

PRESIDENTS' REPORT

How Mid-Market Organizations Are Building Long-Term Resilience in 2026

FROM: STRATFORD GROUP

DATE: JUNE 30, 2026

Executive Summary



Colleen Kelley

Stratford Management Consulting

As planning horizons shorten and organizations face increasing pressure to respond quickly, leadership teams are being challenged to balance immediate demands with long-term priorities.

In this quarter's Presidents' Report, Stratford's leadership team shares observations from across our three areas of business on how organizations can strengthen their ability to adapt while continuing to build long-term value.

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Pierre Cote

Stratford People & Culture

- How stronger operating rhythms help strategy survive day-to-day decision-making.
- Why leadership capability must evolve alongside organizational growth.
- How intellectual property becomes a strategic driver of enterprise value, not simply a legal consideration.
- Practical questions leadership teams can use to assess whether their organization is prepared for what's next.



Jordan Pynn

Stratford Intellectual Property

Long-Term Thinking Is Getting Harder

Over the past quarter, one idea surfaced repeatedly across conversations with our leadership team: the pressure to perform today has never been greater, but concentrating solely on immediate demands often makes it more difficult to secure success in the future.

➔ [Watch interview snippets from these and other interviews on our YouTube channel](#)

There was a time when leaders could comfortably separate long-term planning from day-to-day operations. Strategy happened during annual planning sessions. Execution happened everywhere else.

Now, planning horizons are shorter. AI is accelerating operations, while economic uncertainty continues to force difficult investment decisions. The future isn't arriving in five-year increments anymore. It's showing up every quarter, sometimes every week.

In this environment, leadership teams are caught between responding to immediate issues and protecting the long-term health of the business. That tension is becoming one of the defining leadership challenges for mid-market organizations.

The organizations navigating it most effectively aren't choosing between long-term planning and short-term execution. They're deliberately connecting them: translating strategic priorities into quarterly decisions, developing leadership capability before complexity overwhelms the business, and treating valuable ideas as enterprise assets rather than operational by-products. From each of Stratford's business line presidents, the message is remarkably consistent: *resilience is built long before it is tested.*

For leaders, the question is no longer whether change is coming. It's whether the organization can absorb it without losing momentum, focus, or value along the way.

The Leadership Challenge Facing the Mid-Market

Many organizations are experiencing increasing complexity while still relying on leadership practices, operating models, and governance approaches that were designed for a much smaller business or a much longer planning cycle.

When short-term pressures consistently dictate decision-making, important investments in capability, operating discipline, and strategic assets are often delayed until the cost of waiting becomes impossible to ignore.

MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

Turning Strategy Into Everyday Decisions

For Stratford Management Consulting President Colleen Kelley, strategy becomes meaningful only when it shows up in everyday choices. A plan may be well understood at the executive table, but its real value is tested in resource decisions, meeting rhythms, performance conversations, and the trade-offs teams make when conditions change.

That connection is becoming harder to maintain as markets move quickly, customers demand more, and leaders balance growth ambitions with tighter capacity and sharper scrutiny on investment. In that environment, urgency can quietly become the operating model. Decisions still get made, but they begin to reflect the loudest issue rather than the direction that matters most.

Colleen's perspective is that organizations rarely drift because leaders lack ambition. They drift when the systems that support execution have not kept pace with the complexity of the business. As companies grow, informal alignment is no longer enough. Leaders need clear decision rights, disciplined operating rhythms, and measures that reveal progress before problems appear.

Quarterly reviews, weekly leadership meetings, and cross-functional planning conversations are often treated as administrative necessities. Used well, they test whether strategic priorities still guide the organization, whether resources are focused where they will matter most, and whether emerging issues require a change in direction or simply more disciplined execution.

The goal is not to lock the organization into a fixed plan. It is to give leaders enough clarity to respond quickly without losing sight of the larger purpose behind their decisions.

The question Colleen encourages leadership teams to ask: *if someone reviewed the decisions your team made over the past quarter, would they be able to see your strategy in action?*

What This Means:

Execution becomes far more predictable when leaders establish an operating model that keeps priorities visible without constant executive intervention.

PEOPLE & CULTURE

Leadership Capability for Sustainable Growth

For Pierre Côté, Stratford's People & Culture President, every growth strategy eventually becomes a leadership challenge. As organizations mature, success depends less on individual effort and more on the collective capability of the organization itself.

That capability is not always easy to assess. Strong financial results can hide organizational strain for a surprisingly long time.

Many companies continue to perform well while decision-making becomes increasingly concentrated, communication grows less consistent, and leaders spend more time solving operational issues than developing the organization around them. Over time, the business can quietly outgrow the leadership model that helped create its early success.

