



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FRONTIER RESEARCH: I
INTERDISCIPLINARY

Volume 20 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2020

Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal

Publisher: Global Journals

Online ISSN: 2249-4626 & Print ISSN: 0975-5896

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GJSFR-I Classification: FOR Code: 180199p



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Business Competitiveness: Building and Applying the 3Cs and the Strategic Change Matrix across COVID-19

John R. Hamilton ^α, Rohit Ramanujam ^σ, Singwhat Tee ^ρ & Michael Underdown ^ω

Abstract- This India-wide, empirical, point-in-time, global literature-supported, quantitative study involves 232 leading management consulting firm (MCF) consultants and contracting client firm (CF) perspectives. It relationally builds a structural MCF-CF 3Cs model that links MCF competencies into MCF-CF capabilities systems and then into CF business competitiveness. The 3Cs model can be visually and numerically presented as a CF three-dimensional positioning within the strategic change matrix. Future pathways towards a new optimal strategic future CF position can then be strategic change matrix mapped. A contribution towards Management-Consulting-Theory is presented as one that likely follows and embodies the MCF-CF 3Cs model processes.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Across the 2019-2020 COVID-19 global pandemic times, it is increasingly important for firms to continually map their pathways towards competitiveness (Eaves et al. 2020; Ollagnier et al. 2020; Sheppard et al. 2020). This India-wide study captures Survey Monkey online respondent data from 313 management consultant firm members of the 'Institute of Management Consultants of India.' It investigates how management consultancy firms (MCFs) across India help each of their contracting client firm (CFs) to build, and enhance, their unique competitiveness.

a) Client Firms

The long-term impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic continue creating disruptions. This brings both a threat, and an opportunity to the firm. In these uncertain times, astute firms can adopt an offensive position - building on their strengths, and seeking at pace, to close their competitiveness gap. This likely requires quality and performance mixes of innovation, technology and people (Eaves et al. 2020).

The risk of catching the COVID-19 virus has also driven consumers towards online purchases and

home delivery services. Hence, as firms move towards a different and post COVID-19 pandemic global business environment, new digital opportunities can offer further firm capabilities and deliverables and possibly greater firm scale-up possibilities (Ollagnier et al. 2020).

Sheppard et al. (2020) suggest firms should repair their existing business, rethinking the firm's future focus and reconfiguring the firm's overall strategic model. Thus, the astute firm can restart post COVID-19, by offering a transformed suite of digitally improved business capabilities that may in-turn change or enhance its competitiveness possibilities.

Accenture in Europe see business competitiveness resulting from a multi-dimensional approach. They suggest bold leadership can develop innovative approaches towards new customer value and towards creating a strategy for both long-term business competitiveness and business growth. This likely requires investment to shore up core deliverables, to pursue renewed growth through both incremental and game-changing innovation, and to improve the firm's competitive positioning within its business ecosystem (Ollagnier et al. 2020).

Such consumer-related changes are forcing astute firms to incorporate latest rapid-response digital servicing systems into their capabilities suites. Such firms also seek to develop their competencies, to grow their digital and data-driven capabilities and to produce smart deliverable systems that ultimately help change their business competitiveness (Eaves et al. 2020). Digitally aligned inclusions can further enable the firm's capabilities and advance pathways towards competitive cost advantage and new competitive intelligences. These can likely add to a firm's sustainable performance positioning (Ollagnier et al. 2020). Hence to outmaneuver competitors, and/or to guard against an unknown future, a CF today can contract the assistance of a MCF.

b) Management Consulting Firms

MCFs are professional services entities with a strong team of business researchers and problem solvers. These entities typically professionally assist firms and/or governments to: investigate problems, identify key solutions, and advance ongoing firm performance and business outcomes (Brandon-Jones

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et al. 2016). CFs see MCFs as assisting in their change management processes (Burke, 2017), and/or as building MCF suggestions into: their future business strategies, modifying their IT systems, and changing their operational designs and structures, but retaining an applied behavioral science and psychology approach (Burke, 2017).

This MCF management consulting process is normally a contracted arrangement between a MCF and a CF. It is generally strategically framed to ultimately deliver changes and benefits to the contracting CF. For example, some of MCF's knowledge creation competencies may be useful CF additions that then help it grow revenue and profitability (Li et al. 2002; Palvia et al. 2010), whilst other MCF competencies components (like new innovations) can sometimes indirectly or directly assist in delivering further CF financial capabilities (Becerra et al. 2008; Cheung et al. 2011).

Management consulting can sometimes present in complex formats. Rio Tinto's 'mine-of-the future' receives multiple external knowledge-related firm inputs from firms including: Google (GPS), SAP, Microsoft (HoloLens3, democratizing IT), Apple (3D interactive gaming engines), plus: systems automation, robotics, mechanics, digital intelligence and R&D from multiple sources. These products coalesce as suites of new competencies to help build Rio Tinto's entrepreneurial intellectual capital, its new knowledge creation, its new innovations, and its existing and developing capacities. This approach is in-effect multiple MCFs consulting and assisting aspects of the CF (Rio Tinto) to enhance its technological capabilities and build its strategic drive for greater business competitiveness.

This multiple MCFs-to-CF relationship is now strategically mapped into delivering Rio Tinto's world first 'intelligent' mine - with all its capabilities/assets digitally driven, and returning smart networked decisions 'in a microsecond.' (Rio Tinto, 2020). Again, as per the MCF-to-CF relationships discussed above, the Rio Tinto model provides the same 3Cs phases of (1) competencies - which further enable (2) capabilities, and capabilities' deliverables - which further enhance (3) business competitiveness (Hamilton, 2020).

MCFs typically employ intellectually-astute individuals as their management consultants. In specific cases, MCFs can collectively enhance the CF's performance capabilities (Woolley et al. 2010). They can bring selected unique capabilities like: proficiency, ideation, information, intelligence, and reaction (Grewal et al. 2020; Harvey et al. 2019) into the CF. MCFs can help motivate a CF workforce towards change, and towards enhancing existing qualities and servicing capabilities (Johnson and Ashforth, 2008; Yee et al. 2008). They can also assist in building additional CF revenue streams by combining the MCF's and the CF's

latest business practices (Bergh and Gibbons, 2011; Hughes et al. 2011).

Research studies support that MCFs typically do add capabilities expertise across services, qualities, performance, and profit/loss reengineering (De Boeck et al. 2019; Loureiro et al. 2020; McGivern et al. 2018). Some research studies add that MCFs can bring behavioral (competitive) perspectives that then help with the CF's motivation, cognition, and emotion progression (Cho and Linderman, 2019; Johnsen et al. 2019; Levine et al, 2017; Pluut et al. 2018). Thus, MCFs can both enhance and/or add to an existing CF's business capabilities, and these can then contribute towards enhancing a CF's competitiveness.

c) *Study Motivation*

Consultancy.com.au suggests globally, management consulting has compounded 4.1% pa from \$205 billion in 2011 to \$251 billion in 2016. Management consulting is a form of relational strategic management between the MCF and the contracting CF and targeting the building of business competitiveness (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Management consulting incorporates further strategic management views including: (1) the external view of the firm - with superior returns targeted (Duschek, 2004; Ormanidhi & Stringa, 2008; Porter, 1980), (2) the resource-based view - offering superior internal returns (Barney, 1991; Duschek, 2004; Rumelt, 1991), (3) the competence-based view - efficiently using resources (Freiling, 2004), and (4) the knowledge-based view - with knowledge as a productive resource (Grant, 2002). Hence, the MCF is well resourced to offer a CF various-pathways towards strategic change within the dynamism prevalent across the globally-competitive industrial domain (Teece et al. 1997).

The MCF-CF relationship resides within the strategic management paradigm. Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes (2004) propose a likely strategic management relationship between organizational theory and organizational practice can create a unique, targeted, business-competitive positioning for a contracting CF. This management consulting process builds through creating concepts (competencies), delivering proposed capabilities (or actions), improving economic worth, and creating new CF business competitiveness possibilities. Rodenhauser (2018) proposes a recent MCF shift from its former 'MCF brainy-body-shop' (that tells its CF what to do), to its current MCF-CF unique-product-development deliverables (where diversified digital competencies articulate into changing CF business capabilities) (Bogdanich & Forsythe, 2018). MCFs and CFs both continue to migrate their current business models and deliverables towards consumer-demanded solutions (Clun, 2017) and towards new CF competitiveness

positions (Cavaleri & Shabana, 2018; Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Jednak & Kragulj, 2015; Stefanikova et al. 2015).

However, like the above literature, most MCF-CF research is non-empirical, or supplied by the industry itself. Hence, this study notes an opportunity to research, and to further clarify the workings of MCF CF strategic management relationship. It asks the research question:

In COVID-19 times can MCF competencies, and developing MCF-CF relational capabilities, model into enhancing a CF competitiveness position?

d) Research Setting

Today, CFs contractually-engage MCFs worldwide (Deloitte, 2020; Ernst & Young, 2020; L.E.K. Consulting, 2020; Vault.com Inc., 2020). To add research continuity, this MCF study enlists the Indian management consulting industry as follows:

1. This one nation study offers ongoing constants – national uniformity, business governance uniformity, language/culture uniformity, and it enlists highly-informed respondents from the peak management consulting body throughout India.
2. The 'Institute of Management Consultants of India' emailed each of its members with this study's on-line Survey Monkey requests and its five follow-up email reminders.
3. Local and global MCF members of the Institute of Management Consultants of India have scant MCF competencies literature linking Indian MCF competencies constructs into advancing CF capabilities systems, or into changing CF business competitiveness.

