

A Study on the Development of the Management Consulting Market for Small-Scale Businesses

소규모 기업 경영컨설팅 시장의 개발에 대한 연구

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Abstract: This study conducts an in-depth analysis of the necessity and structural challenges of the management consulting market for small-scale businesses and proposes strategies and approaches for its systematic development. Small-scale businesses account for the vast majority of all companies in South Korea yet continuously struggle with management improvement due to insufficient capital, manpower, and expertise. These businesses require external consulting for tasks such as ISO certification, management certification, government subsidy utilization, and digital transformation (DX) projects including smart factories and smart stores. However, they find it difficult to obtain quality consulting at a reasonable cost, given a market structure dominated by large consulting firms and a shortage of standardized services and specialist personnel. To explore this, two real-life consulting project cases were analyzed: Company A (retail and online distribution) and Company B (manufacturing in the parts/metal processing sector). Common problems identified include (1) financial and manpower constraints, (2) uneven consultant capabilities, (3) short-term, document-focused approaches, and (4) lack of post-consulting maintenance. Addressing these requires (a) standardized consulting models and improved professional competency, (b) an ecosystem built through government assistance and private sector collaboration, and (c) extended digital transformation consulting paired with robust follow-up systems. By defining the small-scale business consulting market as an independent domain, this study underscores the need for specialized consultants, collaborative platforms, and sustainable support systems involving government entities, industry associations, and financial institutions.

Keywords: small-scale business; management consulting; ISO certification; digital transformation (DX); smart factory; government support; consulting standardization; ecosystem development

Chapter I. Introduction

1. Research Background and Necessity

1.1 Current Status and Importance of Small-Scale Businesses in South Korea

Small-scale businesses form the backbone of the South Korean economy, accounting for the vast majority of all companies and contributing significantly to job creation and regional economic vitalization. According to the "Basic Statistics of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises" published by the Ministry of SMEs and Startups [1], small-scale businesses and micro-entrepreneurs with fewer than 20 permanent employees or annual revenues below KRW 12 billion represent more than 90% of all companies, and they provide a very high proportion of employment.

Despite this quantitative significance, small-scale businesses are highly vulnerable to changes in the external environment due to capital shortages, insufficient specialist personnel, fragile financial structures, and relatively low technology and systems capabilities. The "Survey Report on Micro-Business Conditions" conducted in 2022 [2] also confirmed that small-scale businesses and micro-entrepreneurs face difficulties in improving their competitiveness due to an unstable business environment and a lack of management expertise.

Accordingly, professional management consulting support is essential for the efficient utilization of diverse management resources such as capital, technology, and human resources. However, due to the market structure of domestic management consulting, which is centered on large corporations, and high consulting costs, it is not easy for small-scale businesses to access quality consulting (Korea Management Consulting Association, 2020) [3].

1.2 General Structure of the Management Consulting Market and the Exclusion of Small-Scale Businesses

Globally, management consulting has become a core industry supporting corporate innovation and growth, led by large global consulting firms (e.g., McKinsey, BCG, Deloitte, PwC). However, these large consulting firms tend to prioritize the mid-to-large enterprise market that can commission strategic consulting or large-scale projects.

- First, small-scale businesses have relatively low cost-bearing capacity for consulting.
- Second, the problems of small-scale businesses are field-intensive and require practical improvements in a short period, but the comprehensive solutions offered by large consulting firms are often too 'strategic' or long-term and do not align with immediate on-site needs.
- Third, the consulting demand of small-scale businesses has strong regional and industrial specificity that is difficult to address with generic consulting techniques.

As a result, small-scale businesses find it difficult to secure an appropriate pool of consultants, ultimately relying on inexperienced consultants or those with only partial expertise in certain fields, or simply going without consulting altogether. The "Current Status and Challenges of the Domestic Management Consulting Market" [3] points out this problem, analyzing that 'the absence of specialized consulting models for small-scale businesses is a serious obstacle to the development of their capabilities.'

1.3 Urgency of Developing the Small-Scale Business Management Consulting Market

Small-scale businesses, lacking capital, manpower, and management know-how, also struggle with basic management functions such as financial and accounting management, human resources, and marketing. According to the "Survey Report on Micro-Business Conditions" [2], the greatest concerns of small-scale business managers are: financial structure improvement; human resource management (recruitment, training, evaluation); utilization of government subsidies and tax benefits; and online/digital transformation.

In particular, with the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the government's digital transformation (DX) policy, cases dealing with ICT-based management innovation such as smart factory construction and smart store introduction are rapidly increasing (Ministry of SMEs and Startups, 2023). However, these require comprehensive capabilities including expertise in process automation and advancement, experience in system implementation such as MES/ERP, and redesign of management processes, making it very difficult to pursue without external consulting assistance.

Nevertheless, companies and personnel that professionally provide consulting for small-scale businesses are severely insufficient, resulting in a prevalence of 'non-expert' consulting or simply the abandonment of consulting. This ultimately causes small-scale businesses to miss the timing for innovation or to pursue the wrong direction, leading to financial and time losses.

1.4 Opportunities and Threats in the Digital Transformation (DX) Era

Since COVID-19, as the non-face-to-face and online market has rapidly expanded, small-scale businesses are also exploring various channels including online markets, SNS marketing, and live commerce. Digital transformation has become an essential challenge for all businesses regardless of scale. However, the 'digital divide' between small-scale businesses and large corporations in terms of digital technology and IT

infrastructure is even more pronounced. To bridge this gap, approaches through government support project linkage, same-industry partnerships, and joint investment are urgently needed.

Therefore, management consulting for small-scale businesses must go beyond simple ISO certification consulting and financial consulting to encompass a comprehensive form that includes IT/DX consulting. In this process, if market infrastructure development—such as producing specialized personnel (consultants), establishing consulting standardization and standard fee systems, and presenting performance verification indicators—does not precede, adverse effects from indiscriminate consulting may also appear.

2. Research Objectives and Scope

2.1 Research Objectives

This study primarily aims to identify the structural characteristics and core problems of the small-scale business management consulting market, and to present consulting models, specialist workforce development strategies, and market ecosystem construction plans to resolve them. Specifically, the following detailed objectives are set:

① Understanding the current status and problems of management consulting for small-scale businesses:

- Investigate and analyze the gap between the consulting demand felt by small-scale business managers and the consulting services actually provided in the market.
- Identify realistic difficulties (cost, manpower, expertise, etc.) faced by small-scale business consulting, unlike consulting for large and mid-sized companies.

