

THE
ARGONAUTS
SERIES

V | M | G



Seven Creative Business Strategies

SHAKING UP THE GROWTH JOURNEY

From traditional player to outlier with creativity

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FOREWORD



The more there are constraints,
the more creativity is required.

This observation, shared by one of our participants after the inaugural Argonauts Series breakfast, perfectly captures the essence of what we discovered that morning in May.

When the world feels uncertain, when markets shift beneath our feet, when regulatory landscapes evolve faster than we can adapt—that’s precisely when leaders must dig deeper and think differently.

I’ve spent my career navigating the intersection of strategy and creativity, from the analytical rigor of Macquarie Group and PwC to the dynamic world of client solutions at VMG.

What struck me most about our gathering of 25 senior leaders wasn’t just the diversity of their backgrounds—finance, technology, energy, automotive, real estate, and more—but their shared recognition that traditional approaches aren’t enough anymore.

The ancient Argonauts didn’t set sail because the seas were calm. They embarked because the prize was worth the perilous journey.

Our modern-day Argonauts understand this same truth: sustainable growth demands courage to venture into uncharted waters, wisdom to assemble diverse teams, and creativity to overcome obstacles that have no precedent.

What you’ll find in these pages isn’t a theoretical framework dressed up as insight. These are real stories from real leaders who’ve faced the music—some hitting the right notes, others learning from discordant moments.

From Afterpay’s audacious early listing to Spriggy’s brilliant pivot toward parents, from Macquarie’s contrarian philosophy to the hard-learned lessons of scaling too fast or too slow.



The conversations that morning were remarkable not just for what was said, but for what was shared—the candid admissions, the “we should have done this differently” moments, the insights that only come from being in the arena.

As one CEO noted, it’s about “building an abbey rather than just chipping at a rock”—ensuring everyone in your organisation understands the bigger vision.

This white paper represents more than a collection of business case studies. It’s a manifesto for leaders who refuse to accept that “this is how we’ve always done it” as a valid strategy. In an age where artificial intelligence is reshaping everything we thought we knew about work, creativity, and competitive advantage, the need for adaptive, bold leadership has never been more critical.

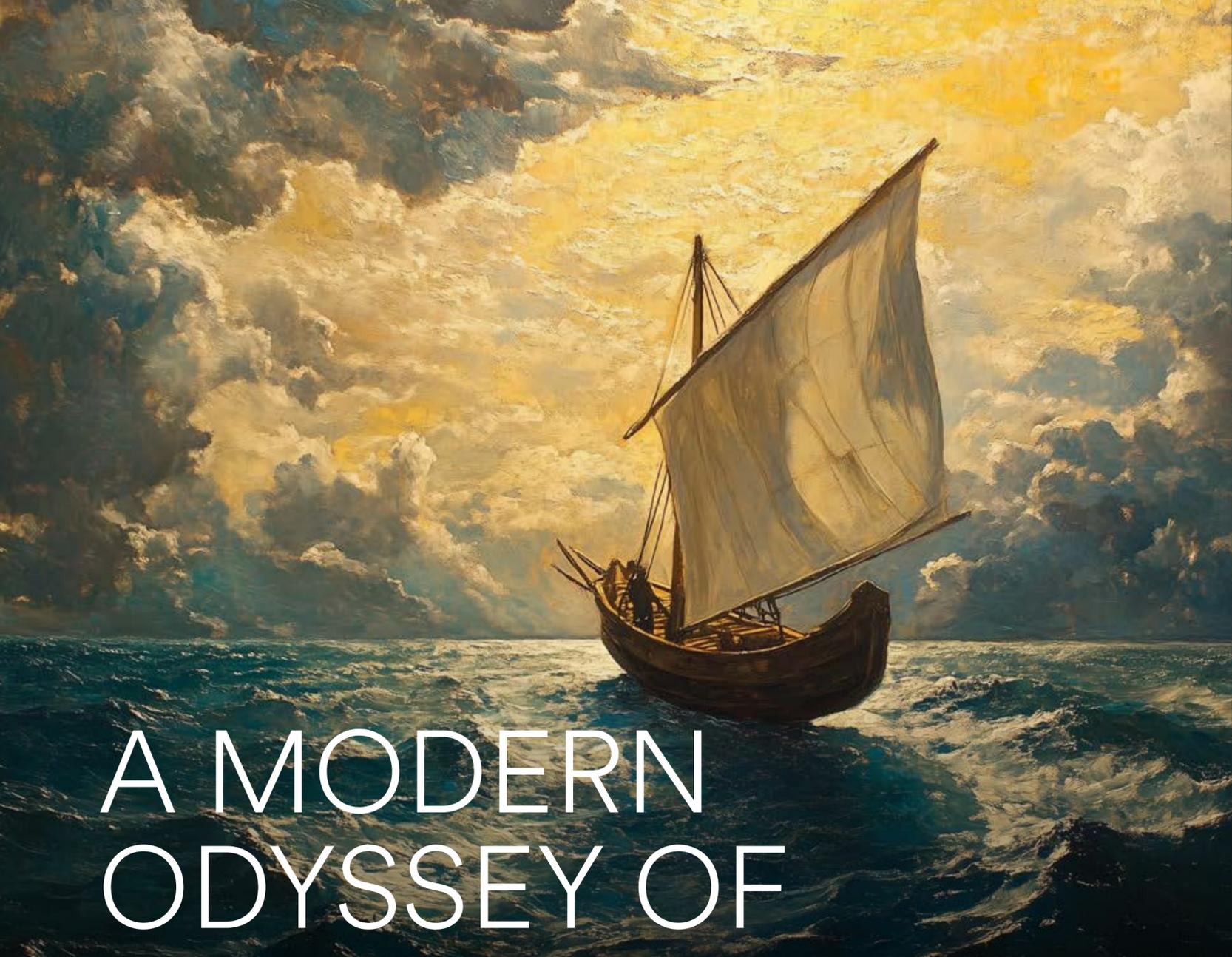
The Golden Fleece our modern Argonauts seek isn’t mythical—it’s the sustainable growth that creates lasting value, meaningful employment, and positive impact. It’s the kind of success that isn’t just measured in quarterly results but in the legacy we create.

I invite you to join us on this journey. The seas ahead may be uncertain, but as our breakfast demonstrated, we’re not sailing alone.



Olivier Vojetta

Client Solutions Director
& Lead of Consulting Practice,
Yakkazoo



A MODERN ODYSSEY OF

BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

In ancient Greek mythology, Jason and his Argonauts embarked on a quest for the Golden Fleece—a symbol of success achieved through courage, skill and collaboration.

Our modern-day Argonauts—senior leaders from diverse sectors—came together not for mythical treasure but to explore a different prize: **sustainable growth in a world defined by uncertainty.**

On May 7, 2025, at the QT Sydney, VMG hosted **The Argonauts Series – Business Leaders’ Breakfast.** This gathering of 25 senior leaders from ten industries was more than just a networking event. It was an exchange of bold ideas and hard-won insights on growth, strategy, and creativity.

Just as Jason’s Argonauts were a team of innovators, builders, poets, healers, warriors and many more, our participants brought diverse perspectives—from technology to finance, energy to automotive via real estate and public sector—illustrating that the true engines of growth are diversity and collaboration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The inaugural event of the Argonauts Series by VMG brought together 25 senior leaders from ten industries on May 7, 2025, to explore what it really takes to achieve sustainable growth in today's volatile landscape.

What emerged wasn't just another business networking event—it was a masterclass in how successful leaders navigate uncertainty, challenge conventions, and create lasting value.

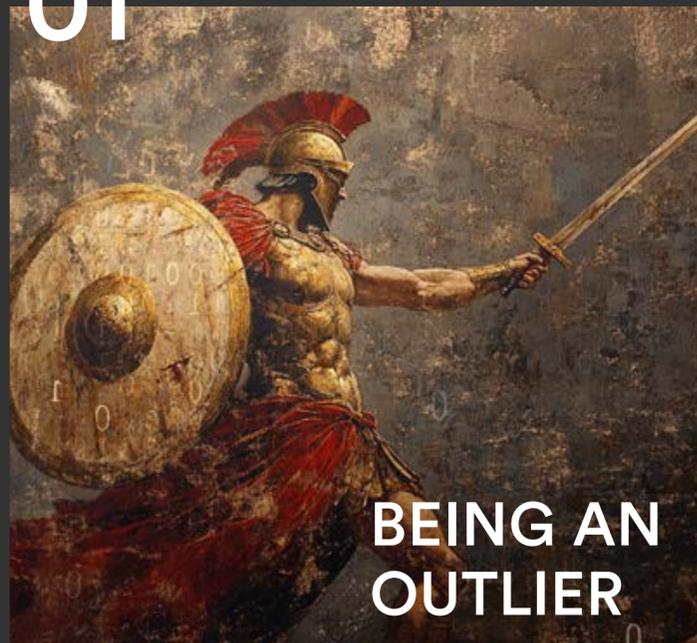
Our discussions revealed that sustainable growth rests on three fundamental pillars, each as essential as the crew members Jason assembled for his legendary quest.



“Creativity is a business imperative because if you don’t embrace it, your competitors will.”

