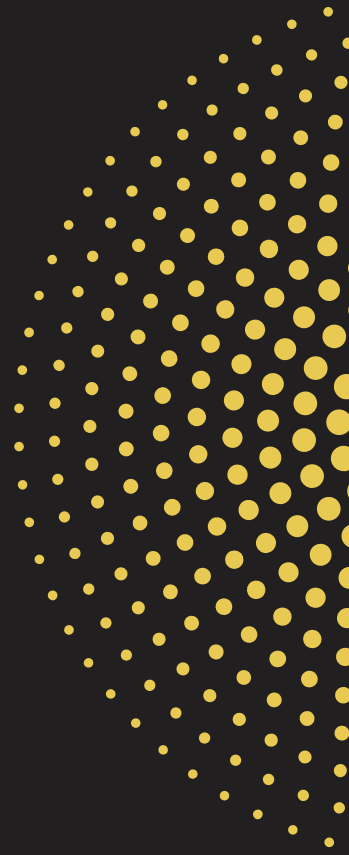
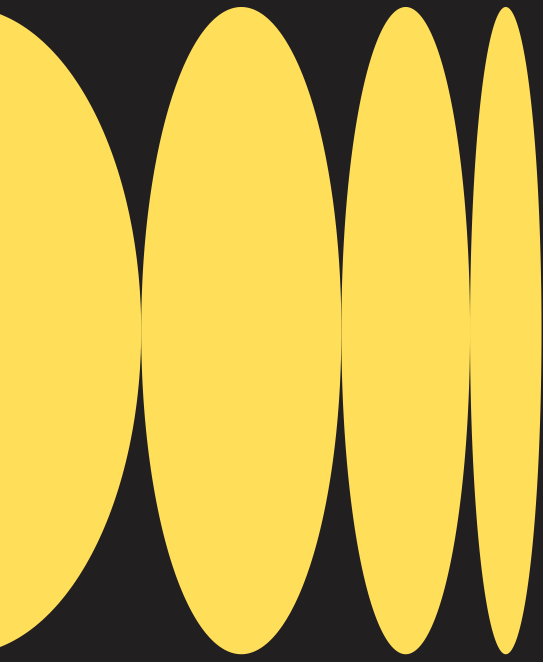


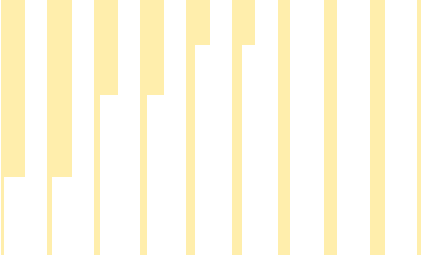


Commit to Direction. Preserve the Right to Change Course.

Emerging Themes Across
Enterprise Strategy Teams in 2026

The Strategy Brief | Strategy Circle
Insights Report





Executive Summary

This month, our Strategy Circle skipped the abstract theories and put one leader in the Hot Seat to solve a massive, real-world dilemma: How do you fire bullets and build a great strategy locally when the global corporate headquarters keeps shifting the ground beneath your feet?

Every great leader faces this. Your team needs a roadmap today. Budgets must be locked in now. But with leadership shakeups and moving targets at the top, your foundation feels like shifting sand.

Waiting for perfect data is a death sentence. But blindly locking yourself into a rigid plan is just as dangerous.

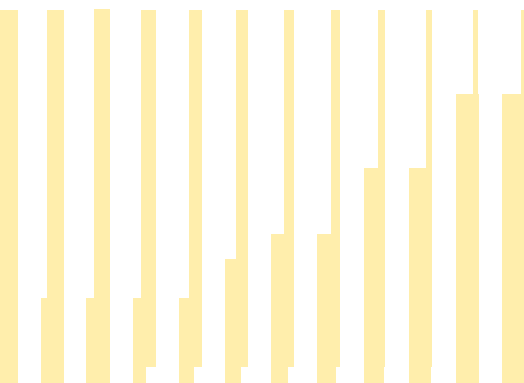
When our groups debated this, they discovered a fundamental principle of Great by Choice:

Uncertainty doesn't mean you stop making bets. It means you change how you place your bets.