② Development of a differentiated consulting model:

- Present a step-by-step consulting model reflecting the special characteristics of small-scale businesses (field-intensive, funding constraints, etc.).
- Discuss around cases (Case Studies) immediately applicable in the field, including support plans linked to ISO certification and government policies (smart factory, smart store, etc.).

③ Development of professional consultants and establishment of a standardized consulting process:

- Propose education, qualification, and evaluation frameworks to alleviate the phenomenon of non-professional consultants proliferating in the market.
- Explore directions for establishing 'consulting manuals' or 'standard guidelines' that guarantee a certain quality of consulting processes and deliverables.

④ Strategy establishment from a policy and ecosystem perspective:

- Discuss ways in which the government, industry associations (e.g., Korea Management Consulting Association), financial institutions, and universities (educational institutions) can cooperate to nurture the small-scale business consulting market.
- Present ideas for building a sustainable ecosystem by lowering market entry barriers and sharing information and resources through collaborative models such as consulting cost subsidies, joint procurement, and joint projects.

2.2 Research Scope and Limitations

In this study, 'small-scale businesses' are defined as those with up to 20 permanent employees and annual revenues below KRW 12 billion, and in some cases also include businesses with fewer than 10 permanent employees and annual revenues below KRW 5 billion (micro-entrepreneurs).

- **Industry scope:** Manufacturing, wholesale/retail, and service industries are broadly covered, but the actual case analysis focuses on 1–2 representative industry types.

- **Analysis scope:** Among management consulting, ISO certification, management certification, government subsidy consulting, DX (smart factory/smart store) construction, HR/labor affairs, and marketing (online/SNS) consulting are the main targets.
- **Regional scope:** Domestic (South Korean) small-scale businesses are targeted, and if necessary, overseas small-scale business consulting cases (particularly Japan, the U.S., and parts of Europe) are also referenced for comparison.

This study conducts qualitative analysis centered mainly on case studies and literature research. Large-scale empirical analysis (surveys or statistical models) is left for follow-up research. Therefore, the authors acknowledge the limitation that the models proposed in this study may not be universally applicable to all small-scale businesses. However, by organizing the major concerns and consulting demands commonly experienced by small-scale businesses, the study aims to provide a generally usable guide within the consulting market.

Chapter II. Theoretical Background

This chapter organizes the definition and characteristics of small-scale businesses and the concept and scope of the consulting market, examines why management consulting is necessary for these small-scale businesses, and comprehensively reviews related prior research and literature. Through this, the study aims to concretize the necessity and differentiation of research on the development of the small-scale business consulting market.

1. Definition of Small-Scale Businesses and the Consulting Market

1.1 Definition and Characteristics of Small-Scale Businesses

(1) General Definition of Small-Scale Businesses

Small-scale businesses vary somewhat in detailed criteria and legislation by country and industry, but generally refer to businesses with small numbers of permanent employees and revenue figures. In South Korea, various indicators under the Framework Act on Small and Medium Enterprises and the Act on the Protection of and Support for Micro Enterprises classify micro-entrepreneurs and small enterprises differently. For this study, the following criteria are applied:

- Permanent employees: 20 or fewer
- Annual revenues: KRW 12 billion or below
- Legally and administratively classified as 'micro-entrepreneurs' or 'small enterprises'

(2) Business Environment of Small-Scale Businesses

Compared to large and mid-sized companies, small-scale businesses have the following characteristics:

- 1. Shortage of capital and resources (human, facilities, technology, etc.):** Due to insufficient capital and specialized personnel, they face limitations in various management activities such as new product development, marketing, and R&D (Korea Micro Business & Market Service, 2022).
- 2. Concentration and speed of decision-making:** Internal decision-making is concentrated in the representative or a small number of executives, enabling rapid decisions when needed but also carrying the risk of lack of expertise or arbitrary decisions (Korea SME Research Institute, 2021).
- 3. Vulnerability to market changes and external environment:** Small-scale businesses are easily directly impacted by macroeconomic fluctuations, legal and institutional changes, raw material price increases, and labor cost burdens (Theory and Practice of Management Consulting, Seo Myeong-gil, Kim Mi-suk, Kwon Hyeok-jin, 2015).
- 4. Many family-run or solo founding businesses:** There is a high possibility of absolute dependence on the personal capabilities and networks of the business owner, with potentially inadequate internal controls and standardized processes.

1.2 Concept and Scope of the Consulting Market

(1) General Definition of the Consulting Market

Consulting refers to support provided by an individual or company with specialized knowledge for problem-solving, capability enhancement, and performance improvement of organizations (businesses, institutions, etc.) (Organizational Socialization and the Profession of Management. Sloan Management Review, Schein, 1988). Traditionally, management consulting includes specialized services across various functions such as strategy, organization, human resources, finance, marketing, and production management. Recently, the scope has expanded to digital transformation (DX), IT system construction, and certification consulting (ISO, management certification, etc.).

(2) Concept of the Small-Scale Business Management Consulting Market

The 'small-scale business management consulting market' in this study refers to the market providing consulting services that support management improvement, government subsidy selection, productivity enhancement, digital transformation, and certification acquisition for the small-scale businesses defined above. Existing large consulting firms (e.g., McKinsey, BCG, Samjong KPMG) mainly conduct projects for larger companies or public institutions and charge high consulting fees, making them inaccessible to small-scale businesses. However, small-scale businesses have very high demand for 'outsourced specialized knowledge' across all aspects of management, and they wish to receive specialized consulting within a relatively low budget.

The problem is that the consulting market for small-scale businesses itself is not systematically organized, and there are many cases of non-professionals or one-time low-price consulting being conducted indiscriminately. Therefore, the starting point of this study is the need to define this domain as a separate market and discuss systematic service models, standard fee systems, and plans for developing professional consultants.

2. Necessity of Management Consulting for Small-Scale Businesses

2.1 Difficulty in Securing Management Expertise

Small-scale businesses often lack professional managers or organizational systems, showing weaknesses in core management functions such as marketing strategy development, financial management, and organizational operations. Especially in family business or solo founding models, there is a strong tendency to rely on the intuition of the representative, making it easy to neglect medium-to-long-term business strategies and risk management. In this situation, if a consultant with specialized knowledge participates as an external partner, businesses can quickly prepare countermeasures and enhance implementation capabilities (Ministry of SMEs and Startups, 2021).

