

**EXAMINING THE PRECURSORS OF THE HARD ELEMENTS OF
CHANGE MANAGEMENT FOR ACHIEVING OPERATIONAL
EXCELLENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF MANAGEMENT
CONSULTING FIRMS IN LAGOS STATE
BY**

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to investigate the connections between the hard elements of Change Management and Operational Excellence (OPX) in the field of management consulting, an area that has not received extensive attention. Building upon the McKinsey 7s Model, we formulated hypotheses suggesting causal relationships between the hard elements of change management and operational excellence (OPX). A survey design was employed, and data were gathered through an electronic questionnaire distributed to 95 respondents, with 70 responses obtained from 10 consulting firms. Both descriptive and inferential statistics, utilizing SPSS, were applied, and the Chi-Square test was utilized to assess the three hypotheses. The research identified robust and positive connections between the adoption of technology, organic structure and operational strategy on the attainment of operational excellence. While the results were somewhat ambiguous, they did substantiate the notion that a commitment to change plays a moderating role in the relationship between change management and operational excellence. Decision areas within the consulting strategy framework, such as adopting cutting edge technology, supporting dynamic organic structure, and aligning best spoke strategies emerged as domains where change management could be beneficial. Consequently, these findings carry implications for organisational and change management endeavours within the business consulting sector.

Keywords: *Change Management, Operational Excellence (OPX), Resource-based view (RBV), Technology, Organic Structure, Operations Strategy, Management Consulting.*

Introduction

In the realm of research focused on change management and operational excellence, the field of business consulting has historically received limited attention. The primary focus has been on enhancing customer value and ensuring long-term sustainability (Chiawah, 2019). This perspective resonates with Owie (2019) assertion that organizational failure to achieve operational excellence often stems from insufficient attention to change management. The bulk of contemporary operational excellence research has predominantly centered on sectors like manufacturing, oil and gas, and education, as highlighted by Ahmad *et al.* (2018), giving rise to recent advancements in understanding change management and operational excellence. Change management, as defined by Bellantuono *et al.* (2021), involves transitioning from the current state to a desired state concerning the challenges and opportunities encountered by businesses. Additionally, achieving excellence requires alignment with the firm's plan, addressing both the hard and soft components of change management. A critical concern in the field of business performance revolves around how organizations establish and sustain competitive advantages while pursuing excellence (Bag *et al.*, 2020). Many organizations falling short of excellence may be hindered by management lacking a comprehensive understanding of the prerequisites for achieving exceptional performance. Existing research has primarily focused on identifying key factors that can elucidate how organizational transformation can be optimally managed to aid businesses on their path to excellence. This research aims to contribute to understanding the current parameters of change management influencing organizational excellence, particularly in management consulting operations. The identified metrics could serve as preconditions for any establishment embarking on organizational change management initiatives.

Recognizing the significance of hard dimensions, as outlined by Mohamed *et al.* (2018), this research focuses on hard elements of technology, organic structure, and strategy. Moreover, successful change implementation may hinge on employees' commitment. Pellegrini *et al.* (2018) note that employees' attitudinal commitment, such as affective commitment to change, correlates with their ability to navigate organizational changes. In the context of the global business market, marked by factors like globalization, intense competition, and technological breakthroughs, Nwinyokpugi (2018) suggests that companies in Nigeria must adapt and

evolve to thrive. To secure their survival and growth in this challenging climate, businesses must cultivate a new set of competencies.

Management consulting plays a pivotal role in bolstering Nigeria's economy by contributing substantially to service employment, human capital, and support services. This sector is recognized as one of the fastest-growing in the world (Adetokunbo & Edioye, 2020; Ogechukwu, 2011). Consequently, in order for Nigeria's service companies to achieve operational excellence, there is a pressing need to cultivate or embrace a fresh set of change management dimensions. These dimensions may encompass technology, organizational structure, and operational strategies, aligning with the dynamic and evolving landscape of the global business environment (Etuk, Uford & Udonde, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

This research is centred on the effective management of organizational change to attain operational excellence, with a specific focus on the largely unexplored landscape of Nigeria's management consulting. Despite numerous studies delving into manufacturing and other service sectors, there remains a notable gap in the evaluation of Nigeria's management consulting, prompting the need for this investigation. Previous research efforts primarily concentrated on identifying crucial characteristics that enhance our comprehension of how organizational change can be optimally navigated, aiding organizations in their pursuit of excellence. The primary aim of this study is to enhance our understanding of the prevailing change management elements influencing business performance, particularly within the realm of consulting operations in Nigeria. The overarching objective is to scrutinize the significant impact of change management on operational excellence in organizations within the management consulting sector in Lagos State.

