Activation Readiness: The Fastest Way to Turn Business Strategy into Growth

Joanna Anthony, 25 August 2025

There is an oft-quoted (but poorly sourced) statistic from the 1990's that says *"90% of strategies fail."* With a stat like this, why would you bother creating a strategy at all?

More helpful, current and accurate statistics can help business leaders work out HOW to maximise their business strategies. Rather than focusing on the actual stats, below we focus on **the reason WHY strategies succeed or fail**:

- **Execution is the hard part.** McKinsey's 2025 analysis of "strategy champions" finds only ~1 in 5 companies rate their strategic capabilities as high—and those that win are notably better at mobilising execution, not just crafting plans.
- **Big change efforts under-deliver.** Bain (2024) reports only ~12% of business transformations hit their original ambition—most fail due to overloaded/under-resourced talent and capabilities.
- **Project-to-strategy linkage is weak.** PMI's *Pulse of the Profession 2025* shows only 18% demonstrate high business acumen; those who do are significantly more likely to meet business goals, schedules and budgets (and have fewer project failures). In other words, the capability to translate strategy into delivery is scarce.

Delivery alone is not enough

We know the world has changed. Project delivery alone no longer guarantees success. The Project Management Institute (PMI) unveils a fundamental shift in its *Pulse of the Profession® 2025: Boosting Business Acumen* report. The message is resounding:

- Only 18% of professionals demonstrate high business acumen; the majority (66%) rate as moderate.
- Those with high business acumen outperform peers across core metrics — 83% meet business goals, vs. 78%; 73% hit budget targets vs. 68%; 63% meet schedules vs. 59%; and failures drop to 8% vs. 11%.

In short, **business acumen is the differentiator** that elevates professionals from tactical troubleshooters to strategic value creators.

Helping client service teams deliver the business plan

In agencies, client service teams often operate as tactical responders ie. juggling deadlines, client demands, and firefighting crises. It's high-energy and high-pressure, but are rarely positioned as strategic partners.

The PMI findings ring especially true:

- Tactical strength is necessary but not sufficient, and by this we mean scope management, resourcing and schedule delivery. This is where most client service teams have focused historically.
- To deliver an agency's own growth ambitions, client service teams need strategic foresight and business fluency eg: financial acumen, outcome measurement, market insight, stakeholder influence. In other words, a business mindset.
- Most client service teams are not trained in this area, and most agencies are not structured to empower this role. Therefore, most client service teams hit constraints – systemic, cultural, or capability-based – that stop business growth in their tracks.

Delivering the Business Plan

This is where *Strategy Activation* comes in: deliberate, structured support that moves client service teams from reactive to reflective—from delivering to delivering with purpose.

3.1 Diagnostics: The Activation Readiness Scan

We begin with diagnostics: a proprietary *Activation Readiness Scan* which maps:

- Where strategy execution is stalling
- Where there are biggest blockers: **people**, **systems**, or **culture**
- How client service specifically lacks clarity, capability, or context

3.2 Roadmaps: Building deliberate paths to competency

Working together, we convert diagnostic insights into tangible action plans with milestones, ownerships and goals:

- Skills-based milestones e.g. financial metrics, client value frameworks.
- Systemic changes e.g. governance updates, measurement redesign.
- Culture shifts eg team narratives, behaviours, rituals.

3.3 Consulting + Mentoring: Embedding the right actions, skills and behaviours

Here's where strategy becomes a liveable concept:

- **Consulting** helps leadership understand where gaps threaten delivery: people silos, unclear metrics, poor stakeholder engagement.
- **Mentoring:** guiding people through the maze, aiding decision-making in the detail and nuance, bringing clarity as well as new skills and behaviours.

3.4 Training + Masterclasses: Building the skills to deliver the plan

Masterclasses designed to:

- Examine success metrics: how to implement, track, monitor and deliver the goals eg client impact, satisfaction and retention, business growth, team leadership.
- Shift from Transactional, short-term relationships to building deeper, longterm relationships and become a Strategic Partner.
- A space to model and test out different scenarios in order to try something new, different and brave.

The mechanics: How this looks in practice

Step 1: Activation Readiness Scan

- Short, diagnostic audit with client service leadership that flags weak links across capability, systems, behaviours.

Step 2: Implementation Roadmap

- Defines a clear path: mentoring, tools, KPI alignment, process redesign.

Step 3: Mentoring & Coaching

- A blend of mentoring and coaching to meet today's rapid learning.

Step 4: Masterclass Series

- Interactive sessions on a wide range of topics eg translating strategy to client value, measuring impact, financial literacy, stakeholder engagement.

Step 5: Sustained embedding

Monthly check-ins and outcome monitoring to enable adaptations, creative problem solving, on-the-go learning, goal achievement and recognition.

Why this works—and why it matters

5.1 Business Outcomes

PMI data confirms that individuals with high business acumen deliver:

- Higher goal achievement (+5%)
- Better schedule & budget adherence (+5%, +5%)
- Lower failure rate (3% margin improvement)

When your client service teams gain those fluencies, agency performance begins to reflect it.

5.2 Strategic Identity

Client services stop being the frontline "fixers." They become:

- Trusted advisors
- Drivers of retention and growth
- Translators of strategy into action

5.3 Cultural change

Embedding business acumen changes behaviour: planning becomes purposeful, measurement becomes meaningful, delivery becomes impact-focused.

Test it out

If you'd like to transform your client service team from tactical trouble-shooters into strategic value creators, start with a quick, easy diagnostic: **Activation Readiness Scan.**

This gives us a great startpoint to dig deeper and find out how you can get the right shape, energy and actions into the business to deliver your plan.

Contact me on hello@joannaanthony.com to set up a free consultation.

I help creative agencies and inhouse Creative Ops teams translate strategy into systems, behaviours, and results. As a client service and change specialist with 30+ years' experience inside agencies, I am skilled at 'making it happen'.

Joanna Anthony, Operations | Coaching | Consultancy, IF X THEN Y

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