

TWENTY2 COLLECTIVE — TALES

# BEDROCK

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*A Tale of Activation*

twenty2 collective

*Realising the value of change.*

*“Funded is not the same as resourced.  
Resourced is not the same as ready.”*

THE ACTIVATION GAP — TWENTY2 COLLECTIVE PPP PULSE REPORT, Q3 2026

## A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

*Bedrock is a work of fiction. Kate, Grant, Mac, and Halyard Resources do not exist. The situations they move through do — composited from patterns we've observed across programs, sectors, and years, none of them any single client, all of them true to something we've watched happen more than once.*

*It's the first in a series we're calling Tales — short, standalone stories that sit alongside our research, for anyone who'd rather feel a finding than read it as a statistic. If you've already spent time with our handbook, you'll recognise the bones of CORE underneath this one, even though nobody in it ever says the word.*

PART ONE

# The Best Day

The email arrived at 6:52 on a Tuesday morning, before Kate Sorensen had finished her coffee, and it changed the shape of her year.

*Subject: Project Bedrock — confirmed.*

*Kate — board approved the budget yesterday afternoon. \$14M, three-year build, go-live target end of Q2 next year. You're leading it. Come and see me at 9. — Grant*

She read it twice, standing at the kitchen counter in her socks, and felt something she hadn't felt in eighteen months of asking for exactly this. Not relief. Something closer to vindication.

"Mum." Josh was fourteen and already taller than her, leaning in the doorway with his school shirt half-buttoned. "You're smiling at your phone like it said something good."

"It did."

"Good good, or work good?"

"Is there a difference?"

He rolled his eyes in the specific way that meant *there is absolutely a difference and you know it*, and went to find his other shoe. She didn't chase the thought. She had a train to catch and a nine o'clock with the CEO of Halyard Resources, and for the first time in a long time she walked into the building feeling like the ground under her was solid.

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Grant Pashley's office looked out over the Swan River, and he liked to stand at the window when he talked, which meant most conversations with him happened to the back of his head. He did it now.

"Fourteen million," he said. "Three sites, one planning system, real-time visibility from pit to port. The board's been asking for this since before you and I worked together, Kate. You know what it means if we get it right."

"I know what it means if we get it wrong, too."

He turned around at that, and for a second something crossed his face, not quite a wince. "Meridian was four years ago."

"I'm not bringing it up to relitigate it. I'm bringing it up because the operators at Site Two still call any new system 'the next Meridian' before they've even seen it. That's the environment I'm walking into."

“Then don’t let them call it that. Call it Bedrock. Something solid. Something that isn’t going anywhere.” He said it like a man closing a sale, which, she supposed, he was: to her, to the board, to himself. “You’ve got the mandate, you’ve got the money, and you’ve got twelve months. What else do you need?”

It was a real question, and later she would understand it was the only wrong answer she gave him that whole morning, because she answered it too fast.

“Nothing,” she said. “I’ve got everything I need.”

She believed it. That was the thing she’d come to understand about the best day of a program: everyone in the room believes it, and that belief is exactly why nobody stops to ask the harder question underneath it. Funded is a feeling. It is not the same thing as ready.

## PART TWO

# The Space Between

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Three weeks in, Kate stood at the front of a conference room on the fourteenth floor with a slide behind her that said *PROJECT BEDROCK: LAUNCH* in a font Nic from Marketing had chosen specifically because it looked, in his words, “like something you could trust.” Forty people had come. The site leads had dialled in from the pit, tinny and half a second delayed. Doug Reyes, her predecessor, technically still two levels above her on the org chart and technically not involved in this at all anymore, sat in the back row with his arms folded, and she made a point of not looking at him.

The launch went well. People clapped in the specific muted way people clap at ten in the morning. Grant said a few words about the board’s confidence and left early for another meeting, which everyone understood to mean the meeting had gone exactly as well as it was supposed to.

It was in week five that the first crack showed, and it showed up somewhere so small that for two days Kate genuinely believed it wasn’t a crack at all.

