THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

What Is a Strategy Execution Platform?

A strategy execution platform connects strategic priorities to funded initiatives, execution, and realized value in one governed system. Here's what it does, how it differs from PPM, work management, and consulting-firm tools, and how to tell whether you need one.

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A strategy execution platform is software that connects an organization's strategic priorities to the initiatives funded to deliver them, the work required to execute those initiatives, and the financial and non-financial value they produce, in one governed system. It exists to close the gap between the strategy leadership sets and the results the organization actually delivers.

That sentence is the whole category. The rest of this page is what it means in practice, why the category exists, how it differs from tools you probably already own, and how to tell whether you need one.

What problem does a strategy execution platform solve?

Every organization I talk to has a strategy. Most have a plan. Almost none can tell you, on any given Tuesday, whether the plan is on track to deliver the strategy, which initiatives are quietly eroding, or what the number at the end of the year is going to be.

That's the strategy execution gap, and it has a cost. In our work with transformation offices and PE value creation teams, we consistently see roughly ten percent of a program's targeted value erode before it's ever realized. Not because of bad strategy, and not because people aren't working. It goes to three places:

The wrong work gets funded. When the prioritization method isn't codified, funding decisions drift toward whoever argues best in the room. Initiatives that score well on ambition and poorly on feasibility get greenlit; the boring one that would have moved EBITDA doesn't.

Risks surface weeks late. The work happens in one set of tools, the reporting happens in another, and the connection between them is a person building slides. By the time a slipping initiative reaches a steering committee, the multi-week delay has already cost money that an earlier escalation or funding pause would have saved.

The reporting tax. Rolling status up from dozens of workstreams into an executive view consumes a quarter of a large program's effort, and it doesn't just burn the PMO. It burns every stakeholder and leader who has to prepare for, sit in, and follow up on the meetings that reporting feeds.

A strategy execution platform is built to remove those three failure modes specifically. It is not a general-purpose productivity tool that happens to be used for transformation.

How is a strategy execution platform different from the tools I already have?

This is the question I get on nearly every first call, so here is the map. There are four categories of software that get used to run strategic programs, and they stack on top of one another.

Collaborative work management (Monday, Asana, Smartsheet, Trello)

- **Built for:** teams coordinating tasks.
- **Strengths:** project and task collaboration; adoption.
- **Gaps:** no strategic alignment or prioritization, no financial benefits tracking, no stage gates, and cross-program governance is painful because the data model is flat.
- **Who owns it:** you.

Project and portfolio management (Planview, Clarity, OnePlan)

- **Built for:** PMOs managing project portfolios and resources.
- **Strengths:** stage gates, hierarchy, resource management.
- **Gaps:** partial strategic alignment, partial benefits tracking, and a thinner execution and collaboration layer, so teams keep a work management tool alongside it.

- **Who owns it:** you.

Consulting-firm platforms (McKinsey Wave, BCG Key, Bain Accelerator)

- **Built for:** consulting engagements with financial targets.
- **Strengths:** stage gates, financial monitoring against targets, executive reporting.
- **Gaps:** stop at the strategy and benefits layer; no project, task, or team collaboration, so a Monday or Asana runs alongside. Built to run one particular way.
- **Who owns it:** typically the consulting firm.

Strategy execution platform (Conductor, Shibumi)

- **Built for:** transformation offices, EPMOs, and value creation offices governing strategy through to value.
- **Strengths:** strategic alignment and prioritization, stage-gate governance, financial and non-financial benefits tracking, cross-program RAID and dependency governance, and full project and task collaboration, on one end-to-end data model.
- **Gaps:** not an analytics or BI tool; not an engineering delivery tool.
- **Who owns it:** you.

A few things jump out of that comparison.

Work management tools are excellent at what they do. A PMO leader I spoke with recently, who had run a business transformation on Smartsheet, put it fairly: it's a great tool for managing projects, but when you try to level up and ask how the whole portfolio is doing and what impact it's driving, it wasn't built for that. The problem is the flatness. There are no meaningful relationships between the objects that matter in strategy execution, so cross-program governance ends up as workarounds, and every time the structure changes the workarounds break.

Consulting-firm platforms come at it from the other direction. Wave, Key, and Accelerator are strong at exactly the layer work management tools lack: stage gates, financial monitoring against targets, and executive reporting. What they stop at is the execution layer. They don't do the project management, task management, and collaboration where the work actually happens, so organizations end up running a Key alongside a Monday and reconciling between them. And they're built to run one particular way, which works during the engagement and chafes afterward.

A strategy execution platform is the category that spans the whole stack: strategic alignment at the top, financial value realization at the bottom, and the execution and collaboration layer in between, in one data model. That's why teams that adopt one typically retire a work management tool, and why teams coming off a consulting engagement migrate onto one when they turn a temporary transformation team into a permanent strategy execution capability.

What does a strategy execution platform actually do?

The right way to think about it is as a closed loop. Strategy goes in at one end; realized, auditable value comes out the other; everything in between is connected.

Plan. Strategic priorities are defined and decomposed. Ideas and business cases are captured, scored, and aligned to those priorities, with digitized approvals so there's full traceability from a proposal to the decision to fund it. This is where the platform answers the question most organizations can't: how well is our portfolio actually aligned to our strategy, and is it drifting?

Prioritize. The portfolio is modeled against capacity and expected value. Scenario planning lets leadership see what happens to this year's and next year's benefits if an initiative is cancelled, accelerated, or added, before committing. This is the piece that stops the wrong work getting funded.