Instead of trying to predict the future with a crystal ball, the best leaders use three core rules to navigate the fog:

- **Fire Bullets, Then Cannonballs:** Start with small, low-risk moves that create value no matter what corporate does next. Once you have proof of what works, commit the big resources.
- **Build a Flexible Map:** Stage your decisions. Delay the non-urgent ones, and intentionally design your plans so you can pivot without destroying the company.
- **Productive Paranoia:** If your bosses don't understand why you are being cautious, your flexibility will look like hesitation. You must over-communicate your logic and document your choices so everyone stays aligned.

True strategic agility isn't about being fast and frantic when chaos hits. It's about deliberately building a fortress that preserves your ability to act before the storm arrives.





You Can't Wait for Certainty Before You Start

The core tension in this month's Hot Seat boiled down to a difficult reality:

The local team had to take action.

The global corporate strategy was a total blur.

Waiting for clarity would have made planning comfortable, but the clock was ticking. In the real world, deadlines don't pause. Products have to launch, campaigns have to go live, and budgets must be assigned.

Almost every leader in the room recognised this trap. If you wait for 100% complete information before making a move, you will wait forever. Leaders change, markets shift, and corporate priorities flip overnight. The assumptions you built your plan on yesterday can evaporate tomorrow.

When hit with this kind of fog, the natural human instinct is to freeze, to delay execution until the uncertainty passes.

But here is the empirical truth: Uncertainty does not shrink just because you choose to wait.

In fact, waiting is not a pause; waiting is a deliberate strategic decision. And usually, it's a bad one. While you sit on your hands, your teams lose direction, your customers get ignored, and your windows of opportunity slam shut.

So, the circle stopped asking a useless question: "How do we create absolute certainty before we commit?"

Instead, they asked the defining question of enduring organisations: "How do we confront the brutal facts and drive forward without pretending certainty exists?"

That mental shift makes a difference.

Not Every Strategic Decision Should Be Treated the Same

One of the most powerful insights from our discussions was that great leaders don't treat all decisions as equal. They separate them based on one metric: **how hard is it to undo?**

The leaders in the room used different words, but they all pointed to the exact same framework.

Some called it **"Two-Door" decisions**, choices where, if you step through and realise the room is on fire, you can easily step right back out. Others broke it down into three specific buckets: **No-Regrets, Reversible, and Irreversible.**

The terminology doesn't matter. The core principle does: **Not every decision deserves the same amount of chips on the table.**

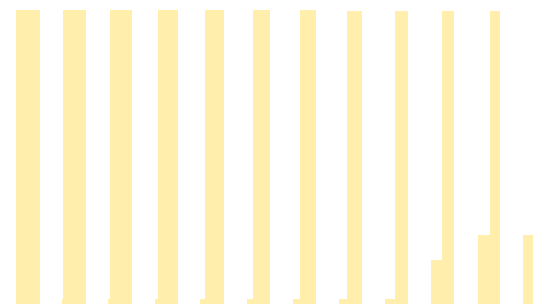
- **No-Regrets Moves:** You pull the trigger immediately. These are actions that win no matter what the future looks like. They build core strength.
- **Reversible Moves:** You proceed with caution. If the corporate strategy shifts tomorrow, the cost of changing direction is cheap and manageable.
- **Irreversible Moves:** This is where you pause. Once you dump massive money, time, and team energy into these, you are locked in. Undoing them will break the company. Therefore, these require extreme confidence and evidence.

This flips how we view strategy when the future is blurry.

Stop asking a binary question like: "Should we commit or should we stay flexible?"

