Make Strategy Stick

A Playbook for Closing the Strategy-Execution Gap in an AI-Accelerated World

Why most strategies stall - and how to align people, data, and direction before the tech (and competition) pulls ahead.

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XISY

Why This **Paper Exists**

Over the past few months, we conducted in-depth interviews with senior leaders across mid-to-large organisations in Australia & NZ - from finance directors and tech CEOs to infrastructure heads and operations executives. The conversations spanned different sectors, covering diverse organisational challenges, but one line came through consistently:

> **“The strategy makes sense. We just can’t seem to make it land.”**

Different sectors, different pressures, same fundamental problem. Nearly every leader we spoke with was wrestling with the same execution challenge.

Here's what's really happening. Teams are burning themselves out on yesterday's priorities while this quarter's strategy sits in PowerPoint. Data that's supposed to drive decisions is actually paralysing them - three different churn numbers, two conflicting dashboards, one very frustrated CFO. Projects form a life of their own because nobody knows what actually matters anymore.

Success gets measured by time, budget and RAG status, not whether it has moved the needle that counts. When that needle is buried in a 160-slide board pack, proving value becomes impossible.

Meanwhile, leadership spends Wednesday afternoons arguing about font sizes instead of making decisions. It's not that people don't care. The system has become a strategy-eating machine that turns clear direction into confused activity.

Here's what stood out: the firms moving fastest aren't the biggest or oldest. They're the ones who've refused to let complexity kill clarity. One plan everyone can see. One rhythm everyone follows. One source of truth everyone trusts.

With AI accelerating everything, this gap is about to become a chasm.

Most leaders want to "do something with AI." Boards are asking for AI updates. Innovation teams are running pilots. But when those pilots stall - and they do - the blockers aren't technical. They're the same persistent problems that already slow everything down.

This isn't an AI strategy paper.
It's a get-your-house-in-order-first paper.

Because AI doesn't fix execution drift. It accelerates it at machine speed.

What follows are the execution killers we found lurking in nearly every organisation, and the surprisingly simple moves that winning firms use to stay ahead. Not revolutionary frameworks or expensive transformations - just disciplined basics that make strategy impossible to ignore and execution impossible to avoid.

The tools are within reach. The competitive advantage is real. The question is whether you'll fix the foundation before your competitors leave you debugging yesterday's priorities.

01

The Strategy-Execution Death Spiral

Here's the brutal reality: 67% of strategic goals now miss their targets.

That's not a process problem. That's organisational carnage hiding in plain sight.

You've got smart people with clear plans, backed by solid business cases. Then strategy hits the execution layer and dies a slow, expensive death. Teams work harder while results get weaker. Leadership gets frustrated. The board gets restless. Everyone blames "execution challenges" and promises to do better next quarter.

Rinse and repeat.

The Numbers **Don't Lie**

Post-2019 GDP swings are twice as wide as the 20 years before (IMF)
Strategy has to pivot faster, but most execution rhythms are stuck in annual treacle.

Only 37% of execs trust their own KPIs (Accenture)
When leaders don't trust their own numbers, every decision becomes guesswork.

82% of boards now expect ROI inside 12 months (Gartner)
Long-term thinking died somewhere between the last pivot and the next board meeting.

In Australia, hard-to-fill roles are up 38% year-on-year (Jobs & Skills Australia)
You can't execute strategy when key seats sit empty and your best people are one bad week from quitting.

What It **Sounds Like** in the Room

"We're great at starting. But we never stop, even if we don't know if what we're doing is creating value.."

"Every quarter brings a new plan. But the old one doesn't get retired."

"Three churn numbers in one meeting...again."

"We're rebuilding the strategy, but no one's checking we have the data to support it."

"The board wants AI results. We're still reconciling last month's financials."

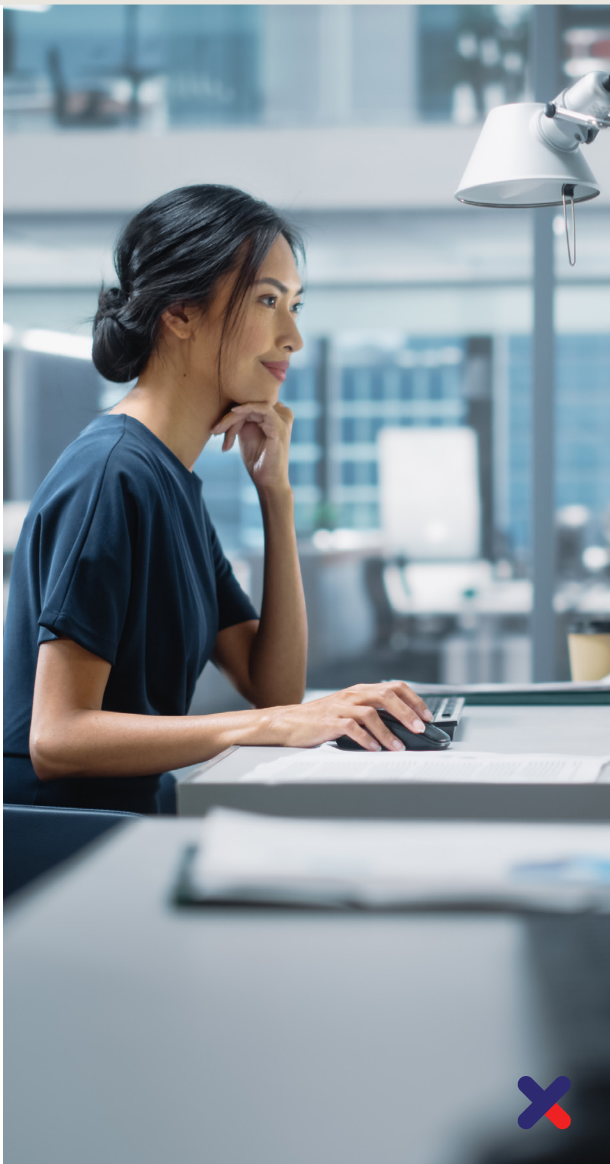
These weren't isolated complaints. They were symptoms of the same disease:

