

PART TWO

A strategy and a symptom look the same in a board pack

Boards are asking for AI strategy.
Many are asking because they
are afraid.

Three things

- 01 Being seen as behind is a different condition from being behind.
 - 02 A strategy and a symptom produce identical artefacts.
 - 03 Three questions separate them, and there is a way to ask that costs nobody their standing.
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The mandate arrives without a diagnosis

A peer at a dinner. A regulator's consultation paper. An analyst question nobody had a clean answer to. A competitor press release that is nine parts ambition.

The director returns and asks for the AI strategy. Nobody has said what problem it solves, because what produced the request was a comparison.

Both produce the same board pack

A deck. A budget line. A steering committee. A workstream owner. A portfolio of pilots. Six months in you cannot tell them apart from the outside.

A strategy with no stated problem cannot be wrong. Nothing can falsify it, so nothing can stop it. It runs until the budget does.

40%+

of agentic AI projects expected to be cancelled by end of 2027

Gartner cites escalating costs, unclear business value and inadequate risk controls. Unclear business value is the condition a project is born with when nobody stated the problem.

Three questions

- 01 What changed?** A conference is a symptom. A lost customer, a moved cost line or a regulator's letter is a problem.
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- 02 What decision is waiting?** If none is, the document has no job.
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- 03 What would we stop doing?** Fear-driven mandates displace nothing.
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Do not comply, and do not argue in the room

Complying produces the document. Challenging the premise in front of peers makes a director look naive, and the mandate arrives anyway with less of your influence on it.

Accept the request. Make the diagnosis the first deliverable.

A one-page position in three weeks

- 01 Where we actually are, from a readiness assessment rather than an opinion.
 - 02 What our named peers can demonstrably do, and how we know.
 - 03 The two or three decisions this would let us make.
 - 04 Which one we recommend deciding first, with a date.
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The board that asks whether it is behind is asking about its reflection. The board that asks whether it could move if it decided to is asking about the organisation.

TERENCE KOK

Write one sentence naming the problem

If you cannot write it, you are about to ask for a symptom to be dressed as a strategy, and everyone downstream will comply.



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