



THE END OF "CONSULTANT DRIVE-BYS"

Why Implementation Outweighs Recommendations

**THIS IS NOT A CRITIQUE OF CONSULTING. IT IS A SHIFT IN HOW
ORGANIZATIONS ACCESS AND ACT ON EXPERTISE.**

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"From advisory distance to embedded accountability."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations do not fail from a lack of good advice. They fail from a lack of execution. For decades, the traditional consulting model has operated under a structural assumption: that expert recommendations, delivered with authority, will naturally translate into organizational action. The data suggests otherwise. According to Harvard Business Review, 67% of well-formulated strategies fail because of poor execution—not because the strategy was wrong, but because the organization lacked the capability, authority, or discipline to implement it.

The consulting model is not underperforming due to a lack of smart people. It is underperforming because the incentives are different. Consultants are paid for advice, deliverables, and project completion—not for long-term operational impact. Their engagement ends when the report is delivered. The hard work of implementation begins after they leave.

Fractional leadership removes the constraint that made this model structurally flawed. Organizations can now access C-suite expertise that stays, builds, and is accountable for results—not just recommendations.

"A consultant advises. A fractional executive decides, builds, and is accountable for results."

TRADITIONAL CONSULTING	FRACTIONAL LEADERSHIP
Advisory distance	Embedded in the leadership team
Recommendations	Implementation and outcomes
Fixed-scope project	Ongoing, accountable engagement

TRADITIONAL CONSULTING	FRACTIONAL LEADERSHIP
Paid for deliverables	Accountable for results
"Done to" the organization	"Done with" the organization
Leaves when project ends	Stays until impact is delivered
Outcome: Reports on shelves	Outcome: Organizational capability

THE SHIFT IN ONE PAGE1. THE CONSULTING PARADOX

The traditional consulting model is built on a contradiction: organizations pay for expertise to solve problems, yet the very structure of consulting engagements prevents the deep integration required to solve them.

Consultants are typically engaged for fixed scopes or timeframes. Their job is to diagnose, analyze, and recommend. Implementation is left to the client—often the same client that lacked the capability to solve the problem in the first place.

This creates a predictable failure pattern: brilliant recommendations, minimal implementation, and a return to the same problems months or years later.

Exhibit 1: The Consulting Paradox

Organization lacks capability → Hires consultant for expertise → Consultant delivers recommendations → Organization cannot implement → Problem persists → Repeat

2. THE CEILING OF THE "ADVICE-ONLY" MODEL

Most organizations continue to invest in incremental improvements to their consulting engagements. They ask for more detailed implementation plans. They request longer transition periods. They demand more "actionable" recommendations.

These are local optimizations applied to a structurally flawed system.

The fundamental constraint is this: consultants lack institutional power. They can

recommend, but they cannot decide. They can diagnose, but they cannot build. They can advise, but they cannot lead.

The results are stark:

- 67% of well-formulated strategies fail because of poor execution
- Only 30-40% of consulting recommendations are implemented after 12 months
- 63% of advisory projects fail due to implementation gaps, not bad advice
- Industry data shows 30-50% of recommendations are never fully implemented

Exhibit 2: The Advice-Implementation Gap

Consultant recommendations → 30-40% implemented → 60-70% unimplemented → Strategy fails → Organization repeats cycle

3. WHY "DRIVE-BY CONSULTING" FAILS

The term "drive-by consulting" captures the fundamental flaw in the traditional model. A consultant who doesn't take ownership is just a visitor with opinions.

The failure modes are predictable:

- Incentive misalignment: Consultants are paid for deliverables, not long-term operational impact
- The execution gap: Advice is easier than implementation
- Short-term horizons: Client employees who resist change will "ride out the consultant's contract"
- No skin in the game: Consultants leave when the project ends

Exhibit 3: The Drive-By Consulting Cycle

Consultant arrives → Diagnoses → Recommends → Departs → Organization attempts implementation → Fails → Consultant unavailable → Problem persists

4. FRACTIONAL LEADERSHIP COLLAPSES THE PARADOX

Fractional leadership removes the requirement that organizations choose between expert advice and accountable execution .

The model is simple: instead of hiring consultants who diagnose and leave,

organizations engage fractional executives who integrate directly into the leadership team, participate in decision-making, and take accountability for outcomes.