– Nimesh Shah, ReadyTech

01



**BEING AN
OUTLIER**

THE COURAGE TO CHALLENGE CONVENTION

The most successful companies we examined—from Afterpay’s audacious early listing with just \$500k revenue to Macquarie’s contrarian investment philosophy—succeeded precisely because they dared to be different. They didn’t follow industry playbooks; they rewrote them.

As Karen Chan from Perennial Partners observed, “Creativity comes in many guises, and you’ve got to have creativity at all levels within an organisation.” This isn’t about being different for the sake of it—it’s about strategic differentiation that creates genuine competitive advantage.

02



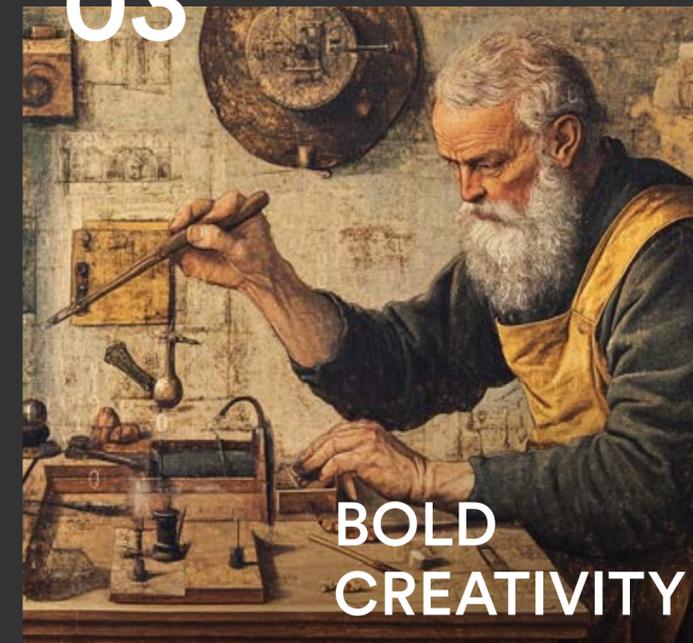
**MODERN
LEADERSHIP**

ADAPTIVE NAVIGATION IN TURBULENT WATERS

Today’s leaders must be part strategist, part psychologist, part futurist. The adaptive leadership model we identified goes beyond traditional command-and-control structures. It’s about building resilient teams that can pivot when markets shift, as demonstrated by Spriggy’s brilliant pivot from targeting millennials to focusing on parents, or Xero’s Rod Drury’s self-aware leadership transitions.

As James Posnett, General Manager for Listings at the ASX noted, “With innovation, we’re by nature pushing boundaries, and some people are not going to like it. It’s about managing all those different stakeholders.”

03



**BOLD
CREATIVITY**

INNOVATION AS STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

Creativity isn’t just for marketing departments—it’s a business-wide discipline that drives everything from financing models to operational efficiency. Airtasker’s media-for-equity approach and ReadyTech’s disciplined product expansion strategy show how creative thinking can unlock growth opportunities that traditional approaches miss.



These pillars were brought to life through seven detailed case studies, from Afterpay’s transformation from startup to \$40 billion acquisition target, to the cautionary tale of Friendster’s early innovation without scalable execution. Each story reinforced a central truth: in an age of artificial intelligence and accelerating change, the companies that thrive are those that combine human insight with technological capability, strategic vision with tactical agility.

Perhaps most importantly, our Argonauts understood that sustainable growth isn’t just about quarterly results—it’s about building organisations that create lasting value for all stakeholders. In a world where constraints are multiplying and uncertainty is the only certainty, the leaders who succeed are those who view these challenges not as barriers, but as catalysts for creative solutions.

The Golden Fleece of sustainable growth remains within reach for those bold enough to chart new courses, wise enough to assemble diverse teams, and creative enough to turn constraints into competitive advantages.



THE STATE OF
THE WORLD

AND



THE POWER OF
DIVERSE EXPERTISE
TO SUCCEED IN IT

THE GOLDEN FLEECE A BOLD VISION THAT GALVANISED HIS TEAM

Jason's mission to retrieve the Golden Fleece was high-risk, high-reward. A seemingly impossible goal that could secure his legitimacy and power.

For modern businesses, this mirrors the bold strategic goals we need to set ourselves.

If you intend to enter a new market, disrupt an industry, launch a revolutionary product, or lead a digital transformation project, you are following in Jason's footsteps.

Jason had an ambitious vision, one that in selling to his supporters provided the foundations to galvanise his team and the stakeholders he needed to achieve that goal.

Such high-risk ventures require strong leadership, clarity of purpose, and belief in the mission. The environment we launch our mission into matters, but also there is no right or wrong time to start.



What matters is **being able to outline that mission to the team and balance the confidence and self-belief** they need to hear with the analysis and insights that tell us **‘this has a chance’**.

THE ARGONAUTS

DIVERSE HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS ARE CRUCIAL

Jason didn't do it alone, he assembled a crew of heroes, each with unique strengths. He didn't just pick the strongest; he picked a diverse team capable of facing different challenges.

Leaders do this everyday but those that succeed do so because they look beyond the CV, the degrees or years in the market—they look for people who can adapt to challenges as yet unknown. And not as individuals but that unique combination of skills that individually may not seem right, but combined are far more powerful than the sum of the parts.

As we enter complex environments, and uncertain times, success flows when we foster collaboration across different skill sets. Great leaders know they can't do everything themselves, they have to recognise the skills in others and empower them to work as one toward that goal. Great leaders also recognise that cultural and cognitive diversity is essential for solving unpredictable problems.

Inclusive, adaptable teams bring skills and experience beyond our own that are invaluable when we journey into the unknown.



MYTHICAL CHALLENGES THE VUCA ENVIRONMENT WE FACE

The Argonauts encountered all kinds of unpredictable challenges: clashing rocks, sirens, harpies, hostile kings. Many of these couldn't be solved through strength alone—they required ingenuity, diplomacy, or external help.

In today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, we find strong parallels. Climate disruption, AI transformation, geopolitical tension, consumer fragmentation and a nervous investment environment, require agility and resilience to navigate.

What Jason taught us was not all problems are solvable with brute force—some require cleverness, adaptability, and alliances to overcome.

The most successful businesses and their leaders prepare for the unknown. They anticipate change and build flexible systems that can adapt with those changes.



They also inject creativity into their team culture knowing that left-of-field ideas are more often the ones that provide the solution and can clear the path through the uncertainty.

MEDEA'S HELP STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND WHY HOW YOU MANAGE THEM MATTERS

Jason only succeeded because of Medea's help. Their alliance brought success, but also long-term complications.

In business, this is akin to partnerships, acquisitions, or reliance on a key stakeholder or technology.

The lesson from Jason though is although the alliance brought success initially it also became fraught and led to tragedy. Short term decision making by Jason saw Medea turn against him and his betrayal had long term consequences.

So, while strategic alliances can unlock otherwise impossible outcomes, these relationships must be managed ethically and carefully with a deep understanding of the long-term implications of short-term decisions.

Leaders who choose alliances carefully and develop an environment of open dialogue and understanding of each participant's needs, can ensure they remain productive and beneficial for all in the long term.



JASON'S LEADERSHIP WHY CRISIS LEADERSHIP DEMANDS AN ABILITY TO DEAL WITH AMBIGUITY

Jason wasn't a flawless leader by any stretch. His leadership was tested repeatedly.

He had to make tough decisions, manage conflicts and maintain morale amid danger and uncertainty. He failed on occasion and those failures often stemmed from his lack of growth as a leader.

Transparency, decisiveness and emotional intelligence matter more than invulnerability and good leaders must be resilient but also willing to learn and grow from their mistakes.

Leadership isn't about always having the answers—it's about making decisions amid ambiguity, holding the vision and earning the trust of your team and stakeholders.



THE RETURN DELIVERING RESULTS AND FACING THE CONSEQUENCES

The journey didn't end with Jason securing the fleece. His return was fraught with personal and political consequences.

In business, the post-project phase, delivery, integration and stakeholder impact, is often where challenges really emerge.

Success is more than the "win". Achieving the goal is just the start; integrating it sustainably into your organisation and ecosystem is the real test.

Leaders must think beyond the win to long-term stewardship, legacy and value creation.





THE SEVEN CREATIVE BUSINESS STRATEGIES — WE UNCOVERED

The Argonauts Series Business Leaders' Breakfast drew on and drew out several business case studies. Some were discussed by the leaders who came from these businesses—who were part of these stories, while others were raised by VMG or our guests as examples of what has, and has not, worked.

Each contains nuggets of wisdom and while some overlaps are obvious, each is unique for the time and place they happened, those who were part of the journey and the barriers they faced on their journeys.

Our takeaways are just that—our thoughts on what is valuable in them. Yet we know from our discussions on the day, and the subsequent discussions with the leaders, that everyone has their own take on them. As a business, we need to view these from above, and identify the parallels with our own circumstances and find the nuggets that will help us on our missions.

01

REVOLUTIONISING FINTECH WITH BOLD VISION: A STORY OF DISRUPTIVE GROWTH



OVERVIEW

Afterpay, an Australian fintech company, pioneered the “Buy Now, Pay Later” (BNPL) model, offering consumers a flexible payment solution.

CHALLENGE

At the time of its IPO in 2016, the concept of BNPL was relatively new and faced significant skepticism. Regulatory uncertainties around credit classification and anti-money laundering (AML) compliance further complicated the situation.

