PRE-READING BRIEFING

Article Summaries & Discussion Questions

Four articles on strategy, decision-making, and the future of the organisation

01

The Two-Organizations Problem

Harvard Business Review · Irina Wolpert · June 2026

KEY POINTS

- Every mature company is consisted of two organisations: the polished, reported version leaders see in dashboards and boardrooms, and the messier, lived version employees experience day to day.
- The gap is structural, not a communications failure, this is driven by information layering, incentives that reward good news, and leaders' information flow narrowing the longer they're in role.
- AI is widening the gap: polished AI-generated reports filter out the rough signals that used to leak through.
- Leaders who manage this well don't try to close the gap — they actively surface it, through unscripted conversations and by rewarding people who tell hard truths.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where does the dashboard version of your organisation diverge most from the lived version? Which part of the Star Framework (structure, work/process, rewards, people) is causing that gap?

2. Is AI widening that gap for you, or helping surface the messier truth?

02 Don't Run the Numbers Until You Know Why

INSEAD Knowledge · Emre Soyer & Ilia Tsetlin · July 2026

KEY POINTS

- Good decisions need three things in place first: bandwidth, purpose, and options. Purpose is the one most often skipped.
- Teams frequently argue about 'how' to do something while wrongly assuming everyone already agrees on 'why'.
- Four failure states are mapped: purpose missing despite resources, direction missing entirely, overload without focus, and full crisis when all three are absent.
- AI can boost bandwidth and generate options fast — but it cannot supply purpose, and polished AI output risks being mistaken for a clear objective.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is a team in your organisation debating 'how' without having agreed on 'why'- and of bandwidth, purpose, and options, which is usually missing?
2. Is AI helping you move faster, or quietly letting you skip agreeing on purpose?

03 The Six Questions Every Strategy Must Answer (Part Two)

Oxford Saïd Business School · Saul Betmead de Chasteigner · June 2026

KEY POINTS

- Covers the practical half of a six-question strategy framework: innovation, growth, organisation design, and adaptation.
- Innovation splits into established (improving what works) and emergent (building in unsettled markets); radical ideas fail when the surrounding system isn't ready.
- Execution depends on structure, culture (do stories and rewards match stated values, and can people surface bad news early), and explicit decision principles 'Hell Yes / Hell No / Only If'.
- Adaptation runs on sensing, shaping, and seizing change before the market forces it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is your organisation clear on 'Hell Yes', 'Hell No', and 'Only If' or does culture say one thing and reward another?
2. How quickly does your organisation sense and update its strategy when the world changes?

04 Have Organizational Functions Outlived Their Function?

Deloitte Insights · 2026 Global Human Capital Trends

KEY POINTS

- Traditional functions (HR, Finance, IT, Legal, Procurement) were built for stability and specialism but are increasingly misaligned with the pace business now needs.
- 66% of C-suite leaders say pushing beyond functional boundaries matters — only 7% report real progress.
- Proposed split: 'run the business' work (repeatable, automatable) versus 'grow the business' work (cross-functional, tied to outcomes like M&A or new market entry).
- Real examples: Moderna merged HR and IT under one leader; Unilever placed supply chain and tech under its CFO.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How much of each function's work is 'running' versus 'growing' the business and is it organised that way?
2. If you split 'run' from 'growth' tomorrow, what would move and where would turf protection resist it?

05 Spending on AI versus Humans: What Is the ROI?

LinkedIn · Alec Levenson · June 2026

KEY POINTS

- Companies want to fund AI spend with labour cost savings, but the standard ROI formula they use to justify it is broken it credits the technology alone and assumes zero contribution from the people operating it.
- Standard ROI (revenue change ÷ investment cost) only holds when launching something entirely new, like a product line or market entry not for most AI deployments.
- Proposed alternative: business value mapping trace AI's impact through actual business processes and intermediate steps, not just the end-state revenue number.
- The real driver of ROI is the 'spillover' AI speeds up some tasks while adding new burdens elsewhere; humans still own the consequences of AI-supported decisions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is AI's 'ROI' being calculated by a simple before/after cost comparison, with no credit given to the people running it?
2. What's a spillover cost of AI in your world and if you traced its impact through your actual business processes, what story would you tell instead?