Literature Review

There are four sections to this review. The theoretical framework examines the underlying theories for this research in the domains of operational excellence and change management in the first section. The second section places an emphasis on the concepts and definitions of key independent variables and dependent variables based on previous research works; the third section concentrates on an empirical review of existing research,

focusing on the main thrust of their work, sampling techniques, and the results and conclusions reached the researchers; and the fourth section fixates on hypothesis development given the variables being considered.

Theoretical Framework

The McKinsey 7s Model

This study is anchored on the McKinsey 7s Model. This model aligned with the change management variables of technology, organic structure and operational strategy. These variables of technology, organic structure and operational strategy aligned synchronically with the hard elements of McKinsey 7s Model of systems, structure and strategy hence the adoption. The McKinsey 7s model, which was first introduced by Waterman, Peters, and Phillips in 1980, analyses organizations from seven perspectives: strategy, structure, system, skills, staff, style, and shared values. The first three of these perspectives are referred to as "hard Ss," and the other four are "soft Ss." The McKinsey 7s model is a useful analysis tool that enables managers to identify the level of consistency between an organization's key dimensions and the necessary transformation. A company's strategy is its long-term plan to succeed and achieve its goals.

Businesses frequently use cost, leadership, differentiation, and innovation methods in order to identify their missions and create long-term plans that will help them achieve synchronized strategic goals. Last but not least, shared values are the fundamental principles that shape the company's culture and direct it toward accomplishing strategic objectives (Waterman et al., 1980).