- Abandoned priorities that never officially died
- Outdated projects consuming resources for strategies that changed months ago
- Untrusted data where good metrics go to get ignored

The **Real** Killer

It's not that strategies are bad. It's that they never reach the people doing the work.

Strategy gets filtered, translated, summarised, and optimised until what reaches the front line bears no resemblance to what left the boardroom. Teams keep executing last quarter's priorities because nobody told them what to stop. Middle managers become translators trying to turn long-range ambition into short-range tasks without the tools, time, or clarity to do it well.



The plan changes, but the work doesn't.

Meanwhile, your competitors aren't explaining last month's strategy pivot. They're executing this month's opportunities.

It's not that strategies are bad, it's that most of the time they are overly focused on "what we will do" vs "what we want to look like" at the end of the strategic period.

As a result teams and leaders become obsessed with completion of things and the RAG status of the doing vs the impact the things we are doing on progress toward what we want to look like.

In the absence of goals and metrics that represent those goals, board members, executives, business leaders run riot, asking questions relating to the "topic du jour" that may or may not be germane to your strategy.

Furthermore, with strategies focused on the doing, there's no room for pivoting or responding to things that change.
In a world where the rate of change is increasing rapidly year after year, rigid strategies full of initiatives are more likely to take you to an outdated version of yourself vs a future state that is relevant and competitive.

What Winning Firms **Know**

The organisations pulling ahead have cracked a simple code: **execution speed beats execution perfection.**

They don't have better strategies. They have better systems for making strategy stick. Clear signals that don't get lost in translation. Rhythms that connect planning to action without the meeting theatre. Data people actually trust enough to act on.

Most importantly, they've learnt to kill outdated priorities before they multiply. When strategy or market conditions change, execution changes with it. Not next quarter. Not after the next planning cycle. Now.

The gap between strategy and execution isn't a process problem you fix with better frameworks. It's a system problem you solve with better discipline.

And with AI accelerating everything, discipline isn't just nice to have anymore. It's survival.

02

The Six Silent Performance Killers

These six forces are quietly killing execution in the companies we spoke to in Australia. They're invisible, expensive, and accelerating. While your teams are working harder than ever, these silent killers are stealing speed, burning cash, and derailing strategic progress before it even starts.

We heard them in nearly every interview - sometimes called out directly, sometimes whispered between the lines. Once you know what to look for, you'll see them everywhere.

1 Strategy-Execution Gap

Teams waste 30% of their time on yesterday's priorities while tomorrow's strategy sits in PowerPoint.

What It Looks like:

New strategy, same old work

"Every new chief wants a new five-year plan... we never finish the last one."

Here's what happens. Leadership announces the new direction. Teams nod, take notes, then go back to their desks and keep doing what they were doing last month. Why? Because nobody told them what to stop. The new strategy gets layered on top of the old one.

Interview echo: "We hear the 'why' in the all-staff, but the 'what now' gets lost on the way to our level."

Ghost priorities that won't die

Check your team's backlog right now. How much of it ties to your current strategy? You'll likely find work streams that should have ended months ago, still consuming resources like bacteria.

When new priorities arrive but old ones never officially end, teams do what feels safest - every time. The result is execution drift: multiple versions of the plan, all active at once.

Interview echo: "The objective changed two months ago - but the project plan is still from the last quarter."

Planning becomes the job

Instead of executing, leaders spend their time rewriting OKRs, reshuffling priorities, and syncing on what changed this week. Strategy becomes a rolling rewrite exercise that never ends.

Interview echo: “We’ve had four versions of the quarterly plan in six weeks - each one felt urgent at the time.”

Reality check: Ask three people in your org what the top priority is right now. If you get three different answers, or none of them map to something you can link to a verifiable problem in your strategic goals, you’ve got this killer.

Why this is killing you Your competitors aren’t re-explaining last quarter’s pivot. They’re executing this quarter’s opportunities. Every week spent clarifying direction is a week they gain ground.

2 Data-Trust Chaos

CFOs have stopped looking at dashboards. Analysts spend more time fixing data than analysing it. Decisions get made on gut feel because nobody trusts the numbers.

What It Looks like:

The meeting that never ends

Two dashboards showing different churn rates. Finance says 8%, product says 12%, ops says "it depends how you count." Ninety minutes later, you still haven't decided what you will do to fix it.

Interview echo: "We spent 90 minutes in a meeting debating the right churn number. We never got to the decision the meeting was meant for."

Analysts become data janitors

Your best people aren't analysing trends or spotting opportunities. They're hunting through spreadsheets, reconciling systems, and taking screenshots of dashboards because nobody trusts the automated reports.

Interview echo: "I have one team just doing slide prep and data cleanup. That's their job now."

Leaders stop looking

When the CEO stops checking the numbers, you know trust is gone. When the CFO waits for someone else to verify every figure, decision speed dies.

