# MASTERING THE STORM

Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening – wherever in the world you are joining us today. Welcome to International Consultants Day 2026.

This is a day that belongs to every management consultant on the planet. Whether you are a sole practitioner advising a family business in Lagos, a partner leading a transformation programme in São Paulo, or a specialist helping a government ministry in Singapore, today we pause to recognise the extraordinary contribution that professional management consultants make to organisations and economies worldwide.

International Consultants Day has been celebrated by ICMCI since 2005, falling on the first Thursday of June each year. It is a moment to celebrate our profession, to reflect on the challenges we face, and to recommit ourselves to the standards that set us apart. This year, that reflection has never been more urgent.

We have called this year's event "Mastering the Storm" – and we chose those words deliberately. Not surviving the storm. Not sheltering from it. Mastering it. Because the environment in which we and our clients operate is not simply turbulent. It is structurally different from anything most of us have experienced in our professional lifetimes.

Consider what our clients are facing right now. Geopolitical instability has moved from the margins to the centre of corporate strategy. Trade wars, sanctions regimes, and fractured supply chains are no longer background noise – they are boardroom priorities. The conflict in Ukraine continues to reshape energy policy and defence spending across Europe. Tensions in the South China Sea are forcing companies to rethink decades of supply chain assumptions. In the Middle East, the volatility of war is redrawing the map of economic cooperation and risk.

At the same time, artificial intelligence is advancing at a pace that makes last year's breakthroughs feel like ancient history. Generative AI, agentic systems, autonomous decision-making tools – these are not future possibilities. They are present realities that are already changing how organisations operate, compete, and create value. Industry analysts estimate that over seventy per cent of major consulting firms have now embedded AI-powered platforms into their service delivery. Clients no longer ask whether AI will affect their business. They ask why their consultants have not already helped them harness it.

Layer on top of this the ongoing challenges of sustainability, the expectations of a new generation of workers, regulatory complexity that grows by the month, and a global economy where inflation, interest rates, and growth trajectories vary wildly from region to region – and you have what one would describe as a perfect storm. Not a passing shower but a sustained period of high winds and heavy seas.

And here is the critical point: this is precisely the environment in which professional management consultants should thrive. Storms are when captains earn their keep. But only if those captains are competent, ethical, and properly equipped.

I have spoken many times about the need for agility in our profession, and I make no apology for returning to that theme today. Agility is not a management fad. It is, quite simply, the defining capability that separates consultants who will prosper in this environment from those who will be left behind.

What do I mean by agility in a consulting context? I mean the ability to read a rapidly changing landscape, spot the weak signals, perceive the future trends and adjust our advice accordingly – not after the fact, but in real time. I mean the willingness to cross disciplinary boundaries, to integrate technology, strategy, people, and governance into coherent solutions rather than delivering them in silos. I mean the intellectual honesty to tell a client: the recommendation I gave you six months ago needs updating because the world has changed.

Agility also means embracing new business models. Clients have moved away from traditional hourly billing towards outcome-based and value-driven engagements. They want partners who deliver measurable results, not beautifully formatted slide decks. The consulting firms – large and small – that are thriving right now are those that have restructured around shorter engagement cycles, iterative delivery, and multidisciplinary teams that include technologists, data scientists, and change management specialists working alongside traditional strategy consultants.

But agility without a foundation is just chaos. Which brings me to the heart of the matter.

Management consulting remains, in almost every jurisdiction on earth, an unregulated profession. Anyone can call themselves a management consultant. Anyone can hang out a shingle, print a business card, and start advising organisations on matters that affect livelihoods, communities, and economies. There is no legal barrier to entry. No mandatory qualification. No enforced code of conduct.

Let that sink in for a moment. In a global market that is valued at somewhere over a trillion US dollars – there is no compulsory professional standard. Medical doctors must be licensed. Accountants must be certified. Engineers must be registered. But management consultants? The door is wide open.

How can it be that medical doctors, dedicated to preserving the health of individuals, are regulated, while management consultants dedicated to preserving the health of organisations, whose advice can make or break a million dollar business and ruin employees' lives, have no enforceable regulation? And we have seen the outcome of this lack of regulation recently in the number of scandals surrounding the large firms in the consulting industry.

This is why ICMCI exists. This is why the Certified Management Consultant designation – the CMC – matters. And this is why our standards and codes are not bureaucratic luxuries. They are the essential architecture of that part of the profession that takes itself seriously.

