The Strategy Brief

The Strategy Function Is Becoming the Value Function

Emerging Themes Across Enterprise Strategy Teams in 2026

The Strategy Brief | Strategy Circle Insights Report

Executive Summary

When we planned this month's Strategy Circle discussion, the idea was relatively straightforward. We wanted to challenge members to rethink the strategy function from the ground up. If you could start again, what would you stop doing? What would you double down on? And what would you design differently?

On the surface, it felt like a conversation about organisational design, but, In reality, it became something quite different.

As the discussion unfolded, one topic kept resurfacing. Regardless of whether members came from financial services, technology, telecommunications or healthcare, everyone seemed to circle back to the same question: how do we define value, and how do we make sure we're actually creating it?

That might sound obvious. After all, creating value is what strategy is supposed to do. But listening to the discussion, it became clear that many organisations are still far better at approving initiatives than they are at tracking whether those initiatives ultimately deliver what they promised.

It also felt like something else is beginning to change.

Traditionally, strategy teams have been responsible for setting direction, facilitating planning processes and supporting major transformation programmes. Increasingly though, members described a role that extends much further. One that remains involved long after the business case has been signed off, helping the organisation prioritise competing investments, measure outcomes and continually ask whether the expected value is actually being realised.

Collectively, the discussion suggested that the strategy function itself may be evolving. Not away from planning, but beyond it.

The Strategy Function Is No Longer Just About Strategy

One of the things we enjoy most about these monthly discussions is that they rarely end up where we expect them to.

The opening question this month was deliberately broad. If you had the opportunity to redesign the strategy function from scratch, what would you change?

We expected people to talk about governance, reporting lines or operating models.

Instead, the conversation quickly moved towards something much more fundamental.

Several members questioned whether strategy teams spend too much time supporting activities that consume significant effort without adding much value.

Others reflected on how easy it is for strategy functions to become absorbed in planning cycles, board papers and reporting requirements, while losing visibility of what happens after investment decisions have been made.

Perhaps the most interesting observation came from organisations that have deliberately embedded value management into the strategy function itself. Rather than treating value as something that's assessed when funding is approved, they described following it throughout the entire transformation lifecycle, continually measuring whether initiatives are delivering the outcomes they were originally intended to achieve.

Listening to the discussion, we found ourselves wondering whether this represents a much bigger shift. Perhaps the role of strategy is becoming less about producing plans and increasingly about acting as the steward of organisational value.

The Problem With Value Is That Everyone Defines It Differently

One of the reasons this discussion became so interesting was that nobody actually disagreed about the importance of value.

What differed was what value meant.

For some organisations it was almost entirely financial. Others talked about customer outcomes, employee engagement, reputation or service quality. One member described a corporate scorecard that balanced talent, customer, financial and reputational measures, while others explained how value becomes considerably more complex as organisations diversify into new business models.

There wasn't a single right answer.

If anything, that seemed to reinforce the point.

Before strategy teams can measure success, organisations first need to be explicit about what success actually looks like.

That sounds deceptively simple, yet it's remarkable how often strategic discussions begin with priorities rather than definitions. If leaders aren't aligned on what they're trying to optimise for, prioritisation inevitably becomes more subjective, accountability becomes less clear and measuring progress becomes increasingly difficult.

Perhaps defining value is no longer an outcome of strategy. It may be one of its first responsibilities.

Innovation Only Matters If It Creates Value

Innovation also featured heavily throughout the discussion, although not in the way we expected.

Rather than debating emerging technologies or future trends, members kept returning to a much simpler question. How do we make sure good ideas actually become valuable outcomes?

Paul referenced ISO 56000, which defines innovation as both creating and capturing value. That distinction seemed to resonate with the group. Generating ideas has never been easier. Most organisations have more ideas than they know what to do with. The challenge is deciding which ones deserve investment and then maintaining enough discipline to ensure they ultimately deliver meaningful outcomes.

Several members reflected on the tension between visionary thinking and operational reality. Particularly in younger businesses, there's often no shortage of ambition. The difficulty lies in translating that ambition into a manageable portfolio of initiatives that can actually be executed.

Perhaps that's where the strategy function creates the greatest value, not by generating more ideas, but by helping organisations decide which ideas matter most.

Every Strategy Is Really A Series Of Trade-Offs

If there was one theme that appeared repeatedly throughout the discussion, it was the importance of trade-offs.

Whether the conversation centred on regulation, innovation, portfolio management or organisational redesign, members consistently returned to the same challenge.

No organisation has unlimited capacity. Choosing what to focus on inevitably means choosing what not to do.

Several members spoke about the need to become comfortable being exceptional at a handful of things rather than reasonably good at everything. Others discussed balancing immediate commercial pressures against longer-term investments, while participants from more heavily regulated industries described the constant challenge of balancing compliance requirements alongside growth ambitions.

What struck us was that nobody framed these trade-offs as a weakness. They were simply recognised as the reality of modern strategy.

Perhaps one of the strategy function's most important roles is helping organisations make those decisions deliberately rather than allowing them to emerge by default.

Key Takeaways

Several recurring themes emerged consistently throughout the session:

1. The strategy function is becoming responsible for value, not just strategy

2. Defining value is becoming a strategic capability

3. Innovation only creates advantage when organisations capture value

4. Strategy is increasingly becoming a discipline of trade-offsc decision-making

5.There is no blueprint for the modern strategy function

What This May Signal

After each Strategy Circle session, we usually find ourselves reflecting on whether the discussion represents an isolated set of observations or something more significant. This month felt like the latter. Taken individually, members were discussing value management, innovation, governance, prioritisation and organisational design. Collectively though, it felt like they were describing a strategy function that's gradually changing its purpose. Historically, strategy teams have been responsible for helping organisations decide where they want to go.

Increasingly, they also appear to be taking responsibility for ensuring those decisions create the value they were intended to create. That may sound like a subtle distinction, but we suspect it's a meaningful one. If that's the direction the function is heading, future strategy leaders may spend less time producing plans and considerably more time asking difficult questions about outcomes, accountability and value realisation. And perhaps that's exactly where the next evolution of enterprise strategy lies.

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Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read this Strategy Circle insights report.

The Strategy Circle is a private peer community for senior strategy and transformation leaders, bringing together executives navigating the realities of modern enterprise strategy roles through:

- monthly virtual discussions,
- and quarterly in-person dinners.

If you are interested in joining future conversations and connecting with other senior leaders across the strategy community, please reach out to:

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