Interview echo: “Our CFO doesn’t look at the dashboard anymore. She waits for someone to check it and screen shot it into a PowerPoint.”

Reality check:

How many different “single sources of truth” do you have? If it’s more than one, it’s not single and it’s not truth.

Why this is killing you

When leaders are under pressure to move fast, clean data isn’t a luxury, it’s a survival tool. Without trust in the numbers, decisions either get delayed or made on guesswork. As automation and AI becomes more common, dirty data doesn’t just slow things down - it accelerates bad decisions.

3 Deck Overload

Board meetings have become slide shows. Executives spend more time formatting than thinking. Decisions happen after the meeting, not during it.

What It Looks like:

160 slides, 5 decisions

Your board pack used to be 20 pages. Now it's 160 slides with executive summaries that need executive summaries. Directors walk away knowing everything except what they're supposed to approve.

Interview echo: "Board pack now hits 160 slides. Only five actually matter."

PowerPoint paralysis

Half your leadership team's Wednesday is gone - not to strategy or decisions, but to slide alignment. Font sizes, logo placement, and whether the chart should be blue or green.

Interview echo: "By the time we send the deck, half of it has changed."

Nobody's watching

You're tracking deck views now. The results are depressing. All that effort, and most slides never get opened.

Interview echo: "We've started tracking who views the slides. No one does."

Reality check:

Time your next exec meeting. How many minutes spent presenting vs. actually deciding? If it’s more than 20% presentation, you’re in the danger zone.

Why this is killing you

Decision windows are shrinking. Markets move fast. Competitors who can decide in the room while you’re still formatting slides will move faster and win more often.

4 Workforce Strain

Critical roles sit empty for months. Your best people are one bad week away from quitting. Planning has become a luxury nobody can afford.

What It Looks like:

The hiring freeze that never ends

Three months and counting for that senior role. Meanwhile, your existing team is covering the work, burning out, and starting to eye the exit.

Interview echo: “We’ve had the same two roles open for three months. I’m rewriting the JD myself at this point.”

Talent musical chairs

There’s always someone about to quit. When they do, knowledge walks out with them. The replacement takes six months to get up to speed. Rinse and repeat.

Interview echo: “There’s always someone on the edge of quitting. It’s like a rotation.”

Ship it and pray

Quality suffers when teams are stretched. Corners get cut, testing gets skipped, everyone hopes it works. By the time problems surface, the team’s already fighting the next fire.

Interview echo: “We’re always playing catch-up. Planning feels like a luxury.”

Reality check: How many "temporary" workload increases became permanent? If people have been doing "extra" work for more than three months, it's not extra anymore.

Why this is killing you Execution depends on people who stay, not roles you plan to fill. Every burned-out departure costs you six months of momentum. In fast-moving markets, that's often fatal.

5 AI ROI Theatre

Everyone wants to "do AI." Nobody knows what success looks like. Pilot graveyards are growing faster than results.

What It Looks like:

Demo fever, commitment paralysis

The AI vendor demos are slick. The use cases sound impressive. Then comes budget time and suddenly everyone's got questions nobody can answer.

Interview echo: "Everyone wants to do something with AI, but when it's time to commit, the room goes quiet."

Proof-of-concept purgatory

Innovation teams run pilots that prove nothing, measure nothing, and connect to nothing. When results are unclear, people shrug and move on to the next shiny thing.

Interview echo: "We tried something with AI. Never really got the feedback loop right, it felt like more noise."

Board reality check

Boards want to see AI on the roadmap. They also want to see money coming back. When you can't show both, projects die quietly in committees.

Interview echo: "The board's not against AI, they just won't back another science experiment."

Reality check: How many AI pilots are you running? How many can show ROI right now? If the ratio is concerning, you've got this killer.

Why this is killing you Innovation windows don't stay open forever. While you're running pilots that prove nothing, competitors are running implementations that deliver results. First movers are becoming market leaders.

6 Compliance Quicksand

New regulations arrive faster than teams can adapt. Margins shrink as admin grows. Innovation gets delayed because nobody wants to trigger an audit.

What It Looks like:

Rule stacking

ESG requirements drop in January. Privacy updates in March. Safety standards in June. Same team, same deadlines, double the work.

Interview echo: “We just got on top of the last one, now we’ve got new ESG requirements. Same team. Same deadlines.”

Growth versus compliance

Revenue stays flat. Compliance costs rise. You’re hiring people to tick boxes, not drive results. The engine slows even when the market’s moving.

Interview echo: “There’s no fat left. Compliance is the first reason we say no to new projects now.”

Innovation paralysis

Great ideas get shelved because nobody wants to explain them to the risk team. Change proposals die in committee because the compliance impact is unclear.

Reality check: How many strategic initiatives got delayed or cancelled because of compliance concerns? If it's more than one this year, you're sinking in this quicksand.

Why this is killing you Compliance isn't slowing down. Boards want speed-to-report, not just accuracy. Firms that automate this burden create space to move. Those that don't get buried under admin while competitors sprint ahead.

The bottom line:

These killers work together. Strategy confusion creates data chaos. Data chaos leads to endless meetings and deck preparation. Deck overload burns out your people. Burned-out people make more mistakes and move slower. Without clean data and clear metrics, AI initiatives fail, innovation stalls, and compliance becomes the only thing that feels manageable.

Break the cycle. Fix one, the others get easier. Ignore them all, and they'll quietly kill your execution while you're still planning the next strategy.

