

CMCE Research Awards 2022: celebrating research into management consultancy

Now a regular fixture in the CMCE calendar, the CMCE Research Awards ceremony is an opportunity to celebrate research into management consultancy and is the culmination of a process of selection and judging that spreads over a number of months.

As CMCE Director Nick Bush pointed out in his opening remarks, excellence in management consultancy is an area that is rather under-examined by both consultants and academics alike. It's CMCE's expectation that the awards will increase its profile and encourage more work in this area, something that, encouragingly, the winners seem keen to do.

After a brief welcome from Chris Sutton, current Master of the Worshipful Company of Management Consultants, guest speaker Professor Michael Mainelli gave a keynote speech on the importance of winning. Praising the role of competition in aiding excellence, he drew a distinction between the use of sticks (competition) and carrots (awards) and suggested that we could use more of the former rather than focusing on the latter and that this was an area perhaps deserving of more research by management consultants.

With a penchant for sporting metaphors, Michael bookended his talk by quoting American Football coach Vince Lombardi's famous observation that "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" at the start and closing with "If it doesn't matter who wins or loses, then why do they keep score?" He then observed that we were all winners and learners, a comment that triggered a couple of interesting questions on the nature of sticks and carrots in both public sector and network organisations from finalists Will Harvey and Juani Swart.

It was then on to the announcement of the winners and, in the manner of awards ceremonies everywhere, it was down to a star-studded list of announcers to open the virtual envelopes. In the absence of stars, we had three members of our judging panel and guest Angela Tennent from Elevation Learning (our sponsors for the evening) to do the honours.

Denise Fellows introduced the winner of ***The Changing Environment of the Consultant category***: a paper that had shed valuable light on one of management consultants' main strengths, thought leadership. Lead author of '*The tensions of defining and developing thought leadership within knowledge-intensive firms*', Will Harvey, said that the topic had grown out of some initial work done by one of the co-authors, Alessandra Almeida Jones, who had quickly realised that this was an area needing more study. Will also observed that the topic had helped identify the threats of mis- and disinformation and rapid content development which means people have a warped sense of facts and reality. His future research will look at different modes of thought leadership – blogs, infographics and vlogs – and how effective they are for different kinds of audience.

The winner in the ***Client-consultant Relationships category*** was David Cross and Juani Swart's paper '*Professional Fluidity: Reconceptualising the Professional Status of Self-Employed Neo-professionals*', which highlighted the problem that the existing categorisations of professionalism that applied to larger organisations didn't really apply to the 90% of consultants working in firms of 4 or fewer employees. Talking to Angela Tennent, David and Juani explained that Professional Fluidity refers to the chameleon-like tactics employed by consultants to co-construct their professional validity with clients and collaborators rather than professional bodies. This is one of the key areas that CMCE will be focusing on in coming months so this research is particularly relevant.

Freeman Luca Collina was the winner of the ***Technology and Consulting award*** for his paper '*What are the implications of virtualisation for building trust during the management consultancy lifecycle?*'

which, according to his conversation with judge Alan Greenwood, was inspired by his own experience of consulting across international boundaries via Zoom.

Malcolm McCaig ended the awards sequence with the presentation of the **Lyndall Urwick Memorial Cup** to Andrew Sturdy for his paper '*The Governance of Management Consultancy Use: Practices, Problems, and Possibilities*' which addressed the G in ESG which the Urwick Award now focuses on. Andrew stated that the governance of consulting was an area that had not been subject to examination and hence his paper was the starting point for what he expected to be further studies in specific areas including the rules and regulations currently governing procurement, and the content as well as the context of consulting – a particularly interesting point, considering that [Deloitte had been addressed by Pope Francis](#) and [Boston Consulting Group were looking to employ climate activists](#) – and the different forms of consulting organisation now being employed.

Although it is intended largely as a celebration of the great work being carried out in this area, the event did provide a rapid overview of some fairly detailed topics, and we look forward to exploring these further in Showcase events in 2023. Meanwhile, you can find details of the papers on the [CMCE site](#), and the recording of the event is also available [here](#).

If you are interested in becoming a judge for next year's awards, do get in touch via info@cmce.org.uk.