SOLUTION

Afterpay adopted a pioneering approach by launching early, raising \$25 million at a valuation of \$165 million with just 100 merchants and 6,000 customers. Despite initial legal uncertainties, the company focused on aggressive expansion, securing a

major investment from Matrix Partners for its U.S. growth.

RESULTS

01 Market Valuation

Grew from \$165 million (2016) to \$40 billion (2021) before its acquisition by Square (now Block).

02 Global Expansion

Successfully launched in the U.S., further solidifying its market leadership.

03 Compliance and Scalability

Overcame early regulatory challenges through continuous improvement of AML controls.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Bold, early market entry and relentless expansion can transform a niche concept into a global success story.

VMG POV

The Afterpay story exemplifies our “from insight to impact” mantra perfectly.

Their insight was recognising the untapped BNPL market opportunity, but the real magic happened in translating that insight into bold action despite regulatory uncertainty.

This is where VMG’s Strategic Workshop Design and Facilitation would have been invaluable—helping leadership align on their purpose, mission and vision while navigating complex regulatory questions.

Our Risk Assessment & Mitigation Plan services could have systematically addressed the AML and compliance challenges rather than leaving them as open questions.

Afterpay’s success came from having enough strategic clarity to satisfy early investors and unlock growth funding.

Our Business Case Development expertise helps companies articulate compelling investment narratives while our AI Alignment Workshop ensures teams are strategically aligned on execution priorities. Sometimes the biggest risk is over-analysis paralysis—Afterpay knew when to launch with “good enough” answers rather than perfect ones.

02

GROWTH THROUGH CONTRARIAN STRATEGY



OVERVIEW

Macquarie Group is a global financial services leader known for its innovative approach to investment and asset management.

CHALLENGE

In a highly competitive financial sector, Macquarie needed to differentiate itself from traditional banks and asset managers.

SOLUTION

Macquarie adopted a contrarian growth strategy, investing in complex and unconventional asset classes (e.g., infrastructure, renewables) where competitors hesitated. This approach was supported by a decentralised management model, empowering specialised teams to explore niche opportunities.

RESULTS

01 Global Leadership

Became a leading player in infrastructure investment.

02 Resilience

Achieved consistent growth across market cycles by diversifying into high-margin sectors.

03 Brand Reputation

Established itself as a market leader in creative financial solutions.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Strategic boldness and a willingness to operate outside conventional markets can drive exceptional growth. The key to Macquarie's success lies in collective intelligence.

Like Jason who drew his Argonauts from diverse backgrounds and skillsets, Macquarie knew they had people around the globe with the insights and creativity to help them find the niche, potentially high-margin opportunities their competitors could not. Top down management fails because too few are deciding too much based on too little information.

The crowdsourcing approach from within their team delivered a multitude of opportunities and their diverse team brought their experience to determining which ones were valuable leads.

VMG POV

Macquarie's success demonstrates the power of collective intelligence and decentralised decision-making—core principles we embed in our approach. Their contrarian strategy worked because they had the right people asking the right questions in the right markets.

This aligns perfectly with our Discovery Workshops methodology, where we systematically uncover insights from diverse stakeholders across an organisation. Our Strategic Review & Health Check services help identify those unconventional opportunities that competitors miss, while our Leadership Offsite Design and Delivery creates the collaborative environment where breakthrough thinking emerges.

Macquarie's approach proves that top-down strategy fails when too few decide too much based on too little information. Our Strategic Workshop Design and Facilitation creates the frameworks for organisations to harness their collective wisdom, just as Macquarie did with their global teams. The insight was there—they just needed the right process to surface and act on it.

03

TRANSFORMING SAAS WITH MARKET AGILITY



OVERVIEW

ReadyTech is a SaaS provider specialising in education and workforce management solutions.

CHALLENGE

Amidst a crowded SaaS market, ReadyTech needed to achieve rapid growth while navigating complex regulatory requirements and data security concerns.

SOLUTION

The company focused on a targeted growth strategy, expanding its product portfolio to serve multiple verticals. By leveraging its IPO on the ASX, ReadyTech secured the capital needed to enhance product development and pursue strategic acquisitions.

RESULTS

01 Rapid Growth

Expanded its client base across education and workforce management sectors.

02 Strategic Acquisitions

Enhanced its market presence by acquiring complementary technology firms.

03 Compliance Excellence

Achieved robust data security and regulatory compliance, strengthening customer trust.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A focused product expansion strategy, supported by IPO-driven capital, can fuel rapid growth in competitive sectors.

VMG POV

ReadyTech’s journey from insight to impact showcases the importance of strategic focus combined with execution excellence. Their insight about serving multiple verticals through targeted expansion required precise strategic planning and flawless execution.

Our “Business in a Box” Offering would have been perfect for ReadyTech’s growth phase—providing holistic business planning that addresses product expansion, market entry, and IPO readiness simultaneously. The complexity of managing regulatory compliance, data security, and rapid growth demands our Strategic Review & Health Check approach to ensure all elements align.

ReadyTech’s IPO success demonstrates how strategic clarity translates to investor confidence. Our Business Case Development services help companies articulate their growth narrative compellingly, while our Risk Assessment & Mitigation Plan ensures compliance and security concerns don’t derail momentum. From insight (market opportunity) to impact (successful IPO and acquisitions)—this is strategic execution at its finest.

04

A LESSON IN EARLY INNOVATION AND MISSED SCALING



OVERVIEW

Friendster was one of the world's first social networks, predating Facebook and MySpace.

CHALLENGE

Despite its early success, Friendster struggled with technical scalability and user engagement, eventually losing ground to newer competitors

SOLUTION

The company attempted to pivot through multiple strategies, including rebranding and international expansion, but lacked the infrastructure to support rapid user growth.

RESULTS

01 Initial Success

Became a pioneer in social networking with millions of users.

02 Missed Opportunity

Eventually lost market leadership to Facebook and MySpace due to poor scalability and user retention.

03 Strategic Sale

Was acquired and eventually transformed into a gaming platform in Asia.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Early market entry is not enough—sustained growth requires scalable technology and continuous innovation.

In the world of technology and in particular online services, there are two must-haves: a stable and expandable technology stack and a sticky user experience.

Even the best user experience is pointless if you cannot grow your customer base, especially when it is a social media platform. Diversely a great tech stack is pointless if people are not enjoying the experience. Friendster lacked both which ultimately proved fatal in an environment where new competitors were coming at them thick and fast.

Plan for growth but get your product right—make it **sticky** and **scalable**.

VMG POV

Friendster's cautionary tale reinforces why we emphasise both strategic insight and execution capability in our "from insight to impact" approach. They had the right insight—social networking's potential—but lacked the strategic framework to scale it effectively.

This is precisely where our Strategic Review & Health Check services prove invaluable. Regular strategic health checks would have identified the technology and user experience gaps before they became fatal flaws. Our Discovery Workshops would have surfaced user retention issues early, while our AI Alignment Workshop could have aligned teams on scaling priorities.

Friendster needed our Risk Assessment & Mitigation Plan approach to identify infrastructure and user experience risks systematically. Their failure shows why strategic planning must address both product stickiness and scalable technology architecture.

Our Strategic Workshop Design and Facilitation helps companies navigate these complex trade-offs before they become competitive disadvantages. Great insights require great execution—one without the other leads to missed opportunities.

05

NAVIGATING A COMPLEX IPO WITH PRECISION



OVERVIEW

Gelion is a renewable energy storage provider, listed on the London Stock Exchange.

CHALLENGE

Navigating the IPO process involved complex regulatory requirements and investor skepticism around green energy investments.

SOLUTION

Gelion partnered with leading advisors to ensure compliance and transparency. A compelling sustainability narrative and strong financials were used to secure investor confidence.

RESULTS

01 Successful IPO

Raised significant capital to fund international expansion.

02 Investor Confidence

Attracted major institutional investors focused on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) criteria.

03 Strategic Expansion

Used IPO funds to accelerate the development of new storage solutions.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A well-planned IPO, backed by strong ESG credentials, can be a powerful growth accelerator. Gelion found their Madea—the partner advisory firms that could help them deliver the transparency and compliance their IPO needed.

Combined with strong storytelling—a narrative built around a growing focus on ESG—they navigated the choppy waters of a stock listing and have kept loyal to their promise and their partners to expand sustainably.

VMG POV

Gelion’s success story exemplifies strategic partnership and narrative power—**turning complex regulatory challenges into competitive advantages.**

Their insight about renewable energy storage needed sophisticated execution to navigate IPO complexities and investor skepticism.

This aligns with our Business Case Development expertise, helping companies craft compelling investment narratives that resonate with target investors. Gelion found their “Madea” in advisory partners, just as we serve as strategic partners helping clients navigate complex business challenges through our Strategic Review & Health Check services.

Our Leadership Offsite Design and Delivery would have been instrumental in aligning leadership on their ESG narrative and growth strategy. The combination of strong storytelling, transparency, and strategic execution that Gelion achieved reflects our holistic approach.

Our “Business in a Box” Offering addresses exactly these multi-faceted challenges—regulatory compliance, investor relations, and sustainable growth planning. From insight (ESG opportunity) to impact (successful IPO and expansion)—strategic clarity drives results.

06

UNEARTHING HIGH-GROWTH GEMS



OVERVIEW

Perennial Private Investments specialises in identifying and investing in high-growth, pre-IPO companies.