03

Why Structure Shapes Execution

(And What to Do About It)

The execution gap isn't just a process problem. It's baked into what your organisation actually is - its age, structure, governance, and geography. In the interviews, these four traits came up again and again. Not as root causes, but as friction amplifiers that determine how fast teams can move, how relevant the data is, and whether priorities actually land where they're supposed to.

The firms who've cracked this code are already pulling ahead. Here's what's holding the others back.

1 Age of the Firm

Every year your organisation gets older, it accumulates more baggage. Old systems that "work fine," old plans nobody officially killed, old assumptions that became gospel.

Legacy systems don't just slow things down - they strangle progress. Decisions crawl through approval chains, integration costs spiral, updates wait months for the next platform release. Meanwhile, teams keep executing strategies from two CEOs ago because nobody bothered to tell them those plans were buried.

Interview echo: "There are still teams running the last CEO's plan, just no one told them it's not the plan anymore."

Here's the real kicker: this mess makes your data worthless. When your CRM has three layers of workarounds and every team uses it differently, people stop trusting what they see. Try building any kind of automation on that foundation and watch it amplify the chaos.

Why this is killing you

Time to prune aggressively. Sunset systems that don’t earn their keep, kill processes that add no value, be ruthless about what actually deserves to survive.

2 Ownership Model

Federated structures and partnerships look great on paper. Local leaders get freedom to move fast. In reality? Nobody's actually in charge.

Different business units chase different goals. Strategy alignment becomes a polite fiction you discuss in quarterly meetings.

Interview echo: "We don't even call it a strategy cascade - we call it a strategy puddle."

The data problem gets worse when every region tracks things their own way. Good luck scaling anything when Sydney measures success differently to Melbourne, and Perth is still using last year's definitions.

What actually works:

Stop talking about alignment and start building it. One source of truth, visible everywhere, updated in real time. Shared visibility beats shared PowerPoints every time.

3 Executive Team Tenure

New executives bring energy and fresh thinking. They also bring new priorities, new metrics, and new ways of measuring success - usually before the old ones are finished.

Long-tenured teams avoid this churn but create their own problems. “We tried that before” becomes the default response to anything that feels risky.

Interview echo: “Every new head of strategy wants a new plan, but the team’s still catching up on the last one.”

Either way, your data suffers. New leaders want new dashboards. Old leaders want familiar reports. Teams end up maintaining both, trusting neither.

If you’ve got new leadership:

Resist the urge to rebuild everything immediately. Connect the dots on what’s already working before you start redrawing the map.

4 Geographic Spread

Distance kills execution speed. What should be a quick alignment conversation becomes a week-long email chain across time zones.

Messages get filtered, context gets lost, urgency dies somewhere over the Pacific Ocean. By the time Perth hears about the strategy change, Sydney's already three pivots ahead.

Interview echo: "It's not resistance. They just didn't hear the change. Or they heard it three weeks after we did."

Your data integrity crumbles when remote teams work off outdated information or make their own interpretations. People do what they think is right, not what actually is right.

If you've got new leadership:

Over-communication isn't enough anymore. You need systems that push critical information to people, not emails they might miss. Build feedback loops that confirm what landed, not just what you sent.

The Difference Makers

We spoke with organisations that made this work. They weren't necessarily smaller or younger - they were just more disciplined about structure.

One plan everyone could see. One platform everyone used. One rhythm everyone followed. Clean, relevant data, fast feedback, strategy that actually stuck.

You don't need a startup's resources to work this way. You need a startup's clarity. Because the firms getting this right - shared priorities, trusted data, tight feedback loops - aren't just moving faster. They're moving while their competitors are still figuring out which direction to go.

Structure isn't destiny. But it's the difference between strategy that lives in presentations and strategy that drives results.

04

Why the Usual Fixes Don't Work

When execution starts to drift, most teams reach for the obvious solutions. Add more meetings. Build a better dashboard. Launch a culture campaign to "get everyone aligned."

These feel like the right moves. They're also usually wrong.

The things that feel like fixes often just add more friction or mask the real problem. Here's what we heard, and why it backfires.

More Meetings

On paper, more check-ins make perfect sense. Weekly alignment forums, steering committees, regular all-hands updates. What could go wrong?

Everything.

Interview echo: “We added a Wednesday alignment meeting. Now the Tuesday and Thursday ones are about what we talked about on Wednesday.”

Instead of creating clarity, you’ve created a meeting about meetings. People spend more time talking about work than doing it. The really frustrating part? Nobody feels like they can skip them, even when they’re clearly pointless.

Soon you’ve got teams who show up physically but check out mentally. They’re nodding along while thinking about the actual work piling up on their desk.

The real problem: More meetings can’t fix unclear priorities. They just give you more forums to be confused in.

Shiny New Tools

The demo looks amazing. A slick new dashboard, better project tracking, modern interface, proper training programme. This will definitely solve everything.

Except it won’t.

Interview echo: “We’ve got five tools for tracking work. None of them show what actually matters.”

Here’s what happens. The tool works exactly as designed, but it doesn’t match how your business actually operates.

Teams spend more time feeding the system than getting value from it. The metrics look impressive but don't connect to decisions anyone needs to make.

Within months, people stop updating it properly. The data gets stale. Trust erodes. You're back where you started, just with a more expensive dashboard showing the wrong numbers.

The real problem: Tools can't fix broken data or unclear definitions. They just make the mess look more professional.

Culture Campaigns

This one's the trickiest because culture genuinely matters. But culture isn't a poster campaign.

You can put motivational messages in the lift. Launch videos about "One Team, One Goal." Design t-shirts with inspiring slogans.