Instead, ask the disciplined question: **"Where can we commit with total confidence right now, and where must we fiercely protect our options?"**

That is how you keep your momentum alive without accidentally locking yourself into a trap.



Agility Can Be Designed Into the Strategy



Most people think flexibility is something you scramble to find after chaos hits. That is a dangerous mistake. True elite performers design flexibility into the system long before the storm arrives.

Instead of writing a massive check and approving a giant, three-year plan all at once, the best leaders use a concept we named Staged Commitments. They break time down into three clear horizons:

- Horizon 1 (Now): Full speed ahead. You execute immediate tasks with 100% confidence.
- Horizon 2 (Next): Get everything prepped and ready to launch, but leave enough wiggle room to tweak the plan if the corporate wind shifts.
- Horizon 3 (Later): Keep these options wide open. Do not lock yourself in until the fog clears and you have more data.

The exact same discipline applies to cash. Don't fall into the trap of thinking a budget is just "spent" or "unspent." Instead, split your money into two buckets: Committed Spend (what we must deploy right now to win) and Aspirational Spend (money we hope to deploy later, but only if the evidence proves it's a winning move).

This lets your team keep moving forward at a steady pace. It completely stops the chaotic cycle of starting a project, pausing it, killing it, and rebuilding it from scratch every time your bosses change their minds.

To be clear: This is not an excuse to be soft or non-committal.

You are still making bold, calculated choices. You are simply being hyper-disciplined about when you allow those choices to become permanent.

The ultimate takeaway is this: The hallmark of a truly agile strategy isn't how fast you can rewrite your playbook when things go wrong. It's how much shock-absorption you built into the playbook before the crisis even started.



Protect the Things That Shouldn't Move



We've talked a lot about flexibility. But let's be absolutely clear: if everything is flexible, you have chaos, not a strategy.

The best leaders know that navigating a storm requires a paradox. You must identify the rock-solid pillars of your strategy that never change, even while the tactics around them constantly evolve.

Think about it: Your daily operations still have to run smoothly. Your promises to your customers are sacred and must be delivered. Your team needs enough stable ground beneath their feet to actually execute today's work. Plus, some of your local strategy is just inherently correct, it makes sense no matter what the bosses at global headquarters decide to do.

This means you must draw a hard line between your Non-Negotiables and your Flexible Tactics.

If you fail to make this distinction, your "agility" will degenerate into a nightmare of constant reprioritisation. Your team will change direction every week, resources will bleed out as you constantly shuffle them around, and the anxiety at the top of the company will trickle down to poison the frontline.

But when you lock in what is fixed, the surrounding uncertainty becomes completely manageable.

You don't need a crystal ball that predicts every single detail of the future. You just need absolute certainty about the few things that matter most.



Managing Up Is Part of Strategic Agility



We've cracked the code on designing a flexible strategy. But none of it matters if you can't sell it to the bosses. Designing an adaptable plan is only half the battle; explaining it to senior leadership is where the rubber meets the road.

If your bosses don't understand why your plan is flexible, they won't see you as strategic. They will see you as a leader who lacks conviction and is too afraid to make a call.

When the fog of uncertainty rolls in, managing upwards becomes your number one priority.

You cannot sit in a cave, draft a flawless master plan, and then hand it to corporate headquarters, because a single policy shift from them will blow your plan to pieces.

Instead, you must take your leaders on the journey with you. You do this by ruthlessly exposing the exact assumptions behind your choices. You lay your cards on the table and answer five brutal questions for them:

- What do we know for a fact? (The empirical data)
- What are we blind to right now? (The missing information)
- What are we locking in today? (Our fixed commitments)
- What are we keeping open? (Our flexible options)
- What specific trigger will make us pivot? (The boundary lines)

The best leaders don't just say this in a meeting; they document it and create a relentless communication rhythm.

This isn't about covering your backside with paperwork. It's about creating a shared understanding of the reality you were facing when you made the call.