Against this research setting, this study seeks answers to the above research question.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

a) Background

MCFs release their internal management consultants to investigate their collective competencies as available strategic knowledge networks that can be initiated to provide 'expert' advice and assistance that can help deliver agreed or contracted changes into a CF's capabilities (Pratap & Saha, 2018; Whittington, 2006). MCF's also target progressing each CF towards a changed level of business competitiveness (Srinivasan, 2014; Whittington, 2006). These changes in business competitiveness are often indirectly gauged against the CF sustainable performance as it meets ongoing, and emerging, global business challenges (Jensen et al. 2010; McMakin & Fletcher, 2018; Noe et al. 2017; Srinivasan, 2014). In summary, MCFs work to ultimately build the business competitiveness of a contracting CF. The MCF is also contractually accountable to the CF (Fincham, 2002). Thus, the MCF

and the CF form a relationship that requires strategic and bi-directional cooperation.

The MCF-CF strategic relationship encompasses situational and behavioral integration, and this can aid in the deliverance of CF business competitiveness (Kisfalvi et al. 2016; von Briel et al. 2019). Thus, the MCF-CF relationship exhibits: respect, positivity, agility, responsiveness, and flexibility, and it incorporates asymmetric relational exchanges of knowledge and information (Leiby, 2018). The MCF-CF strategic relationship can also introduce new CF capabilities (and even new CF competency aspects) (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006).

This MCF relational behavior varies with each contracting CF. Each CF has different: deliverance expertise, formal project responsibilities, personal and skills, and current consultancy progression capabilities (Sturdy & Wright, 2011). However, the MCF-CF relationship can be beneficial – saving time and co-creating changes to CF capabilities and their deliverables processes (Breibach & Maglio, 2016).

b) Management Consulting Theoretical Background

Scant definitive management consulting theory permeates the literature, and it remains inconsistent. This is in-part, because management consulting can encompass a diversity of activities.

Management consulting, from a theoretical perspective is a strategic management process that encompasses the 'resource-based view' of the firm (Barney, 1991), with theoretical extensions into encompassing business expert systems, knowledge development/utilization capabilities, and delivering sustainable and competitive-business advantage (Wenerfelt, 1984; Lado & Zhang, 1998; Haseeb et al. 2019).

Management consulting also brings strategies (Tallman, 1991), competencies (Lado et al. 1992), business innovation (Sundbo, 1996), economic worth (Navon, 1995), product development (Verona, 1999), and research implications (Schulze, 1992) into the resource-based view's theoretical framework. Management consulting also fits within institutional theory - as talent-resourced MCF institutions enlist their management consultants to support the social engagement structure that arises between the MCF and its contracted CF. Here, both parties relationally pursue a business solution within the surrounding competitive environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and the MCF and CF combine their valuable, rare, inimitable and firm resources towards enriching CF capabilities (Tan et al. 2015), and towards enhancing CF business competitiveness (Cardeal & António, 2012).

Management consulting also captures the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), motivation theories (Garske & Arkes, 1981), consumption theory (Sheth et al. 1991a), and users-gratification theory (Katz

et al. 1973). These behavioral theories help the MCF-CF relationship to strategically-focus towards the build of consumer-targeted business competitiveness solutions.

The MCF-CF relational system pursues CF capabilities and their deliverables (resources), along with the CF capabilities incorporation of ongoing competitive intelligences (Chase & Murtha, 2019; Mees-Buss & Welch, 2019) - especially when CF capabilities target improving economic performance (Clegg et al. 2004) and enhancing CF business competitiveness.

Transaction cost theory supports the MCF's worth to the contracting CF (Canbäck, 1998). Transaction cost economics theory, social capital theory, and organizational learning theory also apply to aspects of the MCF-CF relationship - as each can help to build CF business solutions within the surrounding competitive environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Business network theory (Axelsson, 2010) presents MCF-CF interactions, along with connectivities, as causing complex changes over time. Leiby (2018) suggests a MCF justifies, recommends, and helps deliver suitable CF capabilities improvements to the CF business deliverables systems, and so brings a prospecting theoretical approach (Tversky & Kahneman, 1979). Luhmann (2005; 2007) adds that structurally-connected MCF-CF networked communication systems operate according to logics, intelligences, and connectivities systems. Thus, business network theory likely also incorporates an attributes-focused theoretical approach (Kelley & Michela, 1980).

Institutional Theory (Jepperson, 1991; Meyer & Höllerer, 2014) brings capacities, innovation and inter-firm connectivities development (or knowledge creation and entrepreneurial intellectual capital) into the MCF-CF collaborative framework (Strang & Meyer, 1993). Institutional theory also (1) draws on: coercive formal/informal competitive influences, (2) encompasses mimetic externalities (including industry memberships, consultancies, or government impediments) and (3) enhances normative competitiveness and best practices surrounding the business competitive environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Hence this COVID-19 study models the MCF-CF resource transference relationship, which occurs relationally, sequentially, and as a network solution over-time. The relationship is also causal - where MCF competencies can help change CF capabilities which in turn can then change CF business competitiveness. Further, as a causal structure, the MCF-CF resource transference relationship can enlist literature supported construct items, and then measure them against a Likert 1-to-5 scale framework. This framework can then frame a SEM model - with causal flows both within (and between) constructs (and their item measures) or within (and between) construct blocks. Hence a relationally-mapped, causal approach to this study's research can be stepwise gauged against Hume's theory-of-causation and Aristotle's 4-step theory-of-causation (Falcon, 2011). Material-cause first bring literature constructs and items. Formal-cause then measures construct-linked, and typologically-collated, efficient-cause. Data cause sees factors reduced to 'best' construct representations. Final-cause models a statistically-relevant best business solution.

The above literature offers management consulting as collectively encompassing a broad spectrum of theories, but fitting within the strategic management relational view of the firm. Consequently, management consulting fits within the strategic management paradigm. From the theoretical approaches above a strategic MCF-CF relationship model is now offered as focusing towards adeptly-delivering dynamic, inter-firm competitive advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Teece et al. 1997). This study's causal approach is appropriate to the development of a three phase MCF-CF resources transference relationship model - initiated by MCF competencies, which are adapted into changing CF capabilities and their embedded systems of business deliverables. These in-turn allow for changes in CF business competitiveness. This three-phase relational model is presented as the 3Cs model structure of Figure 1.

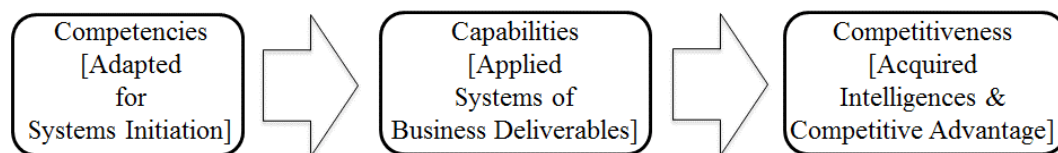


Figure 1: The 3Cs Model (adapted from Hamilton, 2020)

c) *Competencies embedded in the 3Cs Model*

In this study the 3Cs model's competencies are the MCF's adapted intellectual, innovative, knowledge, and skills (capabilities) characteristics. These collectively network, and can then be selectively enlisted to efficiently-advance a CF's capabilities - and so change its business performance (Werr & Styhre, 2002; Lee &

Jung, 2018). The MCF capacities adapt to frame its embedded strategic competitive transference options and abilities into the CF. To this, the MCF adds its recent, learned knowledge creation application possibilities. The MCF also continually innovates to stay at the forefront of business developments, and so continually derives new competitive-business adaptive

horizons (Bello et al. 2016). The MCF enlists its existing competitive IP as beneficial entrepreneurial intellectual capital applied towards changing business applications (Werr & Stjernberg, 2003), and towards changing CF capabilities (Werr & Styhre, 2002).

i. *Knowledge creation*

Knowledge creation is a continual, collaborative, strategic, economic and analyzed combination of different kinds of transference information (Bronnenmayer et al. 2016; Gebhardt et al. 2019; Vallaster et al. 2019); It is entrepreneurial and performance-related and digital (Rydén & El Sawy, 2019, Wang et al. 2019). It taps external sourcing, purchase actions, inter-firm combinations, alliances and/or acquisitions (Goedhart et al. 2015), and it targets product/service affordability (Dobusch et al. 2019), and strategic management systems (Cabiddu et al. 2019; Frynas et al. 2018). Lee and Jung (2018) see MCF knowledge creation as a precursor to enhancing the utilitarian qualities of the CF's capabilities. Thus, MCF knowledge creation is part of an engaged competencies set, selectively adapted to deliver considered, entrepreneurial, strategic and qualities improvements for a contracting CF.

ii. *Capacities*

Capacities are the skills resource toolkits (materials, expertise, functions, information, prices) enabling planned changes to a contracting CF (Degener et al. 2018; Zollo et al. 2018). Capacities are planned activities to provide actionable information regarding a CF's rivals (Suddaby et al. 2020). Hence, the MCF's engaged capacities potentially support multiple outcomes (performance, planning, servicing, successes) across existing/new markets (Teo & Choo, 2001). Petroni (2000), Teo and Choo (2001) and Lee and Jung (2018) view capacities as competencies that potentially assist qualities, products/services, prices, and ROIs. This study sees MCF capacities as capturing qualities and product/servicing linkages that can be adapted to add value-for-money, leading-edge knowledge and potential market leadership settings.

iii. *Innovation*

Innovation helps generate new ideas, creative thoughts, new imaginations, new applications new attention and new emphasis and/or new effective services (Liang, Shu, & Farh, 2019; Molner et al. 2019; O'Reilly & Binns, 2019). Innovation pursues something new – including: new approaches, new technologies exploration, new servicing innovation, new visionary ideas, new ventures, and/or new attention/emphasis/measurement (Bouncken et al. 2020; Jones et al. 2020).

Innovation can enlist R&D intensity, R&D spending, sales and revenue (Xu et al. 2019). It can solve ill-founded ideas, build new acceptance, and avoid risk (Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2011), or it can run adaptive or differentiation comparisons to competitor

items and replace inferior solutions with higher qualities and servicing solutions (Bello et al. 2016).

