

INSIGHT 01

Why most transformations fail at execution — not strategy

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In most transformation programs the strategy is sound. The intent is genuine. The budget is approved. And yet the results aren't there. The answer, in almost every case, is not the strategy. It's what happens after it's agreed.

The uncomfortable number

6–7 in 10

transformation programs don't deliver intended outcomes within scope or timeline

Across large-scale operating and procurement transformations, roughly six or seven out of ten programs don't deliver the intended outcomes within the original scope or timeline. Not because the strategy was wrong — but because execution drift quietly accumulates until the original intent is unrecognisable.

What's interesting is that most of these programs still “finish”. They just finish as something smaller, slower, and more fragmented than designed.

“Most leaders assume transformation is a design problem. It's not. It's a behavioural and decision-speed problem under operational pressure.”

The three breakdowns I've actually seen

1. Decision latency disguised as governance

Everything looks controlled on paper. But in practice, decisions sit in inboxes or steering committees for weeks. By the time approval comes, the operational context has already changed. The governance structure that was meant to provide control becomes the thing that kills momentum.

2. Local optimisation beating system optimisation

In a multi-site or trans-Tasman setup, teams in different regions naturally optimise for their own constraints. The result isn't resistance — it's divergence. Processes slowly fork until the “standard model” becomes theoretical. Nobody is sabotaging the transformation. Everyone is just solving their local problem.

3. Systems integration debt underestimated early

The transformation is designed around the process, not the actual data and system friction underneath it. When the workflows hit real systems, manual workarounds quietly reappear and scale with the program. What was meant to be automated ends up more complex than before.

What leaders almost never understand upfront

If you don't actively design for how fast decisions will actually be made at the edge of the organisation — not how fast they should be made in theory — the strategy will degrade no matter how strong it looks at the top.

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU START

- How fast can a decision actually be made at the operational level?
- What happens when two regions interpret the same process differently?
- Where are the real system integration constraints — not the assumed ones?

Where to start

The Execution Clarity Diagnostic is a structured framework we use at the start of every engagement. It identifies exactly where execution is failing and gives you a clear model for what to fix first. Download it free at viaclara.co.nz or contact us to discuss your situation.