2.2 Necessity of Responding to Market Changes and Innovation

As business cycles have shortened recently and digital technology advancement and globalization are rapidly progressing, smaller businesses are more vulnerable to uncertainty (OECD, 2021). Small-scale businesses need to respond agilely to changes in the business environment, but there is a problem of slowed innovation speed due to limitations in internal infrastructure and specialized capabilities. For example, there are reports that many small businesses fell behind in online transition (e-Commerce) or non-face-to-face sales methods after COVID-19 and experienced revenue declines (Korea Micro Business & Market Service, 2022). In this situation, consulting is an important tool that can create a turning point for corporate growth through process innovation, digital transformation, and online marketing strategy.

2.3 Policy Support Direction and Increasing Demand

The government is also operating various policies, subsidies, and consulting voucher systems to support micro-entrepreneurs and small businesses (e.g., the Ministry of SMEs and Startups' 'Micro-Business Consulting Voucher Project,' regional government-specific 'specialized consulting support projects,' etc.). Accordingly, the connection platform and support framework between 'suppliers (specialized consultants or consulting companies)' and 'demanders (small-scale businesses)' is gradually increasing, but the market has not yet fully specialized, and the disparity in consultant capabilities and unclear service quality standards are pointed out as

limitations.

2.4 ISO Certification and DX Consulting Cases

In the ISO audit/certification consulting and DX (smart factory, smart store) consulting cases performed by this researcher, large and mid-sized companies prepare requirements in advance through their own departments, while small-scale businesses often do not even know 'what certification is' or 'what effect digitalization has' due to lack of dedicated personnel. These companies rely on consultants for almost all processes as if outsourcing, and there are many cases where certification failures, project delays, and increased additional costs occur from receiving low-cost, non-expert consulting. Therefore, if a specialized consulting system tailored to small-scale businesses is established, these problems can be largely resolved.

Through field consulting experience, particularly in ISO and DX consulting, the following problems are especially prominent:

- **(1) Opacity of price and scope:** Certification and DX consulting fees are determined through negotiation without a publicly recognized standard, so cases are frequent where small-scale businesses bear excessive burdens relative to appropriate costs or conversely receive poor consulting at overly low costs.
- **(2) Consultant capability gap:** Consultants without proper expertise in the field are also active, and consulting is sometimes provided with insufficient understanding of standard requirements or inadequate knowledge of smart factory automation equipment.
- **(3) Insufficient post-consulting maintenance:** Focusing only on formal outcomes such as passing certification audits or completing equipment installation, without sufficient follow-up management such as post-operation, maintenance, and education, ultimately reduces performance.
- **(4) Insufficient linkage with government support systems:** Although government/local government certification, vouchers, and smart support projects exist, the specialized structure for guiding and linking small-scale businesses to effectively utilize them is insufficient, and the synergy effect is not properly realized.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Domestic Research Trends

Domestically, many studies have been conducted on the effects of management consulting and consulting processes targeting SMEs in general. However, there are virtually no documents that specifically target 'small-scale businesses' with up to 5 or 20 permanent employees. The Korea Micro Business & Market Service (2022) published a report analyzing the benefits of consulting projects among micro-business support policies, but the scope of consulting is concentrated in certain areas such as store management guidance and startup consulting.

3.2 International Research Trends

International research on small-scale business consulting is mainly linked to SME (Small and Medium Enterprises) support policy research in the UK, Australia, and EU regions. For example, the European Commission (2020) analyzed cases where professional consultants assisted small European businesses' innovation projects through the 'SME Instrument' EU funding program. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) in the UK also regularly publishes reports on the actual effects of management consulting and mentoring for small businesses.

3.3 Differentiation of This Study

Based on the review of prior research and experience above, the necessity, effects, and improvement challenges of consulting for small-scale businesses clearly exist. However, research presenting a concrete blueprint for strategies to efficiently and systematically develop and foster the 'small-scale business consulting market'—including (1) small-scale business-specific consulting models by field and stage, (2) professional workforce

development and qualification standards, (3) standard fee systems and government support policies for consulting, and (4) ecosystem construction for DX/smart support—is still insufficient. This study differs from existing literature in that it deeply proposes specific market development measures and strategies. In particular, through a 'case study' approach analyzing actual consulting project experiences, field problems, and success factors, and attempting research that combines theory and practice, this study has its main differentiation.

Chapter III. Research Methodology (Case Study Approach)

This chapter adopts a case study method for an in-depth understanding of the small-scale business management consulting market. Case studies have the advantage of deeply grasping the problem situation and resolution process through specific cases occurring in actual fields, and are particularly evaluated as an appropriate research method for targets with diverse and complex management environments like small-scale businesses. To this end, this study selects two companies where actual consulting projects were conducted, analyzes the cases, and derives implications based on the results.

1. Research Approach and Design

1.1 Research Approach: Appropriateness of Case Study

- **Characteristics of Case Study:** Case study is a method of investigating a limited number of cases in depth to concretely understand organizational phenomena and derive or supplement general patterns and theoretical hypotheses. This is particularly suitable for comprehensively grasping the special business conditions and consulting support situation of small-scale businesses as in this study.
- **Qualitative approach:** Rather than large-scale surveys or empirical analysis, this study collects and interprets the context of actual consulting projects and participants' experiences as qualitative data, aiming to obtain highly field-relevant results.

1.2 Case Selection Criteria

- **Small-scale business status:** 20 or fewer permanent employees, annual revenues below KRW 12 billion.
- **Consulting type:** Must have experience introducing at least one of the key areas: ISO certification, government support (management certification, vouchers, etc.), and DX (smart factory/smart store) construction.
- **Diverse industries:** For richness in comparative analysis, cases from different industries among manufacturing, wholesale/retail, and service industries were selected as much as possible.
- **Time elapsed since project completion:** Companies where actual post-operation performance or difficulties had emerged at least 6 months after project completion were prioritized.

Based on these criteria, two companies—Company A (wholesale/retail and online distribution) and Company B (manufacturing and root industry)—were provisionally selected from approximately 10 candidate companies the researcher had participated with in actual consulting field work (abbreviated for confidentiality in this paper).

