BOARDROOM

Ready, Fire, Aim

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THE DISCUSSION TOPIC

Ready, Fire, Aim

“2026 is a giant game of Whac-A-Mole for C-Level leaders.” James Harris, Founder of The Boardroom

FTSE equities have slipped 3% and UK economic growth is flat at 0.1% (Bloomberg, 2026). Add in geopolitical fragmentation, regulatory complexity and unpredictable trade dynamics, and you have the perfect storm to navigate (McKinsey 2026).

Navigating this disruption starts with fast but informed decision making. Leaders that lack good information emphasise cost-cutting, hunkering down in times of crisis. Yet during disruption, the best performing organisations stand out for their ability to make better decisions around risk appetite, resource allocation and new value creation (McKinsey 2026).

So what can you do in 2026 to make braver decisions? And what role does tech, people and process play in supporting this?

REPORT CONTENTS

Contributors & Aim

The contributors to this report are senior executives at a variety of large scale and complex organisations across multiple industries.

The report explores how senior leaders are navigating the growing challenge of decision-making in large, complex organisations. Drawing on insights from a cross-industry roundtable, it examines why decisions are becoming harder to make, how risk aversion, governance and cultural inertia slow progress, and what leaders can do to build faster, clearer and more accountable decision-making models. The discussion revealed that in 2026, the greatest risk is not always making the wrong decision, but delaying the decisions that determine resilience, growth and competitiveness.

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Indecision Costs

"Organisations often hold decisions due to fear of public persona. What would the newspapers write about us?" Roundtable Participant

A consistent theme across the discussion was that indecision is no longer a neutral position. In volatile markets, standing still can create more risk than acting. Leaders described how fear of reputational damage, shareholder reaction, regulation and internal scrutiny often pushes organisations towards caution and limits the appetite for risk from leaders. Yet this caution can quietly become decision avoidance, causing businesses to miss opportunities, fall behind competitors and delay necessary transformation. The roundtable made clear that leaders must reframe decision-making itself as a strategic capability, not an administrative process.

Actionable Solutions

"At a certain point, making any decision is better than making no decision at all." Roundtable Participant

Reframe inaction as a risk: Assess the cost of delaying a decision, not just the risk of making one.

Create urgency before crisis hits: Use market shifts, customer expectations and competitor movement to build a clear case for action.

Make risk appetite explicit: Define what level of reputational, operational and financial risk the organisation is prepared to accept before decisions reach the board.

Analysis Paralysis: Beyond Data

"There is one clear barrier to overcome: analysis paralysis. But how do we do it?" Roundtable Participant

Participants repeatedly challenged the idea that slow decision-making is caused by a lack of information. In many cases, leaders already have the data, the board pack and the analysis, but decisions still stall. The deeper issue is cultural: organisations have normalised the habit of delaying, escalating or over-socialising decisions until ideas themselves become diluted. Several leaders argued that the role of senior leadership is not simply to review information, but to create the conditions where decisions are made clearly, quickly and with ownership.

Actionable Solutions

"You take 80% of the time making a decision and 20% executing. It should be 20% making the decision and 80% execution." Roundtable Participant

Define decision rights clearly: Identify who is responsible for making the decision, who should advise, and who simply needs to be informed.

Make pre-alignment purposeful: Use pre-meetings to test assumptions, surface objections and improve the quality of the discussion, but avoid letting them become hidden decision forums that drain momentum.

Turn committees into decision forums: Ensure senior meetings end with a clear outcome: approve, reject, defer with reason, or request specific missing evidence.

Questions to Consider:

- *Do your governance processes help leaders make better decisions, or simply make them safer to defend?*
- *How much time is spent aligning stakeholders before a meeting compared with executing after a decision?*
- *What opportunities are being lost because your organisation is still waiting for certainty?*

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Trust the Edge

"The small decisions build the big decisions. Involve those on the ground to inform your decision-making." Roundtable Participant

A strong theme was the need to push decision-making down, not always up. Large organisations often escalate decisions because teams lack clarity, confidence or access to the right information. This creates bottlenecks at senior levels and removes ownership from the people closest to the problem, that can have truly valuable contributions and information. Participants argued that stronger decision-making cultures are built through everyday behaviours: clear intent, trusted teams, daily discipline, frequent feedback and permission to make small decisions.