Interview echo: "We had a strategy called 'One Team, One Goal.' Trouble was, no one agreed on the goal."

When the actual goals are fuzzy or conflicting, the slogans just highlight the confusion. People start rolling their eyes at the gap between the marketing and reality. Strategy begins to feel like branding instead of direction.

The worst part? What seems crystal clear to leadership often makes no sense to the people expected to execute it.

The real problem: Culture can't carry execution if the plan keeps shifting underneath it.

What's Really Missing

These fixes all miss the same fundamental point: they don't connect strategy to delivery in a way that sticks.

Meetings can't create alignment when nobody knows what actually changed. Dashboards don't help when the data underneath is broken or the definitions keep shifting. Culture campaigns fall flat when the underlying work patterns haven't changed.

Real fixes don't just polish the surface. They change how work actually gets done, week by week. They tie vision to action through systems, not slogans. Through clear priorities, not better presentations.

The organisations getting this right aren't running more meetings or buying better tools. They're building rhythms that make strategy impossible to ignore and execution impossible to avoid.

That's the difference between fixes that feel good and fixes that actually work.

05

What Winning Firms Do Instead

Most fixes don't work because they don't change how work actually gets done. The firms who close the execution gap do five things differently.

Each move directly tackles one or more of the six killers. Together, they reset how strategy lives in the business - not in presentations, but in daily decisions.

1 One-Page Goals Everyone Can See

What It Looks like:

- Three clear goals the board actually cares about
- Each one tied to a lead metric (what moves it) and a lag metric (how you'll know it worked)
- Shared as a live page or dashboard you can interact with to get to the heart of the issue, not buried in a 30-slide strategy pack

Why it works:

Most strategies are encyclopaedias. That's fine for reference, but useless for execution. When goals live in slides, they get discussed once then forgotten. When they're on one clear page that everyone can check anytime, they stay visible.

This gives teams something they rarely have: clarity. What are we aiming for? What's in the way? How will we know if we're getting there? Who's actually watching this?

It also sends a signal from the top. When board and executives stay aligned on a few meaningful goals - and those don't change every fortnight - the rest of the organisation gets the message: this is what matters, focus here.

The value isn't simplicity for its own sake. It's about creating a live, shared truth that removes the guesswork from what "good" actually looks like.

2 A "Metrics That Matter" Tree

What It Looks like:

- Each goal broken into layers: Goals → Metrics → Drivers → Delivery Bets & Actions
- Less than 10 key metrics at the top level
- Built in a shared tool, not pasted into presentations

Why it works:

People don't struggle to hit targets because they don't care. They struggle because they can't see the connection between their daily work and the big goals.

A metric tree shows the chain from boardroom outcomes all the way down to what drives them day-to-day. Executives see the results they need. Teams can trace how their work contributes. Managers spot where things are stuck without needing three layers of translation.

This stops the usual chaos of disconnected metrics. Instead of every department tracking their own version of success, everyone aligns around the same goals and the numbers that support them.

Less debate, more progress. People stop chasing metrics that don't matter and start pulling in the same direction. You know what's working, what's not, and where to focus next.

3 OKRs That Force Focus

What It Looks like:

- Each team sets no more than 3 objectives per quarter
- Each objective has up to 3 clear key results
- Every key result ties back to a specific metric in the tree

Why it works:

Most teams don't lack ambition, they lack focus. OKRs create a healthy constraint. When you've only got space for three priorities, the noise drops and the real work stands out.

This makes progress visible too. Each key result connects to a real number, not vague goals like "improve collaboration." Teams know what they're aiming for and whether it's actually working.

It helps kill legacy goals that hang around like bad habits. Makes pivots sharper and faster, not just reactive. Stops teams from spreading thin across too many fronts.

When everyone works off the same rhythm and the same metrics tree, OKRs become more than a to-do list. They become a shared compass.

4 Quarterly Direction + Weekly Reality Checks

What It Looks like:

- Clear 90-day direction agreed upfront
- Weekly 30-minute check-ins with a tight agenda: What moved the metric? What's blocking progress? What's next?
- No presentations, no show-and-tell, just live data on a shared screen

Why it works:

Too much leadership time gets wasted on "update theatre." People narrate what already happened. Presentations get read aloud. Nobody leaves with clarity on what's actually changing.

This flips the script. Quarterly direction sets the pace. Weekly sessions become the moment to course-correct, not rehash old news. Everyone sees the same data. You spend time solving problems, not describing them.

It's not about more meetings, it's about better ones. You cut the lag between spotting issues and fixing them. Leaders stay close to real progress. Teams know when focus is shifting. Nobody wastes time on slides that are outdated before they're opened.

5 One Clean View of the Numbers

What It Looks like:

- Start with the 3-5 metrics that matter most
- Get them into one live view (doesn't need to be perfect)
- Prove it works, then expand gradually

Why it works:

You don't need a data lake to fix decision-making. You need a clean stream of the right numbers, in one place, where people actually look.

Most teams drown in dashboards while starving for clarity. They waste hours checking figures, comparing tools, asking other teams to verify numbers. When you pull the key signals into one live view and keep it simple, that noise disappears fast.

You stop wasting time reconciling reports. Decisions happen quicker. You build a foundation for automation that won't break the minute it goes live.

The reality:

None of these moves require a massive transformation programme. They need intent, clarity, and the discipline to stick with them.

The firms getting this right didn't try to fix everything at once. They picked a few key shifts - clearer goals, cleaner, more relevant data, tighter rhythms - and built momentum from there.