Innovation in this study provides the CF with new ideas including: collaborative knowledge and support competences that create further CF dynamic resourcing capabilities (Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2011), and encapsulate novel ideas, new technologies exploration, R&D intensity and innovation measurement, and competitor comparisons (Bello et al. 2016, Liang et al. 2019, Xu et al. 2019).

iv. *Entrepreneurial Intellectual Capital*

Entrepreneurial intellectual capital procures big data information and enhances problem solving (Zhan et al. 2018) across collaborative, near real-time, product development and supply chain knowledge and information acquisition processes (Kache & Seuring, 2017; Lee & Jung 2018) from implicit or explicit internal and external sources. It links flexible business infrastructure competencies into assimilation, management, financial and operational targets (Liu et al. 2016).

Entrepreneurial intellectual capital socio-technical dimensions also help deliver enhanced capabilities practices – including: deep infrastructure knowledge, utilization of practical infrastructure knowhow and boosting of competencies via state-of-the-art practices (Liu et al. 2006).

This study pursues entrepreneurial intellectual capital as problem solving expertise, improving firm social capital, developing global firm performance, making firm performance world-class and resourcing to deliver firm solutions.

d) *Capabilities embedded in the 3Cs Model*

The MCF-CF capabilities exist as applied multi-networked business deliverables systems. The first system is the values deliverance system – consisting of qualities, performance and economic worth. The second system is the consumer-relations system – consisting of servicing, risk avoidance and contractual satisfaction. These two systems are business retail related as pathways towards loyalty and/or sustainability (Jones et al. 2006). The third system is the competitive intelligences system – consisting of qualities, risks, servicing and intelligences acquired. These systems fit within Kaltcheva et al.'s (2013) capabilities scope of 'path linkages that strategically apply and-gauge the fulfilment of MCF-CF capabilities deliverables - whilst keeping the firm sustainable and economically competitive.'

i. *Qualities*

The qualities subset of a firm's operational values system (McLachlin, 2000; Hamilton et al. 2014; Hamilton & Tee, 2016) can be gauged against service qualities (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles) (Zeithaml et al. 1990). In management consulting, reliability and responsiveness

are key MCF-CF values system business deliverables (McLachlin, 2000). Assurance and empathy are also important tangible contributors. Thus, in management consulting, the MCF-CF relationship pursues heightened levels of service qualities deliverables, and conjointly produces new measurable values system deliverables. In this study the MCF-CF relationship is respectful, highly-skilled, delivering improved qualities, responding to opportunities, finding points of excellence, and consistently improvements driven.

ii. *Performance*

The performance subset of a firm's operational values system sees MCF-CF improvement options often performance-related across the workplace (McLachlin, 2000). Performance is an induced applied change in outcomes from a start point to an end point (Cannon et al. 2010). Performance is an applied operational measure such as cost, speed, dependability, quality or flexibility against lean business operational measurement groupings such as just-in-time, automation, kaizen, total productive maintenance, or capability stream mapping (Belekoukias et al. 2014). This study enlists four often-applied performance deliverables (efficiency, effectiveness, productivity and flexibility) (de Leeuw & van den Berg, 2011; Karwan & Markland, 2006) as applied optimized business outcomes, an optimized relationship, an improved service, and a collaborative relationship. Further as part of the values system, performance also displays a path link from qualities into performance, and another path link from performance into economic worth (Cannon et al. 2010; Yrjölä et al. 2019; Zhang et al. (2019).

iii. *Economic-Worth*

The economic worth subset of a firm's operational values system can emanate from an external firm perspective (Spanos & Lioukas 2001) and can result in applied budgeted accomplishments (sales volume, growth-in-sales, market share, growth) (Bronnenmayer et al. 2016). Internally, economic worth can be a strategic profitability (ROA, profit, ROI, ROE, net profit) (Bronnenmayer et al. 2016; Geletkanycz & Boyd, 2011; Sobol & Klein, 2009). In this study economic worth is improved returns, worthwhile (value) investments, profit, and value for solution development. A MCF-CF economical worth measure also provides a path towards a sustainable (competitive)-business positioning (Hamilton, 2006; Hamilton & Tee, 2016; Jabłoński, 2016).

iv. *Servicing*

The servicing subset of a firm's consumer-relations system is an hedonic capability that a consumer is acquiring when viewed against an ongoing experience (Babin et al. 1994). It is consumer-perceived, and it is also associated with senses, pleasures, feelings, and/or emotions (Cheng, 2014). It encompasses the extent to which the deliverables of a

servicing capability arouses emotions, and creates pleasant experiences (Jahromi & Zhang, 2020). Thus, servicing is an emotive, consumer-related, hedonic capability experience. Servicing normally includes a consumer's perceived capability, relationship, services and needs connections (Rogg et al. 2001). Servicing covers awareness, problems, complaints and feedback (Sum et al. 2002). But servicing can encapsulate consumer needs, consumer goals, consumer-orientation behavior, and/or sales-behavior (Johnson & Ashforth, 2008). Servicing sometimes extends across recommendations, returns, degrees-of-service and service priorities/standards (Arenas et al. 2020). Thus, although servicing is inconsistently captured - because it varies depending on circumstances, this study follows Johnson and Ashforth's (2008) definition of 'servicing as a firm's capabilities response towards satisfying its consumers' hedonic needs in ways better than its current competition. Hence this study sees servicing as sharing expertise, providing innovative solutions, delivering cost effective solutions and completing planned services.

v. *Risks Avoidance*

The risks avoidance subset of a firm's consumer-relations system captures changing business environments as these often drive economic pressures in firms. Risks avoidance correlates with firm capabilities (Dotzel & Shankar, 2019), but to change a business by including a MCF-to-CF risks avoidance capabilities construct remains challenging. Some see economic downturns as risks resulting from externalities and performance paralysis – and measurable via resource utilization analysis. An intentional shift in internal resource utilization remains risky in itself, and in some cases possibly links with a firm's ongoing performance (de Oliveira et al. 2020). Other external risks arise when adding new technologies (Radanliev et al. 2019) or when changing customer servicing (such as: service-efficiencies, buying patterns and/or innovative practices) (Al Kailani & Kumar, 2011, Snihur & Wiklund, 2019). Thus, risks avoidance also likely links with firm servicing. Hence risks avoidance is included in MCF-CF capabilities suites as change(s) affecting resources utilization, timeframes for servicing, technologies incorporated into services, and consistency of requested product qualities.

vi. *Contractual Satisfaction*

The contractual satisfaction subset of a firm's consumer-relations system is included as it supports consumer re-consumption considerations (Brown & Chin, 2004; Porter et al. 2020; Schepker et al. 2014). Contractual satisfaction is also an external personalized MCF-CF relationship – leading towards improving (ongoing) competitive advantage (Pick & Eisend, 2014). Contractual satisfaction from a psychological perspective appraises MCF-CF activities, tasking and

accomplishments (McKinlay & Starkey, 1988). It reflects on ideas, desires, predictions and normative customer expectations (García-Canal, 1996), and is sometimes linked to perceived improved qualities or better financial performance (Dobrzykowski & McFadden, 2020; Polo & Sese, 2013). High level servicing, risk mitigation and ongoing familiarity are precursors to improving contractual satisfaction (Lai et al. 2013; Poppo & Zhou, 2014). Contractual satisfaction is also linked forwards into generating a sustainable (competitive)-business positioning (Van der Heijden et al. 2013). In this study contractual satisfaction is measured as consulting on-budget and on-time, and effectively implementing change improvements.

vii. *Competitive Intelligence*

Competitive intelligences are a subset of a firm's competitive intelligences system. They are part of 'a marathon, and not a sprint' process, towards improved economic growth and social welfare (Porter, 2004). This form of competitiveness offers the firm the ability to: (1) compete within a specific market, (2) increase market share, (3) enter expanding (international) markets, and (4) achieve sustainable business growth and profitability (Moghaddam et al. 2020). Sapienza et al. (2006) offer firm-growth, as business competitiveness - linked to a firm acquiring an enhanced sustainable performance positioning. Thus, firm competitive intelligences are a form of firm capabilities deliverables drawing on: (1) suitable input resource competencies (human/financial/technology, innovation, and intellectual design based resources), (2) internal operational/managerial capabilities across process systems, leadership, and astute strategies, and (3) intelligence-supported, sustainable (competitive) business outcomes measures (Cetindamar & Kilitcioglu, 2013). This study measures competitive intelligences as improving competitive advantage, new intelligences building business success, intelligent engagements, and intelligently growing business markets.

e) *Competitiveness embedded in the 3Cs Model*

i. *Competitiveness, Sustainability and Collective Intelligence*

Competitiveness remains a relative and not absolute term (Feurer & Chaharbaghi, 1994; Herciu & Ogreaan, 2018). Some see competitiveness as a firm's: comparative astute usages of its resources (Tan et al. 2016) or performance efficiencies (Porter, 2007) or profitability measures (Garelli, 2006) or stakeholder value advantages (Chikan, 2008). However, competitiveness is comparative, and in the business domain, it is typically used to compare a firm against its potentially competing firms (Porter, 1985; Porter and Kramer, 2002; Jiang et al, 2016; Tan et al, 2016). Competitiveness also links with (1) competitive advantage, (2) added technologies (Denning&

Stratopoulos, 2003; Shrivastava, 1995; Tracey, Vonderembse and Lim, 1999), and to (3) values enlisted (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Marin, Rubio & Maya, 2012; Hamilton & Tee, 2016).

Firms are learning institutions that act and react, to their external and global environments (Feurer and Chaharbaghi, 1994). Some firms realize their competencies, and their resource capabilities alone, may be insufficient to produce their desired competitiveness (Wu, 2008), and so seek expert consultancy assistance (Ramanujam et al. 2019; Ramanujam, 2020). Here, additional capabilities including business pivots with external cloud data intelligences, process enhancing changes new resource inclusions can assist in enhancing competitiveness (Lin & Wu, 2014; Mihet & Philippon, 2019; Hamilton 2020). Hence when conducting business, *competitiveness* is better termed as *business competitiveness*.