1.3 Research Design Overview

- **Stage 1: Preliminary Study** — Explained research objectives through coordination with the companies, conducted preliminary interviews to assess the types of materials needed for case analysis and accessibility.
- **Stage 2: Main Study** — Conducted in-depth interviews with company management, field personnel, and consulting participants (consultants, field employees, etc.), and collected reports, plans, and results prepared during consulting.
- **Stage 3: Analysis and Cross-Case Comparison** — Coded key themes for each case and derived factors needed for small-scale business consulting market development by comparing and contrasting

commonalities and differences.

- **Stage 4: Strategic Implications** — Based on analysis results, presented strategies directly related to the topics of this paper such as consulting standardization, professional workforce development, and government support system construction.

2. Data Collection

2.1 Data Collection Sources

- **Interviews:** Semi-structured interview method was used. Meetings of approximately one hour each were conducted with 2–3 people including company representatives, executives, field practitioners, and external consultants. Interview content covered: company background (industry, scale), consulting adoption motivation and process, collaboration patterns with consultants, problems and success factors, post-evaluation and improvement challenges. Audio recording was conducted with parallel use of written summaries only for sensitive information with prior consent.
- **Documentary materials:** Consulting proposals, MOUs, project plans, interim/final reports, ISO certification audit-related documents, DX construction results (photos, drawings, etc.). Internal company materials (financial statements, HR regulations, etc.) were received as extracts or summaries within the scope of analysis purposes due to some sensitive matters.
- **Public policy materials and statistics:** Small-scale business support policy manuals and statistical data published by the Ministry of SMEs and Startups, Korea Micro Business & Market Service, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, and local governments were referenced.

2.2 Overview of Case Companies

- **Company A (Wholesale/retail and online distribution):** 23 permanent employees, annual revenues approximately KRW 11 billion. Package-type consulting including ISO certification, management certification (Mainbiz, venture confirmation), and government subsidies (vouchers, commercialization funds).
- **Company B (Manufacturing/parts processing, root industry):** 9 permanent employees, annual revenues approximately KRW 4 billion. Received consulting while introducing automated equipment and MES systems through the government's smart factory deployment support project. Also conducted ISO certification, management certification, government subsidies (vouchers), and patent BM consulting.

2.3 Data Collection Schedule

- Preliminary survey (–June 2024): Company candidate screening, coordination with target companies, NDA (non-disclosure agreement) execution.
- Main survey (July–September 2024): In-depth interviews, documentary data collection, site visits.
- Analysis (November 2024): Interview transcript organization, documentary data organization, draft case analysis.

3. Analysis Methods

3.1 Case Analysis Framework

This study conducts both intra-case analysis and cross-case analysis based on the case study methodology:

- **(1) Consulting adoption background and process:** Records of what need led each company to adopt consulting and how, the consultant selection process, costs, and duration.
- **(2) Consulting execution content:** Project scope (ISO, DX, etc.), staged deliverables, whether problems occurred and countermeasures.
- **(3) Consulting outcomes and difficulties:** Actual effects (financial and non-financial) after consulting

completion, remaining challenges, whether post-consulting support was provided.

- **(4) Success and failure factors:** Classified into internal factors (management attitude, personnel capability), consultant factors (expertise, communication), and external factors (government policy, market environment).

3.2 Cross-Case Comparison and Interpretation

3.2.1 Commonalities and Differences Between Cases

- **Commonalities:** Strong motivation to utilize government support projects (solving capital and know-how shortages externally); difficulties arising from cost and schedule issues in cooperation with consultants; tendency for managers to view certification or DX itself as 'goals,' resulting in insufficient post-operation systems.
- **Differences:** Industry difference—wholesale/retail vs. manufacturing—means the nature of field problems (IT systems, processes, logistics) differs; CEO decision-making style—Company A has very rapid decisions, Company B delegates some authority to field staff; consulting expertise requirements—smart factory (technical) vs. ISO certification (process/documentation).

3.2.2 Key Interpretations and Implications

1. Small-scale business-dedicated consultants:

Both Companies A and B require high expertise, but lack the budget for large consulting firms, relying on 'mid-sized consultants' or '1-person experts,' resulting in capability disparities. Required capabilities: (1) familiarity with government support project processes, (2) foundational knowledge in complex fields such as ISO and DX, (3) field communication skills.

2. Effect of government support linkage:

Reduces consulting cost burden and helps secure implementation capacity. However, administrative procedures are complex and support timing is limited, so there is a risk of missing appropriate timing. The additional burden arising from insufficient support project budget at Company B is a point of caution.

3. Absence of post-consulting systems:

Focusing on the formal completion of certification/DX construction, post-sustainability (education, monitoring) is pushed back. Small-scale businesses have no dedicated departments, so momentum falls sharply after consulting ends.

4. Participation of field workers and middle management:

If only the CEO is actively engaged and field employees are passive, consulting implementation was difficult. In Company B, field workers did not sufficiently learn MES usage after introduction, causing trial and error.

Chapter IV. Case Analysis

This chapter examines in detail two small-scale businesses ('A' and 'B') as cases, according to the research methodology and case analysis framework presented in Chapter III. The industry, scale, consulting adoption background and process, consulting execution content and outcomes, and common/differentiating factors of each company are organized. Through this, the study aims to more concretely identify the unique problems and improvement directions that appear in the small-scale business management consulting market.

1. Overview of Case Companies

1.1 Company A: Wholesale/Retail and Online Distribution

- **Industry:** Wholesale/retail, online distribution (e-commerce, etc.)
- **Established:** 2017
- **Scale:** Approximately 23 permanent employees, annual revenues approximately KRW 11 billion (average over recent 3 years)
- **Characteristics:** While partially maintaining face-to-face and offline sales, rapidly expanded online sales channels from 2020. The CEO has a strong tendency to actively utilize digital platforms and certification systems.

Consulting adoption background:

- **Need for comprehensive package consulting:** The CEO aimed to simultaneously elevate funding and corporate brand image by linking ISO certification (ISO 9001, 14001), management certification (Mainbiz, venture confirmation, etc.), and government support vouchers in a short period.
- **External expertise dependence:** Lacking personnel to exclusively handle certification or government support project procedures internally, sought to receive package-type service from external consultants covering everything from document preparation to audit response.
- **Accelerating online market competition:** Judged that corporate credibility (certification and government support outcomes) was needed to secure competitive advantage as the online distribution market rapidly grew after COVID-19.