The CMC designation is the only globally recognised professional certification for management consultants, upheld across some 60 major countries. It assures clients that the consultant they have engaged meets verified standards of competence, adheres to a published code of professional conduct, and commits to continuous professional development. In a market awash with self-proclaimed experts, the CMC is a mark of trust.

But standards are not static. They must evolve as the profession evolves. And that is exactly what we are doing in ICMCI.

Let me now turn to what lies ahead of us in today's programme, because every session has been carefully chosen to address the challenges I have just outlined.

Immediately after my remarks, **Robert Bodenstein CMC** – many of you will know Robert as the immediate past Chair of ICMCI, and a man who led the development of the ISO 20700 standard for management consulting services. Robert will take us deep into the theme of *navigating the storm: developing and implementing strategies in an uncertain world*. This is the subject of this year's ICMCI White Paper, based on the theme of our 2025 Annual Conference. Robert brings a unique combination of strategic insight and practical experience and he understands better than most what it takes to build strategy that survives contact with reality. His session will give us the frameworks and the mindset we need to turn uncertainty from a threat into an opportunity. This is not abstract theory – it is the precision strategy that our conference title demands.

Following Robert, **Celal Seçkin CMC** – Chair of our Professional Development and Standards Committee – will present the *2026 update to the ICMCI Competence Framework*. This is a milestone moment. The Competence Framework defines what it means to be a professional management consultant. It is the foundation on which the CMC designation rests. Celal and his team have conducted an extensive review, gathering feedback from member institutes, IQA assessors, CMC holders, and external partners across our network. The updated framework reflects the impact of digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and the global megatrends that are transforming our profession. It has been restructured to be as lean and practical as possible while ensuring that it remains fit for the future. If you want to understand what competence looks like in the age of AI, this is the session you cannot afford to miss.

I will then return to present ICMCI's *Code for the Responsible Use of AI in Management Consulting*, that we are publicly launching today. This is a subject we need to care about passionately. Artificial intelligence is, arguably, the most powerful tool ever to enter our profession. But a tool is only as good – and as ethical – as the hands that wield it. Our AI Use Code sets out the principles that should govern how consultants deploy AI: human oversight and responsibility, transparency, fairness, privacy, safety, accountability, and sustainability. It addresses governance structures, individual responsibilities, client communication, and data protection. It is, I believe, one of the most important pieces of work ICMCI has produced, because it positions our profession at the forefront of responsible AI adoption – not as passive users of someone else's technology, but as trusted advisors who bring ethical rigour to every engagement.

Another important ICMCI publication soon to be publicly available is this year's paper on the ICMCI National Consulting Index.

The National Consulting Index (NCI) is a measure of the relative strength of a country's management consulting sector, compared to the country's overall economy. NCI is calculated by dividing the $ value of a country's management consulting sector by the $ size of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The NCI was first developed by the ICMCI in 2018, as part of our work as a leader in the development of management consulting as a global profession

This year's paper provides a data- driven analysis which looks at the correlation between the NCI and seventeen other global indexes of country-by-country characteristics. The analysis revealed a noteworthy correlation between the NCI and six of these indexes. These were the Corruption Perceptions Index, GDP per capita, the Human Development Index, the Index of Economic Freedom, the Global Innovation Index and Hofstede's Individualism. The paper makes recommendations for further research around the NCI and correlation testing with other global indexes.

So let me draw these threads together. The storm is real. Geopolitical disruption, technological transformation, shifting client expectations, and the ever-present challenge of maintaining professional standards in an unregulated market – these are not hypothetical risks. They are the daily reality of our profession.

But I am before you today not with a warning, but with a conviction. The management consultants who will master this storm are those who combine three things: the **agility** to adapt their thinking and their methods to a world that will not stand still; the **competence** to deliver advice that is grounded in genuine expertise, not borrowed jargon; and the **integrity** to hold themselves to standards of conduct that earn and keep the trust of their clients.

That is what ICMCI stands for. That is what the CMC designation represents. And that is what today's programme is designed to strengthen.

We are not just commentators on the storm. We are the navigators through the storm. Let us make sure we are worthy of that role.

Thank you for your attention, and now, let me hand over to Robert Bodenstein, who will begin our journey into the heart of the storm.