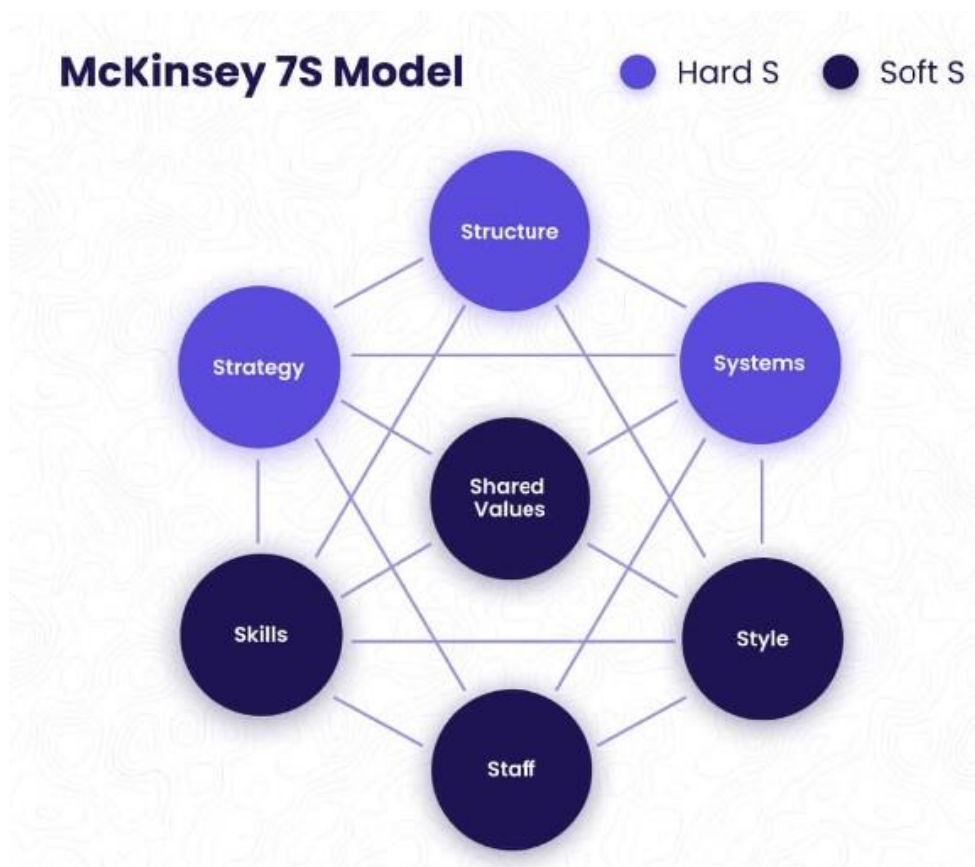


Figure 1: McKinsey 7s Model adopted from ResearchGate publication DOI:10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1129

This model is often used in strategic planning, organizational design, and change management processes. It provides a holistic view of an organization. It helps leaders identify areas where adjustments or improvements are needed and facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how changes in one element can impact other areas of the organization. The McKinsey 7S Model provides a practical and systematic way to assess and improve the overall effectiveness and performance of an organization. Despite its popularity, it is often avoided due to complexity of interrelated static elements with no step-by-step guidance and overemphasising on internal factors. The main reasons for the adoption of this model are:

Holistic Organizational View: The 7S Model provides a holistic approach by considering seven interconnected elements: Strategy, Structure, Systems, Shared Values, Skills, Style, and Staff. This is beneficial when studying change management as it ensures that all aspects of the organization are aligned to support operational efficiency.

Cultural and Structural Considerations: Change management often involves altering organizational culture and structure. The 7S Model helps in identifying how changes in one area may impact the others, offering insights into potential challenges and opportunities for synergy.

Conceptual Framework

Operational Excellence

Excellence is defined by the European Foundation for Quality Management (1999) as "excellent practice in managing the organization and delivering outcomes" (Gabriela-Livia, 2021). Sarigül and Oralhan (2016) emphasized that operational excellence entails not just cost-cutting and quality-improvement, but also knowing how to manage people and resources effectively. To achieve operational excellence, there is need strong change management competence and strong leadership. Employee empowerment, ownership, and a culture of continual improvement are also critical to operational excellence. Its adoption and implementation typically require a corporation to change the way its workers think and act.

Change Management

The future and success of an organization are dependent on how successfully managers handle change. The focus of this research is to determine the link between change management and operational excellence (Galli, 2018). Many organizations have exclusively focused their efforts on soft variables in the past when undergoing organizational change. On the other hand, Mann, Adebajo, and Tickle (2011) suggest that "most successful organizations put a great deal of effort into the soft elements." Indeed, soft variables may make or break a successful change process since we can't impose hard systems on an organization without taking into account their impact on people (Fok-Yew, 2018). The researcher uses this method to try to incorporate "hard" variables into change management. Three hard elements were found in this study based on a literature review: technology, organic structure, and operations strategy.

Technology

Technology is a key component of successful change (Lewis, 2019). Microelectronics-based or computer-controlled equipment used in the design, or handling of a service is referred to as "service technology," and it is most usually used to refer to advanced service technology.

Organic Structure

Organic structure is another key component of successful change. Organic structure is made up of explicit norms and processes that, to the greatest extent possible, promote creativity, autonomy, learning, and decentralization of decision-making, which works well in changing environments (Stojanović-Aleksić, Nielsen, & Bošković,2019)

Operations Strategy

The perspective of how a business unit serves many operational goals, such as quality, prices, delivery, flexibility, and sustainability, is characterized as an "operations strategy". This is another key driver of change management (Badri *et al*; 2000).