The scheduling data migration, the unglamorous, unphotographable work of moving eleven years of maintenance and planning records into the new system’s format, had stalled. Not failed. Stalled, in the way things stall when three different people each believe someone else is driving.

“Who owns data migration?” she asked, in the Thursday standing meeting, and watched four faces do four different things.

The delivery lead, a sharp, tired woman from the vendor side, said, “That sits with the client’s data team, contractually.”

The data team lead said, “We were told PMO was coordinating the migration schedule, we’re just executing against what’s given to us.”

The PMO lead looked at Kate. “We report status. We were never given the authority to actually reprioritise anyone’s time. That’s a sponsor decision.”

Everyone looked, eventually, at Kate, because in the absence of any other candidate, the person running the meeting becomes the owner of whatever nobody else claims. She said something reassuring about getting it sorted by Monday, and it was sorted by Monday, in the sense that she personally spent Friday and the weekend on the phone reallocating two data analysts from a different team and asking Grant, awkwardly, for the authority to do it again if it happened next month.

He gave it to her without hesitation, which felt like a win. It took her another three weeks to notice what it actually meant: the go-live memo said the *program* owned setup. In practice, nobody had ever agreed what “setup” was, when it ended, or whose name was on it if it went wrong. Not

until the thing nearly went wrong, and then it was quietly, silently, hers. Not because anyone decided that. Because nobody had decided anything else.

Shared ownership, she was starting to understand, was a phrase that sounded like a solution and behaved like a vacancy.

## What Gets Cut First

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By week eight the schedule had a problem, and the problem had a name: the go-live date hadn't moved, but the discovery phase had run three weeks long, which meant something downstream had to give.

Kate sat across from the finance director, a careful woman named Odette Marr, and watched her run a highlighter down the budget line for Change and Capability Enablement, the training, the coaching, the two full days per site that had been planned to bring planners and schedulers up to speed on the new system before they were expected to live in it.

"If we push the training to run concurrent with go-live instead of ahead of it," Odette said, "we recover three of the four weeks we've lost. It's the only lever big enough to matter."

"It's also the thing that determines whether anyone can actually use what we're building."

"I know. I'm not saying it's free. I'm saying it's the lever." Odette wasn't being callous. Kate could see that. She was being honest about the shape of the constraint, which was in some ways worse, because it meant there was no villain to argue with. Just a calendar that didn't care.

Kate held the line for exactly one week. Then a director from Site One, a blunt, decent man named Wozniak who'd been running maintenance schedules by feel for twenty-two years, told her directly that his team could absorb a delayed go-live better than they could absorb going live without knowing what they were doing.

"You want green ticks on a board," he said, not unkindly. "I want blokes who aren't standing around the depot on day one asking each other what button does what while the plant's waiting on a part."

She fought for two more days and lost anyway. The training moved. It always moves, she was starting to realise. Not because anyone believes it doesn't matter, but because it's the only piece of the plan that doesn't have a date physically attached to a steel structure somewhere. You can't defer a shutdown. You can defer a person's readiness to work inside a system, right up until the moment you can't, and by then it isn't a training problem anymore. It's a go-live problem wearing a training-shaped mask.

The night the decision was finalised, Kate got home at nine to find Josh had eaten dinner alone and left her plate wrapped on the bench with a note that said *saved you some, went to Tyler's*. She sat at the counter and ate cold pasta standing up and thought, not for the first time, that the version of herself running this program and the version of herself who used to be home for dinner were starting to feel like two different people, and she wasn't sure yet which one Grant was actually promoting her toward.

## The Green Slide

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The steering committee met on the second Thursday of every month, and by week eleven Kate had learned its real function was not oversight. It was theatre, and she meant that almost affectionately: a room full of serious people needing to see motion, because motion is legible in a way that foundation work is not.

She had, in front of her, two honest options for the slide.

Option one: tell them that user acceptance testing had surfaced eleven data-integrity issues across the migrated maintenance records, three of them significant enough to affect scheduling accuracy at Site Two, and that fixing them properly would cost another two weeks nobody currently had.

