerabilities temper these advancements. The urban-rural digital divide, limited access to digital financing, and underrepresentation of women in ICT (31%) continue to constrain inclusive growth. Moreover, while infrastructural and regulatory maturity has advanced rapidly, cybersecurity and data-resilience capacities remain insufficiently developed, placing Moldova at a critical juncture between digital expansion and systemic fragility.

The micro-level reality: digitalization among SMEs

At the microeconomic level, the landscape is considerably more nuanced. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for over 97% of all registered companies and employ approximately 65% of the national workforce. Despite their pivotal role in the Moldovan economy, only 17% of SMEs currently utilize advanced digital solutions, such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), cloud-based platforms, or artificial intelligence (AI) tools, and fewer than 15% have formulated a formal digitalization strategy [2].

Survey data reveal that approximately 70% of SMEs lack the time, expertise, or financial resources required to initiate and sustain digital transformation processes. Moreover, 45% of firms report uncertainty regarding the technologies most appropriate to their operational needs, thereby exposing a persistent consulting and advisory deficit within the SME ecosystem. As a result, digital adoption tends to be reactive rather than strategic, often driven by external funding mechanisms or regulatory compliance pressures, rather than by a proactive long-term vision of competitiveness and innovation.

Findings from the EBRD study further demonstrate that digital awareness does not necessarily translate into capability [2]. While more than half of firms acknowledge the strategic importance of technology for maintaining competitiveness, fewer than one-third integrate digital tools meaningfully within their business models or organizational workflows. The most frequently used instruments remain basic accounting software, e-commerce platforms, and social media marketing, whereas data analytics, process automation, and AI-based decision systems remain largely underexplored.

As succinctly noted by one study participant, "Moldovan SMEs are not resistant to digitalization – they operate within a context of uncertainty, fragmentation, and overload" [2]. This observation encapsulates the structural paradox facing Moldovan enterprises: the aspiration for modernization exists, yet the pathways toward its realization remain constrained by knowledge, capacity, and systemic limitations.

The EBRD survey identifies five principal categories of barriers constraining the digital transformation of SMEs in the Republic of Moldova [2]. Each barrier type corresponds to specific behavioral, strategic, or organizational limitations that hinder the transition from digital awareness to actionable implementation.

Despite the constraints outlined above, the landscape of SMEs in the Republic of Moldova reveals a set of emerging drivers and enabling factors that, if strategically leveraged, could significantly accelerate the country's trajectory toward digital maturity and competitiveness [2]:

1) Government and Donor programs. Initiatives such as the ODA Digital Voucher Program and PARE 1+1 Digital provide co-financing mechanisms for technological investments, employee training, and process automation. These programs represent essential instruments for reducing financial barriers and stimulating technological adoption among SMEs.

Table 1. Principal barriers to digital transformation among Moldovan SMEs

Barrier category	*Quantitative findings*	*Analytical implications*
1. Financial constraints	68% of SMEs report insufficient financial capacity to support digital investments; only 9% have accessed donor-funded grants	Reflects inadequate financial planning and low awareness of available digital financing instruments (e.g., ODA [6], PARE 1+1 Digital)
2. Human Capital and Skills	74% of firms lack personnel with relevant IT or data competencies; 60% indicate low digital literacy among managers	Highlights a critical leadership capability gap – technological adoption is limited by managerial cognition and organizational learning capacity
3. Information deficit	45% of respondents report “not knowing which digital solutions best fit their business model”	Indicates the absence of structured consulting or advisory support; decisions are made on an ad hoc basis or through peer imitation
4. Operational overload	70% state they have “no time” for training or strategic digital planning due to day-to-day operational demands	Suggests that many SMEs function in a *survival-oriented mode*, where transformation efforts compete with short-term operational continuity
5. Resistance and perception	38% express a “low perceived relevance” of digital tools beyond accounting or marketing functions	Reveals limited understanding of the return on investment (ROI) and the broader logic of value creation through digitalization

Source: developed by the authors using [2]

2) Sector-specific partnerships. Collaborative projects including Tekwill in Every School and Digital4SMEs (implemented in partnership with USAID and UNDP) contribute to the development of digital competencies and foster cross-sector innovation ecosystems, linking education, entrepreneurship and technology.