It often begins with small signs: managers hesitate because decision authority is unclear, executives pulled into every important conversation, and teams wait for approvals that never seemed necessary before.

Pierre's perspective is that organizations need to build capability ahead of complexity, not after complexity exposes the gaps. That means looking beyond hiring plans and organizational charts to ask whether leadership capability, accountability, communication, and decision-making have evolved alongside the strategy the organization is trying to deliver.

The question Pierre encourages leadership teams to ask: *are your people simply working harder, or has the organization itself become capable of carrying the next stage of growth?*

What This Means:

Organizations that invest in capability before they need it are better positioned to sustain performance without depending on a handful of individuals.

Protecting the Value Your Business Is Creating

For Stratford Intellectual Property President Jordan Pynn, one important conversation this quarter challenged how organizations think about intellectual property.

For many businesses, IP still feels like something that happens after innovation has already occurred. An invention is disclosed. A product launches. A trademark is needed.

Jordan's perspective is that by that stage, many of the decisions shaping enterprise value have already been made. Without a deliberate approach to IP, organizations can unintentionally diminish the value they are working to create.

Organizations create intellectual property long before they protect it. Every product decision, research initiative, customer insight, proprietary process, or technical breakthrough can contribute to competitive advantage. Whether that value ultimately belongs to the organization depends on the discipline surrounding it.

The companies creating the strongest long-term enterprise value are not necessarily inventing more. They are becoming much more intentional about identifying, evaluating, protecting, and leveraging what they already have.

What This Means:

Protecting strategic assets early provides greater flexibility during expansion, investment, partnerships, and future exit opportunities.

As innovation accelerates, particularly with AI changing how ideas are developed and shared, that discipline becomes increasingly important.

Jordan encourages leadership teams to ask: *what valuable knowledge, ideas, processes, or innovations are we creating today that may need to be protected before their value is fully visible?*

Connecting Strategy, Leadership, & IP

Viewed together, the perspectives from our three presidents point to a common leadership challenge: organizations are being asked to move faster, but speed only creates value when the business has the discipline, capability, and protection needed to sustain it.

Each leader approaches that challenge from a different angle. Colleen's focus on operating discipline shows how strategy must be visible in everyday decisions. Pierre's focus on organizational capability reminds leaders that growth depends on more than effort; it depends on whether the organization can carry complexity without over-relying on a few individuals. Jordan's focus on IP highlights the value companies are already creating, often before they have fully recognized or protected it.

The common thread is that resilience is not built through a single initiative. It is built when the systems that guide decisions, the people expected to lead through change, and the assets that create future advantage are developed together. When one advances without the others, organizations compensate through urgency, executive effort, or informal workarounds that may be effective for a period of time, but becomes harder to sustain as the business grows.

The forward-looking opportunity is to treat these areas as connected parts of the same conversation. If strategic priorities are clear, leadership capability is strong, and enterprise value is deliberately managed, the organization gains more than efficiency. It gains the ability to adapt with intention, make better trade-offs, and protect the value it creates.

For leadership teams, the practical question is whether the business is being designed for the complexity it is likely to face next, not just the performance it needs to deliver now.

Looking Ahead

Across Stratford's business lines, the perspectives shared this quarter point to an encouraging conclusion: organizations have more agency than the pace of change can suggest.

Markets will continue to shift, technologies will evolve, and competitive pressures will keep emerging. Those realities sit largely outside an organization's control. What remains within a leadership team's control is how deliberately the business prepares to respond.

The organizations that continue to outperform will not necessarily be the ones making the boldest predictions. More often, they will be the ones strengthening the foundations that allow them to adapt, execute consistently, and create lasting value beyond any one market cycle or leader.

Continuing the Conversation

Every organization reaches moments when yesterday's way of operating no longer fully supports tomorrow's ambitions.

If these reflections sparked discussion within your leadership team, Stratford brings together the strategy, people, and intellectual property perspectives that help organizations move forward with greater clarity and confidence. Whether refining strategy, strengthening leadership capability, or thinking differently about protecting the value your organization is creating, we're always [happy to chat](#).

Questions Worth Bringing to Your Next Leadership Meeting

Rather than asking whether you have the right strategy, consider asking a different set of questions.

- Which of our recent decisions strengthened the organization we're trying to build, and which simply solved today's problem?
- Where has complexity increased faster than our leadership capability?
- Are we investing early enough in the systems, people, and governance our strategy will require a year from now?
- What valuable knowledge, processes, or innovations have we created that deserve greater protection or investment?
- If our business doubled over the next three years, what would struggle first?

These questions don't produce easy answers but they do create better conversations. Revisit regularly to help you adapt without losing direction.