

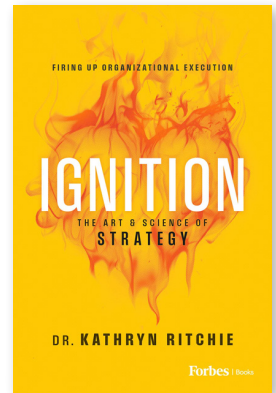


Executive Book Summaries®

Ignition

The Art & Science of Strategy

by **Dr. Kathryn Ritchie**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Many organizations' strategies look sound on paper but fail to produce meaningful change. Leaders often sense that something is misaligned, yet continue to project confidence while execution stalls, teams disengage, and initiatives lose momentum. The core pain point is not a lack of ideas, but the inability to translate strategy into coordinated action, accountability, and sustained results.

Ignition: The Art & Science of Strategy addresses this gap by offering a practical framework for turning strategic intent into measurable execution. It places leadership accountability at the center of this translation. It shows leaders how to move beyond vision statements and embed strategy into daily operations. By focusing on alignment, accountability, and the human dynamics behind execution, organizations can energize teams, foster shared ownership, and adapt quickly without losing strategic clarity. The approach is designed to work across different organizational sizes and industries, emphasizing strategy as a living system rather than a static plan.

Drawing on more than two decades of global advisory experience, Dr. Kathryn Ritchie blends strategic rigor with behavioral insight, providing tools she has used to help leaders align people, priorities, and purpose. Her approach is grounded in real-world application rather than theory alone. *Ignition* positions strategy as both an art and a science, one that drives innovation, accountability, and lasting transformation.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

- Get valuable insight into how to turn strategy from a plan into aligned action
- Understand how to engage teams and create shared ownership
- Find out how to embed strategy into everyday decision-making
- Acquire the necessary skills to lead adaptive, sustainable transformation

Introduction

Strategy has been a part of my life since I was a child. It is in my veins. I live and breathe strategy in all its guises and contexts. Part of the reason I love working in strategy is that I'm comfortable with change and uncertainty. I also love learning. All these aspects are present and play a significant role in the successful development and execution of strategy.

Humans are wired to solve problems and create certainty and stability. That said, our brains are most activated when we face uncertainty. This is why uncertainty should be embraced and seen as a time for learning, when possibilities beyond the known emerge. These are times for reflection and growth and are key ingredients for successful strategy—both its development and its execution.

As a business leader and strategy consultant for over thirty years, I have helped companies double in size, ignite teams to achieve new levels, and navigate transformations, exits, and uplifts. Across this work, I see a landscape of inspiring effort and outcomes as well as missed opportunities, wasted effort, and misused resources. The possibility of learning and improving constantly sits before us.

The Three Enoughs

My foundational business model and thesis posit that we just need enough to drive strong performance and execution.

- Enough clarity – centers on the “what” of the business and strategy.
- Enough cohesion – focuses on all things people, team, and culture.
- Enough discipline – the tools and techniques that will allow the people to lock in the strategy, execution path, and momentum to deliver.

You only need *enough*. Otherwise, you are overinvesting or removing the opportunity from some uncertainty and dissonance. You do need enough of each of these factors.

Why Do Many Miss Out on Their Growth Potential?

Maybe it's because strategy is elusive when it is genuinely in flow in an organization, when the art and science of strategy are in sync. Perhaps it is because strategy is too frequently disconnected from its execution path and equated with a presentation needing approval.

Strategy is both complex and simple, yet not easy. It is about problem-solving and is a function of both art and science.

The science of strategy is all about identifying a need or want that represents a viable market opportunity, and you need evidence of this. The art is the complex part and is embodied in execution.

This is where the “ignition” really shows up. It is about observing and reading the organizational system, seeing the patterns, and finding ways to ignite the system and establish execution momentum.

CHAPTER 1

Why Organizations Fail at Strategy

While the concept of strategy has existed and been applied successfully for thousands of years, its execution still falls short in many organizations, across all organizational types. Too many leaders still struggle to fully assess what a strong competitive strategy—that is, how an organization positions itself to win—truly looks like and, more particularly, what is required to successfully unleash its full potential day-to-day.

It is often seen as a difficult and highly technical area of expertise that must be handled by those with superpowers. Perhaps this misconception is why so many leaders over the past century and a half have outsourced strategy development to consulting firms, typically large and expensive ones. However, overusing large and often costly consulting firms has dramatically slowed the building of a strong strategy muscle in the global business landscape across organizations of all shapes and sizes.