3) Ecosystem support structures. The Moldova Innovation Technology Park (MITP) plays a central role in supporting the ICT ecosystem by providing fiscal incentives, digital infrastructure, and a collaborative environment for over 2,000 technology-oriented enterprises, thereby enhancing knowledge exchange and sectoral integration.

4) Consumer and market pressures. The gradual expansion of e-commerce, although still modest (with approximately 15% of SMEs currently selling online), is being driven by regional market competition and rising consumer expectations for digital interaction and service delivery.

5) Growing demand for consulting services. Approximately 41% of SMEs express an interest in engaging external advisory services for digital projects, yet only 12% have actually contracted a consultant – revealing a substantial untapped market potential for professional consulting and mentoring.

Collectively, these drivers suggest that Moldova’s digital transformation challenge lies not in the absence of opportunity, but in the lack of structured facilitation mechanisms. In this context, business consultancy emerges as a critical translation layer – bridging the gap between policy frameworks, technological providers, and entrepreneurial realities.

From a behavioral economics perspective, the study [2] reveals a persistent discrepancy between perceived value and actual behavioral implementation among Moldovan SMEs:

- 63% of respondents agree that digital tools can improve operational efficiency;
- yet only 29% have implemented any form of process-level automation;
- likewise, 52% acknowledge that digital presence is essential for competitiveness, while fewer than 18% systematically track digital key performance indicators (KPIs).

This divergence exemplifies the “knowing-doing gap” described by Pfeffer and Sutton [8], wherein awareness of what must change does not automatically lead to transformation. The same pattern aligns with Hiatt’s ADKAR model, suggesting that while Moldovan SMEs have largely achieved the stages of awareness and desire, they continue to struggle with the knowledge and ability phases necessary to operationalize digital change.

As succinctly observed in the study, “Without external facilitation and structured change management, awareness does not translate into ability and digital transformation remains a declared intention”.

Furthermore, organizational resistance often manifests not through explicit opposition but through decision paralysis. Entrepreneurs frequently face an overload of digital options, lacking

analytical frameworks to prioritize investments or assess strategic fit. This behavioral inertia underscores the growing need for consulting mediation, whereby specialized experts can offer clarity, contextual analysis, and guided decision-making frameworks to bridge the gap between intention and implementation.

The convergence of organizational barriers and emerging drivers creates a compelling rationale for positioning business consulting as a critical enabling infrastructure in Moldova's digital transformation process. Within this evolving ecosystem, consultants operate not merely as advisors but as strategic facilitators of change, capable of bridging the persistent gap between digital ambition and organizational capability.

The integration of digital technologies – such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and blockchain – has proven essential in increasing traceability, optimizing resource use, and improving operational efficiency across organizations. These innovations, as emphasized in the context of the circular economy, provide a model for how technological enablers can drive sustainable digital transformation [9, p. 226].

Consulting interventions can play a multi-dimensional role in the transformation process:

- Diagnosing readiness – through mapping organizational capacities, assessing leadership alignment, and identifying process bottlenecks that inhibit transformation.
- Guiding prioritization – by selecting and sequencing digital tools and initiatives consistent with each enterprise's strategic objectives and maturity level.
- Facilitating implementation – by coordinating between technology providers and SMEs, ensuring effective project management and resource allocation.
- Reinforcing adoption – through training programs, behavioral change mechanisms, and performance monitoring systems designed to sustain long-term digital integration.

In essence, consulting functions as the missing translation mechanism – the intermediary that converts macro-level policy ambition into micro-level organizational capability. Without this facilitative layer, Moldova risks sustaining a dual-speed transformation, where governmental and infrastructural advances outpace firms' absorptive and adaptive capacities.