CHALLENGE

Perennial needed a systematic approach to identify and nurture startups with high growth potential in a crowded venture capital market.

SOLUTION

Perennial developed a proprietary screening process focused on sectors with scalable growth potential, such as fintech, SaaS, and clean energy. It also offered strategic advisory support to portfolio companies, enhancing their IPO readiness.

RESULTS

01 High Success Rate

Multiple portfolio companies achieved successful IPOs.

02 Scalable Growth

Identified emerging leaders in fast-growing sectors.

03 Strategic Impact

Enhanced the IPO valuation of portfolio companies through targeted support.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Combining strategic investment with value-added advisory can maximise portfolio growth.

VMG POV

Perennial's systematic approach to identifying and nurturing high-growth companies mirrors our "from insight to impact" methodology.

Their proprietary screening process and value-added advisory model demonstrates how strategic frameworks create sustainable competitive advantages.

Our Discovery Workshops help organisations develop similar systematic approaches to opportunity identification, while our Strategic Workshop Design and Facilitation creates the frameworks for evaluating and prioritising opportunities.

Like Perennial's advisory support enhancing IPO readiness, our Business Case Development and Strategic Review & Health Check services help companies become investment-ready.

Perennial's success in combining strategic investment with value-added advisory perfectly aligns with our consulting approach. Our AI Alignment Workshop ensures portfolio companies have aligned execution strategies, while our Risk Assessment & Mitigation Plan services help identify and address scaling challenges early.

The insight about pre-IPO opportunity was just the beginning—the impact came through systematic execution and strategic support.

07

REDEFINING FINANCIAL LITERACY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION



OVERVIEW

Spriggy is a pioneering fintech that digitises pocket money for children.

CHALLENGE

Initially the founders looked to create a digital bank for millennials but after months of research and prototyping they hit a dead end in terms of market opportunity and technology availability.

SOLUTION

Spriggy pivoted to focus on parents and their children and the need for financial literacy lessons and then overcame a reluctance by payments platform providers to help them by partnering with Nucleus from Indue that delivered the pre-paid card and app technology they needed.

RESULTS

- 01 Partnerships for Growth**
Attracted \$2.8 million in two rounds of seed funding.
- 02 Market Opportunity**
Tapped into a market need that saw 100,000 accounts opened in less than 18 months.
- 03 Sustained Growth**
After 9 years they have over 1.2M users and \$850 million transacted.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Test your markets and partner for growth. Pivoting can be one of the most rewarding strategies in business. A founder's idea is just that - an insight that leads to a theory that might become a product or service. Along that journey you need to test your theories. In testing you find both warnings and opportunities. Admitting your initial idea is not right takes guts but the alternative is potentially failure.

Spriggy knew younger people needed help with their finances, and hands-on education was important. But by pivoting to targeting the parents and delivering a safe, user friendly, family finance platform, they hit the gold mine. 90% of their first users were mothers.

VMG POV

Spriggy's pivot story perfectly embodies our "from insight to impact" philosophy.

Sometimes the greatest insights come from admitting your initial hypothesis was wrong.

Their willingness to test, learn, and pivot demonstrates the strategic agility we help clients develop.

This is where our Discovery Workshops prove invaluable - systematically testing market assumptions before committing resources. Spriggy's founders had the courage to pivot when their millennial banking idea hit a dead end, finding their true opportunity in family finance. Our Strategic Workshop Design and Facilitation helps leadership teams navigate these critical pivot decisions.

The partnership with Nucleus shows the power of strategic alliances - something our Strategic Review & Health Check services help identify and evaluate. Spriggy's 90% female user acquisition insight demonstrates why our Discovery Workshops focus on uncovering unexpected market dynamics.

Our Business Case Development services would have helped articulate the pivot rationale to investors, while our "Business in a Box" Offering supports the comprehensive planning needed for successful market repositioning. From failed insight to breakthrough impact - strategic agility creates breakthrough results.



LEARNINGS FROM

THE DISCUSSION

VMG has built our business on our ability to turn insight into impact by connecting the gap between business strategy and creative solutions.

The insights from this event have served to solidify our thinking and fortify our mission to deliver our clients the type of wisdom that goes beyond what is expected of agencies.

Great insights need to be scoured for, drawn from those who have the lived experience of business growth, transformation and have taken the hard decisions in difficult environments. This drove our desire to hold this discussion with business leaders in Sydney.

The Argonauts Series Business Leaders' Breakfast generated an exchange of bold ideas and insights on growth, strategy, and creativity. The parallels with the Argonauts story came thick and fast and the overlapping problems and opportunities faced rose to the surface.

There were several clear learnings that emerged and can be grouped into four key themes:

- 01 Strategic Differentiation for Market Leadership**
- 02 The Imperative of Creativity and Innovation**
- 03 The Growth Mindset of the Outliers**
- 04 The Adaptive Leadership Model**

STRATEGIC DIFFERENTIATION FOR MARKET LEADERSHIP



Few businesses succeed by doing exactly what others have done before.

By definition leadership means leading the way, taking new pathways, trying new strategies to reach a goal.

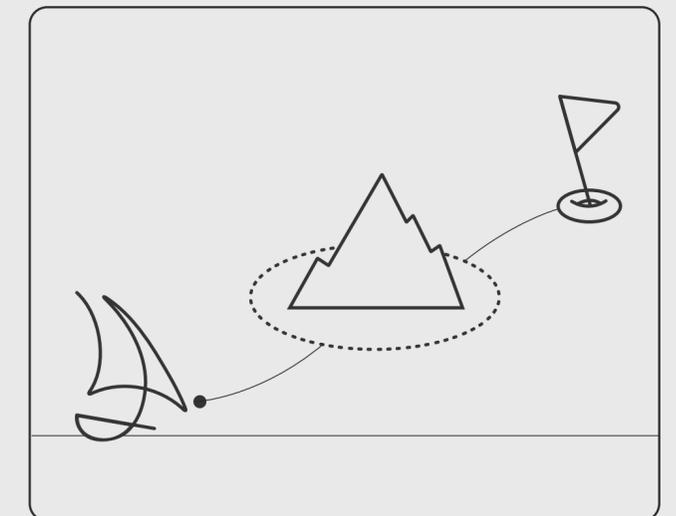
Where others have stopped at a barrier, true leaders take stock, engage with their team, brainstorm new ideas and draw on the diverse experience and creative thinking their team has. Different ideas can deliver on strategic goals.

To achieve market leadership successful companies ask:

- 01 What do we do differently from competitors?**
- 02 Is that difference valuable to the customer?**
- 03 Can we sustain and scale this difference?**

Mostly this differentiation focuses on product or service differentiation, but a fuller definition will draw in differentiation in a strategic approach.

During our session several examples were raised that demonstrated strategic differentiation across a range of scenarios—product/service/customer focused, ways of engaging and strategic thinking focused. There are some examples on the following pages.



01

THINKING: STRATEGIC PIVOT AMID CRISIS THE MEDIA FOR EQUITY MODEL

Airtasker

In challenging economic conditions where capital markets were largely inaccessible to early-stage tech companies, several firms showcased resilience and differentiated thinking.

For example, Airtasker who restructured its cost base and explored creative financing methods, like swapping equity for media exposure which significantly boosted brand recognition and drove investor interest.

This Media-for-Equity Model strategy was then replicated with other major media partners, generating significant brand awareness without direct cash outlay. This creative funding model is a good example of how companies can think beyond traditional capital-raising methods.



02 ENGAGING: BUILDING TRUST THROUGH TRANSPARENCY DATA-DRIVEN INVESTOR COMMUNICATION

Spriggy

Early stage companies can tend to be protective of their financial information.

Although there is an obligation to report on your financials to investors, some choose to be less generous with their sharing, with the view that they do not wish to scare off new potential investors.

However, trust is imperative in business, and both good and bad results are part of the journey.

Companies that excel in investor relations, like Spriggy, maintain frequent and transparent communication with stakeholders.

Spriggy's leadership team not only reports biannually but also conducts regular interactive sessions with investors, building trust and ensuring alignment to their mission. That trust is rewarded with loyalty and peer sharing that drives new investor interest.

03 PRODUCT/SERVICE/CUSTOMER: KNOW YOUR REAL MARKET THE CUSTOMER-CENTRIC MODEL

Many product or service purchase decisions are made jointly—by company committees, by families and by couples.

Understanding who your end-user customer is and who the key stakeholders are, is critical to both creating your product and finding your path to purchase.

Spriggy is a great example of this. As outlined in our case studies section, they initially looked to target young people themselves. Their pivot to focusing on parents first, to secure a family purchase, was built from insights they gained through testing and surveying.

Spriggy's success is rooted in its parent-centric approach, providing parents with complete visibility over their children's spending and saving habits.

This model has driven significant adoption by positioning parents as the decision-makers, while children develop financial literacy under supervision. But they did not forget about the children and developed a product that appealed to them and motivated them to achieve goals through a sticky user experience.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION: A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

Businesses that treat creativity and innovation as strategic imperatives—not just focused on one-off projects—are better positioned to thrive in fast-changing environments.

It's not about having one big idea; it's about embedding a culture where new ideas are **continuously** generated, tested and scaled.

The advantages of embedding a creative culture in business are numerous and cover the whole gamut of the business experience:



COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Businesses that innovate can differentiate themselves from competitors with unique products, services, or customer experiences.



ADAPTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

Creative thinking helps businesses respond to market disruptions such as new technologies, global crises and funding pressures, more effectively.



CUSTOMER RELEVANCE

Innovation allows companies to better meet evolving customer needs and expectations. Market opportunities do not fill themselves—smart businesses develop offerings to meet them head-on.



LONG-TERM GROWTH

Sustainable innovation strategies foster long-term value creation, new revenue streams, and market expansion.

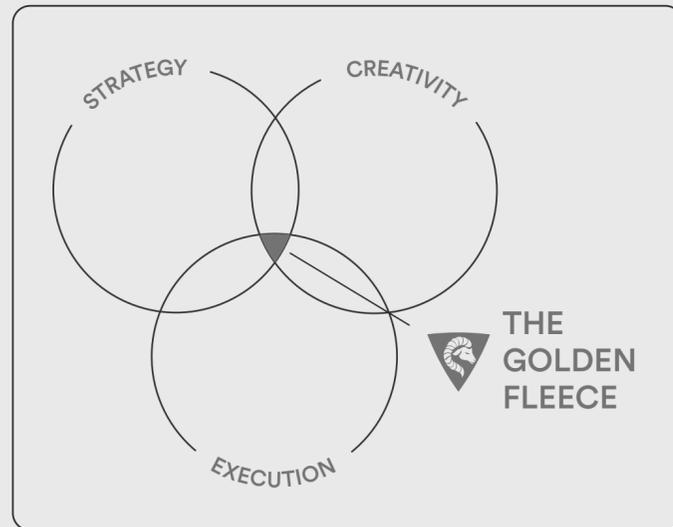


OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Process innovations can streamline operations, reduce costs, and improve quality and shows us that creative thinking doesn't just invent new products—it reimagines how work gets done. Often, the biggest gains come not from doing more, but from doing things differently.

A standout example of operational efficiency is Toyota who revolutionised auto manufacturing with the Toyota Production System, using Just In Time (JIT) inventory management and continuous improvement through their Kaizen model.

ARGONAUTS EXAMPLE: CREATIVITY IN PRACTICE



In a rapidly changing world, creativity is not a luxury—it is a survival tool.

Companies like Spriggy and Airtasker leveraged creative financing models, while Xero’s strategic leadership transition demonstrated the importance of recognizing when to bring in new expertise.

CREATIVE FINANCING TO FUEL GROWTH

When faced with limited funding options, some companies, like Airtasker, used an innovative media-for-equity model, exchanging equity for significant media exposure. This transformed them from a struggling startup to a household brand, an approach that Spriggy and other fintechs can learn from.

REVENUE DIVERSIFICATION

Another creative approach was shared by Galleon, a battery technology company that leveraged its technical expertise to generate immediate revenue by importing and implementing existing battery technology while they continued to build their own offering.

SCALING CREATIVITY BEYOND LEADERSHIP

Successful companies embed creativity at every level. As one CEO emphasised, ensuring every employee understands the company’s mission—like building an abbey rather than just chipping at a rock—fosters a culture of innovation. This mindset prevents creativity from being siloed at the leadership level.

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

Organisations like Macquarie have harnessed the power of collective intelligence by inviting all employees to identify emerging risks or share innovative ideas. This crowdsourced approach has proven invaluable, uncovering insights that traditional top-down methods often miss.

“Creativity is a business imperative because if you don’t embrace it, your competitors will.”

Nimesh Shah, CFO of ReadyTech

THE GROWTH MINDSET OF THE OUTLIERS

More than one person in the room at our event had a copy of Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers* on their shelf, and for good reason.

Outliers teaches us that great leadership is less about being exceptional from the start and more about how we shape, support and situate people over time to drive success.

For organisations, this means investing in leadership as a long-term, inclusive, and contextual process—not a “natural-born” trait hunt.

In the context of the white paper and the examples raised at the event, outliers can be people, businesses or products, and by definition an outlier can be good or bad.

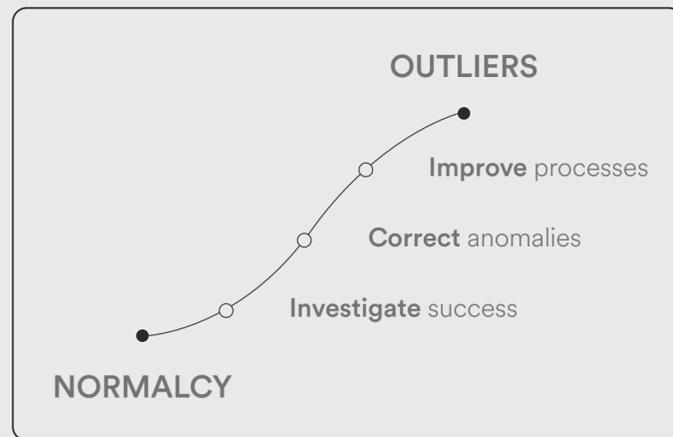
A sales rep who consistently brings in double the revenue of their peers might be called an outlier while a startup that achieves billion-dollar valuation in two years is an outlier compared to the usual business growth rate. In terms of results if one product vastly undersells all others, it may be considered an outlier in sales data.

Every outlier should prompt investigation, so we can learn from success, correct anomalies, or improve processes.

When it comes to growth though, what we are focused on here, outliers are those businesses that stand-out in terms of their success—that have grown above what is considered normal. How did they achieve that growth? What did they do differently, and what was the mindset of the managers that took it there?



ARGONAUTS EXAMPLE: OUTLIERS IN ACTION



The Argonauts Series highlighted that sustainable growth often requires challenging conventional wisdom.

Karen Shan, Portfolio Manager at Perennial Private Investments, shared her approach to identifying “nuggets of gold”—high-growth companies that defy expectations.

NOTABLE OUTLIERS

afterpay

When Afterpay listed in 2016 at an early stage they had only \$500k revenue, 100 merchants and 6,000 customers.

There was also some regulatory ambiguity in terms of their credit and lending status and compliance with Anti Money Laundering rules. Afterpay overcame these challenges by confidently communicating their belief that the regulatory barriers would be overcome—new market players often face pushback from potential investors because ‘no one has done this before’.

Their ability to sell their concept and attract early stage interest saw them list with a \$165 million valuation and post-listing grow rapidly as the barriers were indeed broken, leading to them being acquired just 5 years later by Square for \$40 billion.

> readytech

ReadyTech was founded in the late 90’s and was an early adopter of the SaaS model. Initially focused on the job seeker market, their sticky product and easy to use platform saw them grow steadily but within the constraints of the markets they were familiar with.

Their subscription revenue model allowed them to keep investing back into multiple products but to grow further they needed to diversify into new markets, established sectors such as government and education.

Macquarie Bank came on board to help fund the buyout of a founder and the injection of capital was used to grow into new markets, including the acquisition of seven businesses since 2015. Their offering grew to include education, employment services, apprenticeships & training and payroll.

Listing on the ASX in 2019 they have continued to thrive now generating over \$118 million per annum and servicing 5,000 customers around the world.

A key to their success has been their disciplined product strategy—resisting the urge to move too far outside of their swimlane but focusing on sectors where their platform and experience would resonate, such as procurement, justice and local government.

VMG POV

The **ReadyTech** example is poignant here because although subtle, it demonstrates how outliers in terms of strategy and decision making can deliver success. They are outliers because of their restraint. Too many businesses, in particular SaaS startups, find themselves grabbing too many markets too quickly, producing competent, but not outstanding products, just to be able to serve those sectors.

Losing sight of your core aim is common for businesses that grow fast, but fail slowly due to a lack of product focus and attention to the details of the new markets you think you can serve but do not yet fully understand how to.



“Creativity comes in many guises, and you’ve got to have creativity at all levels within an organisation. But what’s also really key is being able to communicate that creativity throughout the organisation and externally.”

Karen Chan, Portfolio Manager,
Perennial Partners

THE ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP MODEL



Like Jason in our Argonauts story, great leaders have a strong willingness to explore the unknown. They thrive in uncertain environments and complex situations.

The Adaptive Leadership model, developed by Ronald Heifetz and his colleagues at Harvard University, was designed to help leaders and their organisations, navigate these types of choppy waters—situations where there are no clear solutions and where people themselves must learn, adapt and change to move forward.

A leader often faces resistance rooted in values, identity or habits, especially when they are navigating cultural, digital, or structural transformations. The adaptive leader aims to overcome these barriers by building a more resilient and learning-focused organisation.

Their ability to diagnose the problems in the system, understand the reality of any given situation, regulate team distress and maintain disciplined attention to the task at hand are crucial.

But the adaptive leader also thrives because they know how to delegate the work to their team and encourage those below them to voice their concerns and encourage outside perspectives knowing that adaptive change often emerges from the margins.

ARGONAUTS EXAMPLE: CREATIVITY IN PRACTICE



“Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face”

— Mike Tyson

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”



— Theodore Roosevelt

An excellent example was raised at our event—how Xero CEO Rob Drury managed his own and the company’s ambitions.

At key stages of the company’s growth Rod knew his own talents, despite years of founding and growing startups, was not up to the task and hired CFOs to help drive growth. He admitted he was “just a product guy” and that greater skills than his own were needed. Even then his adaptive leadership was tested.

