

# Strategy Management Partners

SHAPING POSSIBILITIES . CREATING IMPACT

EXECUTION CHECK

INSIGHTS ON HOW UK COMPANIES  
ARE ACHIEVING THEIR GROWTH  
AMBITIONS.

2025 RESEARCH FINDINGS



## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report, based on a survey commissioned by Strategy Management Partners, provides insights into how effectively UK companies are executing their strategies and progressing toward their growth targets and desired future outcomes.



## STUDY METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted independently on behalf of Strategy Management Partners by Censuswide, a global leader in digital data collection. An online survey was completed in March 2025 by final decision-makers in strategy (CEOs / Heads of Strategy etc.) from 250 UK companies with a £20m+ turnover and which operate in at least one other country. Participants in the survey come from a range of industries, including IT & Telecoms, finance, healthcare, utilities and manufacturing.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategy Management Partners' latest research explores how effectively UK enterprises are executing strategy and realising their performance aspirations.

While growth continues to be a top priority, many companies struggle with execution.

Approximately 63% of companies are pursuing aspirational growth, and 16.4% are targeting transformative ambitions. However, consistent execution remains a significant challenge. A key insight from the research reveals that only 18.4% of businesses achieve more than 80% of their aspirational growth goals within three years.

**A standout finding is the strong correlation between disciplined execution and superior performance outcomes.**

## Key Insights

- **Execution capability is critical: Only 46% of companies have a clearly measurable “value gap”** which quantifies the gap between their current performance and aspirational targets. The companies that have measurable value gap and approach execution as a core discipline are more likely to achieve their aspirational targets compared to those that have somewhat measurable goals.
- **Talent and capability gaps** remain the most cited internal barrier, according to over 50% of business leaders.
- **Constrained innovation mindset:** 39.2% of organisations pursue innovation but focus on improvements within defined constraints. In 22% of organisations, employees are only encouraged to challenge norms in response to disruptions, rather than proactively seeking innovation
- **External pressures are mounting:** Macroeconomic instability, supply chain disruptions, rising operational costs, and cybersecurity threats are the most pressing external challenges impacting growth potential

The report underscores that clear strategic alignment, data-driven decision-making, and a culture of accountability are essential for bridging the gap between ambition and achievement. In a volatile environment, companies that invest in people, execution readiness, and operational resilience will be best positioned.

The findings emphasize that success hinges not merely on bold strategic ambitions, but critically on execution readiness, talent development, data-driven decision-making, and maintaining a culture of accountability.

\*Definition: The value gap refers to the difference in performance level between an organization's current state and its desired future state, as defined by its strategic vision

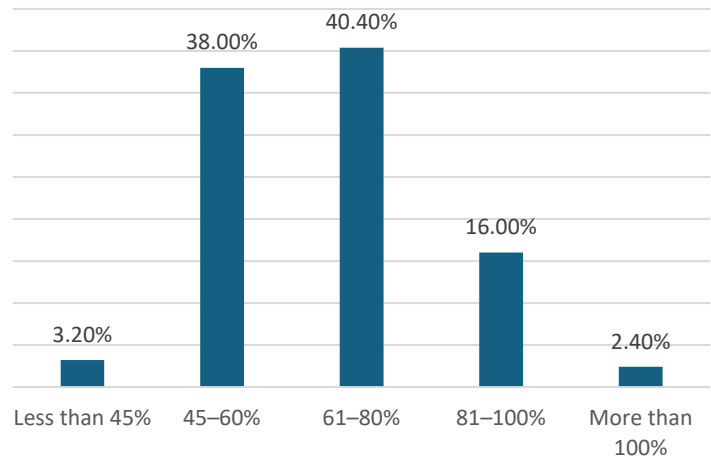
# GROWTH AMBITION VS ACHIEVEMENT

Companies today face a paradox: while ambition to grow is strong, they face execution challenges and fast-moving external pressures.

In the UK over 63% of companies are pursuing aspirational growth. However, consistent execution remains a major challenge.

**SMP’s research reveals that only 18.4% of UK businesses achieve more than 80% of their aspirational growth goals within three years.**

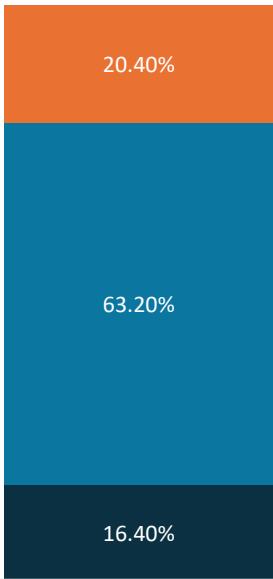
Q. What percentage of your aspirational growth goals did your organisation achieve within three years of setting them?



40% achieve 61-80% and 41.2% achieve 60% or less of their targets.

Q: Which of the following, if any, best describes how your organisation’s vision drives employees to think beyond current limitations and identify new opportunities?

- We focus on incremental growth based on past performance
- We pursue aspirational growth while considering past performance and the competitive landscape.
- We encourage a disruptive, opportunity-focused mindset.



# CONSTRAINED INNOVATION MINDSET

23.6% of large UK businesses demonstrate a proactive, disruptive innovation mindset. Most companies (61.2%) pursue incremental innovation reactively rather than strategically.