Competitive strategy can be understood, embraced, and evolved throughout your organization. Only when it is fully democratized will you unleash the true firepower of the organization you are leading.

But democratizing competitive strategy requires more than participation; it requires clarity about what strategy actually demands—understanding and embracing it as both an art and a science.

The science aspect means that there are real technical and analytical demands associated with arriving at the point of having made a robust set of choices that support your competitive positioning. The art of strategy embraces that strategy and its execution are iterative by nature and depend on taking some risks, testing, and learning. You can have the best strategy in town, but it will go nowhere without the hearts, minds, and hands of your people. These team members question, experiment, challenge, learn, and align to bring your organization's strategy to life.

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People, Systems Thinking, and Alignment

To broaden the strategy's focus, we must incorporate the human element. This involves the disciplines of sociology, philosophy, behavioral science, group dynamics, neurology, psychology, economics, and more. Understanding the impact of these disciplines is how we build our understanding of what we need to do to create and foster the conditions for people to feel inspired to do their best, learn, and grow.

Second, we must account for systems and subsystems when considering our organizations. The systems are dynamic and constantly interact on multiple and varying levels. They cannot be controlled, only shaped.

Third, we should systematically integrate and link all activities within our systems that support our competitive strategy. Once we can connect the various interdependencies to the strategy, activities and work programs can have their “oxygen” and remain aligned.

Strategy development and execution are joined at the hip, ever dynamic, and must be in the blender together. They cannot be detached. No amount of engagement or cascading will fill this void.

CHAPTER 2

Strategy Is Messy

Given that strategy is born in what the Harvard Case Method describes as a wild environment, good strategy is much more than doing the analysis, mapping it on a whiteboard, and documenting a rational story in PowerPoint. Strategy cannot be neatly packaged into boxes of information ready to hit the execution production line. Good—and certainly great—strategy serves as a rudder for your business decisions. It is iterative; the next step or question is informed by the outcome of the last.

When we try to force a mapped-out strategy development process that doesn't assume a wild environment, we'll likely miss out on a business's true potential. The magic happens when we dare to embrace this messy process.

Embracing the mess means stepping away from rigid control to allow for more speculative thinking. It involves asking questions such as:

- What might happen?
- What could we do?
- What if we tried this?
- What would need to be true for specific outcomes to occur?

How to Think About Competitive Strategy

Think of competitive strategy as an ongoing, disciplined journey rather than a slick PowerPoint deck. Michael Porter, a titan in the field of strategy, identified core generic strategies for achieving competitive advantage in his 1980 book *Competitive Strategy*:

- The strategy of cost leadership is when a company aims to be the lowest-cost producer in its industry.
- Differentiation is when a company seeks to stand out by offering unique features, qualities, or services.
- Focus, which splits into cost focus and differentiation focus, targets specific market segments with tailored low-cost or unique offerings.

Three Ways to Stand Out

When it comes to differentiation, there are three ways to stand out in the eyes of your customers:

- Have the best product to win in product leadership.
- Win based on customer intimacy—be responsive to their needs and solve their problems.
- Ensure operational excellence, where you win by being the most efficient at doing the job.

Strategy Needs to Drive Your Business

Strategy, targets, and plans are all important in driving business performance. The relevant question is: What should have priority?

In the entrepreneurial setting, strategy drives the business, whether articulated in words or writing. The risk is that the strategy and its momentum can be lost in transitions. This risk is greater if the strategy is not explicitly articulated and worked with knowingly. And this risk is further compounded if the new owners overweigh the role of financial

targets, driving purely short-term decision-making that undermines the competitive strategy.

Overweighing financial targets outside of the associated strategy gives rise to what I call target-driven strategy. It is the most common—and often dangerous—alternative to an organization being strategy-driven.

CHAPTER 3

Getting into Strategy and What Makes It Work

If a business is making money, then a strategy is in place. It might not be articulated and is likely not optimized. However, an offer in the marketplace is being presented to attract buyers over other offers.

If the business makes a profit, the strategy can be strengthened into something with real, sustainable competitive potential. If the business has reached some level of scale for its industry, there is likely to be a strong strategy foundation and much more potential through more systematic development and planned scaling.

At its core, competitive strategy is about identifying opportunities in the marketplace, choosing the best opportunities given your business, and then addressing them uniquely and superiorly so that the customer perceives higher value from that offer.

Strategy development and execution go hand in hand in a dynamic dance where each informs the other. Separating these two forces is risky for any organization.

