



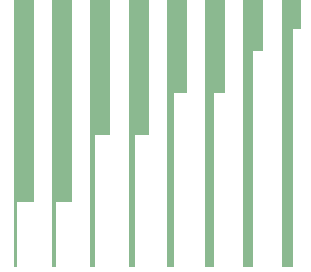
# Balancing Agility and Drift

Emerging Themes Across  
Enterprise Strategy Teams in 2026

The Strategy Brief | Strategy Circle  
Insights Report



# Executive Summary



Across industries, strategy leaders are navigating an increasingly difficult balancing act. The challenge is no longer simply setting strategic direction. It is maintaining momentum against a constant stream of operational interruptions, executive priorities, market shifts, and emerging technology pressures.

A recent Strategy Circle discussion involving senior strategy and transformation leaders across sectors including technology, utilities, insurance, agriculture, and health highlighted a recurring theme:

Many organisations are not struggling from a lack of strategic ambition. They are struggling to protect strategic focus from continuous drift.

Across the discussion, a broader pattern emerged:

Many organisations are no longer struggling to define strategy. They are struggling to coordinate execution across increasingly complex operating environments.

As strategic priorities multiply, transformation activity accelerates, and external volatility increases, the role of the strategy function itself appears to be evolving, from long-range planning toward continuous organisational alignment and prioritisation.

Participants repeatedly described environments where:

- business-as-usual activity absorbs disproportionate organisational attention,
- urgent commercial pressures reshape priorities,
- leadership requests interrupt delivery cadence,
- and transformation programs compete for the same limited resources.

At the same time, leaders acknowledged that rigid long-range planning models are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain in environments shaped by geopolitical instability, rapid technological change, and shifting customer expectations.

As a result, many strategy teams are attempting to evolve from:

Static strategic planning functions, toward: adaptive coordination and prioritisation functions.

This shift is changing:

- how organisations govern strategy,
- how investment decisions are made,
- how teams allocate resources,
- and how leaders think about execution itself.

# The Rise of Strategic Drift



One of the strongest themes emerging from the discussion was what several participants described as the growing “gravity well” of operational activity.

While most organisations maintain formal strategic plans, participants noted that execution frequently becomes fragmented by:

- urgent operational demands
- short-term revenue pressures
- executive-led initiatives
- and reactive prioritisation cycles

Importantly, members stressed that strategic drift is rarely intentional.

Instead, it often occurs gradually through the accumulation of competing priorities. Several leaders observed that:

- transformation programs continue to launch
- strategic priorities continue to expand
- but organisational capacity does not

This creates environments where teams become overloaded, priorities blur, and strategic initiatives slow without being formally deprioritised.

A recurring tension emerged between:

maintaining long-term direction, while also: responding rapidly to immediate commercial realities.

Many participants acknowledged that modern strategy teams increasingly operate in a permanent state of trade-off management rather than linear strategic execution.

Several participants noted that the issue is rarely a lack of ambition or initiative.

In many cases, organisations already have extensive transformation agendas underway. The challenge is that new priorities are continuously layered on top of existing ones, creating execution strain without corresponding increases in organisational capacity.

This is creating what some leaders described as a growing execution capacity problem rather than a strategy problem.



# Governance Is Becoming A Strategic Capability

A second major theme centred around governance structures.

Multiple participants described growing reliance on:

- strategy steering committees,
- cross-functional prioritisation forums,
- and enterprise-wide resource visibility processes.

These mechanisms were viewed not as bureaucratic controls, but increasingly as essential strategic infrastructure.

Participants noted that effective governance processes create:

- transparency around trade-offs
- visibility into resource constraints
- alignment across departments
- and organisational trust around prioritisation decisions

One participant described implementing monthly resource capacity assessments involving:

- finance
- strategy
- and enterprise PMO functions

The purpose was not simply project reporting, but exposing organisational overload before it silently undermined delivery capability.

This reflects a broader shift occurring across enterprise strategy functions:

Strategy is increasingly becoming less about annual planning cycles and more about continuous portfolio management.

The organisations perceived to be operating most effectively were not necessarily those with the most ambitious strategies.

They were those with:

- clearer prioritisation mechanisms
- stronger visibility into execution capacity
- and more mature decision-making processes

# Agility Is Replacing Long-Range Certainty



Participants widely acknowledged that traditional long-range strategic planning assumptions are becoming harder to sustain.

Many leaders described shorter planning horizons, more frequent review cycles, and increasing pressure to remain adaptable.

Rather than abandoning long-term direction entirely, several participants described moving toward:

“North Star” style strategic models, where: long-term ambition remains stable, but execution pathways evolve continuously.

This reflects a growing recognition that adaptability itself may now represent a competitive advantage.

Several leaders discussed the importance of:

- modular transformation programs
- shorter execution cycles
- and breaking large initiatives into smaller, adjustable components

The objective is not necessarily faster change for its own sake.

