

The background of the slide is a composite image. On the left, there are bright yellow and white lightning bolts striking against a dark blue background. On the right, there is a complex, branching molecular structure, possibly representing a protein or a network, with blue and red highlights. The top left corner features a purple and orange geometric pattern.

The decision advantage

Six systems, four connected case studies
and a signal-to-action pathway

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Executive summary

Decisions are becoming harder and more consequential

Many strategic ambitions remain attractive. What is changing is whether the conditions required to deliver them remain available.

AI deployment depends on access to power, data, infrastructure and talent. Electrification depends on grid capacity, permitting, financing and critical resources. Growth, transformation and resilience initiatives increasingly compete for the same infrastructure, workforce capability, capital and institutional capacity.

Leaders are making major investment, growth and resilience decisions while the assumptions underpinning those decisions are also changing. Strategic opportunities that appear independent often depend on the same enabling conditions.

Organizations already possess extensive data, forecasts and scenarios. Decision quality increasingly depends on identifying which assumptions matter, recognizing when those assumptions are changing and understanding how decisions should adapt in response.

Signals are abundant. Decision-relevant signals are scarce.

The scale of the opportunity

The stakes are significant.

Intangible investment surpassed \$10 trillion in 2025 across the economies tracked by [WIPO/Luiss](#). Applying current investment intensities to International Monetary Fund [April 2026 GDP projections](#) suggests these economies could invest close to \$100 trillion in productive tangible and intangible assets between 2026 and 2030 if current patterns persist.

Opportunity is unlikely to be constrained by a lack of ambition. Advantage will come from recognizing changing conditions early enough to capture value while options remain available.

Value is often lost before a traditional risk event occurs. Projects become constrained before assets fail. Transformation programs slow before markets change. Strategic opportunities can remain attractive while becoming inaccessible because critical inputs, infrastructure, capacity, capital or talent have already been secured elsewhere.

Building decision advantage

Decision advantage is the ability to make better decisions under uncertainty by recognizing changing assumptions, understanding what value is at stake and acting while credible options remain available.

Organizations create decision advantage when they can:

- Identify the assumptions underpinning important decisions
- Recognize when those assumptions are changing
- Understand the implications for growth, resilience and performance
- Determine where investment, redesign, acceleration, delay or risk transfer may be appropriate
- Adapt before constraints emerge or opportunities narrow

This report focuses on improving the quality and timing of decisions under uncertainty. It is not designed to predict a single future.

A practical framework for better decisions

The report provides a practical framework for translating changing conditions into better decisions. It combines three connected perspectives.

First, this report presents a repeatable pathway for moving from signals to decisions by:

- Identifying changing assumptions
- Assessing the value at stake
- Establishing thresholds and triggers
- Generating evidence that actions improve outcomes

Second, this report identifies four value-at-stake lenses covering:

- Strategy
- People and operations
- Financial performance and capital
- Risk financing and insurability

Together, these lenses help leaders assess both value exposed and value unrealized.

Third, this report details six connected systems that increasingly shape strategic outcomes:

- AI and digital decision systems
- Infrastructure and shared systems
- Energy, electrification and critical resources
- Human capability, resilience and care
- Geopolitics and regional agency
- Nature, climate and interconnected capital

These systems provide a structured way to identify changing assumptions, shared dependencies and emerging constraints before they affect performance. They are analytical lenses for examining one interconnected operating environment.

Testing decisions under different futures

The framework is applied to four strategic decisions that many organizations are already making today:

- **AI-enabled growth:** How value creation depends on infrastructure, governance, workforce capability and critical inputs
- **Electrified growth:** How grids, finance, resources, permitting and delivery capability shape investment outcomes
- **Security-driven growth:** How geopolitical competition influences access to talent, infrastructure, technology and markets
- **Adaptive capacity under pressure:** How workforce capability, health, institutional capacity and demographic pressures shape organizational performance

Each case study begins with a strategic ambition and asks a simple question:

“What assumptions must hold for this decision to succeed?”

Those assumptions are then tested across three futures:

- **Value-creating:** Conditions support value creation
- **Adverse:** Constraints, disruption or capability gaps undermine delivery
- **Divergent:** Outcomes become increasingly uneven across organizations, sectors or regions

The objective is to identify where assumptions become vulnerable, where options narrow, and where earlier action may preserve flexibility or create advantage.

Understanding value at stake

Many organizations are comfortable assessing downside risk. Far fewer systematically assess the value that may never be realized if action comes too late.

This report therefore considers two dimensions of value at stake:

- **Value exposed:** Value that could be lost, impaired, delayed or weakened if assumptions fail
- **Value unrealized:** Value that may never be captured because opportunities narrow, capacity becomes unavailable or access is secured by others first

Understanding both dimensions enables more complete decisions about timing, investment and resilience.

Looking ahead

The next 20 years are unlikely to be defined by a single technology, disruption or source of risk. They are more likely to be shaped by **interactions across systems** competing for the same infrastructure, resources, skills, institutions, finance and capital.

Organizations that create advantage will not necessarily be those that forecast the future most accurately. They will be those that recognize changing assumptions early, understand what is at stake, and adapt decisions before opportunities narrow or constraints become binding.

Opportunity is not the scarce resource. Access to the conditions required to realize that opportunity increasingly determines outcomes. Infrastructure, institutions, skills, resources and capital shape whether strategic ambitions are delivered, delayed or abandoned.

This report provides a practical framework for building that decision advantage.



Foreword: Hindsight is the best insight to foresight

For [twenty years](#), the Willis Research Network has connected leading-edge science with the practical challenges facing insurers, businesses, governments and communities. Founded in 2006, it pioneered a collaborative model bringing academic expertise, advanced modelling and emerging research into real-world risk management decisions. That purpose has remained constant, even as risks themselves evolved, becoming more connected and difficult to interpret in isolation.

Long-term, multi-disciplinary WRN partnerships have brought specialists and decision-makers together across geographies, moving ideas from the laboratory or journals into risk models, resilience strategies, financial instruments and market solutions. This type of collaboration continues to matter because no single institution has the breadth of knowledge needed to understand the range of interconnected risks facing society today.

The next twenty years offer significant opportunities for resilient growth, but progress could be uneven given the complex landscape of environmental, geopolitical and technological risks.

The concept of decision advantage comes from the military and strategic field, where the goal is to make better decisions faster than opponents or the changing situation. Risk leaders face the same challenge: increasingly, they need to make decisions against an uncertain background, acting before they have perfect insights and while credible options remain open.

Meeting that challenge requires a combination of specialist expertise, relevant data and connected thinking. Technology can accelerate [analysis and execution](#), but decision-making in the face of uncertainty ultimately requires human judgement (at least for now) and personal accountability.

This report continues the WRN's tradition of connecting deep research with practical application: it draws on our recent [emerging risks surveys](#), on follow-up research into how those risks evolved, our forward-looking research programmes and a review of leading external forecasts and scenarios. It offers practical guidance to risk and insurance leaders, and should give them comfort that the decision advantage is within their grasp, even in complex, volatile and continuously evolving risk landscape.

Hélène Galy

Willis Research Network Director

1. Move from signals to decisions

Start with the strategic decision, not the risk category

Strategic decisions are becoming harder to execute because the conditions required to deliver them are changing at the same time.

Leaders are making decisions on growth, resilience, workforce transformation, technology adoption, capital allocation and risk financing while the assumptions underpinning those decisions continue to evolve and interconnect. AI, electrification, workforce transformation and security-related growth increasingly compete for the same infrastructure, resources, talent, capital and institutional capacity. Strategic opportunities that appear independent often depend on the same enabling conditions.

Most organizations already have forecasts, scenarios, specialist expertise, risk registers, market intelligence and extensive data. The harder task is determining which developments matter, which assumptions are being tested and what decisions should change as a result.

Signals are abundant. Decision-relevant signals are scarce.

Decision advantage depends less on predicting the future than on recognizing changing assumptions, understanding what value is at stake and acting while credible options remain available.

Decision advantage is the ability to make better decisions under uncertainty. It is created when organizations connect emerging change to practical choices before exposures accumulate, constraints become binding or opportunities narrow. The objective is to make existing insight more useful to decisions that shape growth, resilience, people, capital and risk financing.

Foresight is most valuable when it changes a decision before conditions change the outcome.