In 2015 he shocked markets when his America’s CEO of just 6 months was terminated and shortly thereafter his new CFO of only 6 weeks left. Rod realised they lacked the start-up mentality he fostered and also that the recruitment agencies he relied on were unable to deliver suitable candidates.

He turned to his own team, setting up structures to mentor and promote from within and draw on his network, including board members and investors, to recommend more suitable candidates.

When Rod exited as CEO in March 2018, having recently sold down \$95 million in shares, he again used his adaptive leadership skills to ensure the company was in capable hands and it is—thriving to now generate NZ\$2.103 billion in revenue and NZ\$227.8 million in net income from 2 million subscribers.

VMG POV

It is accepted now that the top-down model of leadership is not best practice, yet adaptive leadership requires hard decisions to be made. Those decisions though need to be made by drawing on the skills and experience of your team and your wider community of stakeholders.

No one has been through the problem you face today, with your company, in this current environment. Yet many in your team may recognise parallels with the environment, the type of situation, the markets and your type of business. Together they can brainstorm and find solutions.

The self-awareness required is a start but adaptive challenges require leaders and stakeholders to learn, adapt and grow. The ability to mobilise people to tackle tough problems and thrive in changing environments is foundational to success.



THREE PILLARS OF

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Our discussions uncovered the four learnings, outlined in the chapter above, that can be further distilled into some simple but effective strategies for growth.

These ‘Three Pillars of Sustainable Growth’ combine the four learnings and draw on the experiences of the companies in our case studies that came up multiple times.

All the companies present, and those we discussed, are navigating complex growth journeys. No two are the same but their experiences reveal repeated themes of challenge and success and methods that saw them grow through those challenges. There are some examples of the consistent themes on the following pages.

01

BEING AN OUTLIER

Success in competitive markets requires differentiation—whether through unique products, unconventional models or bold strategic choices.

Outlier thinking does not come from the top alone but leaders must ensure it is embedded through the organisation. Leaders can level the playing field by offering equal access to leadership development, especially for underrepresented groups and leaders must become multipliers—creating the conditions for others to think differently in complex situations and excel.

02

MODERN LEADERSHIP

Leaders must combine resilience with a forward-thinking mindset, capable of adapting to market volatility.

The modern leaders do not focus solely on their own leadership success, but on building systems and cultures that lift others. They are emotionally intelligent and resilient, able to deal with ambiguity and conflict and willing to challenge norms and expectations.

If you are focused on long-term learning and transformation you build a culture that is comfortable with loss and transition. A culture where your team can be focused on the bigger picture goals and understanding that where there are no clear solutions, as a team they themselves must be prepared to learn, adapt and grow.

03

BOLD CREATIVITY

Creativity is not just a tool but a necessity, enabling companies to develop breakthrough solutions and seize new opportunities.

Creative thinking doesn't just invent new products—it reimagines how work gets done. Often, the biggest gains come not from doing more, but from doing things differently.

A key is always reviewing what business you are in. When Netflix, a DVD rental company, pivoted to streaming and later into original content production, they did so because they knew they were in the home entertainment business. Their innovation disrupted the entire entertainment industry and changed how people consume media forever.

SUMMARY

These three pillars combined, form a powerful alliance of thinking, skillsets and leadership capabilities that are found at the heart of all great business success stories.

The beauty of them lies in what links them—a culture of adaptability, left-field thinking and self-awareness that drives organisations forward. They are able to move with agility, pushed along by self-belief and a group vision, through the sometimes choppy waters of the journey to sustainable growth.

“With things like innovation, we're by nature pushing the boundaries, and some people are not going to like it. It's often just about managing all those different stakeholders.”

James Posnett, General Manager,
Listings, ASX



THE ARGONAUTS IN A WORLD

— OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Sydney event and the stories that were shared there were undoubtedly valuable for providing us examples of businesses shaking up the growth journey.

However, they are historical—examples drawn from the past, many of them from the days before the advent of artificial intelligence and the avalanche of new AI based tools that have come in recent years, months and even days.

As an agency focused on helping businesses navigate their growth journeys, we need to look forward as much as we look back. In this last chapter we want to apply the filter of the futurist to our analysis and look at the learnings we gained, and the strategies we identified, through the lens of a world powered by AI.

What effect does AI have on the strategies we called out? What, if any, adjustments need to be made to them to maintain their effectiveness in an age of AI?

OUTLIERS IN THE AGE OF AI

If we look back at Malcolm Gladwell's book and the terms he uses, outliers emerge when talent meets opportunity and they take advantage of a unique context others either don't see or can't access.

AI is absolutely reshaping that context and is a massive shift in the business environment comparable to the rise of the internet or electricity.

It changes:

01 How fast things move

02 What skills are valuable

03 What new markets and efficiencies are possible

04 It creates new pathways for outliers to emerge.

As we discussed on page 30, outliers can be both people and businesses, ideally one that creates the other, so we need to look at both for how AI will affect both.



INDIVIDUALS AS OUTLIERS IN THE AI ERA

EARLY ADOPTERS BECOME MULTIPLIERS

Individuals who understand and leverage AI tools early can become outliers by dramatically improving productivity, creativity and insight. The analysts who use AI to 10x their research output or the designers who generate concepts in minutes and the writers who become highly skilled strategists.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

At companies like ReadyTech, developers are already generating 43,000 lines of code using AI tools, representing a paradigm shift in how quickly creative solutions can be prototyped and tested. This isn't just about speed—it's about freeing human creativity to focus on higher-order strategic thinking.

HYBRID SKILLSETS = POWER

The new outliers often sit at the intersection of skills combining AI with their domain knowledge (e.g., law, medicine, logistics). In our world of marketing we see the opportunity for the marketer who understands generative AI and data analysis to become the growth engine for a business.

THE RISE OF “AI NATIVES”

Just as digital natives grew up with the internet, Gen Z and Alpha can grow up fluent in prompting, automation and AI strategy, giving them a head start others didn't have.

CURATORS, NOT JUST CREATORS

In a world where AI can generate content, the real outliers are the curators, editors—the strategic thinkers who can ask better questions, synthesise ideas and apply them effectively.



BUSINESSES AS OUTLIERS IN THE AI ERA

AI-FIRST COMPANIES LEAP AHEAD

Businesses built around AI from the start (e.g., automation-first logistics firms, AI-driven customer experience companies) can radically outperform incumbents stuck in legacy systems. Like the Netflix examples we mentioned previously where the cloud native Netflix was able to dramatically outperform the brick and mortar based Blockbuster Video.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

Consider how the next “Afterpay” could emerge. While Afterpay created the BNPL category with just 100 merchants and 6,000 customers, AI could now predict success potential by analysing consumer payment behavior patterns, identify optimal merchant mixes for fastest network effects, and model regulatory risk scenarios before market entry.

SPEED BECOMES A COMPETITIVE WEAPON

AI allows for faster experimentation, iteration and decision-making. Companies that embrace this agility culture can pull away from the pack.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

For deep-tech companies like Gelion working on battery technology, AI can translate complex technical milestones into investor-friendly narratives and provide decision support by analysing leadership choices across similar companies and market conditions.

This acceleration in strategic communication can be the difference between securing funding and losing momentum.

NEW MARKET CREATORS = OUTLIERS

Just like how the iPhone created the app economy, AI will lead to entirely new industries from synthetic media to AI-driven education and micro-manufacturing. Outlier businesses will be those who see the white space first.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

AI-powered cross-industry pollination can identify successful patterns in one sector and suggest novel applications in completely different industries.

Machine learning algorithms analysing Airtasker’s media equity model could identify similar partnership opportunities across completely different sectors, creating entirely new revenue streams.

CULTURE IS THE DIFFERENTIATOR

Companies that foster AI fluency, openness and ethics will attract better talent, move faster and adapt quicker in the AI era. The culture of a business will enable it to be an outlier even more than the technology.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

Building on Macquarie Bank’s example of leveraging 20,000 employees for emerging risk identification, AI can now amplify this collective intelligence through sentiment analysis platforms that analyse employee feedback across global operations, innovation idea clustering that categorises thousands of employee suggestions, and cultural pulse monitoring that tracks organisational health in real-time.

Companies leveraging AI for market gap analysis can process millions of data points across industries to identify untapped opportunities that human analysts might miss.

SUMMARY

While this all sounds promising, it is important we inject a word of caution.

Outliers in the AI era will also deepen inequality. Access to AI tools, data and the infrastructure they need are not equally distributed. There's a risk that many will be left behind, in particular education, small business and the developing regions in our country and economies in the world.

The challenge for businesses and governments is to **build inclusive ecosystems where more people and businesses can become outliers**, not fewer.

In the age of AI, outliers won't just be the smartest or the hardest working. They'll be the ones who, as has always been, spot and seize emerging opportunities and become skilled in blending human insight with AI power. Ones who experiment boldly and often and continuously learn.

AI doesn't eliminate outliers, it reshapes the rules for becoming one.



MODERN LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF AI

Modern leaders who embrace the Adaptive Leadership model don't need to fundamentally change their practices and the model itself remains useful in the age of AI— in fact, it's arguably more relevant than ever.

But AI transforms the landscape in ways that change how adaptive leadership is practiced, and what kinds of adaptive challenges leaders will now face.

AI is not just a new tool, it is transforming how work gets done, how decisions are made, how people interact and what skills are valuable. These are classic adaptive challenges that the model seeks managers to embrace, and they require people to change how they think, what they value, and how they behave.