Consulting scope and process:

- **ISO 9001/14001 certification preparation:** Documented internal processes following consultant guidance and prepared quality/environmental manuals and procedure documents. Training and internal audits were conducted in parallel, but due to tight schedules, proceeded mainly with key departments and the CEO rather than all employees.
- **Mainbiz and venture confirmation certification applications:** Prepared business plans, financial data, R&D capability evidence documents, etc. The consultant guided or helped draft key content to submit company internal factual information in the appropriate format.
- **Government subsidy (voucher, commercialization fund) linkage:** Received partial support for consulting costs through the micro-business voucher program. The CEO also proceeded with additional commercialization fund applications (marketing, prototype development), but only partially approved due to budget limitations and unmet conditions.

Consulting results and evaluation:

- **Certification acquisition:** ISO 9001, 14001 certification was slightly delayed from the expected schedule but ultimately completed a successful audit. Mainbiz and venture confirmation certifications were also approved approximately 3 months after application.
- **Short-term outcomes:** Being able to appeal as a 'certified company' externally had a positive effect on gaining extra points in public institution and large corporation partnership bids and attracting some new business relationships.
- **Limitations:** A gap remained between documentation work and actual process improvement. There were complaints that the consulting proceeded with document completion as the priority, lacking empathy and internalization among internal members. Additionally, cost burden was a problem despite partial resolution through government subsidies, and the tight timeline led to severe overwork for the CEO and staff.

1.2 Company B: Manufacturing (Parts/Root Industry)

- **Industry:** Mechanical parts processing (root industry category), partial OEM supply

- **Established:** 2018
- **Scale:** 9 permanent employees, annual revenues approximately KRW 4 billion
- **Characteristics:** Despite the need to strengthen factory automation and quality management systems, there was not a single specialized employee in-house to handle IT or quality certification.

Consulting adoption background:

- Smart factory deployment project participation: Intended to introduce automated equipment and MES through the government's smart factory construction support project, but had no prior experience and completely depended on an external consultant for everything from equipment selection to system construction.
- Simultaneous pursuit of ISO 9001, 14001, and 45001: Following customer requirements, quality (9001), environmental (14001), and occupational health and safety (45001) certifications were needed, and aimed to bundle these together with consulting.

Consulting scope and process:

- Smart factory construction roadmap: Consultant diagnosed the field process flow and presented an introduction plan for MES (production management) and partial automation equipment (robots, conveyors). Government voucher and local government matching grants were utilized to reduce self-funding burden.
- Equipment and SI vendor selection: Under consultant leadership, multiple robot and MES vendors were compared for quotations, ultimately narrowing down to 2 finalists. There were cases where negotiations broke down due to mismatched costs and technical specifications, but contracts were eventually signed after renegotiation.
- ISO 9001, 14001, 45001 certification preparation: The consultant led the overall process including documentation of process management procedures, environmental/safety health manual preparation, and internal audit training. Field employees participated in safety and health training, but given the small workforce, evening and weekend training was sometimes necessary.

Consulting results and evaluation:

- Smart factory construction effect: Some processes were automated, and after MES introduction, real-time work order-performance-inventory tracking became possible. Defect rates decreased by more than approximately 15%, and delivery time management improved efficiently.
- ISO certification: Managing three standards simultaneously was burdensome, but with close cooperation between the CEO and consultant, the audit was passed successfully (approximately 8 months required). Afterwards, business partners and new customers highly valued the certified management system.
- Limitations and problems: (1) Increased self-funding costs—self-funding burden was larger than initially expected, requiring mid-project budget readjustment. (2) MES operation establishment—insufficient user training for employees in the early stages caused trial and error, and the consultant's IT expertise was not perfect, heavily relying on SI vendor technical support. (3) Post-operation infrastructure—lacking an internal person to systematically manage certification documents and automation equipment maintenance, the CEO and field workers are learning on their own after consulting ended.

2. Case Analysis A

2.1 Analysis of Consulting Adoption Background

Both Company A and B show a common pattern in that they chose consulting to utilize government support systems or meet business partner requirements (ISO, etc.). However, Company A differs in that it tried to execute even more 'strategic and comprehensive package consulting' within a short period.

1. **Influence of government support:** Both case companies actively utilized micro-business or SME vouchers, smart factory subsidies, and certification support funds to reduce the cost burden. However, it

emerged as a problem that document preparation during the support fund application process is complex and waiting is required when the project application timing does not match.

2. CEO's decision-making style: Company A's CEO has a very aggressive tendency, proceeding with 'certification→government support→online expansion' in one package with a sense of speed, with the side effect of increased overwork and formalized documentation among internal personnel observed. Company B's CEO valued collaboration with field workers and consultants, but depended significantly on the consultant for IT technology judgments due to unfamiliarity.

3. Case Analysis B

3.1 Consulting Outcomes and Limitations

Both companies secured visible outcomes such as certification acquisition, fund securing, and DX introduction, but post-operation/maintenance and specialist personnel issues remained as challenges.

1. Certification outcomes: Both A and B successfully passed ISO audits and enhanced external credibility, but more time is needed to determine how much the actual internal operation processes have become established.

2. DX (smart factory) effects: In Company B, positive indicators of productivity improvement and defect reduction were observed after MES introduction. However, the CEO mentioned 'additional investment is needed for system advancement, but financial capacity is insufficient and causing concern.'

3. Cost and capability issues: While consulting costs are partially offset by government support, trying to do everything in a low budget and short period raises significant quality concerns. Consultant capability disparity and IT expertise deficiency were also pointed out in some cases (Company B case). Dedicated consultant development for small-scale businesses is urgently needed.

4. Insufficient post-consulting management: Both A and B lack specific roadmaps for maintenance and re-audit/advancement after consulting completion, at risk of halving effects.

4. Cross-Case Comparison and Key Implications

Table 1. Cross-Case Comparison

Category	Company A (Retail/Online Distribution)	Company B (Manufacturing / Root Industry)	Common Implications
Background	Government support + ISO + management certifications pursued as a short-term package.	Smart factory deployment via government program, MES/automation + three ISO standards.	Heavy reliance on government support to offset limited internal capacity and expertise.
Consulting Scope	(1) ISO 9001/14001; (2) Mainbiz, venture certification; (3) voucher applications and online expansion strategy.	(1) Smart factory roadmap; (2) equipment & SI vendor selection; (3) ISO 9001/14001/45001 simultaneously.	Consultants required to cover multiple specialized domains simultaneously.
Outcomes	Certifications obtained, government subsidies secured, initial online expansion strategy established.	Smart factory deployed (defect rate reduced ~15%, lead time improved); ISO triple-certification achieved.	Enhanced credibility, partial cost recovery, productivity gains — generally positive.