Insight from the latest WTW Emerging and Interconnected Risks Survey

The latest survey revealed an awareness-to-action gap. Only half of respondents were confident their organization could respond to today's risk environment, while just 23% believed their strategy would remain resilient over the next decade. Respondents identified 1,606 connections across 48 risk sources, yet only 37% reported having an emerging-risk framework.

The priority now is to translate identified interconnections into coordinated decisions across strategy, people and operations, financial performance, capital and risk financing. These findings reinforce the need for enterprise-wide approaches, clear risk tolerance, scenario thinking, and stronger links between risk and financial priorities.

This report builds on that foundation. Rather than focusing solely on connections between risks, it examines the shared dependencies through which consequences spread and demonstrates how those consequences can be translated into coordinated decisions across four value-at-stake lenses.

How to use this report to improve decisions

Leaders can use this report to:

1. Identify the assumptions underpinning important strategic decisions
2. Assess the value that could be exposed, preserved, created or left unrealized as conditions change
3. Determine when action, redesign, investment, delay or a decision not to proceed is most likely to improve outcomes

Whether the issue is AI adoption, electrification, workforce resilience, infrastructure dependence or geopolitical change, the goal remains the same: converting change into better decisions while options remain available.

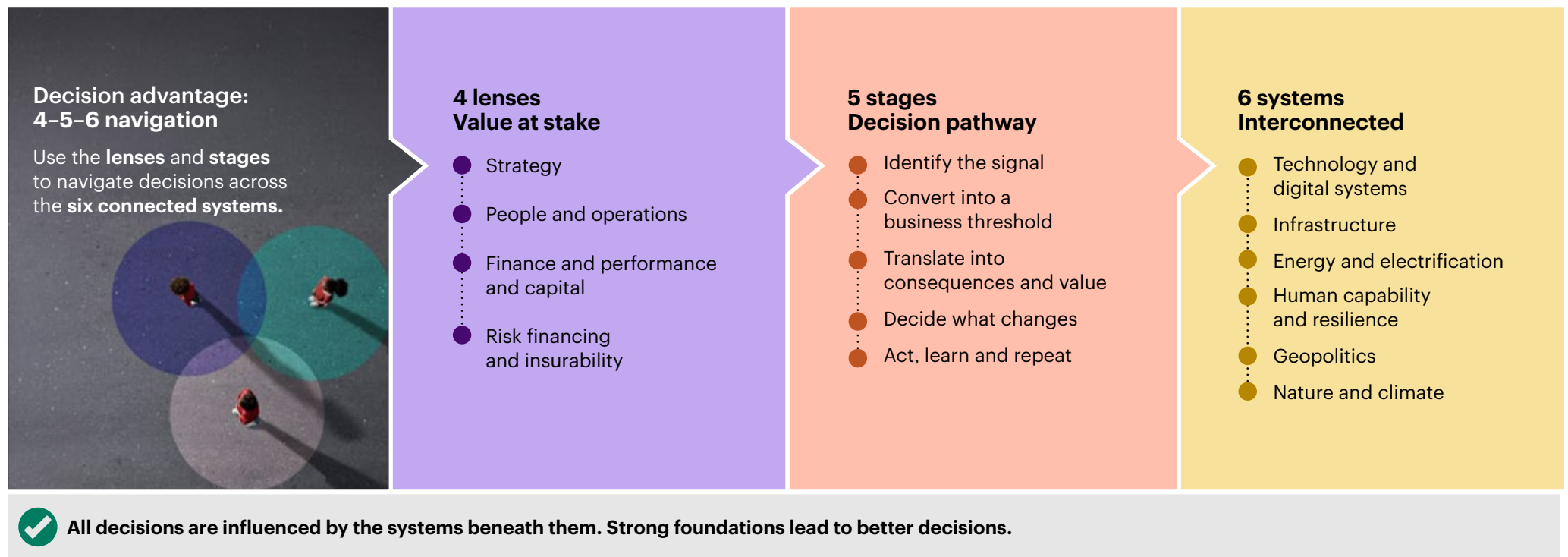
How the 4–5–6 navigation supports decision-making

The report uses a 4–5–6 navigation:

- **Four value-at-stake lenses** assess consequences across strategy, people and operations, financial performance and capital and risk financing and insurability
- **Five decision stages** move from identifying a signal to defining a business threshold, translating consequences into value, deciding what changes and generating evidence through action and learning
- **Six connected systems** reveal where assumptions, dependencies, constraints and opportunity windows may emerge

The framework is applied through **four connected case studies** examining AI-enabled growth, electrified growth, security-driven growth and adaptive capacity under pressure. Each begins with a credible strategic ambition and tests how that decision performs across value-creating, adverse and divergent futures.

The framework is designed to complement existing enterprise risk management, scenario analysis, stress testing and strategic planning processes. The next stage of maturity is connecting those activities more directly to strategic assumptions, value at stake and decision-making.



Why decision advantage matters now

Investment, transformation and resilience programs increasingly compete for the same infrastructure, resources, specialist skills, institutional capacity, finance and insurance.

The cost of delay often emerges before a loss event through higher financing costs, constrained capacity, longer lead times, weaker insurability or opportunities secured by competitors.

A strategy can remain attractive while becoming harder to deliver.

Twenty years of the Willis Research Network (WRN) research point to a consistent conclusion: Outcomes are often shaped more by constraints than forecasts, and preparedness is demonstrated through decisions rather than awareness alone.

Insights from 20 years of research

Over the past 20 years, a consistent **lesson** has emerged from research, **scenario** work and practical risk experience: Organizations are rarely surprised that change is occurring. Rather, they are surprised by **how quickly consequences spread** through the systems on which strategy, growth, resilience and recovery depend.

Three observations appear repeatedly through our research and conversations with organizations making decisions under uncertainty:

- Risks emerge through systems rather than isolated categories
- Strategic outcomes are often shaped more by constraints than forecasts
- Preparedness is demonstrated through decisions, ownership and action rather than awareness alone

The **latest WTW Emerging and Interconnected Risks Survey** reinforces these themes, highlighting how emerging risks increasingly connect through shared systems and dependencies that influence several strategic objectives simultaneously.

A repeatable pathway from signals to decisions

A signal becomes decision-relevant when leaders understand:

- Which organizational objective, strategic assumption or dependency it could affect
- What would constitute a material departure from the baseline
- How consequences could propagate through people, operations, finance, capital and insurability
- Which choices remain available, including acting, waiting and not acting
- What evidence would demonstrate that value was protected, created or preserved

The pathway provides a consistent structure for moving from emerging signals to clear decisions, ownership and measurable action.

Stage		Core question	Output
1	Identify the signal	What is changing and which assumption or dependency does it test?	Signal, relevance and assumption under review
2	Convert into a business threshold	What trigger indicates a material departure from the baseline?	Validated issue, baseline and decision trigger
3	Translate into consequences and value	How could acting, waiting or not acting affect value?	Consequence and value pathway
4	Decide what changes	What should change and who owns the decision?	Action, owner and rationale
5	Act, learn and repeat	What changed and what should happen next?	Evidence, residual exposure and update

The pathway establishes how a signal becomes a decision. Value at stake determines significance. Preparedness tests whether action improved the outcome.

The process is iterative. New evidence may change the baseline, alter a trigger or reveal a previously hidden dependency. Decisions may need to be accelerated, redesigned, paused or reversed. The objective is continuous improvement in decision quality as conditions change.

How value at stake changes the decision

The pathway connects risk insight to the value affected by a decision.

In this report, value may include revenue, margin, productivity, asset value, access to capital and markets, insurability, workforce capacity, operational continuity, recovery capability and strategic flexibility.

Value at stake extends beyond traditional measures of loss because it considers both adverse outcomes and unrealized opportunity.

Value exposed	What could be lost, impaired, delayed or weakened if assumptions fail or conditions deteriorate
Value unrealized	What may never be captured because opportunities narrow, capabilities become unavailable or access is secured by others first

Value exposed captures what may be lost. Value unrealized captures what may never be created.

Strategic opportunities can become harder to access even when they remain attractive. Infrastructure, skills, suppliers, finance, insurance capacity or regulatory approvals may become constrained long before an opportunity disappears entirely.

Decision advantage includes recognizing these windows while credible options remain available.

Four lenses reveal the full value at stake

The four lenses provide a consistent way to assess significance throughout the decision pathway.