It's not about perfection on day one. It's about picking the first lever, proving it works, and building confidence through real progress.

When the system works - when goals are visible, data is trusted, and rhythm is steady - teams move faster, decisions land sharper, and strategy finally sticks.

In a world where execution speed is becoming the competitive advantage, that's what separates the winners from the wishful thinkers.

06

Case Studies

XISY

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CASE STUDY

How a Mid-Size SaaS Company Bridges Strategy and Execution at Scale

COMPANY:

Mid-size SaaS company

SECTOR:

Property Investment Software

CHALLENGE:

Managing fast growth across multiple geographies while maintaining execution quality

EXECUTION MATURITY:

Advanced

The Context:

This property investment software company has been through rapid growth over the past three and a half years. With teams operating across different geographies and time zones, they face the classic challenge of scaling execution without losing clarity or quality.

What makes them interesting isn't their size - it's how they've kept strategy and execution connected during hypergrowth.

What They Got Right

Clear Metrics Philosophy

Instead of chasing dozens of KPIs, they focus on four core areas: “how happy our employees are, how happy our customers are, how well their properties are performing, and how well our business is performing. It’s those four simple metrics that are at the forefront of what we try to do. Everything else becomes a byproduct.”

This isn’t just measurement for measurement’s sake. As their leadership explained: “if you look after your customers and your employees, they look after your business.”

Data-Driven but Human-Centred

“We are primarily a data company, so we rely a lot on the data gathering we do... data forms the foundation of every decision that we make.” But they balance this with a clear understanding that speed without accuracy can be dangerous: “For us, speed is important, but accuracy is paramount...any decision making we have has a big impact on people’s future.”

Rhythm That Actually Works

They’ve built a cadence that keeps everyone aligned: “we have our weekly catch ups within the global leadership team to discuss any blockers and areas to improve and also have discussions around what are the strategic priorities for the coming weeks and months.”

But they’re also smart about avoiding burnout: “we are slowly moving that towards having quarterly targets so that we’re not in those short term cycles which often lead to burnout of teams.”

OKRs Integrated with Strategy

Rather than treating OKRs as separate from metrics, they’ve woven them together: “we build the metrics into our OKRs basically...we have certain specific targets that are linked to all the OKRs that every team has.”

The Geographic Challenge

Like many scaling companies, they face the complexity of multiple time zones and different working styles: “when you have teams working in different geographies, different time zones...ensuring we are all working together and at the same time ensuring the best practices are transferred across sometimes can be a bit of a challenge.”

Their approach is to turn it into an advantage: “that’s the beauty of a business in multiple operational geographies as well. That you learn from different kinds of ways of working and then try to adopt the best practices wherever you can.”

What Makes Them Different

Board Alignment on the Right Things

“Very aligned. Very aligned. That’s not our business where it is. They completely believe in the philosophy and they actually back us when it comes to implementing these strategies as well.”

This isn’t just lip service. When the board pushes for faster growth, the leadership team has honest conversations: “we can grow at twice the pace we are growing right now. But that would mean eventually the business will not be sustainable because the employees won’t be happy enough and your client experience might start suffering.”

Continuous Improvement Culture

"Our key area of focus is we always aim to be 1% better than what we were yesterday...We know we'll never be perfect, but we'll always be a better version of ourselves tomorrow than we are today."

This shows up in their approach to metrics too: "we have continuous discussions on a monthly basis about the things that we're measuring to ensure we're measuring the right things. We are open and flexible enough to changing things around."

Early Warning Systems

They don't just track happy customers - they actively monitor unhappy ones: "we very closely monitor not just happy clients, but also unhappy clients, because we know one unhappy client could lead to at least 15 to 20 bad outcomes for us."

What You Can Steal

- **Start with four metrics:** Employee happiness, customer happiness, product performance, business performance. Everything else flows from these.
- **Build rhythm before tools:** Weekly leadership catch-ups with blockers and priorities beat monthly slide decks every time.
- **Make OKRs work for you:** Create OKRs from issues you can see in your metrics rather than duplicating or replacing metrics with OKRs.

- **Be honest with your board:** Have real conversations about sustainable growth versus growth at any cost.

- **Turn geographic spread into an advantage:** Use different locations to learn best practices, don't just try to standardise everything.

The Bottom Line

This company shows what's possible when you keep strategy simple and execution tight. They're not perfect, but they've built systems that help them stay aligned while growing fast. In a world where most companies struggle to connect strategy to delivery, they've found a rhythm that works.

CASE STUDY

When Partnership Structure Blocks Strategy Execution

COMPANY:
Professional Services Firm (Accounting/ Audit)

SECTOR:
Professional Services

STRUCTURE:
Partnership Model

LEADERSHIP ROLE:
COO (Non-Partner)

CHALLENGE:
Short-term thinking and partner dynamics preventing strategic alignment

EXECUTION MATURITY:
Struggling

The Context:

This mid-sized professional services firm operates as a traditional partnership within a global network. While part of a top-10 worldwide organisation, the local office faces the classic challenge many partnership-based firms encounter: balancing individual partner interests with collective strategic direction.

The firm has standard accounting metrics and processes in place, but struggles with longer-term strategic thinking due to the inherent structure of partnership ownership and profit distribution.

What's Holding Them Back

Partnership Structure Creates Misalignment

The core challenge isn't capability - it's structure. As the COO explained: "The roadblocks would be especially when you're working in a partnership where partners feel that they are perhaps more sole traders than...if a partner doesn't necessarily agree with the strategy, will they buy into it and join the common cause or will they potentially be disruptive?"