The way these dynamics come together is different in every organization. There is no one-size-fits-all. A rolling diagnosis to understand potential blockers and opportunities helps evolve your winning position.

This allows you to get ahead of the curve, mitigate slowdowns, anticipate and address misunderstandings and a lack of ownership, build upon enthusiasm and commitment, and reduce resistance.

Strategy development is the first and most critical role of the CEO and their leadership team, and it requires continual attention. While external advisors may provide incredibly valuable input to inform an organization's strategy, strategy is the last thing a leader should hand off to external parties. Strategy is so much more than documentation. The leader's role is to embody the strategy, lift it off the page, and make it relevant to everyone.

Mindset Matters

Despite significant academic research, writings, and improvement throughout the business world, there is still considerable upside to be realized from strategy development and execution. One driver may be that organizations tend to operate in a linear and controlled manner. This worked to a greater extent when the world moved more slowly.

However, today, overvaluing a linear approach and using it in the wrong places will constrain good strategy. The process of strategy development and strategy execution involves both systems and linear thinking. The critical message here is that the *right thinking style* needs to be applied at the *right time*.

Systems Thinking

This is at the heart of strategy development. It involves exploring and mapping complex interactions within a system and appreciating the dynamic interconnections among its elements. It allows us to identify and explore various possibilities, opportunities, and risks—all essential aspects of the strategy development process.

Linear Thinking

This focuses on creating defined and sequenced pathways, something core to the planning process. It is the classic one step after the other—first this, then that, and then this. Creating a strong plan is critical to translating a competitive strategy into executable form.

In simple terms, strategy development is best approached using systems thinking. When we let go of controlling the content and thought path, patterns and connections through and across a system of possibilities can be seen. This is the place of deeply explorative and speculative thinking and is essential in developing, reviewing, and refining your competitive strategy.

Finding the right balance is key. Certain functions in organizations tend to draw upon one style over another. For example, successful sales functions usually result from a more linear approach than marketing, which is often fueled by systems thinking. Good leaders know how to toggle between different ways of thinking. They spot these style preferences in their team and harness them effectively.

CHAPTER 4

The Importance of the Human Element of Strategy

Successful entrepreneurs have extraordinary talents and connect very tightly with the initial circle of people who stand

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up for their organizations. They're like the heart of a business, pumping life and direction into everything, and people follow them naturally. It's not because these entrepreneurs haven't encouraged independent thought. They are just deeply involved in steering the ship.

Yet there is typically a ceiling to how much an entrepreneur can scale their business. There comes a point where the business can't grow without new investment or leadership talent. Often, it's only after an entrepreneur leaves a company that we recognize the extent of their impact.

These businesses can reach great heights precisely because the team syncs with the entrepreneur's beat. They've been dedicating themselves to that entrepreneurial vision. They're not just working a job but are on a collective mission. Their commitment and loyalty are all tied to that inspirational force. They're doers of the highest caliber, but without the entrepreneur's guiding voice, they can run adrift.

Leadership Transitions During Growth

An important stepping stone to mitigating this risk is for founders to externalize their deep strategic understanding of their business—how they position to win, what choices must be made and executed to align with this, and what lead indicators give them a pulse check on how they are performing.

This is something first-generation entrepreneurs in particular must guard against. It's not just about losing a leader; it's about losing the person who instinctively filled every space with purpose, passion, and direction.

This transition is best done with the entrepreneur in place and usually requires the introduction of a strong COO from the outside who, in essence, has the skills of a CEO and can create the bridge between the entrepreneur and the organization's capability to develop and execute strategy on a rolling basis. This is best accompanied by thoughtful education of all key leaders in situ and involves learning the theory through the lens of real-life strategy in action in that company.

Reading the Room

David Kantor's work in providing leaders with a way to work with this is groundbreaking. He is a systems theorist and psychologist known for his contributions as a researcher, author,

and organizational consultant for understanding human dynamics in group settings.

Kantor argues that, while there has been significant progress over the past couple of decades in finding good to great leaders and coaching them to even greater success, experts and high-placed leaders have tended to overlook a fundamental skill—face-to-face talk, in person and online. Kantor would say that the key to being the best leader you can be depends on this skill.

Kantor described four distinct positions individuals can take during interactions as part of his foundational research. All are required, and they are neither right nor wrong, good nor bad.

1. **Mover** – initiates the dialogue and moves all others into action or sets the direction in the group. The mover gets us going with an idea using a statement, observation, or question.
2. **Follower** – supports or follows the mover's lead and progresses the mover's idea down the path of action.
3. **Opposer** – constructively challenges or resists the direction being set.
4. **Bystander** – observes and may provide perspective or keep a neutral stance. This role feeds back the patterns it notices and helps the group understand where it is in the conversation.