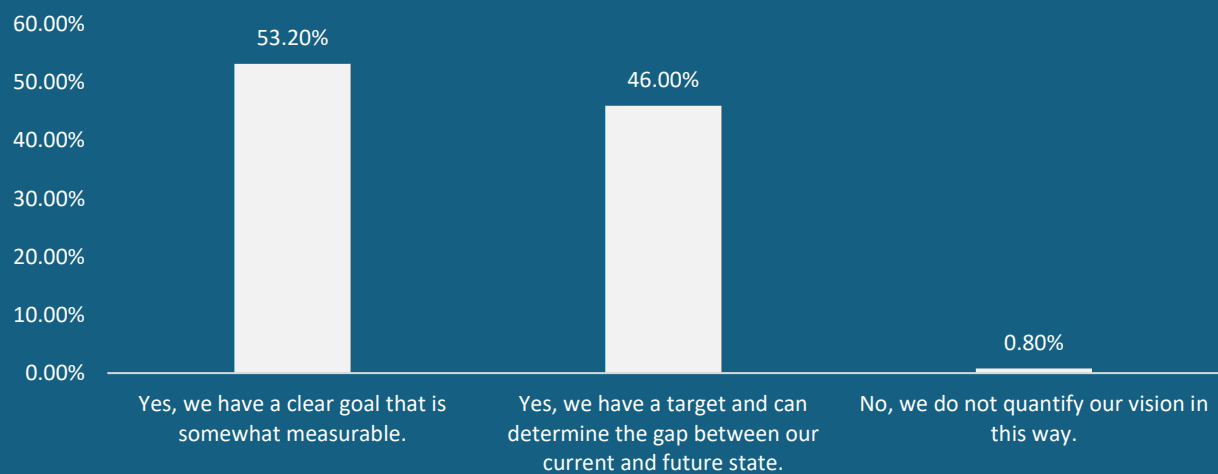
Q. How does your organisation primarily encourage employees to challenge norms and embrace industry disruption for long-term value creation?



KEY RESEARCH INSIGHTS



Q. Is your vision quantifiable and time-bound — can you accurately measure the gap between your current state and desired future state?

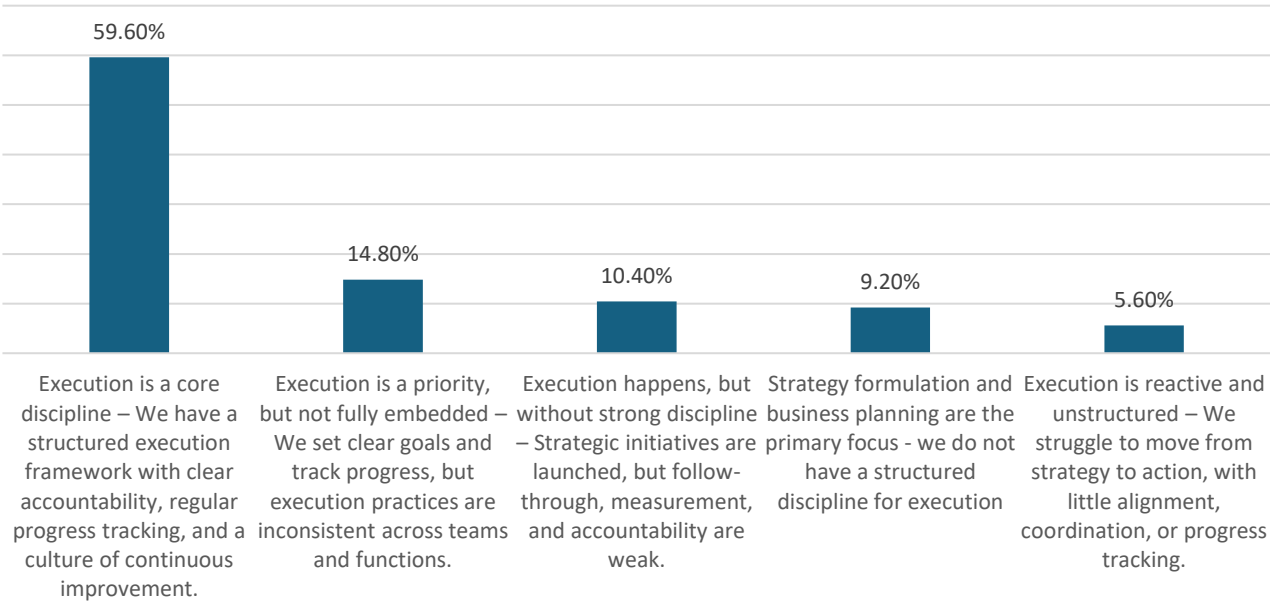


Clarity in Goal-Setting: **Only 46% of companies have a clearly measurable “value gap”** which quantifies the gap between their current performance and aspirational targets. Having a quantified value gap improves planning, enabling organisations to focus on execution and effect timely course corrections in consideration of market dynamics.

# STRONG FOCUS ON DISCIPLINED EXECUTION

Execution is pursued as a core discipline by 59.6%, and though it is prioritised by 14.8%, it is not fully embedded.