These lenses are most powerful when used together. A workforce constraint may affect growth. An operational issue may raise financing costs. A change in insurability may provide an early signal that an underlying dependency is becoming harder to manage.

Lens		What value is at stake?	Typical questions
1	Strategy	Competitive position, growth, optionality, market access and enterprise value	How could changing conditions strengthen or weaken the strategy? Which assumptions are becoming less reliable, and what could become unavailable through delay?
2	People and operations	Workforce capability, resilience, productivity, service delivery and execution capacity	Which roles, skills, assets, suppliers, infrastructure or partnerships could become constrained? What could be redesigned, developed, protected or secured now?
3	Financial performance and capital	Revenue, margin, cash flow, capital requirements and financing costs	How would acting, waiting or not acting affect earnings, costs, investment requirements and access to capital? What is the financial cost of delay?
4	Risk financing and insurability	Retained risk, insurability, recovery capacity and strategic confidence	Which consequences can be prevented, reduced, financed, transferred or retained? Could earlier action improve risk quality, capacity, affordability or strategic feasibility?



How preparedness creates decision advantage

Preparedness is the organization's ability to act on value at stake.

It connects assumptions, triggers, ownership and action. An organization is more prepared when it can reduce potential loss, preserve strategic flexibility and capture time-sensitive opportunities before constraints become embedded.

The [latest WTW Emerging and Interconnected Risks Survey](#) identified an association between broader emerging-risk practices and stronger self-reported performance. While not evidence of causation, the findings highlight several characteristics commonly associated with preparedness.

Evidence of improved preparedness may include faster escalation, clearer decisions, stronger recovery capability, preserved options, secured capacity, improved financing or insurance conditions, new market access, and a clearer understanding of retained and transferred exposure.

How governance turns insight into accountable action

Governance converts insight into decision capability.

Boards need confidence that management can identify changing assumptions, understand what value is at stake and explain how evolving conditions influence strategic choices.

Effective governance provides visibility of critical assumptions; clarity of ownership; defined thresholds; and evidence supporting why action was accelerated, redesigned, deferred or rejected. It also creates a mechanism for challenge, reassessment and learning.

Preparedness enabler	Practices identified in the survey
Visibility of the critical assumptions underpinning strategy	Develop qualitative scenarios, war-game alternative futures, commission research and use top-down and bottom-up perspectives to identify which assumptions must hold for strategy to succeed, which changes could increase exposure and which could unlock time-sensitive value.
Clear ownership of material emerging issues	Use an emerging-risk framework or standard to assign accountability, define responsibilities and ensure designated owners are responsible for managing material exposure and assessing opportunities to preserve or create value.
Defined triggers that prompt review, escalation or acceleration	Establish risk-tolerance levels, scenario thresholds, key risk indicators and escalation criteria, alongside opportunity triggers that indicate when to accelerate, scale, secure capacity or preserve an option before the decision window narrows.
Identification of consequence and value pathways	Use qualitative and quantitative scenarios to compare acting, waiting and not acting, including operational disruption, insured losses, business interruption and wider financial impacts, as well as value preserved, created or left unrealized.
Decision-making that integrates resilience, capital allocation and risk transfer	Test insurance limits through benchmarking, model scenarios at different organizational levels and apply a finance-led approach to align resilience investment, capital allocation and risk financing with the objectives of protecting value, preserving optionality and enabling growth.

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Strategic outcomes increasingly are determined not by what is most likely to happen but by which assumptions stop holding true. Leadership is defined in this era by competence in decision-making under uncertainty. Boards consider value at stake, resilience and strategic optionality, knowing decision advantage comes from recognizing constraints and opportunities while credible alternatives still exist.

John Bremen, Senior Managing Director, Board Advisor
and Chief Innovation and Acceleration Officer, WTW

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How connected systems expose changing assumptions

Organizations operate within one interconnected environment. Dividing that environment into six systems makes it easier to identify where assumptions are changing, dependencies are concentrated and multiple strategic ambitions compete for the same enabling conditions.

The next chapter examines these six connected systems. Chapter 3 then tests them through four case studies, while Chapter 4 translates the findings into practical recommendations for leadership teams.

Understanding what is changing is important. Decision advantage begins when that understanding changes a choice.



2. Six connected systems reshaping strategic assumptions

The board challenge: Securing the conditions for delivery

Most organizations already know what they want to do.

They want to deploy AI, electrify operations, improve resilience, access new markets and transform their workforce. Delivery depends on whether the required conditions will still be available when needed.

Strategic ambitions increasingly compete for the same infrastructure, resources, specialist skills, institutional capacity, capital and insurance. What appear to be separate strategic decisions can become one shared dependency challenge.

The next 20 years may be defined less by a shortage of ambition than by growing competition for the systems that make ambition achievable.

For leadership teams, the question is shifting from:

What are our risks?

or

Which assumptions underpin our strategy, and what happens if those assumptions weaken?

Strategic ambitions increasingly compete for the same enabling conditions

Organizations operate within one interconnected environment.

The six systems in this report are not risk categories, alternative futures or competing scenarios. They are analytical lenses for identifying where assumptions are changing, where dependencies are concentrating, and where opportunities or constraints may influence strategic decisions.

Different organizations will experience different parts of this environment more intensely than others. Yet many strategic ambitions ultimately depend on the same underlying conditions.

The six systems reveal where strategic assumptions may require reevaluation.

The table below summarizes where each system creates opportunity, introduces constraint and tests strategic assumptions.

System		Opportunity	Risk	Decision test
1	 AI and digital decision systems	Higher productivity, faster innovation, improved decision-making, new products and services and the ability to scale expertise across the organization	Infrastructure unable to support adoption, governance and workforce capability not keeping pace, dependency accumulation around a small number of providers, and significant investment producing limited business value	Are we investing in AI, or are we investing in the infrastructure, governance and workforce capability required to capture value from AI?
2	 Infrastructure and shared systems	Improved resilience, recovery capability, continuity and economic value through stronger physical and digital infrastructure	Shared-fate exposure; concentration risk; cascading disruption; and hidden dependencies across operations, supply chains and communities	Which infrastructure dependency would have the greatest impact on our strategy if it failed tomorrow?
3	 Energy, electrification and critical resources	Energy security, industrial growth, lower operating costs, improved resilience and access to new markets	Grid constraints, equipment shortages, permitting delays, resource scarcity and financing pressures that undermine otherwise viable projects	Which enabling system is most likely to prevent this investment from creating the value we expect?
4	 Human capability, resilience and care	Greater productivity, adaptability, workforce resilience, innovation and organizational performance	Skills shortages, aging populations, healthcare and care-system pressures, leadership bottlenecks and transformation programs competing for finite human capacity	Can our growth and transformation ambitions still be delivered if people become the primary constraint?
5	 Geopolitics and regional agency	Access to new markets, strategic partnerships, industrial growth, resilient supply chains and trusted commercial relationships	Export controls; sanctions; fragmented regulation; geopolitical disruption; and competition for trusted suppliers, infrastructure and skills	Which geopolitical assumptions underpin our strategy, and what happens if access to key capabilities becomes constrained?
6	 Nature, climate and interconnected capital	More resilient assets, improved adaptation, stronger long-term growth and better access to capital	Water stress, ecosystem degradation, climate impacts, declining insurability and increasing pressure on natural systems that support economic activity	How dependent is future value creation on natural systems whose performance we do not control?