THE CHALLENGES AI BRINGS

WORKFORCE DISRUPTION

It is obvious that jobs will evolve or disappear. New skills are needed but this isn't just a technical retraining problem, it's about identity, purpose and belonging of those people. Adaptive leadership is needed more than ever to help people navigate fear, loss and uncertainty.

ETHICS AND TRUST

AI raises deep ethical questions: bias, surveillance and misinformation. Modern leaders must engage people in a value-based dialogue, not just compliance exercises, to help the team understand the risks and rewards of AI.

DECISION-MAKING POWER

Who controls the AI tools? Who is accountable for AI-driven decisions? Leaders must distribute authority carefully and encourage transparency in systems that are often somewhat opaque.

CULTURE SHIFT

AI changes how humans interact, there will be less routine work and more focus on creativity and judgment. Leaders must foster cultures of learning, experimentation and humility and not just focus on efficiency.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP APPLICATIONS IN THE AI ERA

FOR STRATEGIC CFOS

Building on the panel's emphasis on strategic leadership with executives like Nimesh and Amit, AI applications now include predictive financial modeling that can simulate thousands of scenarios for complex tech companies, investor communication optimisation using natural language processing to analyse sentiment and optimise messaging, and risk scenario planning using machine learning to identify emerging risks by analysing global patterns.

FOR CEOS IN COMPLEX MARKETS

Leaders can leverage market translation tools that convert technical milestones into investor-friendly narratives, and leadership decision trees that provide decision support by analysing leadership choices across similar companies and market conditions.

SUMMARY

The Adaptive Leadership model is not outdated but it needs to be upgraded by necessity in the face of AI. While AI can solve technical problems faster and more accurately than humans, it cannot resolve adaptive challenges, the deeply human work of changing minds, hearts and systems.

HOW THE PRINCIPLES OF ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP EVOLVE IN THE AI ERA

Adaptive Leadership Practice	AI-Era Application
Diagnose the system	Use AI for better data analysis but still focus on deeply understanding the human dynamics that data can't reveal.
Regulate distress	AI tools may accelerate change so leaders must help people adapt at a humane pace and manage techno-anxiety.
Maintain disciplined attention	Don't get distracted by shiny AI tools; stay focused on the real adaptive work (e.g. culture, inclusion, ethics).
Give the work back	Don't let AI centralise control; empower people to engage with AI and shape how it's used.
Protect voices from below	AI might silence dissent (e.g., algorithmic filtering); leaders must create space for human voices, especially the uncomfortable ones.

AI sharpens the need for leaders who are emotionally intelligent, ethically grounded and able to mobilise people through complexity and ambiguity.

BOLD CREATIVITY IN THE AGE OF AI

As an agency, we are well aware of the power of AI and the threats and opportunities it presents.

We have embraced it but like many are still learning how to balance it in our workflows and to ensure we still make the most of our smart people. AI is great for generating ideas at scale (e.g., 100 headline options instantly), identifying patterns and insights from our data and automating our processes.

For us AI is a creative accelerator, but not a creator of purpose.

This white paper has focused on businesses and the creativity they need across the whole spectrum of their decision making, beyond coming up with headline ideas.

Good businesses will need to understand that humans are still the key to successful decision making.

People understand emotion, context, nuance, and ethics. We challenge assumptions and imagine what doesn't yet exist. We bring that lived experience and cultural relevance to ideas and are best at making the strategic choices about which direction to take.



PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF AI-ENHANCED CREATIVITY

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE INNOVATION

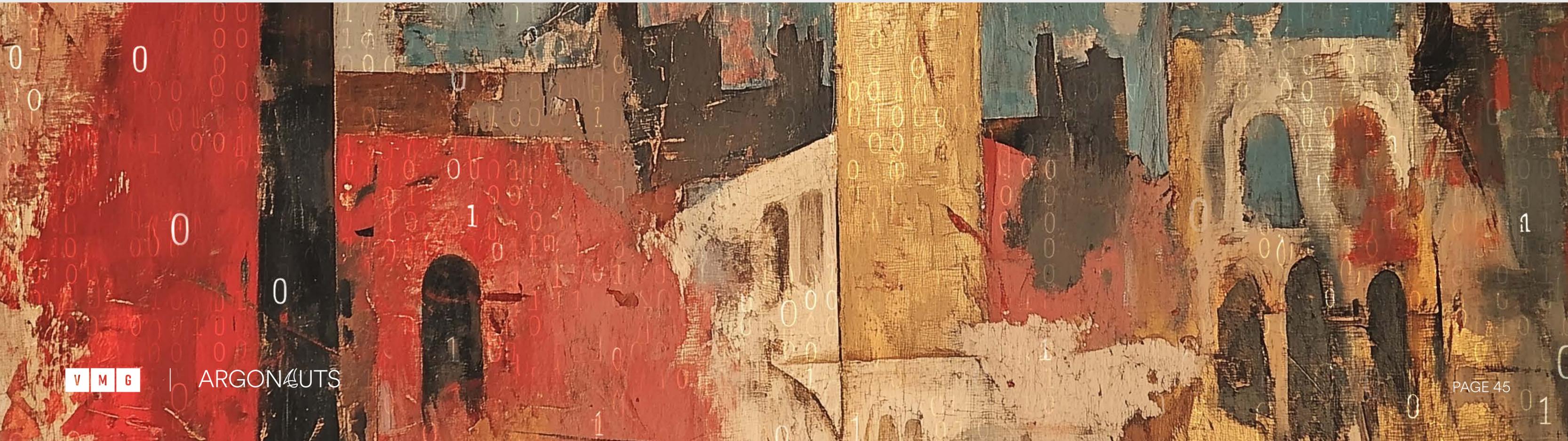
For SaaS companies like ReadyTech, AI can analyse user behavior patterns to identify friction points and creative solutions for enterprise software adoption, while human creativity focuses on the strategic vision and user empathy that drives meaningful innovation.

MARKETING AND PARTNERSHIP INNOVATION

Building on Airtasker's media equity model, AI can analyse media consumption patterns to identify optimal partnership opportunities and predict campaign effectiveness, while humans provide the strategic insight to create genuinely innovative partnership structures.

REVENUE MODEL INNOVATION

AI can identify new revenue opportunities within existing customer bases and suggest innovative pricing models based on successful examples across industries, while human creativity determines which opportunities align with brand values and long-term strategy.



HOW CAN BUSINESSES ADAPT TO AI FOR CREATIVITY AND DECISION MAKING

USE AI AS A CREATIVE PARTNER

Think of AI as the “junior team member”, fast, tireless and endlessly helpful but needing guidance. Focus AI use on ideation, rapid prototyping or automation, while reserving the final decision-making and refinement for humans.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

For IPO-ready companies focusing on ASX listings, AI can analyse company metrics against successful IPO patterns to optimise timing and positioning, identify suitable investor types through machine learning, and tailor messaging for different stakeholder groups, while human strategists make the crucial decisions about narrative, timing, and stakeholder relationships.

REDEFINE THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Shift from ‘create from scratch’ to ‘curate, challenge, and iterate.’ Encourage your team to work with AI tools creatively experimenting with prompt writing, testing variants and combining outputs in new ways.

CREATE SPACE FOR ORIGINAL, HUMAN-LED THINKING

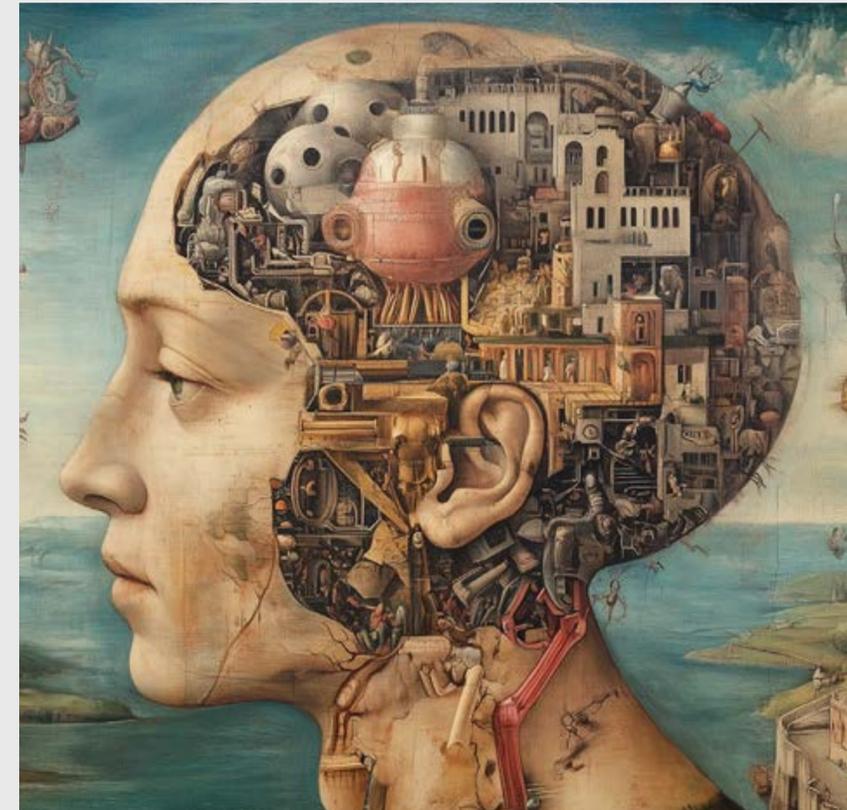
Ensure your team still has time and headspace to think beyond the algorithm and encourage exercises that involve storytelling, empathy, improvisation and big-picture visioning. AI tends to avoid taking creative risks so make room for your team to take that role.