Exhibit 4: The Fractional Leadership Model

Engagement → Embedded leadership → Decision authority → Execution →
Measurable outcomes → Organizational capability → Sustainable success

5. THE A.C.C.O.U.N.T. MODEL™

From Advisory Distance to Embedded Accountability

The A.C.C.O.U.N.T. Model™ defines the seven capabilities required to move from advisory distance to embedded accountability:

- **A — Accountability:** Fractional executives own outcomes, not just deliverables. They are measured by results, not hours billed.
 - **C — Continuity:** Fractional executives stay until the work produces measurable business impact.
 - **C — Capability Building:** Fractional executives install processes, metrics, and routines that remain in the hands of the internal team.
 - **O — Ownership:** Fractional executives decide, build, and are accountable for results. They have skin in the game.
 - **U — Unity:** Fractional executives function as part of the leadership team.
 - **N — Navigation:** Fractional executives guide organizations through complexity with authority and institutional knowledge.
 - **T — Transformation:** Fractional executives deliver lasting change, not temporary fixes.
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6. WHY INCREMENTAL "MORE ACTIONABLE ADVICE" STRATEGIES FAIL

Many organizations attempt to fix the consulting model by demanding more "actionable" recommendations, longer transition periods, or more detailed implementation plans.

This creates structural conflict.

The result is:

- Longer reports with more detail—but the same implementation gap
- More expensive engagements with the same incentive misalignment

- Greater dependency on consultants without building internal capability
 - Repeated cycles of diagnosis without resolution
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7. THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTRAINT

The primary barrier to moving from consulting to fractional leadership is not financial. It is perceptual.

Leaders have been conditioned to believe that expertise must be external, that advice must come from outsiders, and that internal capability cannot be built without permanent hires.

Exhibit 5: The Perceptual Barrier

Belief that expertise must be external → Reluctance to embed outsiders → Continued reliance on advisory-only model → Implementation gap → Wasted investment → Confirmation of "consultants don't work"

8. THE COST OF DELAY

The cost of delaying the shift from consulting to fractional leadership is not theoretical. It is measurable.

Metric	Impact
Average consulting engagement cost	\$750,000+
Recommendations implemented after 12 months	30-40%
Strategies that fail due to poor execution	67%
Advisory projects that fail due to implementation gaps	63%
Unimplemented recommendations	30-50%

The math is unforgiving: organizations are spending millions for advice that never translates into action.

9. THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF EMBEDDED ACCOUNTABILITY

Organizations that embrace fractional leadership gain a compounding advantage:

- Faster execution because decisions are made by those with authority, not just those with opinions
- Higher ROI because investments translate into outcomes, not just reports
- Stronger capability because processes and routines remain in the organization
- Greater agility because expertise scales with need, not fixed overhead

Exhibit 7: The Accountability Advantage

Early adopters: Embedded expertise → Accountable execution → Measurable outcomes → Organizational capability → Sustainable advantage

Late adopters: Advisory distance → Recommendations → Implementation gap → Wasted investment → Repeated problems

CONCLUSION: A STRUCTURAL SHIFT IN HOW ORGANIZATIONS ACCESS EXPERTISE

Organizations are not failing because their consultants are unintelligent. They are failing because the consulting model was never designed for execution.

Fractional leadership enables a fundamentally different model—one where organizations access C-suite expertise that is embedded, accountable, and outcome-driven. Where recommendations become results. Where advice becomes action. Where external expertise builds internal capability.

This is not a critique of consulting. It is a shift in how organizations access and act on expertise.

The question for organizational leaders is not whether this transition will occur. It is whether their organization will lead the shift or respond to it after competitors have already built the capability to execute.

Because in the next generation of organizational excellence, the defining advantage will not be the quality of advice you receive. It will be the quality of execution you deliver.

"The defining advantage will not be the quality of advice. It will be the quality of execution."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lonnie Estep is a technology and business executive focused on helping organizations turn structural disruption into measurable advantage. He has served as C-suite executive and trusted advisor across global enterprises, with responsibility for technology portfolios, customer experience, digital transformation, and organizational design.

THE OWL SIGNAL ADVISORY DIFFERENCE

- Owl Signal Advisory provides fractional C-suite leadership across four critical functions: CTO, CMO, CXO, CSO and CDO .
- *"Because your mission is too important to leave to chance."*
- For more information, visit owlsignaladvisory.com.

For organizations tired of paying for advice that never translates into action, this means accessing the executive capability that stays, builds, and delivers results—without the fixed overhead of permanent hires or the advisory distance of traditional consulting.

"Because great advice is worthless without great execution."