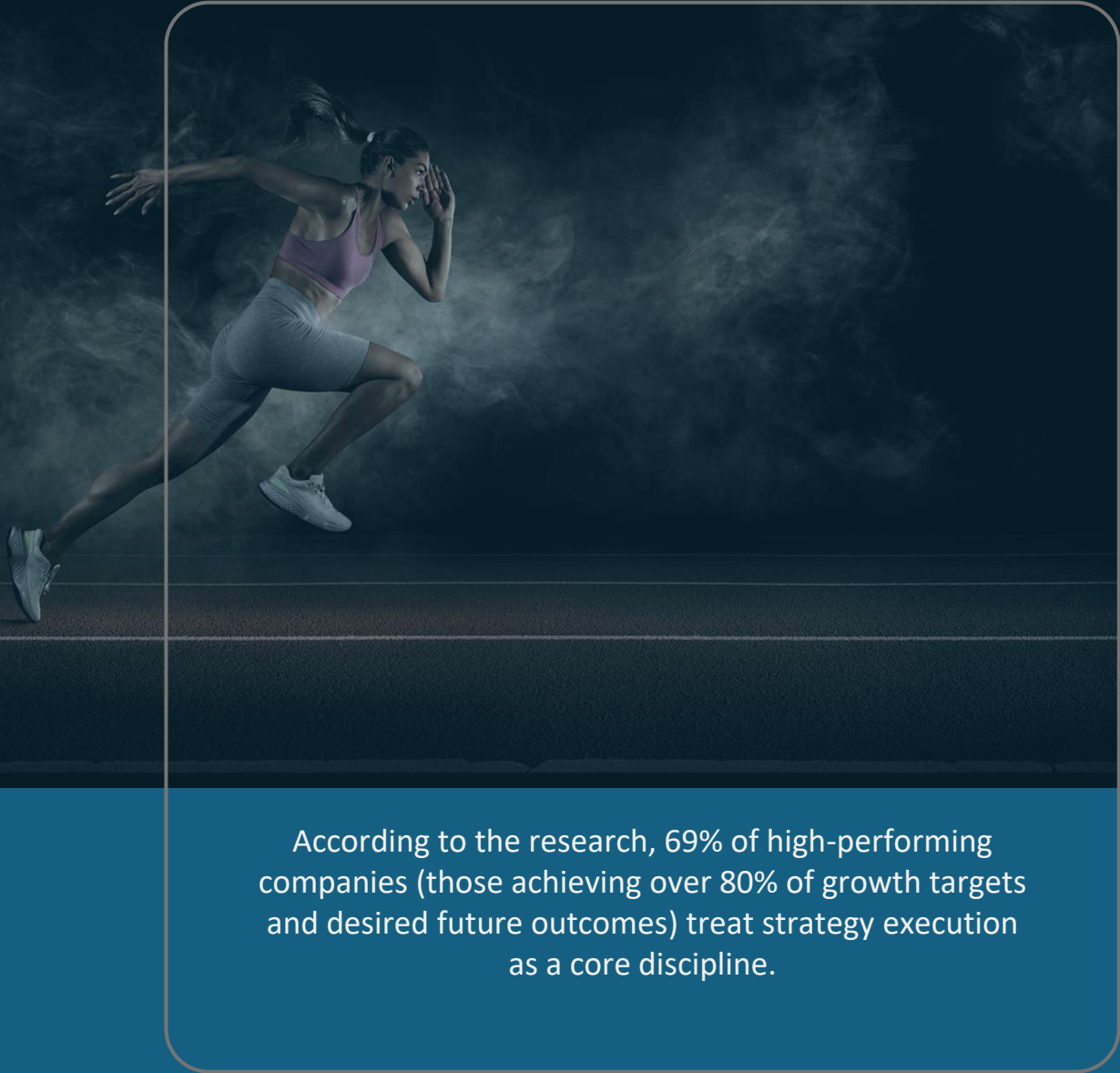
Which of the following, if any, best describes how intentional your organisation is about execution and embedding it as a disciplined process?



For 59.6% of companies, execution is a core discipline – they have structured frameworks with clear accountability, regular progress tracking and a culture of continuous improvement.



## DISCIPLINED EXECUTION ADVANTAGE



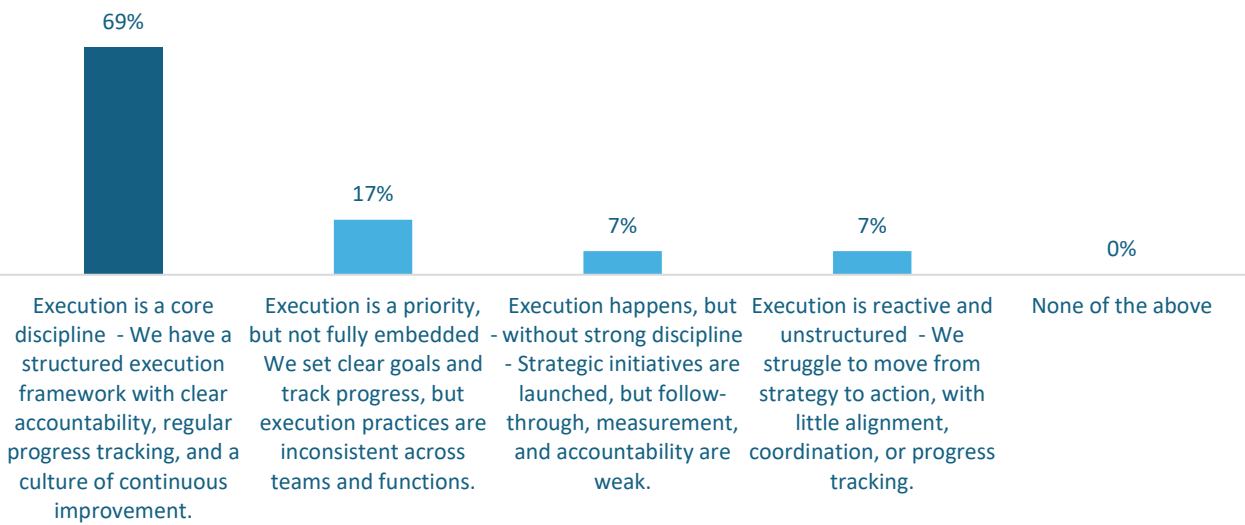
According to the research, 69% of high-performing companies (those achieving over 80% of growth targets and desired future outcomes) treat strategy execution as a core discipline.