Firms exist in perpetuity, and by definition, are 'sustainable entities'. However, competitiveness has an overall firm (business) outcome connotation, whilst sustainability holds a performance outcome connotation (Wagner & Schaltegger, 2003; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2017).

A firm's ongoing sustainable performance encapsulates its economic, social, corporate, and environmental perspectives within an ever-changing business and global environment. Porter (1980) describes this as competitive strategy - with a firm finding an ongoing operational position within its industry where it can sustainably perform and balance its competitive forces into exploiting the most structural good from its capabilities, whilst also creating minimal internal business harm. The firm can also exploit changes to its firm competencies, capabilities, and sustainable performance positioning typically before other rival firms recognize the occurrence of such a pivot. Thus, a firm's strategic management deliverables can contribute towards its sustainable performance positioning.

Herciu and Ogreaan, (2018) also note a firm can synergistically combine 'all its resources' to achieve better (1) productivity (revenue per worker) – a qualities-performance measure, (2) profitability (return on assets) – an economic-worth measure, (3) effectiveness (total assets turnover) – an economic-worth measure, and (4) ongoing sustainability (Dow Jones sustainability performance measure). They show these four systems synergistically combine and contribute to enhancing the firm's overall business competitiveness.

Thus, when conducting business, the *sustainable performance positioning* for the firm is typically a subset of its business competitiveness (which encapsulates the entire business outcomes of the firm).

In building towards business competitiveness, risks for example, can be minimized through: (1) changed initiatives/designs (Chang et al. 2017), (2)

operational resourcing can be changed (Chang et al. 2017), (3) technologies can be changed (Häkkinen & Belloni, 2011; Heffernan, 2012), (4) enhanced capabilities and their deliverables practices can be changed (Beske et al. 2014) – such as: developing economic worth, building ongoing performance, growing digital intelligences, and/or growing market opportunities (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2017; Zhang et al. 2019 in press; Hamilton, 2020; Peng et al. 2020), and (5) including further innovations (Häkkinen & Belloni, 2011). As these firm-enhancing changes arise, the firm's sustainable performance positioning likely improves, and again its overall business competitiveness likely increases.

A firm's sustainable performance positioning can also be strategically enhanced in many ways by: (1) using less resources (Zhang et al. 2011), (2) improving energy efficiencies (Häkkinen & Belloni, 2011; Kolk & Pinkse, 2005), (3) meeting government legislative rules (Marx et al. 2015), (4) meeting consumer preferences (Schrettle et al. 2014), and/ (5) building a positive consumer image of the firm (Chang & Rhee, 2011), and again such enhancements can build towards a firm's business competitiveness.

Further, in COVID-19 times business competitiveness is increasingly digital. Online purchasing is now a major revenue stream strength of the firm. Such new technologies inclusions and new innovations when linked to new market opportunities and ongoing business competitiveness (Haanes & Fjeldstad, 2000; Mellahi & Johnson, 2000; Veliyath & Fitzgerald, 2000) then help create new collective intelligences (Parida, Sjödin & Reim, 2019). Here, 'first-mover' or 'early adopter' digital collective intelligence advantages can likely help re-position or pivot the firm into a changed business competitiveness position.

Thus, business competitiveness can be derived as two constructs: (1) a sustainable performance positioning component, supported by (2) a collective intelligences component.

ii. *Sustainable Performance*

Sustainable performance positioning practices deliver a more efficient process, a higher productivity, and enhanced global market opportunities (Zhang et al. 2011), and this represents a major contribution towards business competitiveness (Chang et al. 2017). Investments into first changing: latest technologies deployed, into solving uncertainties, and/or into rectifying new operation risks, add to the firm's collective intelligences and these can help support both an enhanced sustainable performance positioning and enhanced business competitiveness (Van der Borgh & Schepers, 2018).

Hence, in a changing business world, the MCF and its contracted CF seek to retain their ongoing, individual, sustainable performance positioning. This

requires a capacity to positively engage across their resources (including: workforce, financials, processes, systems, technologies, innovations, connectivities), and to seek ongoing, externally-competitive, and beneficial firm pathways - designed to meet current, and aspiration needs (Auh et al. 2019; Hilken et al. 2017). Thus, a firm's sustainable performance positioning involves a system of ongoing, directed, monitored, and change-related management controls.

Dyllick and Muff (2016) conclude truly sustainable firms seek competitive business solutions that increase their sustainable performance impact, ease their financial conflicts, ease societal needs, innovate their processes, and their strategic reach. In their view collaborative partnerships (such as MCF-CF relationships) can increase the strategic impact of their sustainable performance positioning. Positive business relationships such as in MCF and contracting CF trust domains can deliver reduced transactional costs and can develop inter-firm connectivities (Srinivasan, 2014; Zhang et al. 2011).

Multiple strategic competitive and capabilities management control systems interactively, and diagnostically link into the deliverance of a sustainable performance positioning (Bruining et al. 2004; Gond et al. 2012). Arjaliès and Mundy (2013) studied business management control systems in France's largest listed companies. They found: innovation, communication, reporting, plus assessing threats and opportunities contributes towards a sustainable performance positioning. MCF-CF relational processes likely show similar behavior.

Cavaleri and Shabana (2018) use competitive cost leadership, competitive differentiation, levels of innovation, and levels of imitation/innovation to conceptually-frame a firm's management control systems towards a sustainable performance (financially-rewarding) positioning. Bronnenmayer et al. (2016) also measure budget/scheduling deliverance, targets achieved, profitability, expansion-to-existing, and as extension-to-existing schemes as delivering sustainable performance positioning. Such studies suggest the CF sustainable performance positioning remains a desirable and measurable relationship outcome.

This study follows the Gond et al. (2012) and Arjaliès and Mundy (2013) relationship-view that a MCF-CF deployed, integrated-suite of management control systems can deliver CF sustainable performance positioning - provided the approach is collectively and intelligently integrated (Burgelman, 1991; Simons, 1994). Hence, this study captures the sustainable performance positioning as where the MCF adds/delivers all their CF contracted services, the highest capability-for-money CF solutions, improved CF qualities/performances, and also helps promote competitive/accelerated CF business growth.

iii. *Collective Intelligences*

Collective intelligences constitute a grouped, shared, physical and virtual intelligence system that arises from a firm's collaboration, its collective decision making efforts, and its strategic positioning against its workplace and marketspace competition (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_intelligence). Collective intelligences are an integral part of the firm's strategic and competitive management system. They coordinate, channel, and search engine data-mine direct ideas, solutions and proposals. They overcome deficiencies in connectivities and in knowledge transfer. They formulate mechanisms to innovatively solve new situational encounters. They evolve with their successes, misunderstandings, problems and solutions. They also acquire new learning and skills that assist in future evaluations to restructure and overcome face-to face complex and uncertain situations (Figueroa & Perez, 2018).

These intelligences accumulate across the firm's competencies and its capabilities systems. Collective intelligences blend traditional competencies, high-tech knowhow and firm capabilities (Rubio, Gragera & Fernández, 2018). In particular the values deliverance system and the competitive intelligences capabilities system are major contributors in delivering enhanced collective intelligences. Here information driven collective intelligences emerge from the connection and interaction of multiple, distributed, independent agents that collectively produce and process information, and eventually turn it into useful competitive business knowledge that can be conceptually represented (Fontana, Formato & Pareschi, 2010). This study captures collective intelligences as: adding latest specifically-targeted ideas, enabling latest innovation knowledge solutions, incorporating new transforming digital solution insights and delivering competitive market share pricing solutions.

f) *The 3Cs Model Further Pathways Theoretical Support*

Business Network Theory (Axelsson, 2010) characterizes interactions with connectivities that cause complex changes over time between relationally connected firms. Institutional Theory (Jepperson, 1991; Meyer & Höllerer, 2014) brings capacities, innovation and inter-firm connectivities development into this collaborative framework (Strang & Meyer, 1993). In this study the MCF and its contracting CF also fit relational resource base theory (Barney, 1991) - with links enhancing a sustainable performance and competitive advantage (Wenerfelt, 1984; Haseeb et al. 2019). Resources include firm competencies systems - such as knowledge, assets, innovations and information along with firm capabilities such as systems controls,

implementations, effectiveness and efficiency (Daft, 1983; Barney, 1991), and all become part of the firm's net high-values sustainable performance system (Popovic et al. 2018).

Thus, the MCF-CF relationship brings a dynamic strategic perspective with multiple constructs driving firm value creation and firm value capture. Here the MCF-CF relational consultancy facilitates access to complementary resources, and provides competitiveness benefits over time (Tan et al. 2015; Dyer et al. 2018). Here, valuable, rare, hard-to-imitate firm resources, such as special qualities, high performance and economic worth, can be 'exploited' towards maximizing economic potential (Dyer et al. 2018), whilst providing pathways (such as transforming or pivoting the business model and by guarding against rival substitution and imitation products) towards enhancing firm (CF) business competitiveness, and sustainable performance strategies (Cavallo et al. 2020). Thus, the MCF-CF consultancy relationship is a multi-pathways and a competitive pathways model structure.

g) *The 3Cs model*

Sections 2.2 to 2.6 summarize the theory and constructs embedded into the Figure 1 3Cs model. Figure 1 is now expanded and re-presented as Figure 2. The four competencies constructs work as a combined system. The three central capabilities systems represent the intermediate constructs and the two right side constructs in combination represent the overall business competitiveness position.

Proposition 1 (P1) captures the relationship between competencies and capabilities, and proposition 2 (P2) embodies the capabilities to competitiveness relationship. These pathways are multi-faceted and require complex explanation beyond the scope of this study. Detailed summaries of such construct path linkages can be found within a series of recent publications including Ramanujam, (2020), Hamilton, (2020), Ramanujam, Hamilton and Ciccotosto, (2019), Ramanujam et al. (2019).