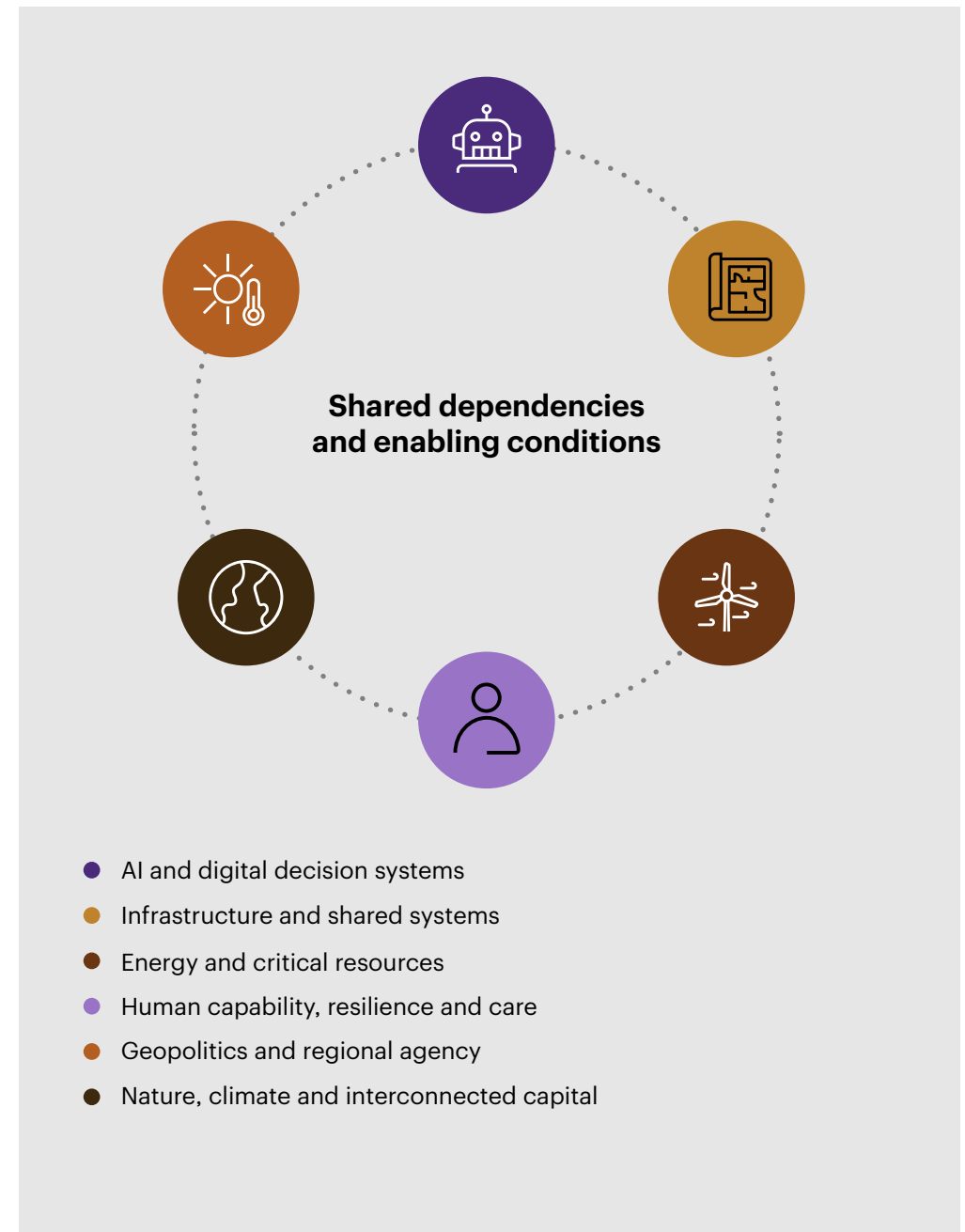
How shared dependencies connect the six systems

The six systems can be analyzed separately, but they rarely operate independently:

- AI depends on infrastructure, energy, workforce capability and governance
- Electrification depends on grids, finance, institutions, skills and resources
- Workforce resilience depends on healthcare, education, infrastructure and economic conditions
- Geopolitical developments influence technology access, supply chains, investment and energy security
- Natural systems influence infrastructure performance, insurability, asset values and resilience

The systems are best understood as different lenses applied to the same operating environment.

Several strategic ambitions increasingly depend on the same enabling conditions. Those shared dependencies create both exposure and opportunity.



AI and digital decision systems

AI is becoming embedded across operations, products and decision-making. Access to powerful models is expanding rapidly, but value increasingly depends on infrastructure, energy, workforce capability, governance and trust.

Competitive advantage may depend less on access to AI itself and more on the systems required to deploy it effectively.

Signal of change: The AI paradox

AI accelerates decisions while simultaneously increasing dependence on power, compute, data, governance and trust.

Assumption under pressure

Compute, power, governance and workforce capability will scale alongside adoption.

The strategic question is whether AI capability is developing faster than the systems required to support it.

Decision test

Are we investing in AI or in the infrastructure, governance and workforce capability required to capture value from AI?

Infrastructure and shared systems

Physical and digital infrastructure increasingly supports multiple strategic objectives simultaneously. Cloud services, communications networks, logistics systems, public infrastructure and energy systems often underpin growth, resilience and transformation at the same time.

Signal of change:

\$732B–\$845B

annual infrastructure losses

Estimated annual losses from disasters and climate-related impacts highlight the growing importance of infrastructure resilience.

Assumption under pressure

Critical infrastructure will remain available and recoverable when needed.

The challenge is no longer simply building infrastructure. It is ensuring critical systems can operate, adapt and recover under increasing pressure.

Decision test

Which infrastructure dependency would have the greatest impact on our strategy if it failed tomorrow?

Energy, electrification and critical resources

Electrification is accelerating across industry, transport, buildings and digital infrastructure.

Success increasingly depends on grids, storage, equipment, critical minerals, finance, permitting and community support developing together.

Signal of change:

6.7T annual investment requirement

The energy transition increasingly appears to be a delivery challenge rather than an ambition challenge.

Assumption under pressure

Grids, storage, permitting, finance and supply chains will scale at the pace required for delivery.

A delay in any enabling system can alter the economics of an otherwise attractive investment.

Decision test

Which enabling system is most likely to prevent this investment from creating the value we expect?

Human capability, resilience and care

Technology, infrastructure and capital ultimately depend on people.

Workforce capability, health, education, care systems, leadership capacity and institutional effectiveness increasingly determine whether strategic ambitions become operational reality.

Signal of change:

59% of workers expected to
require upskilling or reskilling

The future of work may be defined less by job creation or job loss than by the redesign of work itself.

Assumption under pressure

People and institutions can absorb increasing transformation demands.

Transformation increasingly competes for finite human capability. The constraint may not be technology or capital. It may be the people required to deliver change.

Decision test

Can our growth and transformation ambitions still be delivered if people become the primary constraint?

Geopolitics and regional agency

Trade, technology, security and industrial policy are becoming more fragmented.

Regional actors increasingly influence access to markets, infrastructure, talent, capital and technology.

Signal of change:

US\$2.9T global military expenditure

Strategic competition increasingly shapes industrial strategy, supply chains, infrastructure investment and technology development.

Assumption under pressure

Access to markets, suppliers, talent and critical capabilities will remain stable.

The challenge is becoming less about identifying demand and more about preserving access.

Decision test

Which geopolitical assumptions underpin our strategy, and what happens if access to critical capabilities becomes constrained?

Nature, climate and interconnected capital

Nature and climate increasingly influence asset values, infrastructure performance, supply chains, insurance availability and economic resilience.

Water, ecosystems and climate stability are becoming strategic dependencies rather than purely sustainability concerns.

Signal of change:

Approximately

30:1 ratio of nature-negative
to nature-positive finance

Natural systems remain significantly underfunded relative to their economic importance.

Assumption under pressure

Natural systems will continue supporting growth, resilience and asset performance at current levels.

Growth and resilience increasingly depend on systems extending beyond organizational boundaries.

Decision test

How dependent is future value creation on natural systems whose performance we do not control?

Shared dependencies shape outcomes

Viewed individually, each system highlights important technological, economic, environmental and social developments.

Viewed together, they reveal a common challenge: AI deployment, electrification, resilience investment, workforce transformation and strategic growth increasingly compete for the same infrastructure, resources, institutions, skills and capital.

This creates two important effects:

- **Shared-fate exposure:** Multiple strategic ambitions become dependent on the same constrained system
- **Shared opportunity:** A single intervention strengthens resilience, capability or access across several strategic priorities

Success may depend less on the attractiveness of a strategy than on whether the conditions required to deliver it remain available. Several strategic initiatives may therefore succeed or fail for the same underlying reasons.

The leadership challenge is to identify those dependencies before they become constraints.

What the systems reveal

The six systems do not describe separate futures. They reveal where strategic assumptions are becoming more vulnerable.

Some assumptions may remain robust. Others may weaken as demand for common infrastructure, resources, skills, institutions, capital and natural systems increases.

The purpose of the six systems is not to predict which future will emerge. It is to identify where conditions may change the viability, timing or value of important strategic decisions.