# EXECUTION AS A CORE DISCIPLINE MATTERS

Companies that approach execution as a core discipline consistently outperformed.

## Achieved over 80% of growth targets



## Achieved 61-80% of growth targets



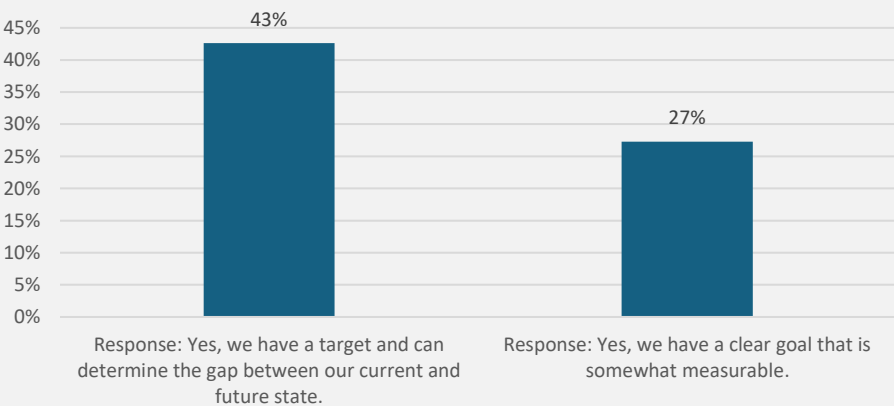
# MEASURING ENHANCES PRECISION



Of the companies that approach execution as a core discipline, 43% of those that have measurable value gap achieved at least 61% of their goals compared to 27% of those that had somewhat measurable goals.

## Achieved at least 61% of Target.

Execution is a core discipline - We have a structured execution framework with clear accountability, regular progress tracking, and a culture of continuous improvement.