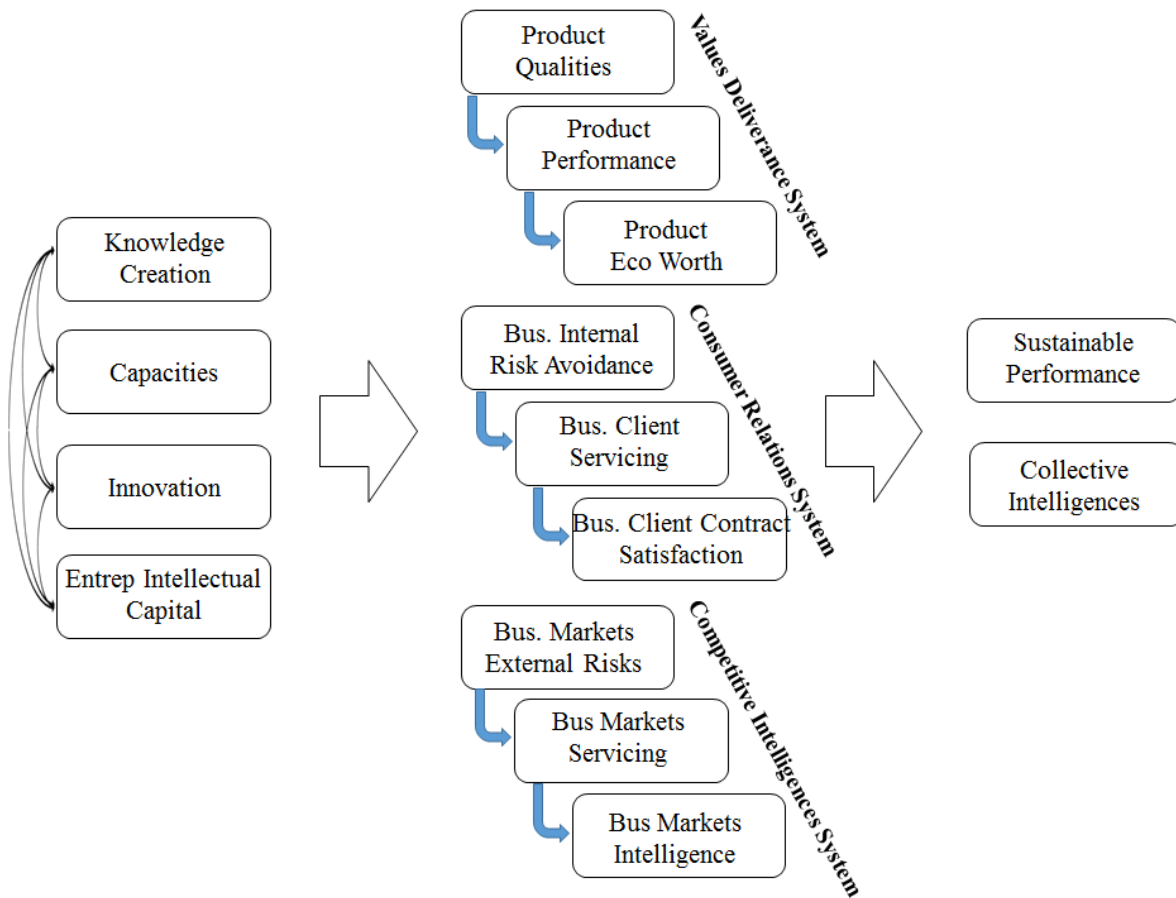


Figure 2: Constructs arrangement within the 3Cs model

III. METHODOLOGY

a) Data Preparation

i. Data Collection

This Likert scale 5-point (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5) study, engages the popular online survey instrument Survey Monkey, and follow's Dillman's (2015) non-incentives on-line survey approach. The study works through the 'Institute of Management Consultants of India.' This peak and international management consulting regional body operates throughout India. This peak body six times emailed each of its members with this study's on-line Survey Monkey requests and/or with its follow-up reminders. Survey completion attempts from the Institute of Management Consultants of India 2020 membership of 550-600 members, totaled 313. Over this 12-week data collection time frame occasional member respondent surveys were incomplete – suggesting fatigue. Some surveys left gaps in the demographics, or the qualitative answers or left illogical Likert questionnaire gaps. Another 16 surveys came from the same IP address – suggesting possible multiple entries by firm respondent – these were also removed. Hence, 234 valid unique member respondent surveys representing 41% of the Institute of Management

Consultants of India 2020 membership were retained for analysis.

ii. Data Preparation

Access to a previous study's questionnaire (Ramanujam et al. (2019) allowed this study to make questionnaire refinements – thereby minimizing respondent measurement item interpretive issues. The previous study's targeted nine constructs and 37 measurement items were adapted and improved – delivering 13 constructs and 58 measurement items, and better capturing a model to explain business competitiveness.

Data cleaning (to no-missing values) removed two more respondent cases with around 10% of their Likert items being left blank. Frequency distributions showed no questionnaire items required initial elimination, and means and standard deviations showed only small skewing or kurtosis.

iii. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Factor reduction (maximum likelihood, oblim, 200 rotations, residuals < 0.05) (Cunningham, 2009) delivered 13 strong constructs as shown in Table 1 - with three to six indicator/measurement items per construct. Item loads lay between 0.58 and 0.90 with only nine of 58 item loads being below 0.70 (Hair et al.

2014). As this study investigates relational pathways, and path strengths, a single indicator latent variable approach is adopted (Munck, 1979; Cunningham, 2008; Grace & Bollen, 2008). This approach minimizes any interaction effects between construct measures, and it best exposes the relative significance of the beta pathways within the model (Cunningham, 2008; Grace & Bollen, 2008).

Construct means and standard deviations indicate near normality (Table 1). Hence maximum likelihood remains the appropriate approach to factor reduction. The Cronbach alpha measures range from 0.82 to 0.92 indicating strong constructs in all cases (Hair, et al, 2014).

The average single indicator load and error measures are derived from Munck's (1979) equations. Here, each net-load resides between 0.63 and 0.75, and so represents a strong load per construct. The error terms are all small, and lie between 0.04 and 0.10. Hence these loads and errors are likely acceptable for SEM modelling (Munck, 1979; Cunningham, 2009). The average variance extracted (AVE) captures the amount of variance due to measurement error in the construct. All AVE's range between 0.50-0.72 and are thus acceptable (Hair et al. 2014).

Table 1: Combined Measurement/Indicator Item Data

Item Code	Construct and Measurement Indicator Items (232 respondent cases into MCF data set)	Item Load	AVE	Mean	Std Dev (σ)	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Load [α(√α)]	Error [σ ² (1-α)]
KNOWLEDGE CREATION								
1	adds MCF expert knowledge to CF infrastructure/practices	0.850	0.61	3.964	0.753	0.856	0.70	0.08
2	adds MCF experiential knowledge to CF infrastructure/practices	0.835						
3	delivers knowledge-based CF infrastructure/practices	0.758						
4	provides further knowledge capabilities for the CF	0.656						
CAPACITIES								
5	offers high quality to CF products	0.825	0.52	4.061	0.685	0.840	0.63	0.07
6	offers clear CF product focusing	0.753						
7	delivers authentic & enduring CF orgal leadership approaches	0.687						
8	offers clear CF value for money	0.683						
9	offers support to change the CF's business	0.641						
INNOVATION								
10	uses innovation to solve CF requests	0.870	0.60	3.926	0.815	0.849	0.75	0.10
11	provides solutions to tomorrow's unknown problems	0.774						
12	encourages MCFs to innovate while solving CF problems	0.772						
13	delivers unique benefits to the CF results	0.665						
ENTREPRENEURIAL INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL								
14	uses MCF intellectual capital to make CF performance world-class	0.885	0.58	4.065	0.713	0.872	0.67	0.07
15	uses MCF collaborations to make CF performance world-class	0.768						
16	uses MCF intellectual capital to improve CF's social capital	0.739						
17	provides intellectual problem solving consulting expertise	0.712						
18	uses MCF intellectual resources to complete CF assignment	0.689						
QUALITIES								
19	consulting changes seen as improving qualities of CF opportunities	0.842	0.62	4.077	0.679	0.891	0.64	0.05
20	consulting processes highlighting where CF can best excel	0.822						
21	advice that consistently improves qualities across CF business	0.791						
22	consulting actions consistently look 'skilled' to CF shareholders	0.752						
23	MCFs are consistently respectful in assisting them	0.731						
PERFORMANCE								
24	collaborative MCF-CF relationships	0.851	0.64	4.126	0.706	0.874	0.66	0.06
25	optimal MCF-CF relationships	0.850						
26	high levels of optimized CF business outcomes	0.840						
27	MCF improves all the CF's contracted services	0.651						
ECONOMIC WORTH								
28	worthwhile CF outcomes for worthwhile investments	0.875	0.65	4.054	0.739	0.882	0.69	0.06
29	improve CF rewards for money invested	0.818						
30	optimized CF financial performances per MCF-CF solutions engaged	0.801						
31	profitable consumer services from the CF monies invested	0.730						
RISKS AVOIDANCE								
32	MCF change(s) that influence CF's use-of-resources	0.850	0.56	4.026	0.722	0.832	0.66	0.09
33	MCFs that consistently deliver ongoing results quality to a CF request	0.720						
34	risk-assessed solutions that include latest technologies inclusions	0.718						
35	MCF serves the CF requirements within agreed timelines	0.706						
SERVICING								
36	providing cutting-edge MCF-CF innovative solutions	0.819	0.63	4.105	0.705	0.872	0.66	0.06
37	delivering MCF-CF efficient cost effective solutions	0.815						
38	completing all MCF-CF services as planned	0.774						
39	always sharing MCF-CF expertise	0.770						
40								
40	MCF meet agreed recommendations	0.755	0.50	4.030	0.726	0.822	0.66	0.09
41	MCF effective implementations for CF	0.752						
42	MCF change(s) that improve CF business capabilities	0.749						
43	MCF consulting on time	0.692						
44	MCF consulting on budget	0.580						
COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE								
45	engages the MCF intelligences to assist the CF	0.902	0.72	4.125	0.724	0.910	0.69	0.05
46	builds MCF-CF competitive intelligences for the CF	0.866						
47	applies new MCF intelligences to help build CF's business success	0.833						
48	improves the CF's competitive advantage	0.794						
SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE								
49	MCF-CF responsibility for CF quality performance	0.843	0.67	4.077	0.760	0.923	0.73	0.04
50	a strong positive MCF-CF partnership	0.843						
51	MCF-CF business solutions that deliver-a-competitive-difference	0.836						
52	accelerated CF business growth	0.833						
53	MCF-CF highest value for money solutions delivered	0.784						
54	always accomplishing what MCF contracted for CF	0.774						
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCES								
55	adds MCF-CF latest specifically-targeted ideas across CF	0.801	0.60	4.124	0.735	0.832	0.67	0.09
56	enables MCF-CF latest innovation knowledge solutions across CF	0.859						
57	incorporates new transforming digital solution insights across CF	0.717						
58	delivers pricing solutions to win further competitive market share	0.725						