It is preserving the organisation’s ability to respond without losing strategic coherence.

This aligns with broader market trends.

Recent Deloitte research found that only 27% of leaders believe their organisations manage change effectively, despite continuous transformation activity occurring across most enterprises.

The implication is significant:

The challenge facing many organisations may no longer be change management.

It may be whether the organisation itself is structurally designed to adapt.



# AI Is Accelerating Strategic Uncertainty

Artificial intelligence emerged as one of the most debated topics during the session. Participants expressed mixed views regarding:

- AI's immediate business value
- the pace of adoption
- and the strategic implications for enterprise operating models

Several leaders acknowledged pressure from boards and executive teams to “do something” with AI, even where the commercial use case remains unclear.

A recurring tension emerged between the fear of moving too slowly and the risk of investing heavily before the commercial implications are fully understood.

Several leaders suggested organisations are currently operating in an environment where experimentation feels necessary, but long-term strategic positioning remains unclear.

Others questioned whether organisations are currently solving genuine strategic problems or simply responding to competitive pressure and fear of falling behind.

One recurring concern centred around value realisation.

Participants noted that while many organisations are experimenting with AI initiatives, relatively few appear able to clearly measure enterprise-level impact.

Discussion also highlighted growing uncertainty around:

- investment timing
- organisational readiness
- and whether companies should act as pioneers or fast followers

Importantly, members repeatedly emphasised that AI adoption is not primarily a technology challenge.

It is a change management challenge.

Several participants suggested that the organisations most likely to realise value from AI may not be those deploying the most tools, but those most effectively redesigning workflows, decision-making processes, and organisational behaviours around them.

# The Emerging Role of the Strategy Function

Perhaps the clearest theme emerging across the discussion was the changing nature of strategy leadership itself.

Historically, many strategy teams operated primarily as:

- planning
- analysis
- and corporate development functions

Increasingly, participants described strategy roles becoming:

- coordination functions
- prioritisation functions
- and enterprise alignment functions

The role is moving from:

setting strategy

toward:

maintaining strategic coherence across constant disruption.

This requires a different set of capabilities:

- organisational influence
- governance design
- resource orchestration
- executive alignment
- and change navigation

Participants repeatedly stressed that:

- clarity,
- communication
- and transparent trade-off management
- are becoming increasingly important leadership capabilities

Not because organisations lack ideas. But because execution environments are becoming structurally more complex.

# Key Takeaways

Several recurring themes emerged consistently throughout the session:

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## > 1. Strategic drift is becoming a structural challenge

Operational pressures, leadership interruptions, and resource overload are increasingly disrupting strategic momentum.

## > 4. AI uncertainty is reshaping strategic decision-making

Leaders remain divided on AI's pace, value, and implementation approach, particularly around measurable business outcomes.

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## > 2. Governance is evolving from operational oversight to strategic infrastructure

Organisations are relying more heavily on steering committees, prioritisation forums, and resource transparency mechanisms.

## > 5. The strategy function itself is evolving

Strategy leaders are increasingly acting as enterprise coordinators and prioritisation leaders rather than purely long-range planners.

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## > 3. Adaptability is becoming a core organisational capability

Many strategy teams are shortening cycles, increasing flexibility, and moving away from rigid long-term planning assumptions.

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# What This May Signal

Collectively, these themes may point toward a broader shift in enterprise strategy itself. Historically, strategy functions often focused on defining direction through periodic planning cycles.

Increasingly, however, strategy leaders appear to be operating as enterprise coordinators, balancing investment decisions, organisational capacity, governance, transformation sequencing, and executive alignment simultaneously.

In this environment, adaptability may become less about reacting quickly and more about maintaining coherence while the organisation continuously changes around it.

# Closing Observation



## Summary

One of the most striking aspects of the discussion was the consistency of challenges appearing across industries.

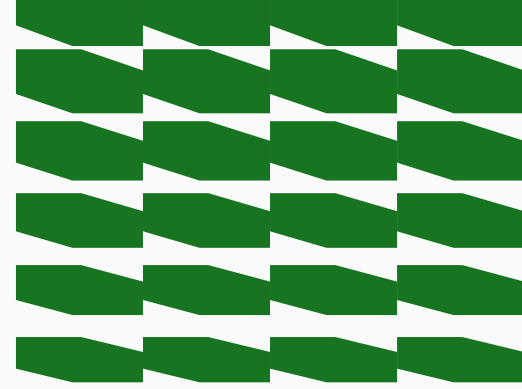
Despite operating in different sectors, many participants described remarkably similar tensions:

- too many competing priorities
- insufficient execution capacity
- growing transformation fatigue
- and increasing pressure to remain agile without losing strategic direction

This may point toward a broader shift occurring across enterprise strategy functions globally.

The organisations most likely to succeed over the coming years may not necessarily be those with the most ambitious strategic plans.

They may be those best able to continuously adapt while maintaining organisational alignment and execution discipline.



# 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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