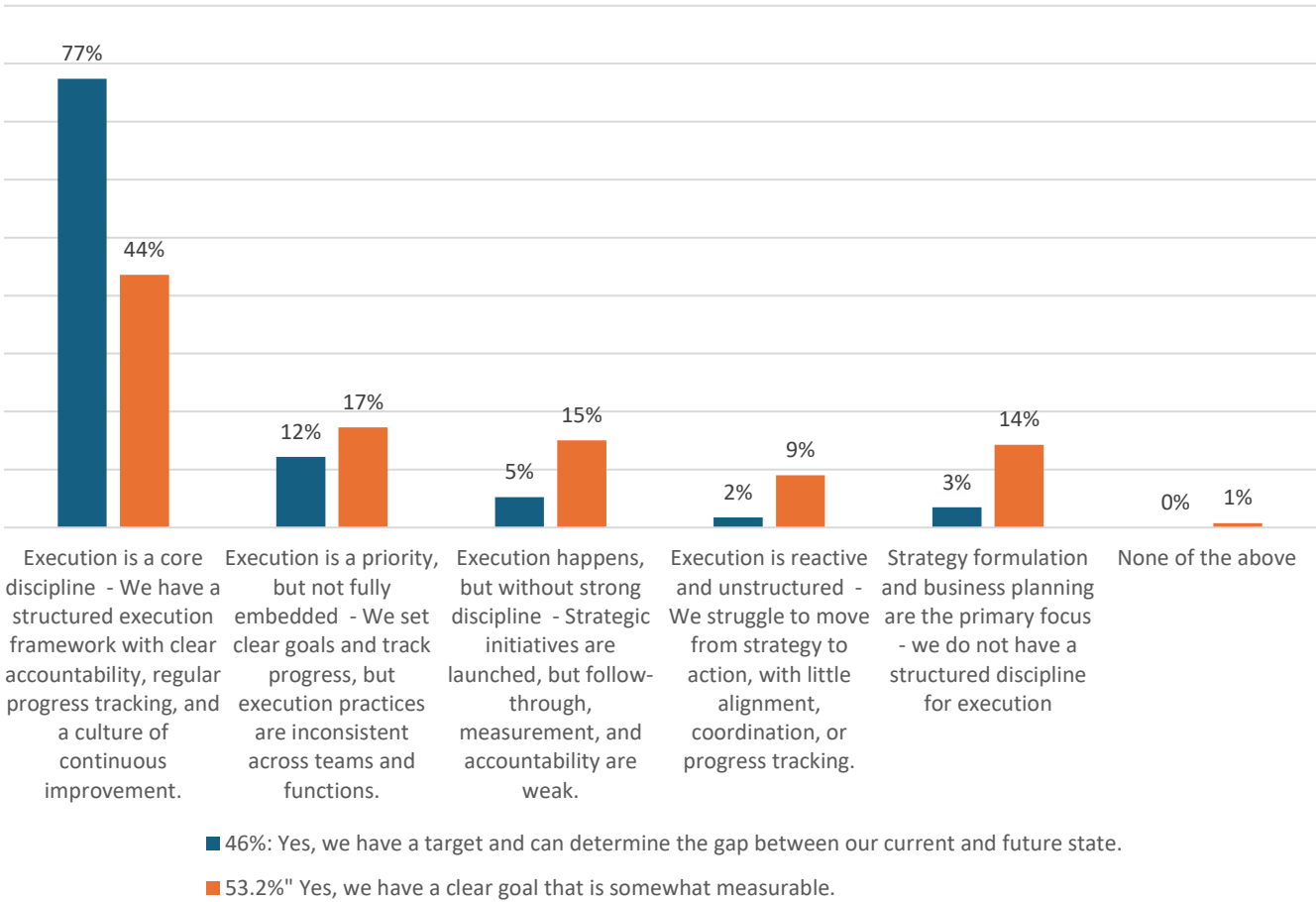


# KEY FINDINGS: VALUE GAP

77% of companies that approached execution as a core discipline also have clear a target and can accurately measure the gap between current state and desired future state.

Q. Is your vision quantifiable and time-bound — can you accurately measure the gap between your current state and desired future state?

Q: Which of the following, if any, best describes how intentional your organisation is about execution and embedding it



Definition: The value gap refers to the difference in performance level between an organisation’s current state and its desired future state, as defined by its strategic vision

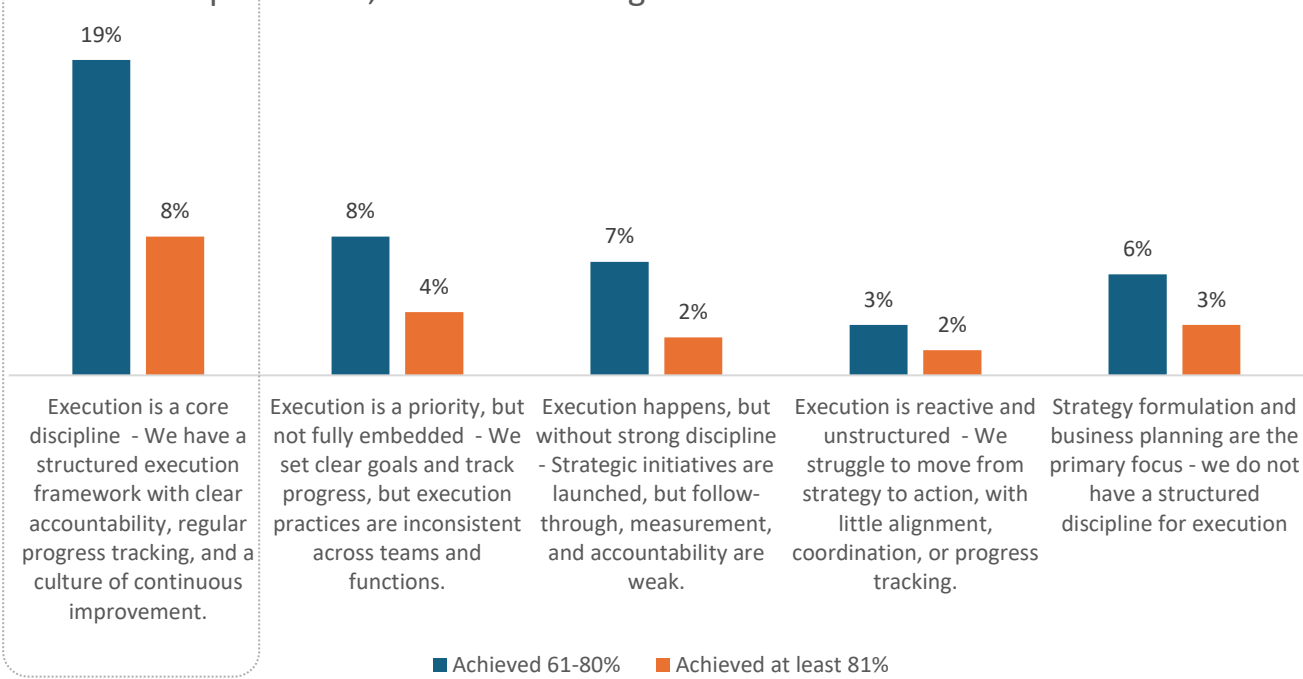
# A COMPARISON OF APPROACH AND PERFORMANCE

Response: Yes, we have a target and can determine the gap between our current and future state.



Number of respondents: 115

Response: Yes, we have a clear goal that is somewhat measurable.



Number of Respondents: 132

# A HIGHLIGHT OF KEY CHALLENGES



**INTERNALLY:** The research highlighted that a talent gap, weak alignment between operations and strategy, and a misaligned organisational culture are currently the top three barriers to strategy execution for UK enterprises.

