

Experienced leaders. Stalled projects. Why capable consultants get overlooked.

Jocelyn Robinson

You didn't get overlooked because your thinking wasn't good enough.

You got overlooked because the right decision-makers couldn't see your value clearly enough, quickly enough or in the terms that mattered to them.

That's a different problem. And it's a solvable one.

I've interviewed and surveyed over 30 consulting leaders across professional services and specialist businesses in Australia, trying to understand exactly where capable consultants lose opportunities they should be winning.

What emerged were 3 gaps. They show up consistently and they're rarely about capability.

And all of them are within your control.

What I didn't expect to find in the research was how consistently capable consultants were losing ground not to better consultants but to more commercially astute ones.

Consultants who understood the room.
Consultants who led with the business priority, not the solution.

Capability wasn't the deciding factor. Clarity was.

That's a confronting finding if you've built your reputation on the quality of your thinking.

Priority

A project that isn't connected to what the business is focused on right now isn't essential. It's optional. Optional gets pushed back.

Expertise

Your credentials got you to the table. They won't get the project prioritised. Leading with what you know without commercial relevance loses decision-maker attention before the case is even made.

Communication

The way you explain your project determines whether it gets approved. Decision-makers need to hear commercial value, not technical detail. Most consultants speak the wrong language.

The problem is rarely what you know. It's what you lead with.

Here's what I believe is really going on.

- 1 If your project isn't connected to a business priority, it won't move forward.
- 2 Your track record gets you considered. Your commercial judgement gets you chosen.
- 3 The commercial value of your project isn't as obvious as you think.

Truth 1. If your project isn't connected to a business priority, it won't move forward.

Before you get ready to pitch, always ask yourself: what's this business focused on right now?

Not what they need technically. Not what you can deliver.

What they are actively trying to solve, protect or grow. A project that connects to that gets considered. One that doesn't gets deferred.

Where the disconnect happens

Decision-makers are assessing more than whether you can deliver the project. They're assessing whether your approach connects to what matters to their business.

You start here

How does this work?

They start here

Why does this matter now

One side is focused on method, process and detail. The other is focused on cost, risk, growth, timing and customer impact.

That difference is where opportunities get lost.

"We moved our pitch to the business benefit of cost reduction. We now talk about climate impact as a secondary goal."

Ross Mahon, co-founder of C6 ESG

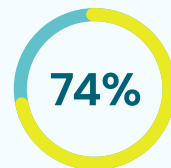
Ross's firm works with manufacturing and industrial businesses on energy reduction and sustainability. What they do didn't change. But that shift doubled their approval rate.

Arash Rashidian, Principal at Lighthouse Advisory, makes the point directly:

"In advisory work, the presenting problem is rarely the whole story. The consultant who takes time to reframe the problem before proposing a solution isn't just communicating better. They're doing something fundamentally more valuable."

That's a confronting shift. I know it because I've watched leaders who've built their reputation on the depth of their thinking resist it. But their thinking isn't the problem. Their commerciality is. Leading with your solution before connecting it to a business priority is what gets you overlooked.

What changes when you get it right



of respondents said decision-makers understand the value of a project faster when it's clearly connected to business outcomes. Not methodology, not credentials. The business outcome has to be front and centre.

When you lead with technical detail instead of business priorities, approvals slow down. When you align to a current business issue, buy-in follows. Commercial language has more positive influence on approvals than technical explanation.

The question isn't whether your project is good. It's whether the business can see why it matters right now.

Truth 2. Your track record gets you considered. Your commercial judgement gets you chosen.


Building a reputation takes years. The relationships, the referrals, the track record of delivery. Most experienced consultants have this solid foundation.


And yet that reputation doesn't guarantee a project moves forward. It earns you a conversation. What happens in that conversation is where many capable consultants give away ground they shouldn't.

"What clients value most is a trusted partner who understands the problem, not just someone with the credentials to solve it."

Survey respondent

Where experience works against you

 **Consultants often open with:**
"Why I am qualified to say this"

 **Decision-makers are listening for:**
"Why this matters to the business right now"

When a conversation opens with detailed background and proof points, attention is already lost.

Rachel Woodhatch-Field has spent 20 years working in global HR leadership roles watching this play out from the decision-maker's side.

"There's a difference between being credible and being truly trusted. Credible can just mean you're safe, reliable, the go-to person who can execute and transact. That's different from the kind of partnership where you're really valued, chosen and respected over the longer term for your collaboration, contribution and strategic alignment."

Rachel Woodhatch-Field, Senior HR Executive

Trust isn't established through credentials alone. It's built through demonstrating that you understand the business, its priorities and what's at stake. A consultant who shows sound commercial judgement alongside their expertise builds trust faster than one who leads with a track record.

In my experience, getting overlooked comes down to how well the consultant knows the world their client is operating in right now. Not their service. Not their track record. The client's world.

What gets you chosen

When asked what matters most in moving a consulting project forward:



of respondents said trust and credibility.



said clear communication.

That order matters. Trust and credibility get you considered. Clear communication gets you understood. Rachel's point is that the consultants who get chosen demonstrate they understand the business, not just the brief.