Kantor also introduces the communication domain, which essentially considers our focus during conversation and indicates what issues, topics, and content naturally gravitate to us. Listening to this domain in action is almost like listening to three different languages. Once understood, it can transform how you, as the leader, can bring it all into play.

- **Power** – the language of accountability, competence, and completion. In short, getting stuff done.
- **Affect** – the language of the connection, emotion, and the lasting impact decisions have on relationships, trust, and motivation.
- **Meaning** – the language of logic and sense of purpose, focused on how ideas fit together, how they work in practice, and what they ultimately signify.

There are no right or wrong communication preferences. We need them all, in different amounts, depending on the pur-

pose of the conversation. Our styles are the combination of all the various elements.

The art here is to *read the room*—assess the efficacy of the dialogue and ask what might need to be done differently to be more effective. Teams with well-developed dialogue skills do this well. It becomes a habit and a competitive advantage. If you, the leader, know how these dynamics play out, you can be a more effective facilitator of conversations, including negotiations, with all groups and teams and in all settings.

Bringing Your People into Your Strategy

If your business is to thrive over time, your approach to competitive strategy must ensure that every team member can understand the strategy as well as where their role fits and how it contributes to the business's success. This dynamic has been demonstrated repeatedly in the world of sports—a championship team with a winning system consistently outperforms teams with only extraordinary individual champions.

Getting everyone on the same page with your strategy may take longer and be more cumbersome in the short term. You might even grow frustrated with those who can't climb as fast or grasp key concepts that seem so basic to you.

However, as you get everyone on the same page, you see the real magic begin to happen. This isn't about getting people to nod along to show agreement; it's about achieving a shared understanding. It's ensuring everyone is reading from the same script, has the confidence to question and challenge, and feels responsible for making it happen.

CHAPTER 5

Your Competitive Strategy

Competitive strategy is the heart of any business, no matter its size. While it is not the only factor in your business's success, it informs the other elements, particularly the culture and your execution focus. Different landscapes present different opportunities and ways to win. Pursuing these will involve hard work, the right skills, and discipline.

My favorite definition of competitive strategy is that it is a set of choices about winning—an integrated set of choices that uniquely positions a firm in its industry to create sustainable advantage and superior value relative to the competition.

While many frameworks can guide the development of competitive strategy, I typically use, with a few modifications, the approach set out in the book *Playing to Win: How Strategy*

Really Works. Competitive strategy in the *Playing to Win* approach comprises five questions:

1. What is your winning aspiration?

This defines the overarching goal for the relevant period you are considering. In most instances, I would suggest three years as an appropriate timeframe.

2. Where will you play?

This allows you to call out where you can win. This includes geographies, product categories, target market segments, channels, and vertical stages of production.

3. How will you win?

This question requires you to call out how you position your business to win. What aspects of your offer make your proposition distinctive and sufficiently attractive for enough of your target market to purchase your offer over the competition so that your business is financially viable?

4. What capabilities must we have in place?

The winning capabilities shouldn't belong to a single person. They must be institutionalized and embedded deeply so they belong to the organization.

5. What management systems are required?

This question deals with translating strategy into actionable steps. This is the beginning of the bridge to a well-structured, relevant, executable plan.

CHAPTER 6

Translating Strategy into Executable Form

Why do around 70% of projects and initiatives fail to deliver on their promises? I learned that leaders, often CEOs, feared that acknowledging what hadn't worked might draw negative attention to their leadership and could even cost them their jobs. So instead of addressing the issue of poor delivery, they swept these challenges under the rug.

Understanding the drivers of the problem and exploring what could turn it around has been a passion of mine for the past three decades. Research and practice, particularly working in the trenches with leaders globally, have revealed the importance of the **Middle Ground**.

The Middle Ground is what sits between the meta-thinking of your competitive strategy and the micro level of doing. This connects, activates, and aligns organizational effort across the whole system. If done well, it focuses on choice

The critical gap lies in the connection between competitive strategy, governance, and execution.

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and filters out the noise—that is, those activities that aren't sufficiently aligned with the strategy—and clarifies what is needed to deliver on your strategy.

The Middle Ground comprises six key areas, all critical to successful execution. They support each other and work together in a way that will unleash your organization's performance operating system:

Step 1: Build out the plan

The task here is to ensure that the competitive strength is not diluted in a rush to identify action.