Management Consulting

Idowu (2023) defined management consulting as providing expert advice and assistance to organizations to improve their performance, solve problems, and achieve their objectives. Consultants work closely with clients across various industries to analyze their current operations, identify areas for improvement, and develop strategies for success. Ivanova (2021) did breakdown of management consulting as follows:

- i. **Problem Identification:** Consultants begin by understanding the specific challenges faced by the client organization. This could range from inefficiencies in operations to strategic issues such as market positioning or growth obstacles.
- ii. **Analysis and Assessment:** Consultants gather data, conduct interviews, and analyze the organization's processes, systems, and structures. They use tools like SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and industry benchmarks to gain insights into the client's situation.
- iii. **Strategy Development:** Based on their analysis, consultants collaborate with the client's management team to develop strategies and action plans to address the identified problems. This may involve setting clear objectives, defining initiatives, and establishing timelines and metrics for success.
- iv. **Implementation Support:** Consultants often assist in implementing the recommended strategies. This could include providing training to employees, facilitating change management processes, or even temporarily filling key roles within the organization.

- v. **Performance Monitoring and Feedback:** Throughout the engagement, consultants track the progress of the initiatives and provide feedback to the client. They may adjust strategies as needed based on new information or changing circumstances.
- vi. **Specialized Expertise:** Management consultants bring specialized knowledge and skills to the table, whether it's in areas like finance, marketing, operations, IT, or organizational behavior. This expertise allows them to offer tailored solutions to each client's unique challenges.
- vii. **Objective Perspective:** One of the key benefits of management consulting is the external, objective viewpoint consultants bring to the table. They can often see things that may be overlooked by internal stakeholders and provide unbiased recommendations.
- viii. **Project Management:** Consulting engagements are typically structured as projects with defined scopes, timelines, and deliverables. Consultants are responsible for managing these projects efficiently and ensuring that they meet the client's expectations.

Overall, management consulting is a dynamic and collaborative process aimed at helping organizations thrive in an increasingly competitive and complex business environment.

Empirical Review

In this review, we have selected two of the studies previously conducted on change management and operation excellence for review of their methodology, theories and findings.

The first paper reviewed concentrates on the usage of business excellence in Asian enterprises as it was investigated by researchers (Mann et al, 2011, p.605). Manufacturing companies made up more than 40% of the total number of respondents in the study. Despite the fact that businesses think that deploying business excellence is critical to achieving major objectives, the Asian area continues to face challenges, including a lack of a business excellence culture, a lack of resources, and a failure to adequately train personnel in business excellence. The study looked at how business excellence is implemented in five Asian nations (Japan, India, China, Thailand, and Singapore). “There is a need for more research into additional Asian countries that may be at varying levels of business excellence maturity, the study concludes” the researched concluded.

In another study, de Waal (2013, p.263) explored whether characteristics that lead to sustained greatness are "evergreen" or stay the same over time. Organizational design, process, strategy, technology, leadership, people and roles, culture, and external orientation were among the eight elements. According to the finding, nearly 90% of the elements that promote greatness reported in research conducted before 1995 are also evident in studies conducted after 1995, which means, although the features of determinants may change over time, those considered to qualify as "evergreens of excellence" that are always important for establishing and maintaining a high-performing establishments have been identified. In this regard, study on the characteristics that lead to brilliance, whether discovered in older or more modern literature, has remained consistent across time.

Hypotheses and the Research Model

Based on the existing literature, three primary hypotheses are presented. The link between the many aspects described in this research is shown in the framework in Figure. 1 below. This research makes a relationship based on the literature, stating that the change management elements are only likely to have an influence on the organization's operational excellence in scenarios when change management procedures are adopted. The moderating effect of Commitment to Change on the connection between change management and Operational Excellence is not being investigated. The importance of technology in today's corporate climate cannot be overstated. For everyone, including businesses, technology has become a way of life. Technology is a must-have tool to reach consumers, workers, and suppliers faster and perform more fluidly, which leads to the first hypothesis:

H₁:1 The adoption of service technology will lead to operational excellence, according to the hypothesis.

Ho:1: The adoption of technology will not lead to operational excellence

The peculiarities of the corporate structure are also essential factors that influence the company's success and come in a variety of shapes and sizes. In order to promote operational excellence, the company's change management must be linked to a structural transformation. Although the impact of structural dimensions on performance is unknown, it is widely

assumed that some structural dimensions, such as the mechanistic and organic structure, influence performance in some way (Michela & Burke, 2000). As a result, the hypothesis is stated as follows:

H₁: 2: The implementation of an organic structure will lead to the operational excellence.