The EBRD findings affirm that Moldovan SMEs are not technologically lagging; rather, they remain strategically unstructured [2]. The prevailing digital divide is therefore not one of access, but of clarity, guidance, and change capability. Consequently, the next stage of Moldova's transformation depends not solely on expanding technological infrastructure, but on empowering enterprises with the knowledge, frameworks, and strategic discipline necessary to internalize change.

In this sense, consulting transcends its traditional service role to become a mechanism of national capability building – bridging awareness and action, transforming digital potential into measurable performance, and embedding resilience within Moldova's evolving digital economy.

Comparative analysis: Macro versus Micro transformation

The comparative examination of Moldova's macro-level digital progress and micro-level adoption among SMEs reveals a persistent structural asymmetry – a phenomenon best described as a "dual-speed transformation". While the government has made substantial advances in digital infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and policy ecosystems, the majority of enterprises continue to operate at low to intermediate stages of digital maturity.

To conceptualize this imbalance, the present analysis employs a Digital Readiness Gap (DRG) Framework, designed to measure the divergence between systemic and organizational dimensions of transformation. The Observed Gap represents the differential between macroeconomic (systemic) and microeconomic (organizational) levels in terms of digital readiness, adoption, and capability. Formally:

$$Observed\ Gap = Macro\ Digital\ Readiness - Micro\ Digital\ Readiness \quad (1)$$

In formula (1), readiness is expressed through a combination of quantitative indicators (e.g., technology usage, digital training intensity, ICT contribution to GDP) and qualitative dimensions (e.g., strategic vision, leadership commitment, and organizational culture).

This analytical framework enables the evaluation of alignment and coherence between national digital progress and enterprise-level adoption. To operationalize this comparison, a qualitative assessment scale was developed and is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Qualitative scale for assessing Digital Readiness Gaps between Macro and Micro levels

Gap Intensity	*Definition*	*Interpretation*
Low	<25% difference between macro and micro levels	Alignment achieved; sustainable progress possible
Moderate	25–50% difference	Implementation lag; policy alignment ongoing
High	50–70% difference	Functional imbalance; consulting needed for coherence
Very High	>70% difference	Structural divergence; SMEs excluded from digital economy
Critical / Severe	Gap extends to behavioral or strategic levels	Systemic misalignment requiring deep transformation intervention

Source: developed by the authors using [2]

Applying this framework to Moldova’s data, Table 3 reveals significant structural and behavioral disparities between macro-level ambition and micro-level implementation.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of Digital Transformation Indicators: Macro versus Micro levels in the Republic of Moldova

Indicator	*Macro level*	*Micro level (SMEs)*	*Observed GAP*	*Analytical Interpretation*
ICT Contribution to GDP	6-8.1% (target >10%)	<2% indirect contribution	High	ICT is a national growth engine but remains disconnected from SME-level productivity; digital gains are concentrated in large export-oriented firms.
E-Government Adoption	70% of G2B services digitalized	15% SMEs sell online	Very high	Advanced government digitalization not mirrored by private usage; administrative modernization has not yet translated into business competitiveness.
Workforce Digital Skills	80% basic skills target	<40% employees trained	High	Education policies succeed nationally, but enterprises lack structured digital upskilling; the internal “learning gap” widens.
Strategic Vision	National Strategy 2023-2030	Only 15% SMEs with strategy	Critical	Coherent policy design contrasts sharply with fragmented firm-level planning; indicates lack of translation mechanisms (consulting, advisory).
Cultural Readiness	Strong in public sector	Weak among SME leaders	Severe	Transformation blocked by leadership mindset and behavioral inertia; reveals the absence of organizational change capability frameworks.

Source: developed by the authors using [2]

The comparison between national digitalization (macro level) and enterprise digitalization (micro level) exposes a distinct “dual-speed transformation” dynamic within Moldova’s digital landscape. While the state advances rapidly in areas such as digital governance, infrastructure development, and policy implementation, the SME sector remains constrained by fragmented decision-making, limited absorptive capacity, and insufficient access to advisory support.