Step 2: Engage the team members

Engaging the hearts, minds, and hands of team members across the organization is more complex than scheduling quarterly town halls.

Step 3: Run everything through the portal of culture

Your culture will be shown in how things are done across the organization in choices, behaviors, and decisions.

Step 4: Understand the magnitude and nature of change

Change is implicit in every strategy and can encompass structural, operational, behavioral, and cultural change.

Step 5: Measure, track and report

Establishing a meaningful way of governing your efforts is core—measuring, tracking, and reporting on performance and progress are necessary disciplines to stay the course and make the required adjustments for successful execution.

Step 6: Build institutional know-how

This ensures that an organization's strategy remains strong daily and is independent of any person or team.

CHAPTER 7

More on Building the Middle Ground Plan

Effective planning is difficult, but it is absolutely essential in driving strategy execution and achieving your business's best performance over time.

Planning skills must be learned, particularly the skills that allow you to build a strong Middle Ground plan. Focusing

here has the potential to unlock significant margin and value for many businesses.

How to Start Building Out Your Plan

The art of planning depends on defining initiatives and activities at the right elevation and within the right hierarchical structure, effectively creating stepping stones from the competitive strategy to relevant, aligned action at the front line. Businesses tend to be better at defining conceptual activities and micro tasks, often doing so without these intermediate links. When thoughtfully constructed, they preserve the strategic intent and power of your competitive strategy.

The development of a good plan requires strong linear thinking. Well-thought-through initiatives sequenced over time serve as the base. The question becomes, which initiatives? How do you surface those activities that will have the most consequential impact on executing your strategy?

To sharpen your thinking, we suggest you undertake an envisioning exercise to support this process and help in the inevitable prioritization and trade-off decisions.

CHAPTER 8

Change

Our environment—physically, socially, technologically, and more—is in perpetual motion. Therefore, we are in a state of constant change.

This is the business context. The ability to work with change, embrace it, and adapt to new circumstances is core to all we do, particularly our ability to learn and lead successful strategy development and execution.

We distinguish two broad categories of change:

- **Continuous change** – includes the day-to-day change such as the technology upgrade, resignation, or misplaced order.
- **Extraordinary change** – a significant change that requires planning, such as a structure change, a location move, an acquisition, or a new platform or process. It demands thoughtful planning to ensure that performance is not disrupted.

The Cynefin Framework, developed by Dave Snowden, is a useful conceptual framework to aid decision-making and problem-solving. It categorizes change situations into five domains based on the nature of the relationship between cause and effect:

- **Simple (obvious)** – cause and effect are clear and easily predictable. Solutions are straightforward and can be applied universally. Best practices and standardized procedures are effective in addressing issues in this domain.
- **Complicated** – cause and effect relationships are not immediately apparent but can be determined through analysis and expertise. Problems require a deeper understanding and expertise to solve, often involving multiple factors and variables.
- **Complex** – cause-and-effect relationships are non-linear and emergent, making them difficult to predict. Solutions are not evident and may require experimentation, adaptation, and exploration of different approaches. There are no right answers but a range of possible responses.
- **Chaotic** – no clear relationship between cause and effect, and situations are rapidly changing and unpredictable. Immediate action is necessary to stabilize the situation, followed by a transition to a more stable, ordered domain.
- **Disorder** – represents a state of ambiguity where it's unclear which domain a situation falls into. It serves as a starting point for understanding and categorizing the nature of a problem before determining the right and appropriate approach.

This framework helps individuals and organizations navigate complexity by providing a structured way to understand and respond to different types of change circumstances that cause problems. It encourages embracing uncertainty, experimenting with solutions, and adapting approaches based on the situation's context.

CHAPTER 9

The Power of Culture

Culture is the way things are done in an organization. It matters because it sets the tone for everyone. It shows everyone how things are done. Newcomers look for signals to figure this out so they can fit in.

A strong culture shows up with strong messages and predictability. People understand what specific behaviors and

decisions mean and what they reinforce. The cultural signals are clear.

With a weak culture, the meanings of cues are not clear. This leaves people guessing. Confusion and a lack of stability ensue. It could be the case that in the ever-dynamic and changing environment in which we operate today, and as our strategy evolves, our organization's culture will need to change and grow with the strategy.

A strong culture is much easier to change than a weak one simply because it is clear. Trying to change something that is loose and unpredictable is very hard. Strong cultures will serve your strategy more powerfully if aligned.