IV. RESULTS

a) Structural Equation Modelling with AMOS 25.0

Figures 1 and 2, Table 1, and the 232 cases data set are combined under AMOS 25.0 structural path modelling to provide a multivariate statistical analysis of the structural relationships between the 13 constructs and their measurement/indicator items (Hair et al. 2014).

The model fit data at the base of Figure 3 shows the resultant structural path modelling delivers an excellent model fit across all the key Goodness-of-Fit

measures for small (200-400 case) data sets. All beta weight path measures are significant at $p < 0.05$ or better. The Chi Square –Degrees of Freedom ratio of 1.89 lies between 1 and 3 – indicating excellent fit, the p value is recorded, but less than that desired., hence the 200 times bootstrapped Bollen Stine p is applied - delivering an acceptable value of 0.393 (i.e. < 0.05) (Hair et al, 2014). Thus, across all key investigative measures, Figure 3’s MCF-CF 3Cs model is an excellent fit path model.

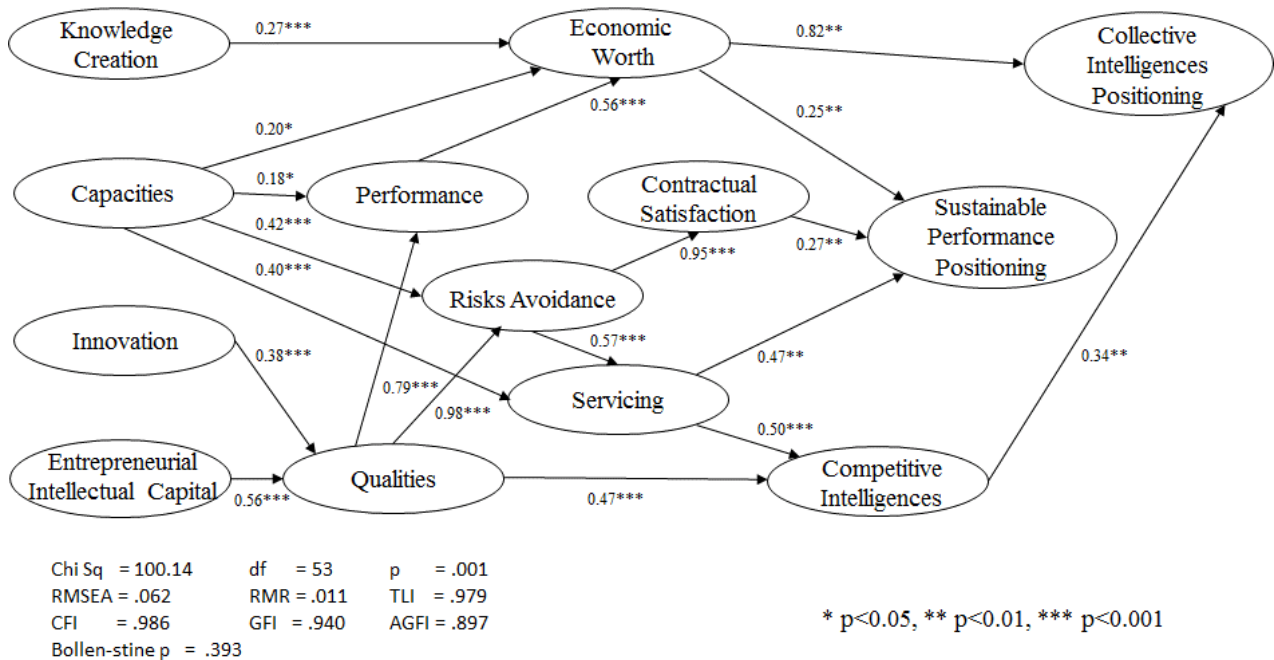


Figure 3: The MCF-CF 3Cs model

Considering the capabilities systems, the MCF-CF values deliverance system draws on all competencies to frame the qualities-to-performance-to-economic worth capabilities pathway, and each capability is causally, sequentially, and additively enacted. Indeed, a CF’s qualities appear to be its key starting capability. Neither the consumer relations system (CRM) nor the competitive intelligences system requires knowledge creation. The maximizing of CF sustainable performance positioning and CF collective intelligences draws upon all four MCF competencies and all six MCF-CF capabilities.

Thus, the role of the MCF and the contracting CF remains complex, engaging, theoretically-framed, and relationally intensive. Further, the MCF must also consider risk mitigation (Glückler & Armbrüster, 2003; Starr et al. 2003), new technologies and innovation assessments, competitive analysis, along with the actual MCF–CF stepwise capabilities systems deliverance modelling approach.

b) Construct Correlations

As all Table 2 construct correlations significantly, and strongly correlate (Cunningham, 2009; Hair et al. 2014), the validity of the path model is further established. All causal precursor constructs strongly correlate with the business competitiveness constructs. Hence, the factor reduction construct process holds discriminant validity - with each construct being shown as suitable for AMOS 25.0 structural equation modelling. In line with Figures 1 and 2, this Figure 3 structural path model shows unidirectional causal information flows across the 3Cs model from independent (competencies) to intermediate (capabilities), to dependent (competitiveness). This and the multiple model pathways suggests the model behaves as an overall system of interconnecting systems, strategically sequenced to assist in producing enhanced competitiveness over time.

Table 2: MCF-CF 3Cs Model Correlations

	Entrep Intel Capital	Knowledge	Capacities	Innovation	Qualities	Risks Avoidance	Servicing	Performance	Satisfaction	Eco Worth	Competitive Intel	Collective Intel	Sustainable Perf
Intel Capital	1												
Knowledge	0.87	1											
Capacities	0.86	0.86	1										
Innovation	0.81	0.80	0.87	1									
Qualities	0.86	0.78	0.81	0.83	1								
Risks Avoidance	0.87	0.83	0.90	0.86	0.93	1							
Servicing	0.84	0.81	0.91	0.83	0.85	0.93	1						
Performance	0.84	0.78	0.82	0.82	0.94	0.90	0.84	1					
Satisfaction	0.83	0.78	0.85	0.81	0.88	0.95	0.88	0.85	1				
Eco Worth	0.90	0.90	0.91	0.87	0.92	0.93	0.89	0.95	0.88	1			
Competitive Intel	0.83	0.78	0.84	0.81	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.86	0.86	0.88	1		
Collective Intel	0.76	0.75	0.78	0.74	0.80	0.81	0.79	0.81	0.77	0.84	0.81	1	
Sustainable Perf	0.84	0.82	0.89	0.83	0.87	0.93	0.93	0.87	0.91	0.91	0.88	0.79	1

V. DISCUSSION

MCFs and CFs continually migrate their current business models and applications towards future consumer-demand solutions (Clun, 2017). Across today's changing global business environments MCF's strategize, and use their acquired entrepreneurial intellectual capital, to knowledge-survey new market opportunities (Irwin et al. 2018). They use these uniquely-acquired competencies as consultancy enablers that can combine and competitively assist towards firm improvements (Rangan & Dhanapal, 2016). In India for example, MCFs enlist external and internal big data sources in mapping their complex, competitive strategies; their innovation; and their knowledge creation (Srinivasan, 2014). In contrast, many Australian firms pursue incremental (rather than transformative and/or innovative) business improvements (Innovation and Science Australia, 2016). Thus, in different countries, MCFs may differ in their consulting CF approaches (Australian Information Industry Association, 2017).

Across the COVID-19 pandemic times, astute firms are re-adjusting and often pursuing digital transformation benefits occurring across global markets (Schilirò, 2020). Some are firms pursuing digital leadership (Prince, 2019). Other firms are seeking new approaches - often involving pivots (Hamilton, 2020). Some are transforming their operations towards an integrated, digital, intelligent, uniquely-competitive entity (The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2017). Such developments can reduce transactional costs and improve market access (Hamilton, 2020). Results show such digitally creative business areas bring added competitiveness and typically perform, and

grow, above the general business deliverables of the economy as a whole (Clun, 2017).

