



AI Is Transforming Professional Services – and Raising the Stakes for Strategic Leadership

What AI Can Do, What Leadership Must Still Own, and How Mastering Strategy Brings the Two Together

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing professional services. Work that once required hours of research, analysis, drafting and synthesis can now be completed much more quickly.

AI can review large volumes of information, identify patterns, summarize documents, generate scenarios, develop initial recommendations, draft reports and presentations, and track actions arising from meetings.

These developments will affect consulting, accounting, law, executive education, leadership development and other knowledge-intensive services. Any professional services firm that assumes its traditional methods and business model will remain untouched is taking a considerable risk.

The change is no longer theoretical. Thomson Reuters reports that organization-wide use of generative AI in professional services nearly doubled from 22% in 2025 to 40% in 2026. More than 80% of current users work with it at least weekly, and two-thirds of corporate respondents want their outside professional firms to use AI. At the same time, many professionals expect AI to disrupt traditional roles, billing models and sources of revenue.

That concern is justified. But it is important to distinguish between the professional work AI can perform and the leadership responsibilities it cannot assume.

■ *Where AI Will Change Professional Services*

Much of the traditional professional-services model has depended on an information and expertise advantage. Advisers could find, interpret and apply knowledge that clients could not readily access or use themselves. They also brought specialized experience, frameworks and judgment to the issues clients faced.



AI is quickly reducing the advantage professionals once had in accessing and gathering information.

It can already help professionals and clients:

- gather and organize information
- summarize research and documents
- identify trends and patterns
- compare alternatives
- develop preliminary scenarios
- generate strategic options
- prepare first drafts of plans and reports
- develop objectives and performance measures
- create presentations and communications
- document meetings and track follow-up actions

The implications are significant:

- Clients will be less willing to pay premium fees for work that AI can complete quickly.
- Assignments based largely on research, content production and recommendations derived from widely available information and familiar frameworks will become more difficult to differentiate.
- Hourly billing will come under pressure when technology substantially reduces the time required.
- Training that primarily transfers information will lose value when the same information is available immediately from an AI assistant.



Facilitation will also be affected. AI can generate agendas, discussion questions, exercises, summaries and action lists. It can organize participant input and identify common themes. A facilitator whose value lies primarily in presenting content or recording a discussion will face increasing competition from technology.

That said, AI will not eliminate the need for facilitation, but it will change what clients should expect from a facilitator. Less value will come from presenting information, creating agendas, activities and discussion questions, or documenting what was said. More value will come from helping leaders surface disagreements, challenge assumptions, address difficult trade-offs, navigate organizational dynamics and turn discussion into genuine decisions and commitments. In Mastering Strategy, the facilitator's role is not simply to deliver the material. It is to help the leadership team do the strategic work that the material is designed to support.

That shift—from delivering workshop content to helping leadership teams do difficult strategic work—is central to the value of Mastering Strategy. If the program depended mainly on concepts, frameworks, workshop materials, reports or facilitator presentations, AI would reduce much of what made it distinctive. Its value lies instead in the structured work, skilled facilitation and shared discipline that help an intact leadership team make better choices, build agreement and follow through under real organizational conditions.

■ *What Leadership Must Still Own*

Strategy is not simply an analytical exercise. Analysis matters. Information matters. Frameworks matter. But strategy ultimately requires leaders to make choices together under conditions of uncertainty.

- AI can identify possible choices. Leaders must decide which choices the organization will make.
- AI can evaluate risks and trade-offs and may eventually make some decisions within limits established by the organization. Leaders must determine those limits and remain accountable for the consequences.
- AI can recommend priorities and may increasingly help determine how competing options should be ranked. Leaders must decide whether to accept those



recommendations and remain accountable for what the organization chooses to pursue or stop doing.

- AI can show that resources are spread too thinly. Leaders must decide which projects will lose funding, attention or executive sponsorship.
- AI can propose operating models and processes. Leaders must change how they and others behave within them.
- AI can prepare strategic communications. Leaders must ensure that their actions reinforce rather than contradict the message.
- AI can track commitments and flag missed actions. Leaders must create accountability when commitments are repeatedly not met.

AI may eventually perform an increasing share of strategic analysis, coordination and decision support. Even as AI assumes a greater role in making and executing decisions, the leadership team remains responsible for deciding where that authority should be delegated, establishing the safeguards and accepting accountability for the results.

These are not solely information-processing problems. They involve judgment, choice, behaviour, relationships, power, trust and collective responsibility.

That is the territory Mastering Strategy is designed to address.

The program works with intact leadership teams because strategy succeeds or fails through how those leaders think, decide, align and act together. Its objective is not simply to give individual executives more knowledge. It is to develop the shared strategic discipline required to turn that knowledge into organizational results.

AI can strengthen that work. It does not eliminate the need for it.

■ *AI May Make Strategic Leadership More Important*

The same forces changing professional services are also changing the organizations those firms serve.

AI gives organizations access to more information, more analysis and more options. It also allows them to act more quickly.



But more possibilities do not automatically produce better choices.

In some organizations, AI will increase the number of ideas, initiatives and proposed investments competing for attention. Leaders may be able to develop options faster than they can evaluate them. Different functions may adopt different tools and pursue disconnected opportunities. Employees may begin using AI without clear direction about where it should be applied, how it should be managed or which organizational priorities it should support.

The result can be more activity without greater strategic coherence.

Recent research points to a consistent pattern. AI adoption is widespread, but enterprise-level value remains much less common. McKinsey found that 88% of respondents reported regular AI use in at least one business function, yet nearly two-thirds said their organizations had not begun scaling it across the enterprise. Only 39% reported an enterprise-level earnings impact. Organizations obtaining the strongest results were more likely to redesign workflows, establish clear leadership ownership and determine when AI outputs required human validation.