Ho: 2: There is no significant relationship between the implementation of an organic structure and operational excellence.

Mokhtar and Yusoff (2009) offer intriguing insights on corporate strategy alignment and operational excellence. As a result, existing research piques interest and points to areas where further research into the link between operations strategy and company success may be conducted. The operations plan must be consistent across all decisions influencing corporate strategy, competitive priorities, and infrastructures in order to be effective. There are gaps in the literature on the specific linkages between change capability and operations strategy, as well as the links between these two entities and service excellence measures. A new focus was placed on change capability in order to anticipate operational excellence in quality, time, cost, flexibility, and sustainability. (Akaegbu & Usoro, 2017). As a consequence, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H₁: 3: A well-defined operations strategy will lead to operational excellence.

Ho: 3: A well-defined operations strategy will not lead to operational excellence.

Methodology

This research looked at the relationship between change management and operational excellence using a causal analysis using consulting organizations in Lagos State that provided demographic samples. To guarantee that every component of the population is considered and has an equal chance of being chosen as a subject, the systematic random sampling technique was adopted (Cr, 2020). Research conducted using selected consulting organizations in Lagos State. The selected organizations are: Dexnova, Resource Intermediaries, McTimothy Associates, Index Consulting, LYD Consulting, Qeeva Advisory, Impact Partners Advisory and BlueSense among others. According to Macionis and Sparks (2009), the population of study refers to the individuals who are the focus of the research. It might alternatively be interpreted as the total number of objects in which the researcher is interested. The population for this study includes

the customers, personnel and management of selected consulting service organizations in Lagos State.

This researcher used a total of (130) participants spread proportionally amongst the selected companies. The sample size was designed to guarantee that all respondents in selected organisations were adequately represented. The firms chosen represent a cross-section of Nigeria's key service sectors.

The data was gathered through the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions on the study's research topics and aims. Questionnaires are used in a variety of situations to acquire information about people's attitudes and behaviours (Williams, 2003, p.245). In this study, a closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert Scale was engaged and administered proportionally to the four selected companies. Online survey was utilised to post the online questionnaire link on Google Docs and also e-mailed it to the executives, customers and employees of various selected service organisations.

Data Analysis, Results, Discussion of Findings

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for this study in analysing the questionnaires. The questionnaires were derived by the researcher based on the research objectives and hypotheses. Descriptive statistics include frequency counts and simple percentages. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize, classify, and explain the aspects of data distribution. Meanwhile for inferential statistic, the Chi-Square(X^2) was utilized. The Chi-Square test was used to examine the three (3) hypotheses with SPSS used to generate the results.

Demographic Profiles of Respondent

The table below summarizes the descriptive statistics of the demographic profiles of the respondents (n=93). The subsequent parts provided a detailed analysis of the findings statistically.

Table 4. 2 Demographic Profiles

Variable	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	60	65%
	Female	33	35%

Age	18-25	14	15%
	26-30	15	16%
	31-35	15	16%
	36-40	22	24%
	Above 40	27	29%
Work Experience	Less than a Year	12	13%
	1-3 Years	13	14%
	3-5 Years	18	19%
	5-10 Years	19	20%
	Above 10 Years	31	33%
Educational Level	High School Cert	6	10%
	Diploma	21	31%
	First Degree	60	50%
	Masters	6	10%
	Ph.D.	0	0%
Employment Level	Management Staff	19	20%
	Senior Staff	46	49%
	Junior Staff	28	30%

An overview of the distribution statistics; shows that ninety-three (93) respondents participated in the survey. Figures obtained indicates sixty-five per cent (65%) were males, while thirty-five per cent (35%) were females. Further analysis shows that twenty-nine-per cent of the respondents were above 40years. On the Educational Level of the respondents, fifty per cent were reported to have a first degree, while ten percent have Master Degrees. The remaining forty per cent have lesser qualifications. Thirty three percent of the respondents have 10 years and above work experience while the remaining sixty-seven percent have lesser experience

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Ho: 1. the adoption of technology will not lead to operational excellence

$$X^2C = (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i = 169.37$$

$$X^2t = 0.01 \text{ d.f. } 1 = 26. 217$$

$X^2_c > X^2_t$ (169.37 > 26. 217). So, reject H_0

Results: The result obtained from the chi-square (X^2) test shows that the calculated chi-square (169.37) is greater than the tabulated chi-square (26. 217) at (0.01) significant level

Decision: We shall reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

Findings: This reveals to us that the adoption of technology will lead to operational excellence in consulting organisations.