Across such COVID-19 pandemic times MCFs can offer astute firms even further assistance -such as applying their 3Cs approaches as a relational assistance mechanism designed to advance changes in each firm's business competitiveness. MCF-CF capabilities deliverance approaches do vary depending on the CF, and its capabilities, and its contractual requirements. For example, the MCF-CF approach may be (1) a CRM system building higher-order meta-cognitive competitive intelligence solutions (Srinivasan, 2014), or (2) value deliverance systems capturing qualities, performance and economic utilitarian capabilities (Jones et al. 2006; Seetharaman, 2020). These and other MCF-CF deliverables modes offer new, scalable, CF business competitiveness solutions.

a) Study Implications

Table 3 introduces the 3Cs model standardized total effects. All competencies and capabilities exert a significant change in CF sustainable performance positioning and collective intelligences positioning – with knowledge creation and innovation being weaker causal contributors.

Table 3: MCF-CF 3Cs Model Standardized Total Effects

	Entrep Intel	Capital	Knowledge	Creation	Capacities	Innovation	Qualities	Risks	Avoidance	Servicing	Performance	Satisfaction	Eco Worth	Competitive Intel	Average Effects per Construct
Qualities	0.56					0.38									
Risks Avoidance	0.33				0.42	0.23	0.59								
Servicing	0.19				0.64	0.13	0.34	0.57							
Performance	0.44				0.18	0.30	0.80								
Satisfaction	0.31				0.40	0.21	0.56	0.95							
Eco Worth	0.24	0.30			0.31	0.17	0.44				0.55				
Competitive Intel	0.36				0.32	0.24	0.64	0.29	0.50						
Collective Intel	0.25	0.16	0.28	0.17	0.45	0.10	0.17	0.30				0.54	0.34	<u>0.28</u>	
Sustainable Perf	0.23	0.08	0.49	0.16	0.42	0.52	0.47	0.14	0.27	0.25				<u>0.31</u>	
Average Effects per Construct	0.33	0.18	0.38	0.22	0.53	0.48	0.38	0.33	0.27	0.40	0.34				

i. Assessing the MCF-CF 3Cs Model Standardized Total Effects

As the average effects per construct for collective intelligences (0.28) and sustainable performance (0.31) are near equal we may assume that business competitiveness is equally delivered via these two constructs. This suggests the most important areas to maximize are the MCF's capabilities and entrepreneurial intellectual capital followed by the CF's qualities, risks avoidance, servicing, and economic worth.

Further, to boost CF's collective intelligences, the CF should specifically contract a MCF with competencies that offer strong existing (digital) entrepreneurial intellectual capital along with a strong set of relevant strategic capacities. Table 3 indicates innovation is a weaker competencies contributor to collective intelligences. Thus, it remains a likely business improvement target area for the CF, and one that the MCF can focus on when enhancing its future competencies.

To promote collective intelligences the key cross-system capabilities constructs of qualities, risks avoidance servicing, competitive intelligences likely need optimization, along with the constructs supporting economic worth. Thus, a complexity of CF approaches is available to the MCF when seeking progress towards optimizing CF collective intelligences. A similar consideration is used to optimize CF sustainable performance.

Still further optimizations are possible across the three capabilities systems of Figure 2. These systems can be structurally equation modelled, and their optimization can be mathematically gauged. This aspect is reserved for a subsequent article, but it is generally described below (section 5.2) in conjunction with this

study's Table 4 adaptation of the strategic change matrix.

ii. Table 3 and Research Question

Figure 3 and Table 3 clearly, and positively answers the research question 'in COVID-19 times can MCF competencies, and developing MCF-CF relational capabilities, model into enhancing a CF business competitiveness position?' Here the CF's business competitiveness position is captured conjointly by the CF's sustainable performance positioning, and by the CF's collective intelligences positioning.

Further, all constructs used in this study exert positive causally-directed effects. This indicates all constructs may help to improve a firm's competitiveness. Thus, the CF should strategically investigate the deliverables of each construct for possible modification, enhancement, change, or even as possible drivers of a potential pivot change.

When seeking a strategic, beneficial, or optimal repositioning, the CF should carefully consider the individual contributions of each relative measurement item and construct effect within each system, along with the relative optimizing contributions across the entire 3Cs model system. Once such optimization contributions are mapped, then the CF can formulate, and implement as desired, its immediate and ongoing competitiveness strategies.

b) The Strategic Change Matrix

The Figure 4 strategic change matrix offers pathways towards advancing past research. It offers pathways to move from a low-level current Z axis matrix box capturing operational, risks and intelligence capabilities systems to a new Z axis positions shown as '1.' The Z axis also implies that operations sets the base, which is refined by risks avoidance incorporation, and which is further refined by competitive business and

markets systems inclusions. The other axes can be similarly considered. This visual interpretive approach

offers competitiveness pathways towards future-proofing a modern agile firm (Hamilton, 2020).

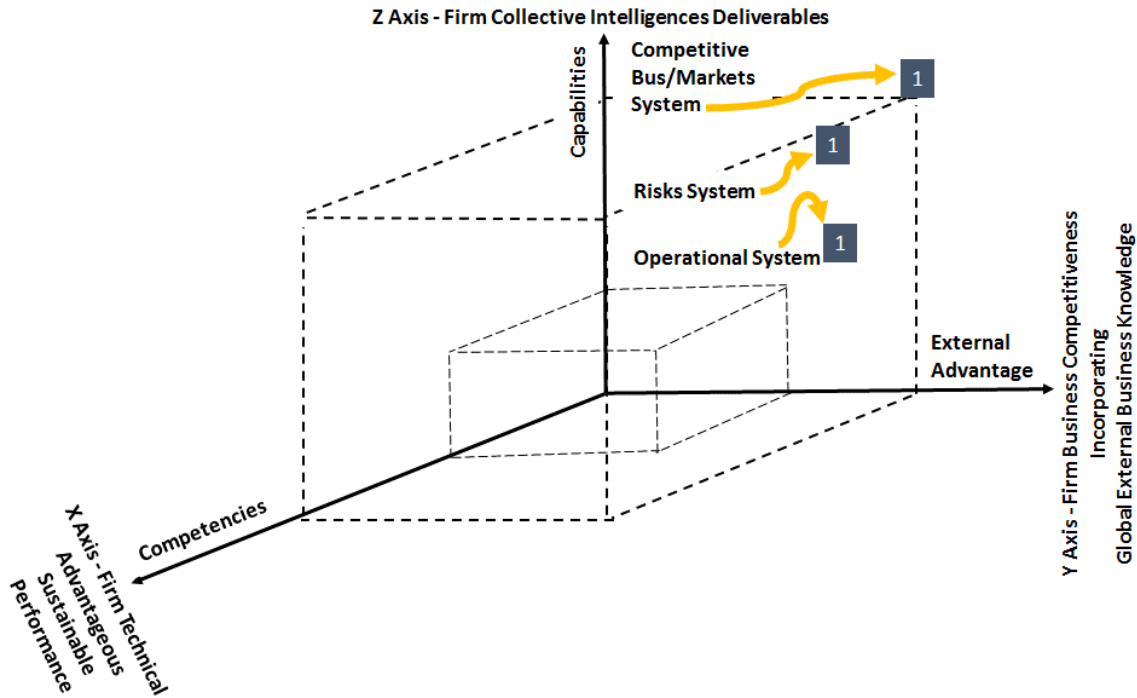


Figure 4: Strategic Change Matrix (adapted from Hamilton, 2020)

Across today's COVID-19 pandemic times, agile firms are repositioning in response to their dramatically-changed business circumstances. CF's seeking to reposition often contract a MCF to assist them in maintaining and/or strategically re-mixing their existing business networks. Today the MCF-CF relationship typically seeks to digitally integrate CF business systems further into an optimizable state of dynamic but flexible equilibrium. Here, the CF is

positioned towards strategically executing chosen, circumstances-altering, business model changes - ones that incorporate its firm business systems. However, these business systems such as those shown in Table 4 likely network in some form across the three capabilities systems analyzed in this study. Thus, as per Figure 3 and Figure 4, a visual understanding of these overlaps can develop as presented below in section 5.3.

Table 4: MCF-CF 3Cs Standardized Total Effects Systems Contributors

Firm Business Systems (Hamilton, 2020)	Values Deliverance Systems	Consumer Relationship Management Systems	Competitive Intelligences Systems
Glocal competitiveness systems	x	x	x
Digital business knowledge systems	x	x	x
Innovation and technologies systems	x	x	x
Capabilities systems	x	x	
Optimizations and feedback systems	x	x	
Economic systems	x		
Intelligences and services systems		x	x
Internal/external leadership & overviews systems	x	x	x

c) The MCF-CF Relationship

Table 3 can incorporate into Figure 4 as follows. First the standardized total effects scores for just the values deliverance system can be averaged to an x axis

score of $(0.24+0.30+0.31+0.17)/4 = 0.25$, a y axis score of $(0.54+0.25)/2 = 0.40$ and a z axis score of $(0.44+0.55)/2 = 0.49$. Second the standardized total effects scores for just the CRM (& risks avoidance)

system can be averaged to an x axis score of $(0.33+0.42+0.23+0.59)/4 = 0.39$, a y axis score of $(0.57+0.95)/2 = 0.76$ and a z axis score of $(0.0.17+0.47+0.27)/3 = 0.30$. Third, the standardized total effects values for just the competitive intelligences system can be averaged to an x axis score of

$(0.36+0.32+0.24)/3 = 0.31$, a y axis score of $(0.64+0.29+0.50)/3 = 0.48$ and a z axis score of $(0.34)/1 = 0.34$. This result is visually shown as Figure 5, and it represents the average change MCF respondents expect to deliver to their contracting CFs.