Challenges	Tight timeline and budget; document-centric approach; weak post-consulting operations.	Higher-than-expected self-funding burden; insufficient MES user training; three-standard workload.	Inadequate post-consulting follow-up; shortage of specialized consultants; financial pressure.
Success / Risk Factors	CEO's drive and government linkage (success); parallel pursuit of many tasks with insufficient expertise (risk).	Improvement will and SI vendor evaluation ability (success); consultant's IT knowledge gap (risk).	Specialized consultant capability, CEO and employee engagement are crucial.

1. Common Implications:

- Need for small-scale business-dedicated consulting model: Package-type approach integrating ISO certification, government support, and DX is effective, but requires correspondingly diverse expertise requirements to be met.
- Government support linkage: Can subsidize consulting costs and help secure implementation capacity, but procedures and timing are complex, requiring the CEO and consultant to invest significant time in administrative work.
- Post-operation system: Continuous improvement and maintenance are needed even after consulting ends, but difficult to execute due to lack of dedicated personnel.
- Standardization and quality management: There is no objective standard for evaluating consultant capability and quality of provided services, making it difficult for companies to gauge 'who is a real expert.'

2. Differential Implications:

- Industry-specific characteristics: Manufacturing (Company B) emphasizes technical and process aspects of smart factories, making IT/SI-related capabilities very important. In contrast, wholesale/retail (Company A) has certification, government subsidy linkage, and online marketing as key factors, enabling relatively 'strategy/documentation'-oriented consulting.
- CEO's style: Company A achieved results by rapidly pursuing multiple tasks simultaneously, but lacked substance. Company B had clear technology adoption outcomes but encountered obstacles in budget burden and post-education.

3. Conclusive Implications:

- Small-scale business consulting requires an implementation support model beyond simple advice. A structure is needed to help comprehensively from funding through business processes, system construction, to post-education.
- If the consultant does not comprehensively understand 'government policies + certification + DX technology,' there is a high likelihood of problems arising in each individual area.
- Case analysis results serve as the basis for concretizing market development plans (consulting standardization, specialist workforce development, ecosystem construction, etc.) to be covered in Chapter V.

Chapter V. Strategic Recommendations

This chapter synthesizes the cases (A, B) analyzed in Chapter IV with the preceding theoretical and literature review to present strategic recommendations for more systematically developing the management consulting

market targeting small-scale businesses. Specifically, the following five areas are examined: (1) standardization of consulting models, (2) enhancement and development of consultant expertise, (3) support systems and ecosystem construction, (4) DX consulting expansion strategy, and (5) expected outcomes and economic impact.

1. Standardization of the Consulting Model

1.1 Establishing a Standard Consulting Process Model

One of the most common problems that small-scale businesses experience when receiving consulting is 'opaque service scope' and 'quality variance.' To resolve this, a standard model defining consulting execution procedures and deliverables to a certain level must be prepared.

1. Specifying step-by-step procedures: Common stages such as Assessment → Goal Setting → Implementation → Training/Internalization → Follow-up are defined, and items to be performed by consultants and companies at each stage are systematized. Example: For ISO certification consulting, summarized into 5 stages: preliminary gap analysis → standard documentation → internal audit → main audit preparation → establishment activities.

2. Deliverables checklist: Documents, reports, and field inspection tables to be submitted/prepared at minimum at each stage are organized in checklist form so that companies and consultants clearly share 'what must be completed by when.' If post-operation manuals and comprehensive evaluation reports are additionally designated as required deliverables, this can prevent work from stopping at merely formalistic tasks.

3. Service categorization (modularization): Since small-scale businesses have limited personnel and costs, it is effective to allow them to select the needed parts in module form. For example, 'ISO certification' and 'DX consulting' can be bundled as a package, or 'financial/tax basics' and 'certification preparation' can be separated. This allows companies to select the consulting scope according to their situation, and it also becomes easier for consultants to organize collaborative (co-work) systems according to their specialized fields.

1.2 Establishing a Standard Fee System (Price Guideline)

The most burdensome aspect for small-scale businesses is consulting costs. To reduce the problem of exposure to 'poor consulting' while seeking low-cost providers, an approximate price guideline is needed.

1. Price ranges according to consulting difficulty and scope: For example: ISO 9001 single certification consulting (6 months) standard at KRW 3 million; ISO 9001+14001 simultaneous at KRW 5 million; DX basic diagnosis+design (3 months) at KRW 2 million, etc. These price standards can be jointly announced through research by the government and associations (e.g., Korea Management Consulting Association) and the Korea Micro Business & Market Service.

2. Consulting service grading: Basic (diagnosis + brief advice), Standard (diagnosis + process improvement + documentation), Premium (additional post-management, DX linkage) grades can be created so small-scale businesses can choose according to budget and need.

3. Reference use in government subsidy calculation: If the government and local governments refer to the standard fee system when providing consulting vouchers or subsidies, the problem of an excessive mix of low-price and high-price markets can be alleviated.

2. Enhancing Consultant Expertise and Development

2.1 Qualification and Education System for Small-Scale Business-Dedicated Consultants

As consultant capability disparity was pointed out as a problem in the preceding cases A and B, unlike general 'strategic consulting,' consulting for small-scale businesses requires very important implementation support, government support linkage, and field communication.

1. Introduction of a qualification certification system: For example, a (tentative) 'Small-Scale Business Consulting Expert (SC Consultant)' qualification can be established led by associations and the government, with qualifications awarded after completing certain educational courses, practical

experience, and examinations. Like ISO auditor qualifications, these can be renewed periodically and performance can be evaluated.

2. Educational curriculum development: The Korea SME Research Institute, Korea Micro Business & Market Service, etc. operate consultant development educational courses covering ISO, DX, government support project knowledge as well as communication/coaching skills and field risk management. Operated as online/offline parallel programs to resolve regional and time constraints.

3. Mentoring and practical opportunities: Encouraging senior consultants with extensive experience to form teams with junior consultants for project execution allows know-how transfer in the field. Participation can be induced in a 'mentor-mentee' format in government support projects or large-small company cooperation projects.