This comparative framework demonstrates that policy success at the macro level does not automatically cascade into organizational transformation. Each identified gap reveals a particular layer of constraint:

- High functional gaps (e.g., ICT contribution to GDP, workforce skills) indicate that while infrastructure and resources exist, guidance mechanisms for translating them into business-level adoption remain weak.
- Very high and critical gaps (e.g., digital strategy, governance usage) highlight a structural disconnect between institutional ambition and enterprise-level operationalization.
- Severe gaps (e.g., organizational culture) suggest that the most persistent barriers are psychological and behavioral rather than technological, confirming the [2] finding that *“entrepreneurs do not resist change; they lack structured support to enact it”.*

From a behavioral change perspective, these discrepancies map onto the missing components of Hiatt’s ADKAR model-namely, *knowledge, ability, and reinforcement* indicating that Moldova’s digital transformation remains trapped between awareness and action. Similarly, when viewed through Kotter’s eight-step model, Moldovan SMEs appear unable to progress beyond the initial

phases of *creating urgency, forming coalitions, and articulating vision*, thereby failing to institutionalize change at the organizational level.

Consequently, these findings underscore the strategic necessity of business consulting as an intermediary system capable of translating national readiness into enterprise-level capability. Consulting interventions can bridge the readiness gap by:

1. Translating macro strategies into actionable digital roadmaps tailored for SMEs.
2. Supporting leadership development and cultural adaptation within organizations.
3. Embedding sustainable digital practices through ongoing mentoring, capacity building, and performance monitoring.

The Observed Gap thus functions not only as a measure of disparity but also as a diagnostic indicator, identifying where targeted consulting interventions could generate the highest developmental impact.

- In areas of High or Very High Gaps, consulting serves as an alignment mechanism, ensuring coherence between governmental infrastructure and business application.
- In Critical or Severe Gaps, consulting operates as a transformation mechanism, enabling the cognitive and cultural shifts necessary for systemic digitalization.

In the Moldovan context, this analysis suggests that while policy and infrastructure have created a fertile digital environment, true transformation will depend on empowering organizations to act. Business consulting therefore emerges as a pivotal transmission belt – a strategic conduit that converts digital potential into organizational capability, thereby enhancing both enterprise resilience and national competitiveness.

Table 4 synthesizes the key indicators, highlighting the potential for macro–micro convergence: macro-level strengths in infrastructure and policy must cascade to the micro level through targeted consulting interventions.

Table 4. Micro-Macro Indicators of Digital Transformation in Moldovan SMEs (2023–2025)

Indicator	*Micro Level (Enterprise)*	*Macro Level (National/Sectoral)*	*Gap / Analytical Implication*
Efficiency	▪ 70% of G2B services digitalized; ▪ 15% of SMEs engaged in e-commerce; ▪ 21–60% cost savings reported.	▪ 80.2% internet penetration; ▪ 98% 4G coverage; ▪ ICT adds +1.3% to GDP.	▪ rural disparities limit scalability; ▪ consulting supports process redesign and operational integration.
Innovation	▪ 35% AI/IoT adoption; ▪ 10% use AI-related consulting.	▪ ICT contributes 6.3% of GDP; ▪ ~200 new IT firms established annually.	▪ a 72% skills deficit constrains R&D capacity; ▪ external expertise accelerates innovation diffusion.
Adaptability	▪ 47% access consulting; ▪ 61% report cybersecurity vulnerability	National target: ▪ top 50 in cybersecurity by 2030; ▪ gender gap in ICT workforce at 31%	▪ low resilience to external shocks (e.g., –5.9% GDP in 2022); ▪ cultural change and risk management are required.
Barriers / Enabling Factors	Barriers: ▪ Skills (72%), ▪ Finance (73%); ▪ Enablers: Donor support (47%)	Barriers: ▪ Rural access (35%); ▪ Enablers: EU funding (€1.9 billion)	▪ 53% internal dependency; ▪ consulting acts as a catalytic mechanism with up to 90% efficiency.