Credibility opens the door. Commercial judgement is what gets you chosen.

Truth 3. The commercial value of your project isn't as obvious as you think.

Your value is clear to you. Making it clear to them is your job.

This is where capable consultants lose momentum. The project is well-considered. The credentials are solid. The relevance is clear... to you.

But if the commercial value isn't immediately apparent to the decision-maker, the opportunity goes on pause. Or it goes to someone else.

Where the message breaks down

"Business leaders don't care about a more efficient cash forecasting process. They care about making quick decisions that impact their customers and their team, the things the business has already committed to."

Survey respondent

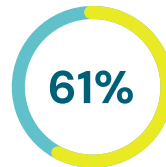
The detail of the project doesn't change. How its commercial value is positioned for the decision-makers is what shifts everything. Most consultants never make that shift.

"Too many specialists move forward without explaining the roadmap, and some move without one at all. The big picture always matters more to business leaders than the detail in the weeds."

Survey respondent

This is the adjustment I see capable consultants resist most. Their instinct is to explain more, add more proof, build a stronger case. But decision-makers aren't asking for more. They're asking for relevance.

What the research showed



61% of respondents said the most common mistake is not adapting the message for the audience. That's a communication problem, not a capability one.

Decision-makers don't always choose the most capable option. They support the option they can understand, justify internally and move forward with confidence.

"Specialists need to express their thinking directly in terms of value and to a decision-maker that almost always means profit or saving. This often doesn't match what the technical leader thinks value means."

Survey respondent

What communicating for the audience looks like

The projects that get approved lead with a problem the client is already trying to solve, express the outcome in commercial terms and give enough context without overloading. They make the path to a decision obvious.

If the commercial value of your project isn't clear to the person deciding, it doesn't matter how expert the thinking behind it is. That's not a capability problem. It's a communication one. And it's entirely solvable.

Where the difference is made

If a project has stalled or isn't getting the recognition it deserves, the answer is rarely more detail or more credentials.

My research shows the same problem showing up three different ways.

- Projects disconnected from business priorities.
- Expertise that isn't combined with in commercial awareness.
- Value that isn't being explained in terms the decision-maker can act on.

What I've seen is that these aren't difficult concepts. The gap is in the preparation. Most consultants walk in knowing their service. The ones who win walk in also knowing the business.

1 Connect the project to a business priority before you meet with the decision-maker

Before you start a pitch, take time to answer these questions:

What problem does this solve? What opportunities does it enable? What happens if it isn't done?

"Most proposals explain what the project delivers. The ones that get approved also explain what it costs the business to do nothing."

Survey respondent

2 Know the business before you pitch it

Commercial judgement isn't something you demonstrate inside a pitch. It's something you build before you turn up.

The consultants who win consistently are the ones who understand the business before they walk in. The priorities, the pressures and what success looks like to the decision-maker sitting across from them.

"A project presented with the wrong priority will stall every time."

Survey respondent

3 Translate your value

Explain the project in language the decision-maker uses, not yours.

"We had a simple test. A 1-minute pitch to the C-suite. If they could understand it, the project passed, no matter how specialised or complex it was. If it couldn't be explained in that time, it wasn't ready."

Survey respondent

If the people you most want to work with can't understand the value of what you're offering in that time, your pitch isn't ready.

That's not a judgement. It's a useful test.

What this comes down to

The consultants I've watched get this right aren't the loudest in the market or the most visible on LinkedIn.

They're the ones who know their client's world well enough to make their expertise impossible to overlook.

That's not a personal brand problem. It's not a content problem.

It's a commercial positioning problem. And it's entirely within your control.

If your projects are well-considered but not getting the recognition they deserve, that's where I start. The gap is commercial positioning. How your value is being explained, to whom and at what point in the conversation.

If you want to go further

The consultants who are hardest to overlook have two things working for them.

They communicate their value clearly in the room. And they've built a body of thinking that means the room already knows them before they walk in.

The first is what this paper is about. The second is a separate conversation, but they're not unrelated.

I build thought leadership programs for consulting leaders doing exactly that. I work with a small number of clients on this, no more than three at any given time.

55% of decision-makers use thought leadership to vet the leaders they're considering working with*. The ones already building that presence aren't waiting to be noticed. They're making it impossible to overlook them.

*Edelman-LinkedIn 2025 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report

About this research

This perspective draws on interviews and survey responses from over 30 leaders across consulting, professional services and specialist businesses in Australia. Their willingness to engage honestly and share specific examples from their own experience made this paper possible.

About Jocelyn Robinson

I work with founders and consulting leaders on the gap between capability and commercial recognition. My expertise spans market visibility, positioning and messaging. This is the work that helps capable leaders and businesses become easier to understand, trust and choose.

And I create thought leadership programs for consulting leaders who want to build industry authority in their own right.

The two are connected. Consulting leaders who communicate their commercial value clearly win more opportunities. The ones who build a thought leadership program become the voice their market turns to before they're even in the room.

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The views expressed in this paper are Jocelyn's own, informed by her research and experience working with leaders across consulting and professional services in Australia.