## **FOUR external challenges were highlighted:**

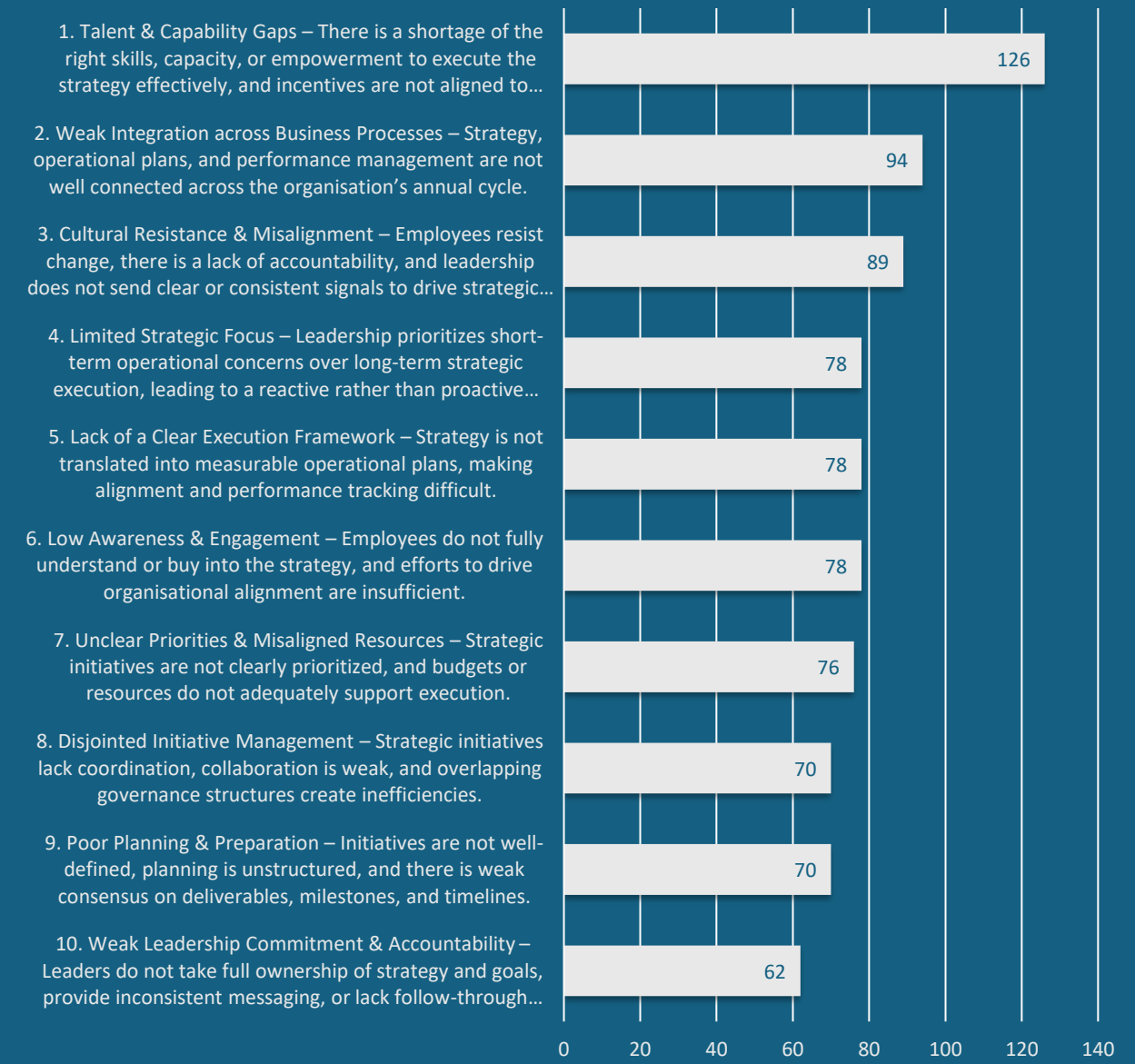
- **Macroeconomic Instability:** Inflation, monetary policy volatility, and currency risks weigh heavily on confidence and investment appetite.
- **Supply Chain Disruptions:** Global trade tensions and protectionism exacerbate operational risks.
- **Rising Operational Costs:** Higher taxes, compliance demands, and general cost inflation constrain strategic flexibility.
- **Cybersecurity:** potential disturbance to business and reputational damage.

Q: What were the key barriers to timely and effective execution of your strategy or agreed strategic actions? (Select up to 5)

**Over half of decision-makers (50.4%) identified talent and capability gaps as the primary barrier to effective strategy delivery.** This finding aligns with ManpowerGroup’s 2025 report, which highlighted that 76% of employers are struggling to fill roles due to a shortage of skilled talent.

Poor integration between strategy and operations inevitably creates a disconnect that hinders the achievement of aspirational goals, regardless of the effort invested.