Deloitte found that only about one-third of surveyed organizations were using AI to transform their businesses deeply. Many were improving productivity without redesigning the underlying work, roles or operating model. Insufficient workforce skills remained the most frequently identified barrier to integrating AI into existing workflows.

BCG similarly found that organizations are adopting AI faster than they are changing the way work is organized and managed. Its research concluded that lasting value depends more on having a clear strategy than on simply giving employees access to additional tools. Half of respondents also said their organizations lacked clear governance for work shared between people and AI.

The obstacle is therefore not simply access to the technology. It is deciding where and why to use it, redesigning work where necessary, creating the conditions required to capture value and maintaining clear human responsibility for the consequences.

Those are strategic leadership responsibilities.



■ *How Mastering Strategy Incorporates AI*

Mastering Strategy is not an AI training program, nor does it treat AI as a separate technology topic. It incorporates AI into the strategic work addressed across all six modules, without changing the fundamental purpose of those modules.

Module 1: Making Strategy Work

This module establishes strategy as a leadership discipline and helps leadership teams understand the conditions that can support or undermine its success. Participants examine the assumptions underlying the organization's strategy and the internal and external forces that may affect its ability to produce results.

AI is considered as one of those forces. Leadership teams explore how it may affect customers, competitors, products and services, costs, workforce requirements, operating economics and the assumptions on which the current strategy is based.

Where AI is strategically significant, the team considers what opportunities, risks or challenges it creates and what those implications mean for the organization.

Module 2: Thinking Like Strategists: Insight, Foresight and Decision Discipline

This module strengthens the leadership team's ability to gather insight, look ahead, challenge assumptions and make sound judgments under conditions of uncertainty.

Participants examine how to distinguish important signals from noise, test different interpretations, consider alternative futures and avoid overconfidence in the information available to them.

AI is introduced as one tool that can support this work through research, environmental scanning, trend identification, scenario development and the generation of alternative explanations and options.

Participants also consider how to assess AI-generated material critically, including questions of accuracy, source quality, bias, uncertainty, confidentiality and the limits of the information on which the output is based.



Module 3: Enabling Strategy to Work

This module examines the organizational conditions required to turn strategic direction into results, including leadership practices, governance, structure, resources, capabilities, incentives and cross-functional coordination.

AI provides one important example of why those conditions matter. Leadership teams consider what would be required to use AI effectively, including appropriate data, technology, decision rights, workforce skills, risk controls and clarity about where human review is needed.

The module also helps teams distinguish among improving an existing task, augmenting an employee and redesigning an end-to-end process to create greater value.

Module 4: Making Clear, Disciplined Choices

This module helps leadership teams establish priorities, evaluate alternatives, allocate resources and translate strategic direction into clear objectives, initiatives and performance measures.

AI can help teams generate options, identify potential consequences, suggest evaluation criteria and stress-test assumptions.

The leadership team must still determine what matters most, which risks it will accept, what it will fund, what it will stop doing and which trade-offs it is prepared to make.

AI can improve the quality and range of choices considered. Leaders remain accountable for the decisions made.

Module 5: Mobilizing for Execution

This module addresses how leaders align people, functions and systems behind the organization's strategic choices.

AI-related change is one current example of the challenges involved. It may alter roles, responsibilities, skills, workflows and performance expectations. Leadership teams consider how to build understanding, address employee concerns, clarify how work will be divided between people and AI, and coordinate action across functions.

The emphasis remains on the leadership behaviours, communication, trust and participation required to turn strategic decisions into coordinated action.



Module 6: Making Strategy Stick

This module focuses on the routines, information, accountability and learning required to sustain execution over time.

AI can strengthen that work by consolidating information, tracking actions, monitoring performance, identifying possible warning signals, preparing summaries for review meetings and helping leaders revisit the assumptions behind their choices.

But automated reporting is not the same as accountability. Leaders must still review the information, challenge explanations, make corrective decisions and follow through.

AI can strengthen the systems used to monitor and support execution. Leaders must still use those systems to make decisions, enforce accountability and improve results.

■ *Five Principles Guide the Program's Use of AI*

Across the six modules, Mastering Strategy applies five consistent principles.

- **First, AI supports thinking but does not own the decision.**
It can organize, accelerate, expand and challenge thinking. Accountability remains with the leadership team.
- **Second, important outputs must be verified.**
Facts, sources, assumptions and conclusions are reviewed rather than accepted because they were produced quickly or presented confidently.
- **Third, confidential information must be protected.**
Organizations should use approved tools and follow their own privacy, security, legal and intellectual-property requirements.
- **Fourth, human responsibility must be explicit.**
Leadership teams should determine which activities AI can perform, which require human review, which decisions should remain entirely human and who remains accountable for the outcomes.



- **Fifth, value matters more than usage.**

The objective is not to maximize the number of people using AI. It is to produce better decisions, stronger performance and more consistent execution.

■ *The Future Is Not Human or Artificial*

The most productive question is not whether AI or human leaders will do the strategic work.

It is how the two should work together.

AI will become increasingly capable. It will perform more analysis, produce more sophisticated options and carry out more routine and multi-step work. Professional services firms and leadership-development providers must adjust accordingly.

But organizations will continue to require leaders who can interpret uncertain conditions, exercise judgment, establish priorities, make difficult trade-offs, align people around shared choices and accept responsibility for results.

Mastering Strategy is designed to strengthen that collective leadership capability.

AI will make information, analysis and strategic options easier to produce. It will not remove the need for leaders to make choices, accept trade-offs, build alignment and remain accountable for results.

The organizations that benefit most from AI will not necessarily be those that use it most widely. It will be those that combine its capabilities with disciplined strategic leadership.

That is the capability Mastering Strategy is designed to build.