Execute. Approved initiatives move through a stage-gate lifecycle, L0 through L5 or whatever your organization calls it, with full project management underneath: Gantt, Kanban, task-level collaboration, and governance of risks, actions, issues, and interdependencies across the whole portfolio, not just within one project. This is the layer consulting platforms leave out and the reason work management tools exist.

Realize. Every initiative carries its own financial and non-financial targets, forecasts, and actuals. Targets are set by the transformation office and locked; project teams update forecasts; actuals come from the ERP or are entered and locked on a schedule. The result is an audit history of what was committed and what actually happened, which is what makes the number defensible in front of a board, a sponsor, or a fund.

Because all four run on one data model, the executive dashboard is a byproduct of the work rather than a separate exercise. That's what eliminates the reporting tax.

What a strategy execution platform is not

Being clear about the edges saves everyone time.

It is not an analytics or BI tool. A good one has dashboards and increasingly has AI that surfaces risks and drafts governance updates, but the reason organizations buy it is to run the program, not to analyze data that lives elsewhere. If you need diagnostics, that's a different purchase, and often a consulting engagement.

It is not a replacement for engineering delivery tools. Jira and Azure DevOps are excellent for software teams and should stay where they are. A strategy execution platform integrates with them so that engineering work rolls up into the initiatives it supports, without asking developers to change how they work.

It is not a methodology. It should be able to run your stage gates, your business case template, your KPI definitions, and your governance cadence, rather than imposing someone else's.

Who uses a strategy execution platform?

Three functions, which increasingly overlap:

Enterprise PMOs and strategy realization offices, which need to govern a portfolio of strategic initiatives against the company's priorities and prove the benefits landed.

Transformation management offices, which are running a defined program, a cost transformation, a post-merger integration, an operating model change, and need stage-gate governance, cross-workstream dependency management, and a single number leadership trusts.

Private equity value creation offices, which need the same thing across a portfolio of companies: a standard way to run value creation plans in every portco, with fund-level roll-up and reporting that doesn't depend on someone building slides at midnight.

The pattern across all three is the same. The organization has decided that executing strategy is a permanent capability rather than a series of projects, and it needs infrastructure to match.

When do you need one?

You don't need a strategy execution platform to run a project. You need one when some of the following start to be true:

- Leadership asks “how are we doing across the whole portfolio?” and the honest answer takes a week to assemble.
- Status is reported in PowerPoint, and the people producing it are the same people who should be delivering the work.
- Nobody can trace an initiative to the strategic priority it serves, or a realized benefit to the initiative that produced it.
- Prioritization decisions are made on relationships and persuasion because there's no shared scoring method.
- A consulting engagement is ending and the tool is leaving with the consultants.
- Multiple workstreams or portfolio companies are running the same kind of program in different spreadsheets, and standardizing feels impossible.

If two or three of those are true, the ten percent erosion is already happening. The question is only whether it's visible.

How to evaluate a strategy execution platform

Whatever you evaluate, including us, test it against these:

1. **Does it span the full stack?** Strategy alignment, prioritization, execution with real project management, and benefits realization, in one system. If it stops at reporting, you'll be buying a second tool.
2. **Can it run your governance, not just its own?** Your stage gates, your business case, your KPI model, your approval chain.
3. **Does it hold up to audit?** Locked targets, controlled actuals, a history of who changed what and when.
4. **Does it handle cross-program governance natively?** Dependencies, risks, and escalations across the whole portfolio, not one project at a time.
5. **Will people actually use it?** The best data model in the world is worthless if teams retreat to Excel. Look at the execution layer through the eyes of a project manager, not a sponsor.
6. **How fast can it be live?** A templated deployment should get a first version running in days, not quarters. Momentum matters more than perfection in the first ninety days.
7. **Who owns it when the consultants leave?** You should.

To see how Conductor connects strategy to realized value, book a demo.

Frequently asked questions

What is the difference between a strategy execution platform and strategic portfolio management (SPM) software?

They're largely the same category under two names. Gartner uses strategic portfolio management, and some vendors and practitioners say strategy execution management; both describe software that aligns a portfolio of initiatives to strategy and governs it through to realized value. In practice, "strategy execution platform" tends to emphasize the execution and benefits layers, while "SPM" tends to emphasize planning and prioritization. A complete platform does both.

Do I still need a project management tool if I have a strategy execution platform?

For strategic programs, no. A complete strategy execution platform includes Gantt, Kanban, task collaboration, and RAID governance and typically replaces Smartsheet, Monday, or Asana for that work. You will still keep engineering delivery tools like Jira or Azure DevOps; the platform integrates with those rather than replacing them.

How is a strategy execution platform different from McKinsey Wave, BCG Key, or Bain Accelerator?

Those platforms are strong at stage gates, financial tracking against targets, and executive reporting, but they generally stop at the benefits layer and don't include the project and task management where work is done. They're also designed around the firm's engagement model. A strategy execution platform covers the full stack and is owned and configured by the organization, which is why teams often migrate to one when a consulting engagement ends and the transformation becomes a permanent capability.

How long does it take to implement a strategy execution platform?

With a templated deployment, a first working version can be live in about seventy-two hours, and organizations typically expand from there in tiers as maturity grows. A fully custom implementation without templates takes three to four weeks. The point is to start executing and reporting from real data immediately rather than waiting for a complete rollout.

Can one platform serve both a transformation office and a private equity value creation team?

Yes, and it's common. The underlying model is identical: strategic priorities, funded initiatives, stage-gated execution, and tracked value. What differs is the structure, with a PE deployment running each portfolio company as its own governed workspace and rolling up to the fund, and a transformation office running one program across workstreams. Value creation and business transformation are the same discipline seen from two sides.