This creates a fundamental execution problem: “Partners who own a business come to work for themselves.”

Short-Term Focus Blocks Long-Term Thinking

The profit distribution model drives quarterly thinking: “in a partnership, the perspective is very much more short term. So cut costs this year, deliver new revenue this year. It’s all this year. Because that’s where the profit distribution comes from.”

When asked what would give him confidence in long-term success, the answer was simple: “Having a long term strategy.” The firm changes strategic direction every “three, four years” - but without sustained commitment between cycles.

Information Gaps Across Hierarchy

As a non-partner in the leadership team, the COO faces structural challenges: “As a non partner, I’m not a peer, so that’s always a bit of a challenge. Not necessarily aware of all information. Because partners can keep some information to themselves. And then the political plays within a partnership can be held behind closed doors.”

This creates execution drag: “when you’re invited in, you can be a little bit in the dark.”

How It Shows Up Day-to-Day

Decision-Making Through Dialogue, Not Data

While the firm has standard financial metrics, strategic decisions happen through conversation rather than structured analysis: "I think strategic decisions are made through dialogue. You might have to draw upon some data to help provide some guidance...but dialogue is really what drives decision making."

This works for some decisions but creates inconsistency when partners have different views or information levels.

"Good Enough" Mentality

The approach to data accuracy reflects the broader challenge: "Close enough is good enough, I think" and "At a very high level, I would say that data is accurate. The more you drill down into data, I think the more challenging it becomes."

While pragmatic, this creates blind spots when partners need detailed information to make strategic commitments.

The Bottom Line

This isn't a story about bad leadership or lack of skills. It's about how organisational structure can block execution even when people understand what needs to happen. The firm knows it needs longer-term thinking, better metrics, and more transparency. But the partnership model creates incentives that work against these changes.

The lesson: execution problems aren't always about process or tools. Sometimes they're about the fundamental structure of how decisions get made and incentives get aligned. Until that changes, even the best strategies will struggle to stick.

07

Quick Reality Check: 6 Tests Before You Spend

Now that you know what works, here's how to spot what won't.

Most projects sound brilliant in the pitch. The demos are slick, the business case is compelling, the vendor promises the world. Then reality hits, money gets burned, and nothing changes.

These six tests cut through the sales pitch and focus on what actually matters: will this change how work gets done?

How to Use This

Run every significant investment - internal project or external vendor - through these tests:

- Read each test below
- Ask the sponsor to walk you through the proof
- Score Green ✓ if it's clear, Red ✗ if it's not
- One Red = probe harder. Two or more = seriously reconsider

TEST 1:

Can We See a 90-Day Win?

Why it matters: Long payback windows don't cut it anymore.

Ask: "What will this actually move in 90 days?"

Green light: Specific goal-centric metric improvement with clear measurement

Red flag: Promises of "insights," "visibility," or "foundation-building" with no concrete outcomes

TEST 2:

Is There a Clear Link to Daily Work?

Why it matters: If the frontline can't see how it connects, it won't land.

Ask: "Can you show how this ties to what teams are doing each day?"

Green light: Clear path from project outcomes to team actions

Red flag: Goals that live in boardroom presentations, not operational systems

TEST 3:

Are We All Seeing the Same Number?

Why it matters: When data doesn't match, progress stalls.

Ask: "Can every relevant team see the same live number, in the same place?"

Green light: Single source of truth, accessible to all stakeholders

Red flag: Multiple dashboards, constant reconciliation, "it depends how you count it"

TEST 4:

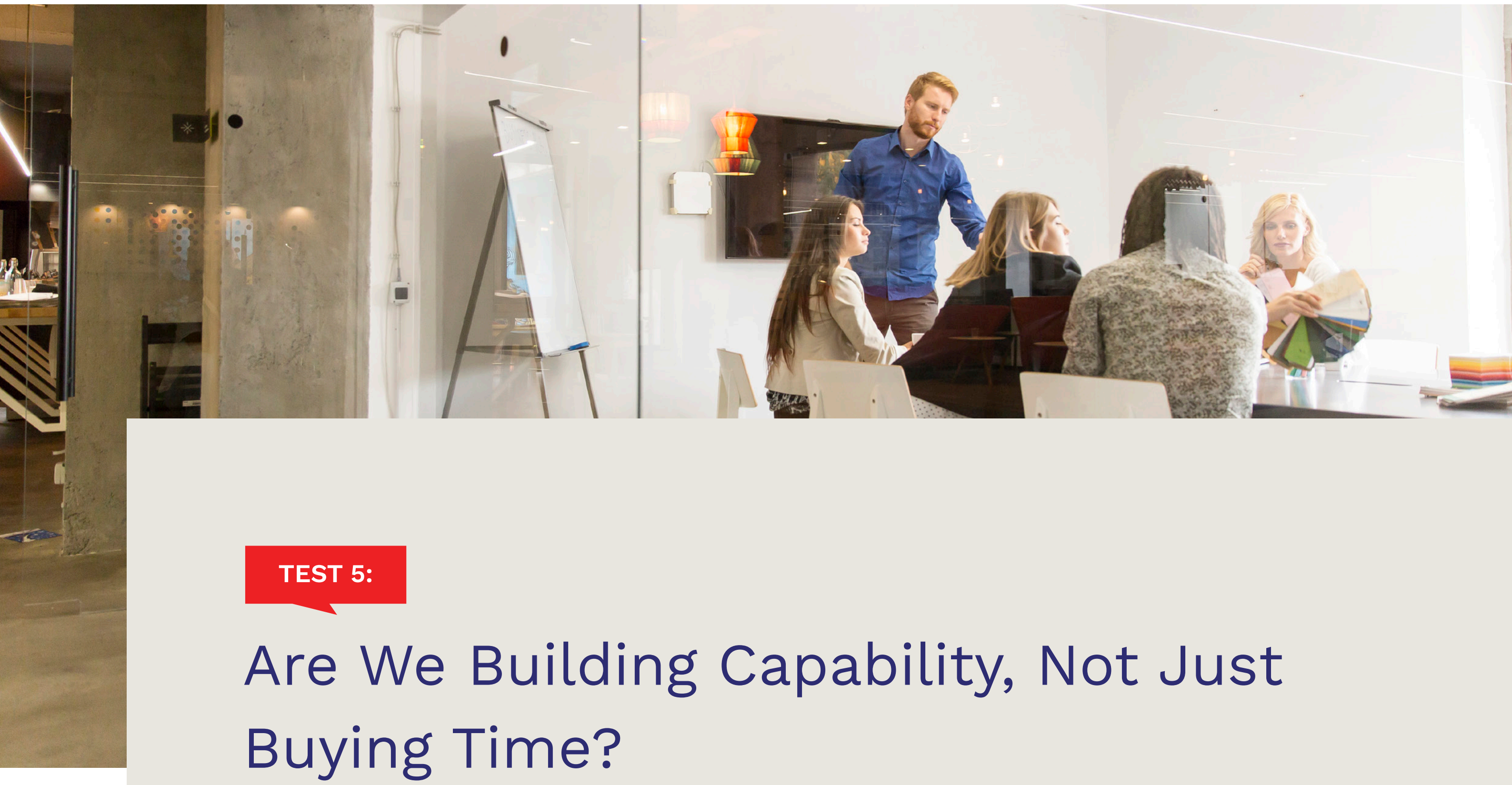
Can We Run a Meeting Without Slides?

Why it matters: Weekly check-ins should solve problems, not replay updates.

Ask: “Could we run our leadership review straight from live data?”

Green light: Real-time data that drives decisions in the room

Red flag: 100-slide update packs, decisions deferred for “further analysis”



TEST 5:

Are We Building Capability, Not Just Buying Time?

Why it matters: Headcount is tight. Good projects should upskill your team.

Ask: “How will our team run this without external support by next quarter?”

Green light: Clear knowledge transfer and internal capability building

Red flag: Consultants with no exit plan, “we’ll handle the complex bits”

TEST 6:

Are We Starting Small and Proving Fast?

Why it matters: You don't need to boil the ocean to prove value.

Ask: "What's the smallest piece of this that proves it works?"

Green light: Pilot approach with clear success criteria and scale plan

Red flag: 12-month builds before anything goes live, "big bang" implementations

Quick Scorecard

Test	Green ✔ / Red ✖	Notes
90-Day Win		
Daily Work Link		
Same Numbers		
Live Data Meetings		
Capability Building		
Prove Then Scale		

YOUR SCORE:

All Green:
Proceed with confidence

One Red:
Probe harder before committing

Two+ Red:
Pause and reassess - this probably won't deliver

The Bottom Line

Most projects fail not because the technology is wrong, but because they don't connect to how work actually happens. These tests help you spot the difference between solutions that sound good in meetings and solutions that change results.

The best investments pass all six tests easily. The worst ones struggle with the first question.

Use this scorecard to cut through the pitch and focus on what will actually move your business forward.

08

Why This Paper Exists - and What You Can Do Next

Getting strategy right means getting execution right.

That's what every conversation, quote, and data point in this paper points to.

It's not that leaders don't have a plan. Most do. The problem is that too many teams are flying blind - overwhelmed by shifting priorities, drowning in tool clutter, unsure which numbers to trust.

We wrote this for the teams caught in that gap. Not to add another framework or methodology, but to show what's already working in firms who've found a better rhythm.

This is about bringing structure to the chaos so strategy actually lands where it matters.

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The Simple Truth

A handful of straightforward shifts can change how your business runs. Clearer goals, fewer metrics, tighter feedback loops. Whether AI is on your roadmap or not, these are the foundations that make faster, smarter execution possible.

The moves in this paper are all within reach. You don't need new headcount. You don't need perfect technology. You just need a clean place to start and the discipline to follow it through.

The firms getting this right aren't doing anything revolutionary. They're just doing the basics consistently, with intent.

If this sounds like where you are - or where you don't want to end up - we can help you get started.

NEXT STEP:

Book a Strategy-to-Execution Health Check

We'll sit down with you and your leadership team for a practical, no-nonsense review of how well your strategy connects to delivery.

What you'll get in 30 minutes:

- A guided assessment using our Strategy-to-Execution framework
- A quick stress-test of one of your current objectives
- Tools and agenda to run your own alignment session next week

You'll walk away with clear next steps and a shared language for what needs fixing.

No slides. No preparation required. Just a working session focused on real progress.

If it feels like the right fit, we'll show you how we help organisations like yours close the execution gap. If not, you'll still have a clearer view of where strategy is getting lost in translation.

Book your session here

The Bottom Line:

Strategy without execution is just expensive planning. Execution without strategy is just expensive activity.

The organisations pulling ahead have figured out how to connect the two. The tools are simple, the impact is immediate, and the competitive advantage is real.

The question isn't whether you need better execution. It's whether you're ready to do something about it.

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