Understanding these interactions is important. Decision advantage comes from acting on them before constraints become visible.

The next chapter tests what happens when strategic decisions are exposed to different combinations of these conditions. Through four connected case studies, it explores how **AI-enabled growth, electrified growth, security-driven growth** and **adaptive capacity under pressure** perform when assumptions hold, weaken or evolve unevenly across organizations, sectors and regions.

3. Four connected case studies

Testing decisions under uncertainty

Chapter 1 introduced a framework for moving from signals to decisions. Chapter 2 identified six connected systems that increasingly shape the assumptions underpinning strategic choices.

The next step is to test what happens when those assumptions change.

The four case studies presented in Chapter 3 begin with strategic ambitions many organizations are already pursuing today. Rather than asking what could go wrong, they ask a different question:

“What assumptions must hold for this decision to succeed?”

The objective is not to identify the most likely future. It is to identify where assumptions become vulnerable, where options narrow, and where earlier action may preserve value or create advantage.

From evidence to decisions

The analysis combines signals, forecasts, scenarios and strategic outlooks with insights from 20 years of WRN research and the latest [WTW Emerging and Interconnected Risks Survey](#). It also draws on futures work from the International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, IEA, International Renewable Energy Agency, World Health Organization, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and UN Environment Programme, together with regional, alternative and Indigenous futures perspectives.

It focuses on recurring themes, critical uncertainties and shared dependencies that may influence strategic decisions over the next two decades.

Rather than developing a single forecast, the analysis tests how decisions perform under different conditions.

The critical question is not **which future is most likely**; it is **which decisions remain robust across different futures**.

Future type	Purpose
 Value-creating	Tests what becomes possible when enabling conditions develop favorably and organizations convert change into advantage
 Adverse	Tests how constraints, disruption, capability gaps or competing demands undermine outcomes
 Divergent	Tests how outcomes become increasingly uneven across sectors, regions, institutions or organizations

The objective is not to predict which future will occur. It is to test how decisions perform under different conditions, identify shared dependencies, reveal constraints and highlight where acting earlier may preserve options or create value.

The cases do not examine risks in isolation. They test what happens when multiple systems interact simultaneously. In every case, the outcome depends less on the attractiveness of the ambition than on whether the enabling conditions identified in Chapter 2 continue to evolve in supportive ways.

Five-stage pathway used across the case studies

Each case study follows the same process:



A simple way to navigate from signals to better decisions.

Case study 1. AI-enabled growth

Strategic ambition

A large organization expands AI across customer-facing, operational and decision-making processes to improve productivity, decision quality and growth. The technology is available. The question is whether the organization can convert capability into sustainable value.

Strategic decision

Which capabilities should be automated, augmented or retained, and what infrastructure, governance, workforce and risk-financing arrangements are required to create sustainable value at scale?

Assumption under pressure

Compute, power, data, specialist skills and governance capability will remain available as adoption scales.

Systems shaping this decision

-  AI and digital decision systems
-  Infrastructure and shared systems
-  Energy and critical resources
-  Human capability, resilience and care

Secondary influences:

-  Geopolitics and regional agency
-  Nature, climate and interconnected capital

What assumptions are changing?

Changing conditions

AI is increasingly becoming a decision system rather than a standalone technology. It is influencing pricing, underwriting, customer interactions, workforce decisions, operational planning and resource allocation. As adoption expands, exposure depends on whether outcomes can be explained, challenged, governed and sustained.

These dependencies are becoming more contested. AI infrastructure competes with electrification, industrial development and data-center expansion for power, cooling, water, land and capital. Provider concentration is increasing while regulatory expectations continue to evolve. Power and cooling constraints are intensifying as AI infrastructure competes with wider electrification, strategic industry and other large users for the same resources. Water availability and growing community scrutiny may also influence where future capacity can be built and operated.

Hidden concentration

Several apparently independent AI applications may rely on the same cloud providers, model providers, data-center regions, chip supply chains and power infrastructure. This creates hidden concentration across operations and recovery arrangements. A disruption affecting one layer of the enabling system could impair several use cases simultaneously, including systems intended to support the response. Dependencies that appear diversified at the application level may be concentrated at the infrastructure level.

Organizational readiness

The less visible challenge is organizational readiness. Capability may scale faster than workflow redesign, accountability, workforce adaptation and assurance.

As AI absorbs routine and early-career activities, organizations may unintentionally weaken the developmental pathways through which judgment, experience and future leadership capability are built. At the same time, assurance capability may become a constraint, making it harder to demonstrate that material AI-enabled decisions remain accountable, explainable and appropriately governed.

Strategic challenge

The strategic challenge is not whether AI capability improves. It is whether infrastructure, governance and human capability improve at the same pace.

Establish the decision triggers: Define in advance the thresholds that would require the organization to reconsider its timing or approach.

When to bring the decision forward: Bring the decision forward when provider concentration, infrastructure access, workforce capability, governance evidence or regulatory requirements move outside planning assumptions, or when securing scarce capacity, skills or favorable provider terms would preserve a material option.

Competing futures



Value-creating future: Governed augmentation

AI improves productivity, accessibility and decision quality because governance, infrastructure, assurance, skills and workflow redesign develop alongside adoption. Critical decisions retain clear accountability, human oversight and tested recovery arrangements. AI becomes a durable source of value because technical and organizational capability advance together.



Adverse future: AI scales faster than control

Competitive pressure accelerates deployment faster than governance, infrastructure and workforce adaptation can keep pace. Power, compute and assurance become constrained. Dependency on a small number of providers increases. Expected gains are offset by remediation costs, service disruption, concentration risk and governance failures.



Divergent future: Access spreads, advantage concentrates

AI tools become widely accessible, but value remains concentrated among organizations with reliable energy, compute, connectivity, skills, finance and institutional capability. Access broadens, while the ability to convert that access into sustainable value becomes increasingly uneven.

Value at stake

The strategic test is whether AI-enabled growth creates net value once infrastructure, governance, workforce redesign, assurance, liability and risk-financing requirements are considered together.

- **Value exposed** includes service disruption, provider concentration, liability, regulatory consequences, governance failures and investment that fails to produce the expected return
- **Value unrealized** includes productivity gains, innovation, market advantage, organizational capability and future growth that may not be captured if the organization moves too slowly or fails to secure the conditions required for adoption at scale

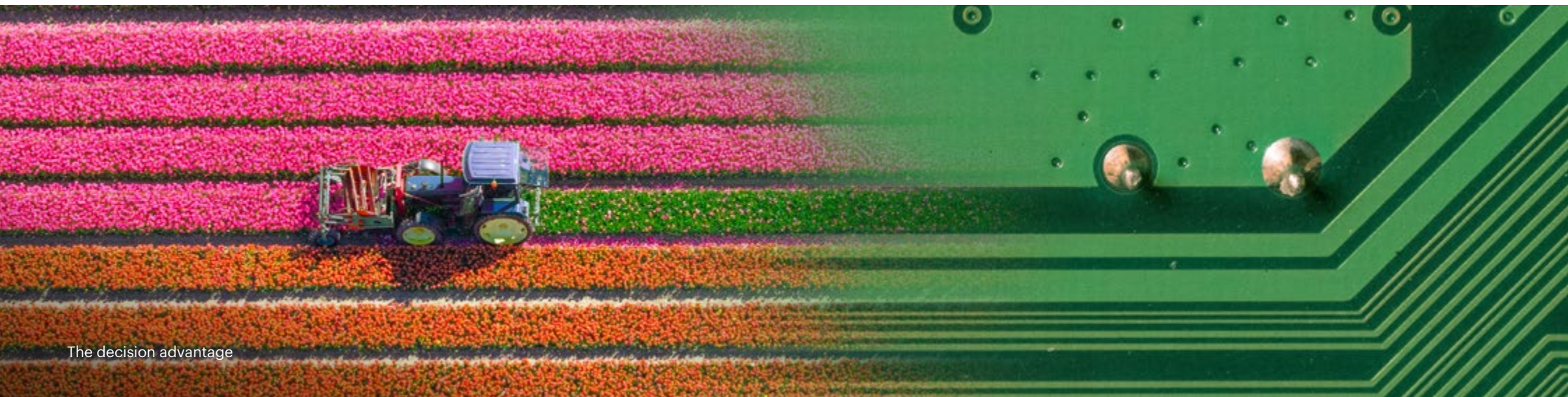
Questions leaders should answer

1. **Identify the signal.** Which AI use cases are influencing material decisions, what strategic objectives do they support; and which infrastructure, workforce, governance and provider dependencies sit behind them?
2. **Convert into a business threshold.** What change in infrastructure access, provider concentration, workforce capability, explainability, governance or regulation would indicate that the assumptions supporting adoption have materially shifted?