Option two: report the dashboard the vendor had built, which showed configuration completeness at 91%. True, accurate, and almost entirely disconnected from whether the system would actually produce a correct maintenance schedule on day one.

She built the second slide. She told herself she'd raise the data issues separately, in a smaller room, with the right people, at the right time. That was true, and also exactly the kind of true that lets you avoid a harder conversation while still feeling like an honest person.

The meeting went well. Grant said the board would be pleased. Doug Reyes, invited as a courtesy, said nothing at all, which she'd have preferred to almost any comment.

It was Priya, the delivery lead, who caught her afterward in the corridor.

"Can I say something you might not want to hear?"

"Go on."

"That slide bought you a good meeting. It didn't buy the program anything." Priya wasn't angry. If anything, she looked tired in the way of someone who'd watched this exact scene before, on some other program, in some other building. "Every week we don't talk about the data issues honestly is a week they get harder to fix. And the first time someone above you finds out we knew and didn't say, that's not a data problem anymore either."

Kate didn't sleep well that night. Not because she thought she'd been caught in a lie, she hadn't, technically, but because she recognised, with the particular clarity that comes at two in the morning, that she'd spent eleven weeks building a program whose real infrastructure was invisible: unnamed owners, training pushed back, a status report calibrated for the room rather than the truth. She had done everything Grant had asked. She had also, somewhere in the doing of it, stopped asking herself the harder questions.

She thought about Josh's note on the kitchen bench. *Saved you some.* She thought about what exactly she was so busy protecting.

## The Man at the Coffee Cart

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She met Mac Sutherland by accident, the way most useful things happen, at the coffee cart outside the building on a Friday morning when she'd forgotten her wallet and he'd quietly told the barista to put it on his tab.

"You looked like you needed it more than I did," he said. He was somewhere past seventy, dressed like a man who'd once worn a hard hat for a living and never entirely stopped dressing for it. "Mac. I used to run operations for a company two buildings from here, long before it had a different name and different owners."

She thanked him, told him her name, and would have left it there if he hadn't asked, plainly, "Big program?"

"Bedrock. Company-wide planning system, three sites."

"How's it going?"

Something about the honesty of the question, no performance in it, no angle, made her answer more truthfully than she'd answered anyone in eleven weeks. "Badly, in ways I keep managing to make sound like progress."

Mac nodded slowly, like she'd confirmed something rather than surprised him. "Can I ask you something, and you don't have to answer if you don't want to?"

"Go on."

"When your program kicked off, how long was it before people were actually working on it? Not meeting about it. Working."

She started to answer fast, *day one, we hit the ground running*, and then stopped, because it wasn't true, and something about this stranger with coffee dripping down his cup made lying feel like more effort than it was worth. "Honestly? Six, maybe seven weeks before anyone was doing the actual work instead of sorting out who was meant to be doing it."

"And when did you first feel like the organisation was genuinely ready for this? Not funded. Ready."

She laughed, not because it was funny. "I'm still waiting to feel that."

"Who owns the first ninety days of Bedrock? Not who's accountable on a chart. Whose name would you say, out loud, if someone asked you right now."

She opened her mouth and nothing came out, which was itself the answer, and Mac watched her realise it.

“That’s usually the one that gets people,” he said. “Everyone can point to a sponsor. Not everyone can point to an owner. They’re not the same job.”

He didn’t lecture her. He asked two more questions over the next four Fridays, the same coffee cart, the same unhurried patience, about how confident she really was in the people currently leading the change on the ground, and what people around her actually said when the program stalled, versus what they said in the steering committee. He never once told her what to do. By the fourth Friday she’d started bringing a notebook, not because he asked her to, but because she’d worked out that writing down her own answers to his questions was doing more for the program than anything in the last eleven weeks of status reporting.

“You keep asking me things I should have asked myself in week one,” she said.