2.2 Consultant Collaboration Platform

Since small-scale business consulting requires a complex combination of multiple specialized fields (ISO, finance, IT, labor affairs, marketing, etc.), it is difficult to respond with one person or a small organization alone.

1. Online matching platform: Build an 'expert matching platform' that enables collaboration between consultants, flexibly organizing specialized personnel by project to meet small-scale business demand. Example: If Company A wants ISO 9001/14001 + online marketing consulting simultaneously, a quality certification expert and digital marketing expert form a team.

2. Consultant association/community activation: While organizations such as the Korea Management Consulting Association currently exist, they tend to operate mainly centered on large consulting firms. Activating separate sub-committees or communities where small-scale business-dedicated consultants can network promotes experience sharing and substantive collaboration.

3. Support Systems and Ecosystem Construction

3.1 Expanded Role of Government and Local Governments

1. Advanced consulting voucher system: Further systematize the consulting voucher system operated by the Ministry of SMEs and Startups and local governments, expanding it so small-scale businesses can receive support for a certain amount (e.g., 50–70% of consulting costs). However, consultants who can receive support should be limited to professionals who have passed certain qualifications and evaluations to ensure quality.

2. Administrative simplification and one-stop support: Both cases A and B had extended consulting periods due to complex administrative procedures. If the government builds a one-stop platform (tentatively 'Small-Scale Business Consulting Portal') that integrates management of voucher applications, certification, and subsidy applications, administrative costs will be saved.

3. Flexible operation of certification and DX subsidies: ISO certification, DX construction, etc. are often tasks difficult to realize in a short period. Field opinions that more flexible budget allocation and project period extension is needed—rather than subsidies bundled by year-end or quarter—must be collected.

3.2 Private Association and University/Educational Institution Cooperation

1. Joint development of standards and guidelines: Through three-way cooperation of academia (university research institutes) + industry (consultant associations) + government (Ministry of SMEs, Korea Micro Business & Market Service), a 'Small-Scale Business Consulting Standard Guide' can be published and regularly supplemented. This allows maintenance of consulting quality and consistency, and use as teaching material for consultant development education.

2. University industry-academia cooperation participation: Opening 'consulting practice courses' or 'DX practical education' at universities or vocational colleges and matching small-scale businesses to participate in project form can be mutually beneficial (students gain practical experience; companies receive low-cost consulting and digitalization support).

3.3 Role of Financial Institutions and Investors

When small-scale businesses strengthen business capabilities through consulting, ultimately their financial stability and growth potential increases. In response, a collaboration model can be explored where financial institutions (banks, VCs, etc.) partially support consulting costs or relax loan conditions for companies with excellent consulting results.

4. Expansion Strategy for DX (Smart Factory, Smart Store) Consulting

4.1 Development of DX Specialist Consultants

Smart factory and smart store construction is a domain combining IT/OT (Operational Technology) knowledge with government project procedures, field process improvement, and personnel education. From the perspective of small-scale businesses, finding an expert who can handle all of this at once is difficult.

1. DX consultant educational curriculum: A course is needed that selects interested current consultants to learn smart factory/smart store-related technology training, government RFP (Request for Proposal) writing, and SI vendor communication techniques. Example: Completion of a '3-month small-scale manufacturing DX consultant course,' followed by qualification award through a certain examination or project execution.

2. Regional DX support center collaboration: The Ministry of SMEs and Startups and local governments install 'Small-Scale Business DX Support Centers' in each region's techno parks, industrial complex centers, etc., with specialists stationed full-time to resolve field difficulties together with consultants.

4.2 Industry-Specific Customized DX Guides

Since the DX approach differs by industry type such as wholesale/retail, food/accommodation, and root manufacturing, the consulting process must also differ.

1. 'Essential solutions' list by industry type: For example, organizing packages such as 'kiosk introduction, POS integration, delivery app management' for restaurants and cafes, and 'MES, ERP, SCM integration' packages for manufacturers allows small-scale businesses to quickly identify necessary elements when discussing with consultants.

2. Publication of standard construction case collections: Publishing and distributing 'Industry A DX Construction Case Collections' compiling success and failure cases allows similar industry small-scale businesses to set basic directions even without consulting, and consultants can also reference them to apply consistent processes.

5. Expected Outcomes and Economic Impact

5.1 Strengthening the Competitiveness of Small-Scale Businesses

1. Management system improvement: Establishment of basic management systems such as ISO certification, and supplementing financial, human resource, and marketing capabilities enables substantive business operations. If a specialist consultant continues to be involved, there is a higher likelihood of post-management and improvement activities continuing and connecting to actual performance creation.

2. Enhanced survival and growth potential: Productivity improvement through digital transformation, expansion of online channels, etc. creates a foundation for businesses to independently drive innovation. With the government support + consulting synergy reducing initial burden, distributed management risks lead to stable revenue growth expectations.

5.2 Expansion of the Consulting Industry and Job Creation

1. Creation of new consulting demand: Small-scale businesses previously had the perception that consulting was 'expensive' and could not approach it, but once standard models and government vouchers are established, market demand can explosively increase. This means expanded business opportunities for

mid-sized consulting firms and solo professional consultants.

2. Regional economic revitalization: If a system linked with regional specialized consultants, techno parks, and universities targeting regional small-scale businesses is activated, regional jobs and the economy will operate in a virtuous cycle.

5.3 Increased Government Policy Effects

1. Policy objective achievement: When various government policies for supporting micro-businesses, strengthening SME competitiveness, and promoting digital transformation are combined with the consulting ecosystem, trial and error can be reduced and efficiency increased. Example: Increased smart factory distribution rates, increased number of certified companies, etc.

2. Reduced administrative burden: When a standardized consulting process and professional group is formed, government departments can pursue projects through professional consultants as intermediaries rather than individually supporting and managing each company, also improving administrative efficiency.

The recommendations examined thus far present a 'framework' for comprehensively developing the small-scale business management consulting market. More specific design of how stakeholders (government, businesses, consultants, financial institutions, etc.) divide roles and what institutional support is needed must follow in the actual implementation process.

In particular, the researcher judges that with 'consulting model standardization' and 'professional consultant development' as cornerstones, when government support voucher system advancement, DX diffusion, and post-management system establishment are organically combined, the foundation for small-scale businesses to sustainably grow will be established.