FOSTER A CULTURE OF HUMAN-AI COLLABORATION

Encourage transparency and discourage secrecy: Make your team be comfortable with sharing what AI helped them with and celebrate how people used AI creatively, not just what was produced.

CROSS TRAIN YOUR TEAMS

Engineers are more likely to embrace AI than people who are creative themselves. Mix that up by cross-training teams (e.g., creatives learning basic AI prompting, engineers learning design thinking).



THE STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

PHASE 1 INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

- 01 Deploy AI for comprehensive market and competitive analysis
- 02 Use machine learning for pattern recognition across successful outlier companies
- 03 Implement sentiment analysis for stakeholder feedback

PHASE 2 CREATIVE IDEATION

- 01 Leverage AI-powered brainstorming tools for business model innovation
- 02 Use predictive modeling to test creative hypotheses
- 03 Apply cross-industry pattern matching for breakthrough ideas

PHASE 3 STRATEGIC EXECUTION

- 01 Implement AI-driven decision support systems for leadership teams
- 02 Deploy real-time analytics for creative campaign optimisation
- 03 Use predictive modeling for risk management and scenario planning

SUMMARY

In the age of AI, creativity becomes more valuable. But it shifts.

For an agency like VMG it's not just about the lone genius with a pen and pad in a smokey corner office sweating over headlines. It's about being a creative orchestrator, combining the speed and scale of AI with human insight, judgment, and originality.

Human creativity brings that originality, along with empathy and values, things AI can only imitate. Business needs to find the balance where AI is a tool in the hands of a creatively empowered human team, not a substitute for them. The bold creative thinking we identified that business needs, like all other aspects of business, just received a supercharge.



CONCLUSION

The ancient Argonauts returned from their quest changed by the journey itself.

They had navigated uncharted waters, faced impossible odds, and discovered that the real treasure wasn't just the Golden Fleece—it was what they learned about leadership, collaboration, and creative problem-solving along the way.

Our modern Argonauts left that breakfast at QT Sydney with something equally valuable: a roadmap for sustainable growth built on being boldly different, leading adaptively, and thinking creatively. But like any good strategy, the real test comes in execution.

The question isn't whether your organisation needs to embrace these three pillars—the question is how quickly you can embed them into your culture before your competitors do.

“If you don't embrace creativity in your organisation, someone else will among your competition.”

Nimesh Shah, CFO of ReadyTech

This is where the journey truly begins. Whether you're preparing for an IPO like Gelion, pivoting your strategy like Spriggy, or scaling into new markets like ReadyTech, the path to sustainable growth requires more than good intentions. It demands the kind of strategic creativity that bridges the gap between ambitious vision and executable reality.

At VMG, we've built our practice around exactly this challenge—turning insight into impact by connecting business strategy with creative solutions.

We understand that in today's AI-accelerated world, the companies that thrive are those that combine human wisdom with technological capability, strategic thinking with creative execution.

Leaders who understand that constraints breed creativity, that diversity fuels innovation, and that the most profound business transformations happen when strategy and creativity work as one.

Our next gathering is already in the works. The conversations will be different, the challenges will have evolved, but the fundamental truth remains: sustainable growth belongs to those brave enough to chart new courses and creative enough to navigate them successfully.



Ready to join the crew?
The Golden Fleece of
your industry is waiting.

READY TO TURN INSIGHT INTO IMPACT?

The Argonauts Series is more than a white paper—it's an invitation to join a community of leaders who refuse to accept the status quo as the ceiling of possibility.

CONTACT
**OLIVIER
VOJETTA**

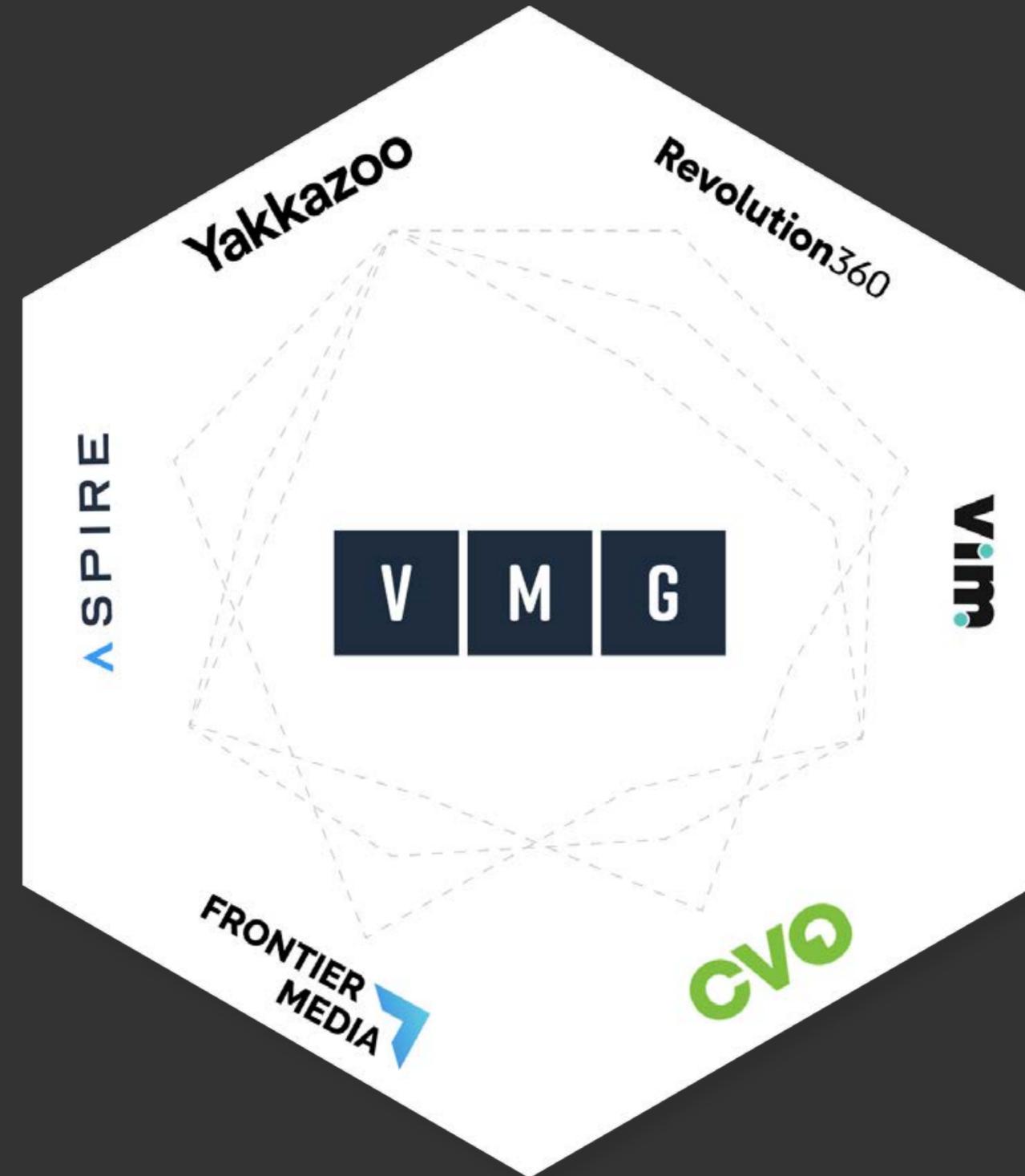
theargonauts@vmg-apac.com
0410 753 426

or visit **vmg-apac.com** to explore how strategic creativity can accelerate your growth journey.

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Manager, Listings, ASX

Daniel Neilson

Head of Private Credit, Rixon Capital

Inès Abderrahmane

Head of Sydney Office, Economic Department
for ANZ & the Pacific, French Treasury

James Posnett

General Manager, Listings, ASX

Karen Chan

Portfolio Manager, Perennial Partners

Niels Thelosen

Senior Risk Manager, Reserve Bank of Australia

Will Mateu

National Business Development Manager, Gallagher



TECHNOLOGY & SOFTWARE

Jeremy Pollack

Founder, Chief Executive Officer, Calven

Kate Alpaugh

Chief Financial Officer, Shippit

Mahendra Tharmarajah

Chief Financial Officer, Airtasker

Nimesh Shah

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Pascal Uerlings

Founder, Co-Chief Executive Officer, J4RVIS

Rachel Gatehouse

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Vinnie Maharaj

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TRANSPORTATION & LOGISTICS

Douglas Niggley

National Account Manager, Qantas



AUTOMOTIVE & MANUFACTURING

Fredrik Orrenius
Co-Founder & Chief Financial Officer, Auto24.Africa



ENERGY & RENEWABLE TECHNOLOGY

Nikhil Dhyan
General Manager Delivery and Services, 5B Australia

Amit Gupta
Chief Financial Officer, Gelion

Stuart Rayner
Commercial Director, Gelion

Richard Liu
Financial Controller, Gelion



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