Actionable Solutions

"Delegate decision authority to those who have the pertinent information" Toby Dykes, Cognizant

Give teams strategic intent, not step-by-step instructions: Clarify the destination, success measures and boundaries, then let teams determine the route.

Build decision-making muscle through small decisions: Use regular operating rhythms to encourage ownership, accountability and action.

Invest in leadership capability: Train managers to make decisions, challenge assumptions and create clarity for their teams.

People, Process, Technology

"You could be given more data and information. But you've got to ask yourself, what are you actually doing with it" Roundtable Participant

Faster decision-making does not come from technology alone. Better data and AI can improve visibility, but they only create value when leaders have the right processes to interpret information and the right people empowered to act on it. Participants described how decision-making improves when organisations combine clear strategic intent, disciplined operating rhythms, trusted teams and structured governance. At senior level, the challenge is not simply generating more insight; it is turning insight into action through people who understand the context, processes that clarify ownership, and technology that supports judgement rather than replacing it.

Actionable Solutions

"Key decisions are driven by people and process. If you ignore these you will be stuck in the mud." Roundtable Participant

Use technology to focus decisions, not flood them: AI, analytics and data tools should help leaders identify priorities, trade-offs and risk scenarios, rather than adding more information that creates further second-guessing.

Build repeatable decision processes: Create a consistent approach for how decisions are framed, escalated, challenged and approved.

Develop decision-capable leaders: Invest in people who can interpret data, challenge assumptions, understand risk and act within clear guardrails.

Questions to Consider:

- *How effectively do your leaders translate strategic priorities into practical decision-making at team level?*
- *Is technology helping your leaders make sharper decisions, or simply giving them more information to process?*
- *Do your people and processes create the confidence to act, or do they push decisions upwards until momentum is lost?*

Conclusions

The Cost of Waiting is Rising

The discussion made clear that indecision is not passive. In fast-moving markets, delayed decisions create their own exposure: missed growth, weaker customer relevance, slower innovation and greater vulnerability to more agile competitors. Leaders cannot remove uncertainty, but they can build the confidence and discipline to act within it. The organisations that thrive will be those that treat timely decision-making as a core strategic advantage, not a by-product of good governance.

Shared Accountability, Not Blame Ownership

Faster decision-making is not simply about assigning one person to own the outcome. In complex organisations, decisions often improve when teams share accountability, challenge assumptions and feel collectively responsible for progress. The risk is when ownership becomes defensive, creating fear that one individual will carry the blame if things go wrong. Leaders need to create environments where accountability is clear, but not isolating: teams understand the guardrails, share responsibility for outcomes, and feel trusted to act, learn and adapt together.

Resilient Decisions Preserve Optionality

Braver decision-making does not mean placing everything on one outcome. Leaders are more likely to act when decisions are survivable, adaptable and designed with options built in. That means creating paths where an organisation can double down if something works, pivot if conditions change, reverse course if needed, or retire the decision without lasting damage. By de-risking the outcome, leaders reduce the fear attached to making the call in the first place. In this sense, resilience becomes an antidote to indecision: not by avoiding risk entirely, but by ensuring decisions are structured so the organisation can keep moving, whatever happens next.

READY, FIRE, AIM

BOARDROOM

The Boardroom Club is an exclusive network of senior business leaders who want to drive change within the complex and evolving world of large organisations. By surfacing the right topic at the right time with the right question, we create the right conversation to deliver the right answer. In doing so, we help our members be a catalyst for change and a true leader within their organisation.

https://www.theboardroom.club/the-club

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Cognizant engineers modern businesses. They help their clients to modernize technology, reimagine processes and transform experiences so they can stay ahead in our fast-changing world. Together, alongside their clients they are improving everyday life.

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