Source: developed by the authors using [2,3,5,10]

These disparities, echoing the knowledge and ability gaps identified in the ADKAR model and the vision and institutionalization gaps from Kotter’s change framework, underscore the strategic necessity of business consulting. Consulting does not merely provide a technological infusion but rather enables a holistic activation mechanism that ensures the sustainable economic resilience of enterprises and strengthens coherence between the micro and macro levels of Moldova’s digital transformation.

The role and significance of business consulting

The management consulting market in the Republic of Moldova represents an emerging ecosystem, characterized by strong ambitions yet constrained by fragmentation and structural limitations. Within an economy where SMEs comprising 97% of all enterprises, form the backbone of entrepreneurship, the sector faces acute challenges in advancing digital transformation (DT).

This market, estimated at approximately €47 million in 2023, includes 765 active firms and 1,842 employees [3]. It remains dominated by micro-entities (65% of all players) that primarily provide essential services such as accounting, tax advisory, and basic strategic planning. However, its evolution reflects a paradoxical dynamic: growing demand for professional expertise, driven by European integration and donor-supported programs (ODA, EBRD), contrasted with an undersupply of specialized services – with only two firms focusing on advanced digital transformation [4].

At the macro level, the sector registered moderate growth between 2022 and 2024, sustained primarily by donor-funded programs and public-private partnerships (EBRD, UNDP, EU, ODA), which account for up to 70% of total revenues for many firms. However, this structural dependency on external funding reduces market elasticity and limits its ability to respond autonomously to the evolving needs of local businesses. Total turnover reached €47 million in 2023, with an average of €61,700 per company, though this figure conceals significant inequalities: large firms (5-10% of total) capture over 40% of revenues, leaving micro-consultants with limited fees (€150-300/hour), often perceived as inaccessible for SMEs with turnovers below 10 million MDL [2].

The main challenges include the shortage of qualified personnel (26% of firms), dependency on external donors (11% of projects), and low demand for complex services, such as digital transformation (only 47% of SMEs use consulting services, mainly for tax compliance) [4]. Emerging positive trends include “coopetition”, partnerships between small consultancies to bid for larger projects, and an orientation toward digital advisory services. Yet the market remains vulnerable to shocks, as evidenced by the 15% contraction in 2022 during the pandemic. These external factors have driven the consulting sector toward greater diversification and integration, increasingly combining economic and digital expertise into a unified advisory approach.

One fact remains certain: business and management consulting are migrating toward a more strategic relevance in the digitalization process, becoming an indispensable link in the digital transformation equation. Consulting bridges the gap between technological availability and organizational capability for utilization. The EBRD study shows that only 19% of Moldovan SMEs employ consulting services for digital planning; however, those that do report competitiveness increases of 60-70% [2]. Moreover, 47% of companies that received consulting support for digitalization reported operational performance gains exceeding 65%.

Consulting thus functions as a change accelerator across three major dimensions:

1. Strategic clarification – assisting firms in developing coherent digital visions and actionable implementation roadmaps.
2. Technological implementation guidance – translating digital solutions into processes adapted to organizational culture.
3. Cultural resilience development – supporting organizations in internalizing change and preventing post-implementation regression.

These three dimensions conceptually correspond to the knowledge, ability, and reinforcement stages of the ADKAR model, and to the “empower action – create short-term wins – anchor new approaches” stages of Kotter’s framework [1]. In Moldova, the major challenge lies in the “ability” phase – firms often possess the technology but lack the internal processes and competencies necessary to utilize it effectively. In this context, consultants act as “translators of change”, capable of intervening where internal capacities are insufficient and of creating monitoring and consolidation mechanisms (e.g., post-implementation audits, digital coaching, upskilling).