Chapter VI. Conclusions and Implications

This study was conducted with the purpose of identifying the necessity and structural problems of the management consulting market for small-scale businesses and proposing strategic recommendations to resolve them. Through the specific case analysis (A, B) of Chapter IV and the strategic recommendations of Chapter V, various issues arising from the interplay between the internal limitations of small-scale businesses and the structural inadequacies of the consulting market were confirmed.

1. Summary and Conclusions

① Reconfirmation of Research Background and Necessity

- Small-scale businesses continuously experience management difficulties due to capital, manpower, and expertise shortages, despite playing important roles in employment creation and regional economic revitalization.
- These businesses actively pursue various management challenges such as ISO certification, government subsidy utilization, and digital transformation (DX), but their high dependence on external consultants due to lack of specialized knowledge and experience is a key feature.
- However, the consulting market specialized for small-scale businesses is still not organized, and indiscriminate low-price/poor consulting and insufficient post-management are pointed out as problems.

② Key Implications Through Case Analysis

- Case Company A (wholesale/retail): Pursued government support + ISO + management certification as a short-term package, raising external credibility, but document-centric and formalization tendencies and insufficient post-operation management emerged as problems.
- Case Company B (manufacturing): Confirmed positive effects of productivity improvement through smart factory and MES introduction, but additional budget and expertise shortages were exposed in IT

technology selection and employee user training.

- Common factors of both cases: ① The CEO's aggressiveness is positive for achieving outcomes, but there is a significant risk of focusing only on short-term 'certification purposes' without a professional post-management system; ② Cost and schedule pressure intensifies due to constraints on government support amounts and timing; ③ Despite needing to handle various specialized domains simultaneously, individual consultant capability disparities are large, leading to uneven quality.

③ Summary of Strategic Recommendations

- Consulting model standardization: Bundling consulting processes, deliverables, and fee systems to certain standards to clearly define 'what must be provided when and at what level' is a necessary device for small-scale businesses to receive services of basic quality.
- Professional consultant development and collaboration platform: Consultants who understand the special characteristics of small-scale businesses and can handle complex fields such as ISO, DX, and government support must be systematically developed. Since one consultant cannot handle all fields, there is a need to share professional capabilities by project through collaboration platforms.
- Support systems and ecosystem construction: The government must actively pursue consulting vouchers and one-stop support systems, and expand the consultant pool through education, training, and mentoring. Private sector areas including financial institutions and universities must also participate to form an ecosystem, lowering the entry barrier for small-scale businesses and making post-operation and continuous improvement possible.
- DX (smart factory, smart store, etc.) expansion strategy: Digital transformation is emerging as an essential challenge for both small-scale manufacturers and micro-business stores. Industry-specific DX guides must be prepared, and field-effective consulting can be conducted by linking with regional DX support centers or university industry-academia cooperation groups.

④ Research Significance

- This study defined management consulting for small-scale businesses as 'one independent market' and identified special problems (costs, expertise, post-management, etc.) of the market to present specific solutions.
- In the domestic and international literature where consulting research for large and mid-sized companies was mainstream, this study provides meaningful differentiation and practical implications by separately approaching small-scale businesses.

2. Research Limitations and Future Agenda

① Research Limitations

- Limited number of cases: This study focused on the cases of two small-scale businesses, with insufficient samples to fully reflect actual diversity by industry type and region, limiting generalization.
- Researcher subjectivity: Being qualitative research based on the researcher's own consulting participation experience, the possibility of subjective perspective cannot be completely excluded. To minimize this, various documentary materials and interviews were conducted in parallel, but systematic verification may be insufficient.
- Lack of long-term outcome evaluation: Consulting outcomes can be stably measured only after at least one year of post-operation, but information confirmable at the time of this study was limited.

② Future Supplementation Agenda

- Sample expansion and multiple case research: If additional diverse small-scale businesses by industry type and scale are selected for comparative analysis, more general and specific conclusions can be drawn.

- Parallel quantitative empirical research: Research quantifying actual consulting effects by statistically comparing outcomes (revenue growth rate, productivity indicators, etc.) between small-scale businesses that received consulting and those that did not is also needed.
- Post-/long-term tracking research: Longitudinal studies tracking how the relevant companies have changed 1 year or 2 years after consulting completion should be conducted to evaluate sustainability and internalization beyond one-time consulting effects.

③ Additional Research Areas

- Consultant capability and ethics research: Follow-up research on how to set consultant ethical guidelines and capability standards to prevent poor consulting or exploitative contract problems occurring in small-scale businesses is possible.
- AI and big data-based intermediary platforms: As digital transformation accelerates, research on online platform models that connect small-scale businesses with consultants and recommend appropriate solutions and support project information can also attract attention.

3. Final Implications

Small-scale businesses form the basic unit that makes up the foundation of the South Korean economy, and various indicators and research have proven that their competitiveness directly connects to the entire national industrial ecosystem. However, in reality, the consulting market is structured around large and mid-sized companies, and it is not easy for small-scale businesses to receive quality consulting at a reasonable cost.

This study reexamines this problem from the perspective of 'development of the small-scale business management consulting market,' exploring solutions centered on four pillars: (1) standardization of consulting processes and prices, (2) development and certification of professional consultants, (3) construction of a government-private collaboration ecosystem, and (4) preparation of comprehensive support measures for strategic areas such as DX.

The ultimate expected effects that can be obtained through this are summarized as follows:

- ① **Strengthening small-scale business capabilities:** Raising expertise comprehensively in finance, human resources, marketing, and digital areas can increase growth and survival probability.
- ② **Diversification of the consulting industry:** Mid-sized consulting firms and solo professional consultants newly entering and growing leads to the development of diverse forms of consulting services.
- ③ **Enhanced government policy performance:** Various certification and support projects are effectively delivered to the field, post-management is also institutionalized, and budget efficiency is improved.
- ④ **National competitiveness expansion:** Moving away from 'top-down' large corporation-led economics, a healthier industrial ecosystem where 'bottom-up' small-scale business competitiveness is supported can be established.

Ultimately, the development of the small-scale business management consulting market is not simply about solving problems of individual businesses, but is connected to the path of improving the overall constitution of our economy and resolving gaps between regions, industries, and classes. It is hoped that the series of measures proposed in this paper will lead to substantive discussion among field practitioners, policymakers, and the consulting industry, and be supplemented through follow-up research.

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