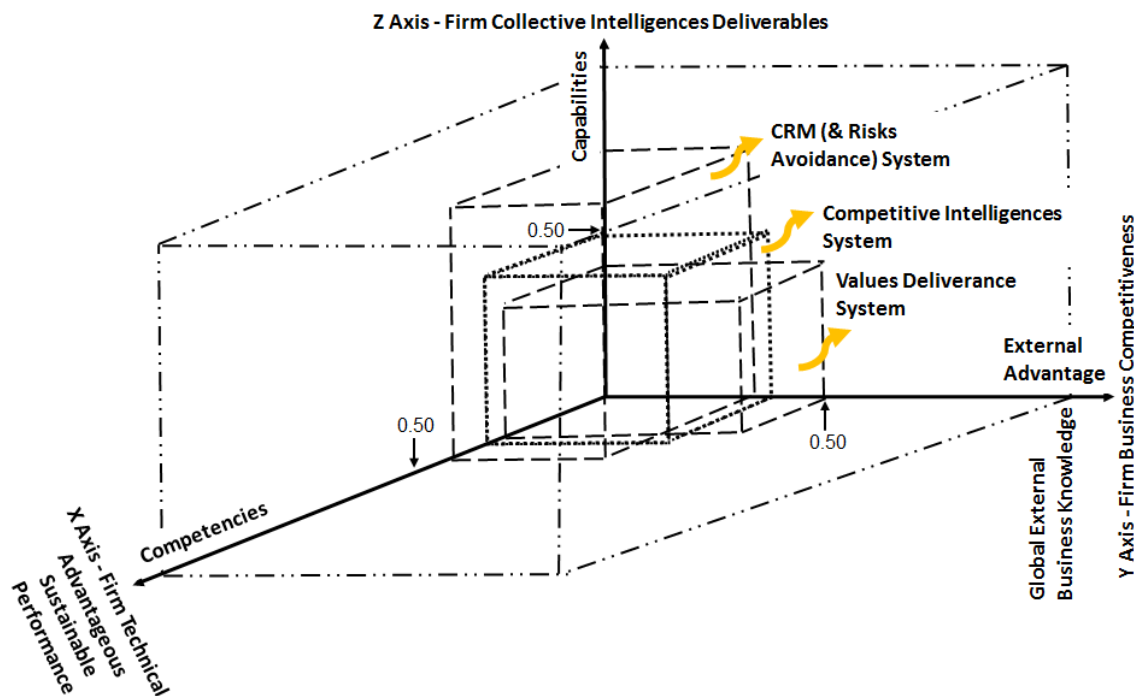


Figure 5: Strategic Change Matrix showing typical MCF-CF capabilities systems

These values suggest the MCF-CF relationship likely delivers a different solution for the developed CF capabilities systems of each contracting CF. The values system has a stronger competitiveness focus. The risks avoidance system has a stronger collective intelligences and competencies focus, whilst the competitive intelligences system positions intermediate or between the other two systems.

Further, an overall strategic change matrix position can be established by computing a net score for the three axes (x axis = 0.32, y axis = 0.54, z axis = 0.38). This indicates the management consultant respondents in India recognize they relationally contribute to the CF's strategic improvement across all three dimensions. They believe they typically advance: (1) CF competitiveness by around 54%, (2) CF collective intelligences by around 38%, and (3) CF competencies by around 32%. Thus, the MCF, on average, provides significant, advantageous, but still only partial business competitiveness solutions to each contracting CF.

d) *The Strategic Change Matrix: a Firm's Values Deliverance Pathway to Competitiveness*

Table 4 depicts that each firm can have a unique strategic change matrix position box (which may

or may not be rectangular) with three overlaying strategic y axis systems. The first y axis system is the strategic operational systems box. Here the firm executes its operations as a values deliverance system.

The firm exists because its qualities, performance and economic worth deliverables are suitably aligned to, and appeal to, its global/local consumer markets. The firm normally strategizes and targets towards its most efficient, effective, viable capabilities deliverables. Hence, it attains a strategic target conversion value of between zero (0%) and 1 (100%). Here, the standardized total effects of Table 3 can gauge a relative, average-weighted score. For example, a firm can follow the Figure 3 3Cs model and establish its own construct beta path weight standardized total effects across its values deliverance system. The firm can then apply these focal points, and test various optimization contributions towards improving its economic worth. Similar estimates can be established for the risks avoidance and competitive intelligences systems. Again, strategic change matrix boxes or an overall strategic change matrix box can be established for the firm. This sets the firm's base-line from which it can competitively gauge and then direct its

strategic, unique, future repositioning. Thus, any CF can use this study's approach and work from a more informed values deliverance position aimed at to strategically improving its competitiveness.

e) *The COVID-19 Pathway to Future Business Competitiveness*

In searching for a competitiveness position beyond COVID-19, the CFs sustainable performance can be advanced with additional measures incorporating latest knowledge additions, further useful innovation inclusions, broadened/heightened capabilities, and/or additional (relevant) entrepreneurial intellectual capital. In special circumstances where a firm requires a change of direction then a pivot solution may be considered around the global external business knowledge area of the y axis.

Where the firm has a current strategic change matrix position determined, it can pursue an advantageous new strategic matrix box positioning. For example, the firm may choose to target a 20% stronger collective intelligences system designed to digitally enhance its value deliverance system, whilst mitigating certain risks. This potentially strengthened business competitiveness positioning also involves competitiveness externalities such as: greater buyer demands, positive supplier changes, less competition, fewer substitutes, and/or fewer copy-cat entrants. Alternatively, if a firm selected a 10% improvement to its existing sustainability performance position from its chosen budget allocation – then from this study's approach this may arise by just smart innovative inclusions to the 3Cs model approach.

Any firm can apply the 3Cs model and strategic change matrix approach. A firm's strategic change matrix box positioning offers a rapid visual from which a firm repositioning or a competitor analysis can be visually assessed for key points of competitive difference against the firm's external environment. The firm can also select where, when and how they can reposition the business. A future, firm-pursued, strategic change matrix box need not be a geometrically regular box shape. It may be specifically expanded towards one focal point, or even towards multiple combinations of competitiveness points. Thus, there are many unique ways for a firm to improve its own post COVID-19 pandemic business competitiveness. Alternatively, a CF can engage a MCF and drawn on its competencies and capabilities to rapidly develop its chosen 3Cs improvements into a recognizable strategic change matrix position.

f) *Management Consulting Theory and Competitiveness*

There is little definitive management consulting theory in the literature and it remains inconsistent. This is in part because management consulting can encompass a diversity of activities. However,

management consulting remains a strategic management relational resource process that usually arises between a MCF and a contracting CF.

Thus, this study proposes that:

'management consulting theory embodies a 3Cs management consulting process - where the management consulting firm competencies (as networks of potential business enhancers) relationally mix with the contracting client firm by fusing their competencies and improving the client firm's capabilities systems. Together these improved networks of shared deliverables systems then contribute towards changing the client firm's business competitiveness positioning.'

Here, the client firm's business competitiveness positioning embodies the 'global/local' business systems outcomes embedded throughout its sustainable performance positioning and its collective intelligences positioning.'

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This India-wide, empirical, point-in-time, global literature-supported, quantitative study involves 232 leading management consulting firm (MCF) consultants and contracting client firm (CF) perspectives. It positively answers the research question showing that today in COVID-19 times, MCF competencies, and MCF-CF relationally developed CF capabilities can network model towards a solution that can change a CF's business competitiveness position.

This study shows that by applying firm-specific refinements to Hamilton's (2020) Figure 3 MCF-CF 3Cs model, and by next incorporating a Table 3 MCF-CF 3Cs Model Standardized Total Effects approach, then a Figure 4 and/or Figure 5 visual, three-dimensional, geometrical, and relational- strategic change matrix position can be mapped for the CF. When next pursuing a more-optimal, strategic (and unique), future CF business competitiveness position, this existing CF strategic change matrix position can be re-gauged, and/or further interpreted, in a similar manner to Figure 5.

Across this 2019-2020 COVID-19 global pandemic time period this study supports the need to strengthen, and refine, the sparse and shallow attempts at building 'Management Consulting Theory.' This study believes 'Management Consulting Theory' should strategically embody management consulting processes - specifically linking MCF competencies (as networks of potential business enhancers) into the MCF-CF relationally-developed CF competencies, and into improved CF capabilities systems deliverables. Together these improved, and networked, multiple CF deliverables systems can then contribute towards changing CF business competitiveness over time.

Today's sudden COVID-19 forced changes on the business world means the firm may need to:

consolidate, or diversify, or pivot, or reinvent, or digitally re-tool, or experiment/transition/exploit a new option. Here, the firm may need to collect and wisely consider each embedded component of its intelligences. This should be conducted in conjunction with it assessing the relevance, and the priority, of each of its sustainable performance components. Such forced change situations likely draw on the firm's competencies, and particularly its weakest engaged competencies of knowledge creation and innovation. Enhancing these two competencies can give the firm a substantive business re-positioning advantage. When implementing such changes, the firm may carefully choose what items it can best uniquely-network across its 'global/local' competencies, and then how to target-map these into reframing its business model. Here, its latest innovative/digital/knowledge approaches can incorporate into its capabilities by additions across its values deliverance system, its CRM system, and competitive intelligences system.

Finally, to cross beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, the firm's business competitiveness choices of what, when, where, and how to focus/retain its uniqueness across its 3Cs constructs can all deploy into its re-modelling and re-optimizing processes. Over time, these two enhancing processes should focus on increasing the firm's business competitiveness components, and they can do so by focusing almost equally on both its sustainable performance positioning and also its collective intelligences positioning!

Recommendations and Limitations

This India-wide, point-in-time study offers new research, a new 3Cs constructs model, and a strategic change matrix application tool as a new approach to the MCF-CF relationship and business competitiveness. It is validated by bootstrapping (Cunningham, 2009), but for wide global acceptance it can be further validated by additional research studies conducted across developed countries and/or possibly sub-sectioned across major global cultures. Validation can even occur via specific industry studies. Such future research studies should also seek to contribute towards management consulting theory.

Author Contributions: John R. Hamilton mapped, developed and wrote this article. Raw data was drawn from PhD candidate Rohit Ramanujam's extensive IMCI data set. John R. Hamilton, Rohit Ramanujam, SingWhat Tee and Michael Underdown reviewed, edited and added ideas across this article.

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