Thus, the current state of the consulting market intertwines closely with that of digital transformation among SMEs, generating an imperative need for structured intervention. At the micro level, Moldovan SMEs – 61% of which are micro-entities – express a nearly universal desire for digitalization (97%), yet only 17% implement it effectively, constrained by cost barriers (73%), skills deficits (72%), and information gaps (63%) [2]. At the macro level, the National Digital Transformation Strategy 2023–2030 envisions a “100% digital state”, with notable achievements such as the EVO application (100,000 users) and ICT exports reaching 14% of total exports [5]. Yet the ecosystem remains fragmented, with regional disparities (rural 20% vs. urban 55% adoption) and dependence on ODA grants (which increased adoption by +41% in pilot programs) [11,12].

The key conclusions can thus be summarized as follows:

- Existing consulting services do not sufficiently address digital transformation needs only 47% of SMEs use them, primarily for reactive rather than proactive purposes (e.g., 50% accounting, while 77% perceive benefits in digital marketing).
- This disconnection underscores the need for an accessible, regionally distributed, and integrated consulting model, capable of converting barriers into opportunities potentially increasing adoption by +35% and yielding an average ROI of 2.1–2.8.

Based on this analysis, it becomes evident that Moldova requires an integrative consulting model, one that connects theoretical frameworks (ADKAR, Kotter) with the practical realities identified through empirical studies. Such a model should:

- Translate national digital policies into actionable microeconomic interventions.
- Build bridges between consulting, digitalization, and organizational culture.
- Function as an alignment instrument between the macro and micro levels of transformation.

A model of this nature would consolidate the role of consulting as a facilitator of change and enable the scaling of impact from individual organizations to the broader economic ecosystem.

Conclusions

The conducted research confirms that business consulting constitutes a decisive accelerator of organizational digital transformation, particularly within the economic and institutional context of the Republic of Moldova. Digitalization has evolved from being a technological option to a strategic necessity, yet the transition from awareness to implementation remains incomplete. The findings demonstrate that the principal barriers to transformation are not rooted in resistance to change, but in structural, behavioral, and cognitive limitations that impede the conversion of digital intention into concrete action.

Within this framework, business consulting functions as the translational infrastructure that bridges the gap between strategic vision and operational reality. Through diagnostic assessment, methodological guidance, and reinforcement of behavioral change, consultants provide the mechanisms through which digital ambition is transformed into organizational capability. This role is particularly significant in addressing the “dual-speed transformation” that characterizes the Moldovan digital landscape, where governmental progress in digital governance and infrastructure has not yet been mirrored by equivalent enterprise-level adaptation.

The study highlights that consulting interventions have a multi-dimensional impact: they clarify strategic direction, enable technological implementation, and cultivate cultural readiness for sustained change. By doing so, consulting effectively reduces the observed Digital Readiness Gap between macro-level policy initiatives and micro-level execution, ensuring coherence between national ambitions and business realities.

The proposed MACD-TM model (Moldova Affordable Consulting-Driven Digital Transformation Model) encapsulates this integrative perspective by emphasizing efficiency, innovation, and adaptability as the three fundamental pillars of sustainable digital transformation. The model provides a structured framework through which SMEs can enhance their absorptive capacity, improve strategic coherence, and embed long-term resilience within their organizational processes.

Beyond the Moldovan context, the findings carry broader implications for emerging economies pursuing similar modernization trajectories. Sustainable digital transformation requires more than technological investment; it demands structured consulting ecosystems capable of transferring knowledge, strengthening leadership competencies, and fostering organizational learning.

In conclusion, business consulting emerges not merely as an auxiliary service, but as a strategic enabler of national competitiveness and innovation. By aligning technological advancement with organizational maturity, consulting ensures that digital transformation becomes a continuous and adaptive process – one that consolidates economic resilience, enhances performance, and supports sustainable development in the digital era.

Acknowledgments. The research was carried out within the framework of the OPTIM Project, based on Agreement No. 003/2024/FA signed between ACAM and HELVETAS Swiss Cooperation Zurich, Chisinau Branch.

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