3. **Translate into consequences and value.** How would acting, waiting or not acting affect productivity, customer outcomes, workforce capability, operational resilience, financial performance, capital requirements, liability and insurability?
4. **Decide what changes.** Which decisions should be accelerated, redesigned, delayed or protected given the assumptions now under pressure? The answers should inform practical decisions across People, Risk and Capital. This may include redesigning roles and workflows, strengthening governance and assurance, reducing concentration risk, securing critical infrastructure and specialist capability and reassessing whether the investment case remains attractive under changing conditions.
5. **Act, learn and repeat.** Evidence should demonstrate that workforce capability, governance and organizational resilience are improving and that value is being created. The results should be used to reassess assumptions, update decision thresholds and refine future actions as conditions evolve.

Bottom line

AI creates durable value through measured adoption, adaptation of roles and processes, and resilient infrastructure. Decision advantage comes from testing all three together before concentration, dependency, trust or governance gaps become embedded.



Case study 2. Electrified growth

Strategic ambition

An equipment manufacturer, natural resources company or infrastructure-focused business commits to electrified power production, lower-emission operations and future-ready opportunities for industrial growth. The strategy promises reduced fuel security exposure, stronger resilience and long-term competitive advantage through electrification.

Strategic decision

Should the project proceed, be phased, redesigned, relocated or delayed as infrastructure, resource, policy, financing and insurance conditions evolve?

Assumption under pressure

Availability of grids, energy storage, equipment, critical minerals, finance, permitting and specialist labor will scale at the pace required for delivery.

Systems shaping this decision

-  Energy, electrification and critical resources
-  Infrastructure and shared systems
-  Geopolitics and regional agency
-  Human capability, resilience and care

Secondary influences:

-  Nature, climate and interconnected capital

What assumptions are changing?

Changing conditions

Electrification is set to be the next industrial revolution, replacing fossil fuel energy sources with electrified sources of power. Industry processes, the boom in data center demand and the uptick in electric vehicles are all contributing to the demand for electrified power, but global value chains are highly dependent on the availability of grids, energy storage, **critical minerals**, equipment, permitting, regulation, finance, skilled labor and community support to scale together.

Booming demand

The most significant assumption is that infrastructure will be available when needed. Grid connections, transformers, energy storage capacity and specialist equipment are becoming increasingly competitive resources. Electrification competes with AI, data centers, industrial policy objectives and wider economic growth for many of the same systems and resources.

The binding constraint can shift over time. Grid capacity may be the most limiting factor one year, transformer availability the next, followed by changes in regulation, permitting, finance, skilled labor or community consent. Any of the limiting factors that dictate the direction and pace of global electrification can change rapidly, with impacts cascading along the entire value chain. A technically viable project can become commercially undeliverable if one enabling system fails to scale alongside the others.

Hidden concentration

The competition for limited systems and resources is becoming concentrated in specific manufacturing hubs and transportation networks. Concentration risk can emerge across mineral processing, equipment manufacturing, grid operators, transmission routes, logistics corridors and financing sources. What appears to be a diversified transition strategy may still depend on a small number of critical bottlenecks.

Financial consequences often emerge before physical disruption occurs. Delays, denied access, export restrictions, contractor failure, financing pressure and equipment shortages can weaken project economics long before any asset is damaged.

Strategic challenge

The strategic challenge is not whether electrification creates value. It is whether the systems required to deliver at scale can grow at the same pace as ambition.

Establish the decision triggers: Define in advance the thresholds that would require the organization to reconsider its timing or approach.

When to bring the decision forward: Bring the decision forward when grid connection dates, equipment lead times, financing conditions, permitting assumptions, resource availability or insurance conditions move beyond tolerance or when securing scarce capacity would preserve a material option.

Competing futures



Value-creating future: Productive electrification creates wider value

Grid capacity, energy storage, finance, workforce capability, infrastructure and community participation develop in lockstep. Electrification builds energy security, delivers more stable, reliable, renewable power for communities and industries. This supports global decarbonization commitments alongside boosting efficiencies for businesses. Capacity is secured early, projects remain financeable and enabling systems scale alongside demand.



Adverse future: Delivery systems move against the business case

Construction delays, logistical bottlenecks, limited grid capacity, equipment shortages, financing pressure, policy fragmentation and resource constraints undermine delivery.



Divergent future: Investment grows while access divides

Priority projects and well-funded organizations secure infrastructure, equipment and financing first. Smaller organizations, lower-priority users and less connected regions face higher costs, longer delays and weaker access to enabling systems. Investment continues, but value creation becomes increasingly uneven.

Value at stake

The strategic test is whether electrified growth remains deliverable, financeable and insurable as infrastructure, resources, policy, finance and community conditions evolve at different speeds.

- **Value exposed** includes project delays, rising financing costs, equipment shortages, covenant pressure, reduced resilience, delivery failure and underutilized investment
- **Value unrealized** includes access to scarce grid capacity, strategic industrial growth, improved energy security, stronger regional competitiveness and future market opportunities that may be captured by others first

Value may be lost through project failure; delay; extended construction periods; higher financing costs; covenant pressure; or missed access to scarce infrastructure, resources and approvals.

Questions leaders should answer

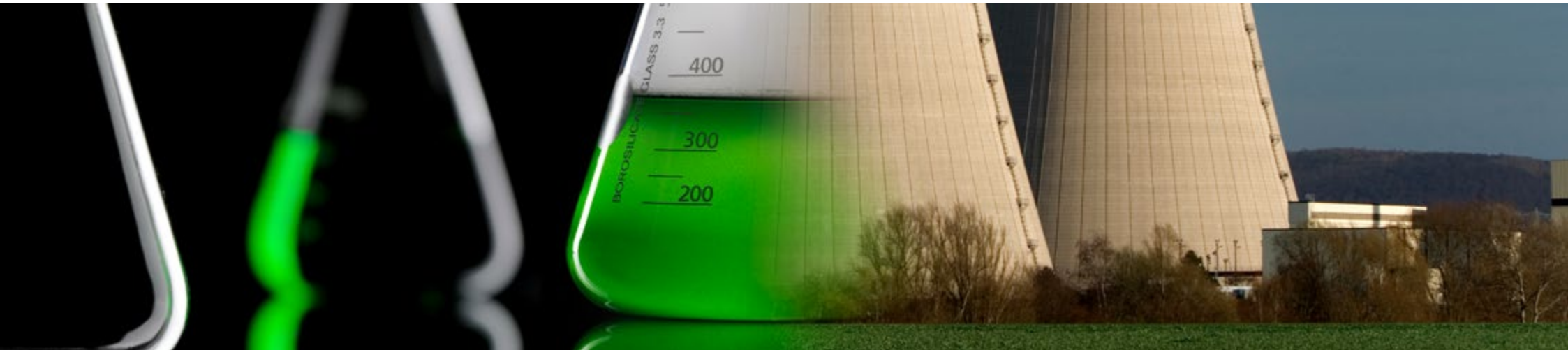
Scenario modelling is the pathway to resilience.

1. **Identify the signal.** Which equipment, technologies, critical minerals, suppliers and specialist skills are critical to delivering our strategy? Any changes to these high-dependency areas have the potential for significant disruption.
2. **Convert into a business threshold.** What specific change in connection timing, resource access, financing conditions, permitting or insurance appetite would

materially affect delivery? Identifying these critical dependencies and inputting data into scenario modelling tools can help to test potential outcomes and the degree of impact on the business' strategic objectives.