When the market twists or corporate shifts six months from now, you don't have to walk into the boardroom and apologise for being "wrong." Instead, you simply look at the documented assumptions and say, "The facts changed, so our tactics are changing."

True agility never looks like a frantic, last-minute scramble. It looks completely deliberate because everyone already agreed on exactly what would trigger a turn.

Resource Flexibility Is Strategic Flexibility



We now arrive at a truth that most leaders completely miss, and it is a massive trap: A strategy can look brilliant and flexible on a whiteboard, but if your actual organisation is frozen solid, your strategy means absolutely nothing.

This is the great disconnect. You can rewrite your plan in five minutes, but what happens when you look at the factory floor? Your budgets are already locked down. Your teams are already maxed out at 100% capacity. Your long-term projects are like speeding freight trains that are impossible to stop, and your best talent is already tied up on other tasks.

If you have zero ability to move your pieces on the board, your strategic agility is a total illusion.

This means elite organisations must practice Disciplined Slack. This doesn't mean keeping armies of people sitting around doing nothing, or letting piles of cash rot in a corner. Instead, it means mapping out your escape routes before the building catches fire. You must know exactly where your flexibility lives by asking four operational questions:

- Which projects can we pause instantly without destroying morale?
- Which investments can we break into smaller, milestone-based steps?
- Which teams can we reassign to a new mission overnight?
- Where will shifting direction cost us the most time and money?

If your resource planning isn't welded to your strategy, you are handcuffed. It doesn't matter how fast your leadership team changes their minds; if the organisation can't physically move, you are a sitting duck.

The ultimate lesson here is simple: Optionality isn't just a clever idea you write into a PowerPoint presentation. It is an operational muscle you build into the actual capacity of your team.



Key Takeaways

Several recurring themes emerged consistently throughout the session:

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- 1. Uncertainty doesn't remove the need to commit
 - 2. Separate no-regrets, reversible and irreversible decisions
 - 3. Build agility into the strategy before you need it
 - 4. Establish what should remain stable
 - 5. Make the logic of flexibility visible
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What This May Signal

Let's go back to first principles. For decades, business schools taught that strategy is strictly about making choices. You choose where to play. You choose how to win. You deploy your troops, allocate your resources, and commit 100%.

None of that changes when the world gets chaotic. But the very definition of commitment has evolved.

When your assumptions change faster than the weather, elite leadership teams add a completely new dimension to their planning. They don't just ask what decision to make; they analyse how reversible that decision is.

This requires supreme leadership judgment to separate your choices into two clear buckets:

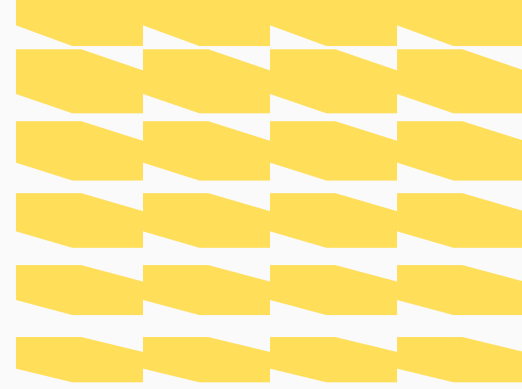
- Conviction Bucket: These choices deserve your full, unyielding dedication. You put your chips on the table and you do not blink.
- Optionality Bucket: These choices deserve protective wiggle room. You keep your options alive until the facts reveal themselves.

The ultimate signature of a modern, world-class organization is knowing the difference between the two.

Your goal is not to build a fragile strategy that snaps or changes every time the wind blows. Nor is it to magically predict every black swan event before it happens.

Instead, your objective is to create a dual-engine system. You must give your team enough clear, unwavering direction so they can move with maximum confidence today, while simultaneously protecting enough flexibility so they can adapt with extreme intelligence tomorrow.

The final playbook is simple: Commit to the direction. Preserve the right to change course.



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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