The key barriers to timely and effective execution of strategy or agreed strategic actions



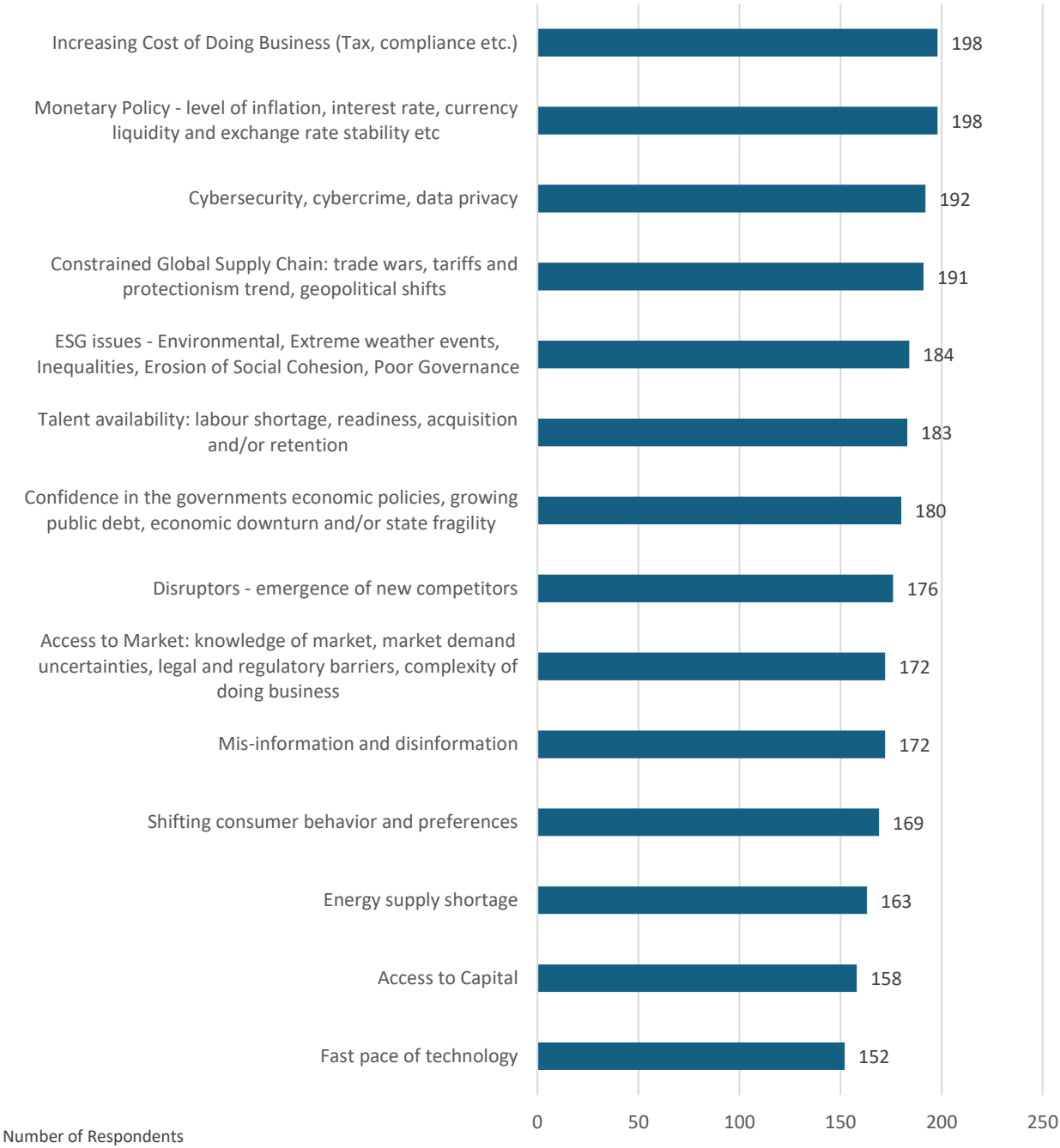
Number of Respondents



Businesses currently face pressing external challenges – all of which are threats to growth ambitions

Over 76% of surveyed business leaders cited global supply chain disruptions as a major growth threat, and 79.2% highlighted the rising cost of doing business and monetary policy instability as serious concerns.