“You did ask yourself. In week one you were sure of the answers. That’s the trouble with the beginning of anything: it’s the only point where you have both the least information and the most confidence. Everyone gets the two backwards.”

## Five Things

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She went back to the program with five decisions, none of them clever, all of them overdue.

She wrote down, in one page, what “ready” actually meant for Bedrock. Not a feeling. A checklist: data validated at ninety-eight percent accuracy per site, every planner through hands-on training before go-live not after, a rollback plan signed off by each site lead by name. If the phase couldn’t produce that page, it wasn’t allowed to be called finished, no matter what the calendar said.

She went to Grant and asked for something that felt, saying it out loud, uncomfortably small: her name, formally, as the single accountable owner of activation. Not delivery, not the vendor relationship, specifically the first ninety days of anything Bedrock touched at each site. Not a committee. Her, by name, with the authority to say *we are not ready* and have it mean something. Grant didn’t hesitate, which told her something about how easily this could have existed from day one, if anyone had thought to ask for it.

She moved the training back. Not by negotiating with the calendar, but by finally treating it as non-negotiable rather than deferrable, which meant something else had to give. The something else turned out to be two weeks of go-live buffer she’d been quietly holding in reserve for exactly this kind of decision, without admitting to herself that’s what it was for.

She called Wozniak from Site One and asked him, directly, what was actually going wrong on the ground that hadn’t made it into any status report, and then she did the same at Site Two and at Site Three, standing in three different depots, and made it clear that the fastest way to lose her trust was not to bring her bad news. It was to sit on it.

And at the next steering committee, she stood up and showed them the eleven data issues from week eleven, four weeks late and entirely undisguised, and told them what it had cost the program not to say so sooner. Grant was quiet for a long moment. So was the room.

“Why are you telling us this now instead of putting a green dashboard up like last time?” he asked, and it wasn’t hostile. It was genuinely curious.

“Because the dashboard bought us a good meeting once already. It didn’t buy the program anything. I’d rather you trust what I tell you than like what I show you.”

Nobody clapped. It was a better meeting than the launch had been.

## EPILOGUE

# Day Ninety

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Bedrock went live at Site One on a Wednesday, four days later than the original plan and, as far as Kate could tell, exactly on time for what the program had actually needed. There was no launch slide. There was a maintenance planner named Cheryl who found a scheduling conflict on her second day using the new system and fixed it herself before it became anyone else's problem, and told Kate about it afterward like it was nothing, which was precisely the point.

Grant called her into his office in October, and this time he didn't stand at the window. He sat across from her the way he might sit across from someone he was about to offer something to.

"COO," he said. "Effective January. The board's asked for you by name."

She thought she'd feel the same thing she'd felt reading his email in her kitchen ten months earlier. She didn't, quite. What she felt was steadier, harder to name, and she suspected it had something to do with what Mac had been pointing her toward all along, four Fridays in a row, one question at a time.

"Can I tell you what actually got us here?" she said. "It wasn't the fourteen million. It wasn't even hitting the date, because we didn't, not the first one. It was that by the end, when something was wrong, people told me. Early. Before it cost anything to fix. Nobody put that in the business case. The business case was quietly depending on it the whole time."

Grant considered that for a moment. "You sound like you've been talking to someone."

"An old man at a coffee cart," she said, and didn't explain further, and he didn't ask.

That evening she got home at six, which had become, without her quite deciding it, the new ordinary time. Josh was at the counter doing homework badly and eating cereal for dinner, which she'd stopped fighting him on.

"Good day?" he asked, not looking up.

"Good day," she said, and meant it in a way that had nothing to do with a slide, a board, or a green dashboard. "Funded was never the hard part, Josh. Turns out getting people actually ready was."

He looked up properly then. "Ready for what?"

"Good question," she said, and sat down next to him, and didn't check her phone once for the rest of the evening.

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## **twenty2 collective**

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Bedrock is the first in the Tales series — short fiction drawn from the Twenty2 People, Productivity and Performance research programme. If this was useful, our handbook covers the frameworks underneath it in full.

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