3. **Translate into consequences and value.** For each challenge or change identified, how would the outcomes change depending on actions taken? Impacts should be assessed against delivery, customer commitments, margins, revenue timing, liquidity, capital requirements and insurability.
4. **Decide what changes.** By comparing the scenario pathways, your business can decide on the optimal outcome and implement a plan. Which decisions should be accelerated, redesigned, phased, relocated or protected given the assumptions now under pressure? The answers should inform practical decisions across People, Risk and Capital. This may include securing grid positions and equipment earlier, redesigning projects around available resources, strengthening contractual protections, adjusting financing structures and reassessing whether the business case remains attractive under changing conditions.
5. **Act, learn and repeat.** Evidence should demonstrate that delivery readiness, resilience, financeability and insurability are improving and that value is being created. The results should be used to reassess assumptions, update decision thresholds and refine future actions as conditions evolve.

Bottom line: Electrification creates value when infrastructure, resources, finance and delivery capability develop at compatible speeds. Decision advantage comes from implementing scenario modelling to identify response plans and build flexibility before constraints become embedded.



Case study 3. Security-driven growth

Strategic ambition

A technology company expands into defense-adjacent and dual-use supply chains while maintaining civilian commitments and commercial growth objectives. The strategy promises access to long-term public investment, growing security demand and participation in nationally significant programs.

Strategic decision

Which opportunities justify investment when strategic demand is rising faster than access to trusted-suppliers, skilled people, infrastructure, energy and recovery capacity?

Assumption under pressure

Trusted-suppliers, skilled labor, infrastructure, energy and market access will remain available when demand increases.

Systems shaping this decision

-  Geopolitics and regional agency
-  Infrastructure and shared systems
-  Human capability, resilience and care
-  AI and digital decision systems

Secondary influence:

-  Energy, electrification and critical resources

What assumptions are changing?

Changing conditions

Security demand remains structurally elevated while governments increasingly prioritize defense, cyber security, critical infrastructure, semiconductors, energy security and sovereign technology capability. Strong demand alone does not guarantee strategic advantage. Delivery increasingly depends on the ability to secure trusted-suppliers, specialist skills, infrastructure, finance and permissions.

Hidden concentration

The most significant assumption is often that capable suppliers, skilled workers, energy, logistics and infrastructure will remain available when needed. In practice, defense modernization, AI deployment, electrification, infrastructure renewal and resilience investment increasingly compete for many of the same resources. Capacity that appears sufficient in isolation can become constrained when multiple national priorities draw from the same pool.

Hidden concentration can emerge across trusted- suppliers, specialist manufacturers, secure cloud providers, semiconductor supply chains, logistics networks, energy systems and security-cleared personnel. What appears diversified at the contract level may still depend on a small number of shared capabilities or become disrupted by [geopolitical fragmentation](#) and government action.

Market access and operating flexibility

Market-access assumptions are becoming less stable. Export controls, sanctions, investment screening, local-content requirements and trusted-supplier rules can alter the economics and viability of a strategy long before demand changes. Preserving market access may increasingly require parallel suppliers, data architectures, contracts, compliance arrangements and insurance structures. These arrangements can preserve resilience and access but may also introduce duplication costs, trapped capital and greater governance complexity.

Strategic challenge

The ability to recover may become as important as the ability to operate. Strategic sectors, nationally important infrastructure and priority programs may receive labor, energy, logistics and restoration support ahead of other users when capacity is constrained. Position within the wider system increasingly influences resilience outcomes. The strategic challenge is not whether security demand continues to grow. It is whether the organization can secure the capability, permissions and operating flexibility required to deliver into that demand.

Decision trigger: Bring the decision forward when security demand accelerates, trusted-supplier requirements change, skilled labor becomes constrained, export controls expand, supplier viability weakens or procurement access creates an opportunity to secure a strategic position before capacity tightens further.

Competing futures



Value-creating future: Strategic investment strengthens resilience

Security investment expands trusted industrial capacity while strengthening infrastructure, workforce capability and supply-chain resilience. The organization secures long-term contracts; develops dual-use technologies; and strengthens relationships across government, industry and research. Investment in cyber security, energy resilience, logistics and specialist skills creates value across both security and civilian operations. Earlier action secures trusted-supplier status, procurement access and strategic partnerships while maintaining existing commercial commitments.



Adverse future: Capacity competition undermines delivery

Demand remains strong but delivery capability becomes the binding constraint. Skilled labor, energy, infrastructure and supplier capacity are diverted toward strategic priorities. Export controls, procurement complexity and fragmented standards increase costs and delay delivery. Growth opportunities exist, but organizations struggle to convert demand into performance.



Divergent future: Priority allocation creates two-speed resilience

Strategic sectors, trusted suppliers and nationally important infrastructure receive capital, labor, energy and recovery priority. Smaller firms, lower-priority sectors and exposed regions face higher costs, weaker access and longer recovery times. Growth continues, but resilience and opportunity become increasingly uneven.

Value at stake

The strategic test is whether security-driven growth creates durable value once competition for trusted suppliers, skilled people, infrastructure, energy, capital and recovery capacity is considered.

- **Value exposed** includes duplicated operating costs, delivery delays, supplier concentration, compliance failures, geopolitical disruption, contractual underperformance and reduced market access
- **Value unrealized** includes procurement opportunities, strategic partnerships, trusted-supplier status, access to long-term public investment and participation in emerging security ecosystems

Value may be exposed through disruption, restricted permissions, supplier exclusion, duplication costs, delayed procurement access and parallel operating models across different regulatory environments.

Questions leaders should answer

1. **Identify the signal.** Which markets, technologies, contracts and partnerships create strategic value, and which dependencies support them?
2. **Convert into a business threshold.** What change in demand, permissions, capacity, supplier availability, workforce access or market conditions would materially alter the opportunity?

3. **Translate into consequences and value.** How would acting, waiting or not acting affect market access, customer commitments, program delivery, revenue, liquidity, capital deployment, liability and insurability?
4. **Decide what changes.** Which decisions should be accelerated, diversified, redesigned or protected given the assumptions now under pressure? The answers should inform practical decisions across People, Risk and Capital. This may include securing trusted-supplier status, strengthening critical partnerships, diversifying suppliers, building specialist capability, restructuring contracts and reassessing where market access or operating flexibility should be protected.
5. **Act, learn and repeat.** Evidence should demonstrate that strategic access, delivery readiness, contractual resilience and organizational capability are improving and that value is being created. The results should be used to reassess assumptions, update decision thresholds and refine future actions as conditions evolve.

Bottom line: Strategic demand does not guarantee strategic advantage. Decision advantage comes from securing the capabilities, permissions, relationships and operating flexibility needed to deliver when capacity, access and recovery become contested.



Case study 4. Adaptive capacity under pressure

Strategic ambition

A large organization pursues growth, digital transformation, operational resilience and productivity improvement while maintaining service commitments and customer outcomes. The strategy depends on specialist skills, management capability, public infrastructure, healthcare and care systems, energy, transport and critical supply chains continuing to function under increasing pressure.

Strategic decision

Can the operating model continue to deliver growth, transformation and resilience objectives if human and institutional capacity become the primary constraint?

Assumption under pressure

People, institutions and public systems can absorb increasing transformation demands.

Systems shaping this decision

-  Human capability, resilience and care
-  Infrastructure and shared systems
-  AI and digital decision systems
-  Energy, electrification and critical resources

Secondary influences:

-  Geopolitics and regional agency
-  Nature, climate and interconnected capital

What assumptions are changing?

Human capability is becoming critical infrastructure

Every major transition depends on human capability. AI requires oversight and judgment. Infrastructure depends on operators, engineers and emergency response. Electrification relies on skilled labor, project delivery and community participation. Geopolitical adaptation depends on leadership, trust and institutional capacity. Human capability is increasingly becoming the operating infrastructure behind strategic ambition.

The most significant assumption is often that people, institutions and public systems will absorb rising demand. Yet transformation programs, regulatory change, workforce shortages, aging populations and growing care pressures are increasingly competing for the same finite human capacity. A strategy may remain financially viable but become operationally undeliverable because the capability required to execute it is unavailable.

Visibility and hidden concentration

Many organizations have limited visibility of the work, skills, care pressures, institutional dependencies and critical capabilities that underpin strategic delivery. Plans that assume people and institutions can absorb rising demand may fail when transformation and disruption arrive together. Workforce visibility is increasingly becoming a strategic control rather than a human resources exercise.

Hidden concentration can emerge around critical roles, specialist expertise, decision authority, institutional knowledge, leadership capability and informal support networks. Plans that appear resilient may still depend on a small number of individuals, teams or institutions whose loss creates disproportionate disruption.