Q. What critical external factors are threatening your growth ambition in your current markets?



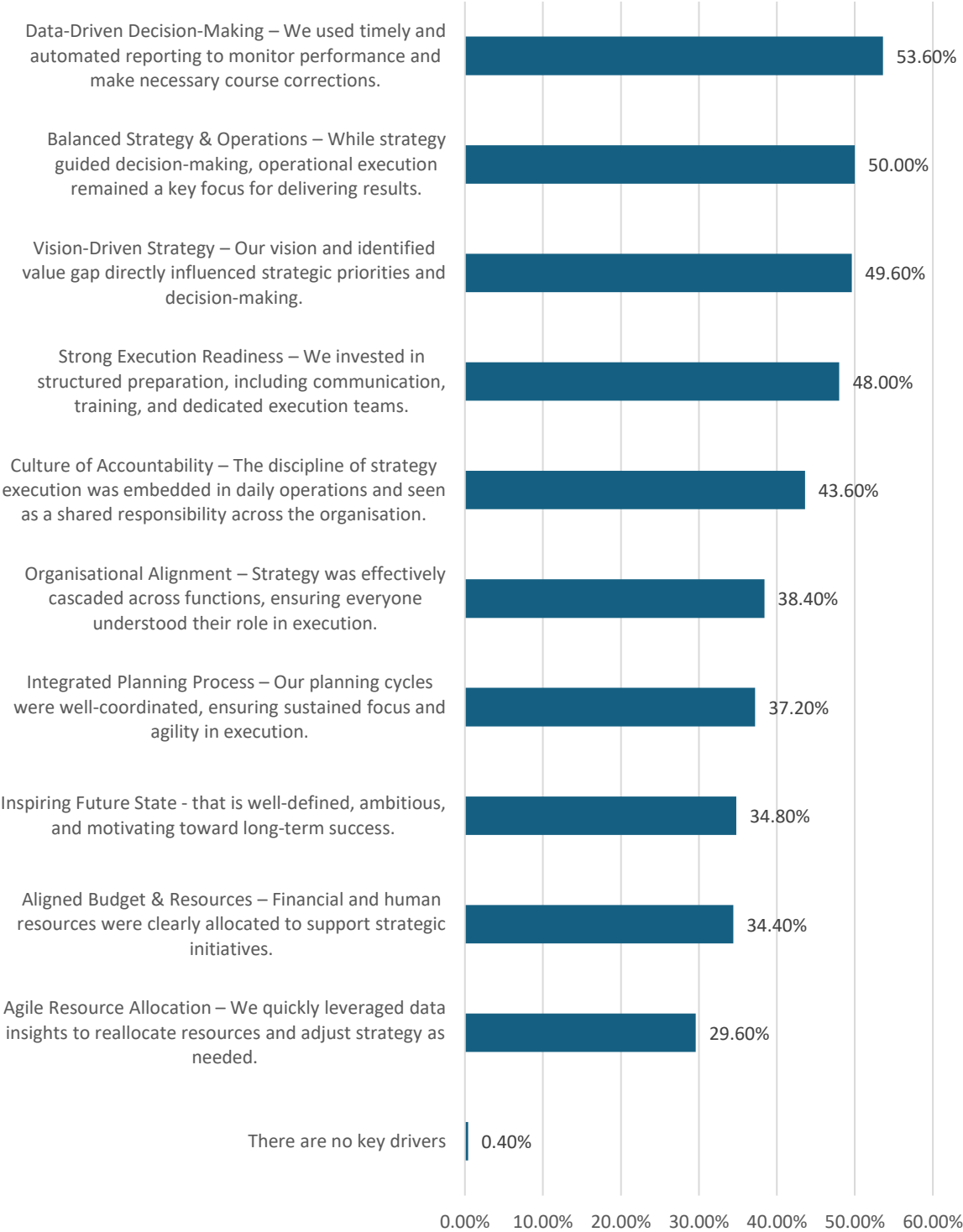


## THE TOP-5 CRITICAL DRIVERS OF SUCCESS

1. **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Real-time, automated reporting enhances performance tracking and enables timely adjustments.
2. **Balanced Strategy and Operations:** Alignment of strategic planning with operational excellence is key to delivering results.
3. **Vision-Driven Strategy:** Clear, measurable vision informs strategic priorities and guides decisions.
4. **Execution Readiness:** Structured preparation, including communication, training, and dedicated execution teams, boosts strategy delivery.
5. **Culture of Accountability:** Embedding execution discipline into daily operations ensures organisation-wide ownership of strategic outcomes.

# IDENTIFIED DRIVERS OF SUCCESS

Q. What were the key drivers of success in the execution of your strategy? (Select up to 5)



## CONCLUSION

While many organisations are setting bold growth targets, our findings highlight the ongoing challenge of execution. The research confirms organisations must embed execution as a core discipline and ensure that strategic goals are supported by clear, measurable plans.

This research underscores a simple yet powerful truth: **aspiration without disciplined execution is not enough.**

### Key takeaways:

- **Make the value gap measurable**  
Quantifying the gap between current and target performance enables sharper planning and execution focus.
- **Embed execution discipline**  
High-performing organisations treat execution as a core capability—driven by structure, accountability, and ongoing performance tracking.
- **Close the talent gap**  
Capability shortfalls remain the top barrier to delivery. Investing in the right skills and aligning teams is critical.
- **Bridge strategy and operations**  
Seamless integration ensures that strategic plans translate into results and enables faster responses to shifting conditions.
- **Ensure agility and readiness**  
Build the ability to course-correct in a timely manner, especially in response to external shocks and emerging risks.

## ABOUT SMP

Strategy Management Partners (SMP) is a niche professional services firm specializing in strategy, leadership development and performance improvement.

We are driven by the purpose to transform organizations and mindsets to drive positive and meaningful change for a thriving future.

At the heart of everything we do is partnership. We collaborate closely with our clients to uncover opportunities, amplify strengths, and turn strategy into action. Through sharp focus and disciplined execution, we help businesses unlock their full potential and achieve real, measurable outcomes.

We provide Consultancy & Advisory, Execution Accelerator Lab, Masterclasses and Executive Coaching.

We lead with expertise, deep know-how, and an open, collaborative mindset. We are sensitive to context, bold in imagining new possibilities, and deliberate in helping our clients confidently make focused, actionable, and impactful choices.

**25+ Years**  
*Our experts' average years of experience*

**TRAIL BLAZERS**  
*Leaders in Strategy Management & Execution*

**EMEA**  
*Practice in United Kingdom & Nigeria*

**200+ Engagements**  
*Clients across sectors & organisations*

**5000+**  
*Trained / Coached executives since 2008*

**> 90%**  
*Our clients consistently close Value Gap within 3 years*

## CONNECT

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