

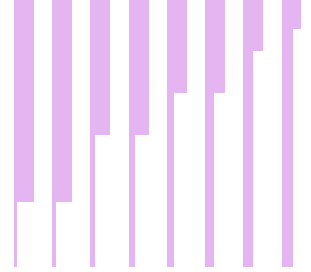
The Strategy Mandate Problem

Emerging Themes Across
Enterprise Strategy Teams in 2026

The Strategy Brief | Strategy Circle
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Executive Summary



One theme emerged repeatedly throughout this month's Strategy Circle discussion:

Many strategy teams are still grappling with a fundamental question.

What exactly is the role of the strategy function?

While strategy teams are often tasked with shaping direction, facilitating decision-making, influencing investment choices, and driving organisational alignment, they frequently do so without direct ownership of budgets, resources, or delivery teams. This creates an inherent tension.

Strategy functions are often expected to influence outcomes without controlling the levers required to achieve them.

Across industries including insurance, energy, telecommunications, infrastructure, professional services, technology, and media, participants described varying interpretations of the strategy mandate.

Some viewed strategy as a planning function whilst others viewed it as a capital allocation function.

Others described roles focused primarily on alignment, prioritisation, portfolio management, or execution oversight.

Despite these differences, a broader pattern emerged. Many organisations appear to be redefining the role of strategy. Less as a function responsible for producing plans. And more as a function responsible for helping organisations make better choices.

Strategy Is Moving Closer To Decision-Making



Participants described a shift away from traditional strategic planning activities.

Previously, strategy teams were often heavily involved in long-term planning exercises, board presentations, and corporate strategy development.

Increasingly, however, leaders described strategy becoming more closely linked to real organisational decisions.

This included:

- capital allocation
- portfolio prioritisation
- medium-term planning
- investment decisions
- resource allocation

In several organisations, strategy teams gained influence not by producing more analysis but by becoming involved in the conversations where trade-offs were made.

It was clear the group believed the closer strategy sits to important decisions, the greater its organisational relevance.



Execution Remains The Great Debate



Perhaps the most debated topic during the discussion centred around execution accountability.

Participants expressed differing views regarding the extent to which strategy functions should be held accountable for delivery outcomes.

Some argued that strategy teams cannot reasonably be held accountable for execution if they do not control resources or implementation teams.

Others suggested strategy functions have an important role in ensuring execution frameworks, planning processes, and accountability mechanisms are in place.

What emerged was a distinction between ownership and accountability.

While delivery may sit within business units, many participants felt strategy teams remain responsible for ensuring strategic choices are translated into plans, priorities, incentives, and measurable outcomes.

Success often depends less on whether strategy teams execute initiatives themselves, and more on whether strategic choices are embedded into the way the organisation operates.



Capital Allocation Is Becoming Strategic Territory



Another recurring theme involved the relationship between strategy and capital allocation.

Several participants described strategy functions becoming increasingly involved in investment prioritisation and portfolio decisions.

Rather than operating separately from financial planning processes, strategy teams are helping shape where discretionary investment is directed and how competing priorities are evaluated.

This appears to be strengthening the mandate of many strategy functions. When strategy influences where resources are allocated, it becomes more closely connected to organisational outcomes.

The discussion suggested that strategy may be evolving from a planning discipline into a resource allocation discipline.

Proving The Value Of Strategy Remains Difficult

One challenge surfaced repeatedly throughout the conversation. How do strategy teams demonstrate their value?

Unlike operational functions, strategy teams often influence outcomes indirectly. Success may appear through better decisions, stronger alignment, improved prioritisation, or avoided mistakes. These contributions can be difficult to quantify.

Participants discussed the importance of creating clearer links between strategic initiatives, organisational objectives, and measurable outcomes. You need to be able to demonstrate impact.

As strategy functions continue to evolve, the ability to articulate value may become increasingly important for maintaining influence and credibility.



Alignment Is Emerging As A Core Capability



A final theme centred around alignment.

Across multiple organisations, participants described spending significant time translating strategic intent into operational priorities.

This often involved:

- stakeholder engagement
- executive alignment
- planning processes
- incentive structures
- governance mechanisms

Many participants suggested that creating alignment may be one of the most important functions strategy teams perform.

Wxecution becomes increasingly difficult when priorities are interpreted differently across the business.

In this context, alignment itself appears to be becoming a strategic capability.



Key Takeaways

Several recurring themes emerged consistently throughout the session:

> 1. Strategy mandates remain highly variable

Organisations continue to define the role of strategy in different ways, ranging from planning and portfolio management to execution oversight and capital allocation.

> 4. Demonstrating strategy's value remains challenging

Indirect influence makes measuring strategic impact difficult but increasingly important.

> 2. Strategy is moving closer to resource allocation

Influence increasingly comes from participating in decisions around investment, prioritisation, and capital deployment.

> 5. Alignment is becoming a core strategic capability

Strategy teams are spending more time creating organisational coherence than producing plans.

> 3. Execution accountability remains unresolved

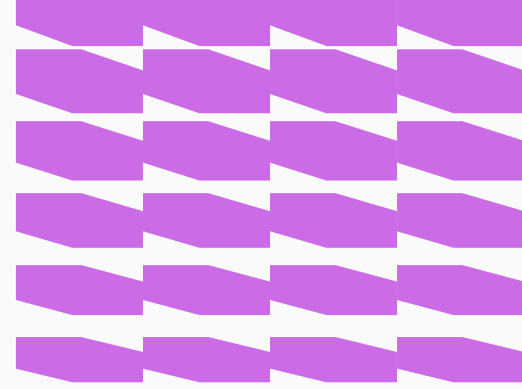
Many organisations continue to debate where responsibility for delivery should sit.

What This May Signal

Historically, strategy functions often existed to help organisations define where they wanted to go. Increasingly, however, direction may be the easier part. The more difficult challenge is creating alignment, influencing choices, allocating resources, and maintaining momentum across complex organisations.

In this environment, the future of the strategy function may not be determined by its ability to create plans. It may be determined by its ability to influence decisions.

The organisations most likely to succeed may not be those with the most sophisticated strategy documents. They may be those that create the clearest connection between strategic choices and organisational action.



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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