Hypothesis Two:

Ho: 2. there is no significant relationship between the implementation of an organic structure and operational excellence.

Table 4.3.3 shows the responses of the respondents on the questions that are related to the hypothesis.

$$X^2_C = (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i = 149.58$$

$$X^2_t = 0.01 \text{ d.f. } 1 = 20.09$$

$X^2_c > X^2_t$ (149.58 > 20.09). So, reject H_0

Results: The result obtained from the chi-square (X^2) test shows that the calculated chi-square (149.58) is greater than the tabulated chi-square (20.09) at (0.01) significant level

Decision: we shall reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

Findings: This reveals that there is significant relationship between the implementation of an organic structure and operational excellence in consulting.

Hypothesis Three

Ho: 3. a well-defined operations strategy will not lead to operational excellence

Table 4.3.6 shows the responses of the respondents on the questions that are related to the hypothesis.

$$X^2_C = (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i = 164.65$$

$$X^2_t = 0.01 \text{ d.f. } 1 = 26. 217$$

$X^2_c > X^2_t$ (164.65 > 26. 217). So, reject H_0

Results: The result obtained from the chi-square (X^2) test shows that the calculated chi-square (164.65) is greater than the tabulated chi-square (26.217) at (0.01) significant level.

Decision: We shall reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

Implications: This reveals that a well-defined operations strategy will lead to operational excellence in consulting organisation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study focuses on the relationship between hard elements of change management and operational excellence in management consulting firms based in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrated a statistically significant and positive association between operational excellence and technology adoption, organic structure, and operational strategy. This study takes MCKinsey 7s Model as the framework in operational excellence and change management respectively. The study was able to demonstrate the following:

- that technology adoption leads to operational excellence in management consulting firms.
- that the implementation of an organic structure and operational excellence have a substantial link in consulting service firms.
- that having a well-defined operations strategy leads to operational excellence in consulting enterprise.
- Adoption of technology, the implementation of an organic structure, and a well-defined operations strategy, among other elements, will lead to operational excellence.

Recommendations

- Organizations, particularly those in the management consulting, should find the right mix of technology adoption, organic structure, and operational strategy, among other elements, in order to succeed in change projects and achieve operational excellence.
- To achieve operational excellence, managers should develop policies, procedures, and processes that combine three hard elements of change management, among others, into their strategic planning and direction. The findings, on the other hand, are expected to provide

managers with insight into the most appropriate operational excellence model based on organizational needs.

- It is also suggested that management consultants balance both the soft and hard elements of the change management process in order to improve stakeholder management as they strive for operational excellence.

Contribution to Knowledge

- This study has made significant contributions to practice, technique, and theory, as evidenced by the data analysis findings above. Success in change projects requires the correct combination of adoption of technology, organic structure, and operational strategy for management consulting service organizations, among others. On the other hand, understanding all three components, among others, and commitment to change, may assist consulting firms in guaranteeing operational excellence.
- The outcome of the study has provided empirical evidence of the relationship between change management and operational excellence, taking into consideration the hard elements of adoption of technology, implementation of organic structure, and a well-defined operations strategy leads to operational excellence in consulting, among others.
- The study provided empirical evidence that change management affects operational excellence.
- This research has added to the literatures on change management and operational excellence management.

Suggestion for Further Study

- The variables should be expanded to include other enablers of both soft and hard elements of change management.
- This study recommends that more research be done, including moderating variables such as commitment to change in future studies.
- The study could further be expanded into other areas, not to be limited to management consulting

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