Culture eats strategy for breakfast often comes to mind when we think about the relationship between strategy and culture because everything goes through the portal of culture. Still, it won't make it to dinner if the strategy doesn't robustly carve out the organization's purpose and winning positioning.

Strategy without culture is hollow, and culture without strategy is aimless. Both must be developed harmoniously to ensure the organization can successfully navigate internal and external challenges and sustain competitive advantage across market cycles. Strategy provides the direction, and culture offers the means to execute and sustain that direction.

CHAPTER 10

Creating Momentum Through Systems

The shift from one-dimensional governance, where risk assessments are seen as separate documents and presentations to demonstrate performance, to a true system of governance is critical. Risk assessments should inform how risks are mitigated, which is built back into the plan.

These should function as part of an integrated learning, diagnosing, and iterating system that creates momentum and enables effective strategy execution and performance.

Governance isn't a one-size-fits-all playbook. It's about understanding what the organization needs to govern itself properly, maintain transparency, and keep those who are accountable informed while enabling rather than constraining effective execution.

Having worked with all structures and organizations at all stages of development, I can tell you that overdoing governance can be as damaging as doing too little. It can potentially stifle an organization to the point of failure.

CHAPTER 11

Your Strategic Leadership ToolKit

Strategy development is improving across many organizations. Most know (or assume) they have a good strategy, and if the business is making money, some form of strategy is clearly in place. Strong earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) often signal that a solid strategy is operating. Governance is also receiving increased attention. However, the critical gap lies in the connection between competitive strategy, governance, and execution.

Leadership is the lynchpin of your organization's success. *Your* leadership. No matter your success and path thus far, we all have blind spots and over-indexed superpowers that mask our blind spots. Your opportunity is to explore what might be holding you back and, consequently, the execution of your company's strategy. Whether you are a CEO or a team member, your leadership still counts.

Get clear about your strengths; perhaps have a reliable playbook that supports your success. Know it, grow it, and continue to employ it.

The 3 Pillars of Execution Excellence

Execution excellence rests on three key pillars:

- **Clarity** – encompasses how clear you are about where you're going and how you will get there. This includes strategic direction and operational clarity about roles, responsibilities, and expectations at every level of the organization.
- **Cohesion** – addresses how well your organization and its culture are aligned with the strategic direction. It's about ensuring that the various elements of your business—from culture to capabilities to operational systems—work together rather than at cross purposes.
- **Disciplines** – refer to the systematic practices and behaviors that ensure consistent execution over time. These are governance systems, planning and measurement practices, and leadership behaviors that sustain performance.

Reading the Environment Continuously

One of the most critical capabilities for ongoing success is staying connected to your operating environment. This is not a one-and-done exercise. This is critical in today's high-paced, complex, and dynamic environment, likely accelerating in importance with AI, quantum computing, and other emerging technologies.

People throughout your organization often possess sediments of knowledge—insights and intuitions about what's happening that may not yet show up in formal data. Creating mechanisms to surface and examine these insights can provide early warning signals about changes that require strategic attention.

CONCLUSION

Implementation Starts Now

There's already a strategy in place and activity happening. Your role is to assess where you are, identify what needs attention, and begin systematically strengthening the connections between strategy, execution, and governance.

Start with the self-assessment questions. Be honest about gaps. Then prioritize the areas that will have the greatest strategic impact on your ability to execute your competitive strategy effectively.

The goal isn't perfection—it's systematically improving your organization's capability to translate strategic intent into sustainable competitive advantage.

Your competitive strategy provides the foundation. Your execution capabilities determine whether that strategy creates the value you intend. Your governance systems ensure you stay on track and adapt as needed. Together, they form the integrated approach that separates successful organizations from those that are average and "kinda" survive, and those that struggle despite having good ideas.

The journey from strategy to sustainable competitive advantage isn't linear and is never complete. But with the right intention, mindset, behaviors, framework, and discipline to address what you discover and learn, you can build an organization that survives and thrives in whatever environment it faces.



Dr. Kathryn Ritchie is the founder and CEO of Ignition Institute, a consulting firm that guides leadership teams through holistic, performance-driven transformations worldwide. Known for her expertise in strategy execution, she helps organizations move from planning to measurable growth by building accountability and alignment at every level. Ritchie previously held management roles at Macquarie Bank and served on nonprofit and university boards. Trained initially as a speech pathologist, she brings a distinctive understanding of human performance and change. She holds an MBA from the Australian Graduate School of Management and was named one of *Women's Leader Magazine's* Most Inspiring Women Leaders of 2022.

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