Development and resilience capacity

Developmental pathways are becoming a strategic dependency. As AI absorbs routine and early-career tasks, organizations may inadvertently weaken the work through which judgment, institutional knowledge and future leadership capability are developed. Capability can become concentrated while succession becomes weaker.

Health, care responsibilities, financial strain and access to public services increasingly influence attendance, productivity, decision quality, participation and recovery. Organizational performance can be affected by pressures that sit well beyond the workplace itself.

The decision advantage

Heat can amplify workforce, care and infrastructure pressures simultaneously. Productivity declines, absence increases; and transport, energy and communications systems become stressed at exactly the point organizations depend on them most.

The strategic challenge is not whether demand for capability increases. It is whether human, institutional and community capacity can develop fast enough to support strategic ambition.

Decision trigger: Bring the decision forward when absence, turnover, burnout, retirement readiness, healthcare access, critical-role cover, succession indicators, care pressures or productivity move outside tolerance or when intervention can preserve scarce capability before options narrow.

Competing futures



Value-creating future: Adaptive capability becomes a source of advantage

Training, labor mobility, AI-enabled augmentation, flexible work design and workforce resilience develop alongside investment in infrastructure and adaptation. Organizations redesign work around human strengths, preserve critical developmental pathways and strengthen links with education, healthcare and community institutions. Human capability becomes a source of productivity, innovation and recovery capacity.



Adverse future: Capacity constraints undermine delivery

Aging populations, workforce shortages, care-system pressures, infrastructure disruption and transformation demands arrive simultaneously. Strategic initiatives remain funded but become increasingly difficult to deliver because the required people, leadership capacity and institutional support are unavailable. The limiting factor becomes execution capability rather than funding, technology or demand.



Divergent future: Aggregate progress masks unequal resilience

Technology, flexible work and workforce investment improve aggregate outcomes, but access to skills, care, training, healthcare and resilient infrastructure becomes increasingly uneven. Well-resourced organizations capture a disproportionate share of capability, while smaller organizations, vulnerable communities and lower-priority services absorb more of the adjustment cost. Technology spreads, but the ability to convert it into value becomes increasingly uneven.

Value at stake

The strategic test is whether growth, transformation and resilience ambitions remain achievable when human and institutional capacity become constrained.

- **Value exposed** includes productivity loss, delayed transformation, weakened succession, leadership bottlenecks, burnout, capability shortages, service disruption and slower recovery
- **Value unrealized** includes innovation, organizational agility, workforce participation, knowledge transfer, adaptive capacity and long-term productivity gains that are never captured because capability constraints emerge first

Value may be lost through turnover, labor shortages, weakened developmental pathways, concentrated expertise, declining decision quality and a reduced ability to absorb future change.

Questions leaders should answer

1. **Identify the signal.** Which strategic outcomes depend on scarce skills, critical roles, leadership capability, care systems, public services or institutional capacity?
2. **Convert into a business threshold.** What change in workforce availability, succession readiness, care pressures, burnout, productivity, participation or capability would materially affect delivery?

3. **Translate into consequences and value.** How would acting, waiting or not acting affect service delivery, productivity, transformation outcomes, customer commitments, talent access, financial performance, resilience and insurability?
4. **Decide what changes.** Which decisions should be accelerated, redesigned, protected or reallocated given the assumptions now under pressure? The answers should inform practical decisions across People, Risk and Capital. This may include redesigning work; strengthening leadership and succession pipelines; preserving developmental pathways; investing in workforce resilience; improving visibility of critical skills and care dependencies; and reassessing where capability should be built, retained, augmented, automated or protected.
5. **Act, learn and repeat.** Evidence should demonstrate that workforce capability, adaptive capacity, succession readiness, decision quality and organizational resilience are improving and that value is being created. The results should be used to reassess assumptions, update decision thresholds and refine future actions as conditions evolve.

Bottom line: Human capability determines the pace and resilience of transformation. Decision advantage comes from building skills, leadership, succession, care and adaptive capacity before capability constraints become the limiting factor on growth, resilience or recovery.





What the four case studies reveal

Across all four case studies, the opportunity remains attractive. What changes is the availability of the systems that make delivery possible.

Value is often lost before a traditional risk event occurs. Projects may be delayed without suffering physical damage. Strategies may become constrained without formally failing. Opportunities may remain attractive while becoming inaccessible because another organization secures scarce capacity first.

The cases highlight a broader lesson: Interconnected risks create interconnected decisions. A change in AI capability, grid access, geopolitical permissions or workforce health can simultaneously affect workforce strategy, operational resilience, risk financing, liquidity and capital allocation.

The same signal may therefore require multiple functions to act at once.

Decision evidence must also be reusable across governance, investment, contracting, underwriting and claims. This allows assumptions, mitigations, value-creation choices, residual exposures and unrealized opportunities to be explained and defended as conditions change.

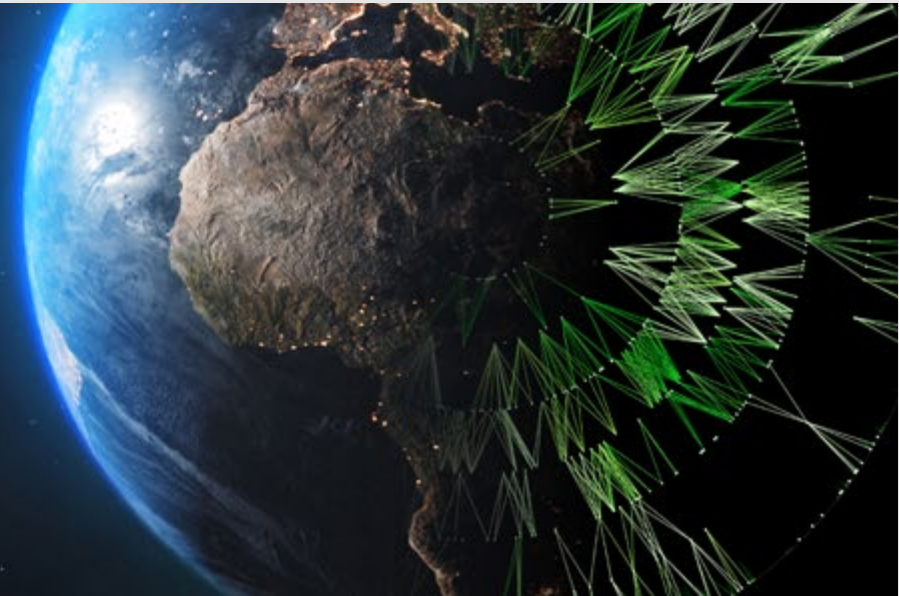
The challenge is rarely a lack of opportunity. The challenge is whether the infrastructure, institutions, skills, resources and capital required to deliver that opportunity remain available when needed. Decision advantage comes from recognizing those dependencies before they become constraints.

4. The leadership agenda

The four case studies reach a consistent conclusion. Strategic opportunities often remain attractive. What changes is the availability of the systems required to deliver them. Infrastructure, workforce capability, trusted suppliers, finance, natural systems, governance and institutional capacity increasingly determine whether ambitions are realized, delayed or abandoned.

Jen Daffron

Scenario & Future Trends Lead, Willis Research Network



The challenge for leadership teams is not simply identifying risk. It is recognizing when assumptions are changing, understanding what is at stake and acting before critical dependencies become constraints. Decision advantage comes from securing the conditions required for future value creation while credible alternatives remain available.

Across all four case studies, four patterns emerge:

- Strategic opportunities often remain attractive
- Shared dependencies increasingly determine whether they can be delivered
- Value is frequently lost before a traditional risk event occurs
- Early action can preserve access, capability, resilience and future choice

The five actions that follow translate those observations into practical leadership priorities.

Five actions for leadership teams

The leadership agenda focuses on five recurring actions. Together they help organizations identify changing assumptions, understand value at stake and improve decisions before options become constrained. For each action, an anonymized WTW client example illustrates how organizations are already applying similar principles in practice.

Action 1. Make strategic assumptions explicit

Every important strategic decision depends on assumptions. Some concern market demand, regulation, technology or capital. Others concern access to infrastructure, workforce capability, suppliers, institutions, natural systems or insurance capacity.

Leadership teams should identify which assumptions matter most, establish how they will be monitored and define what evidence would justify reassessment. Strategic underperformance increasingly occurs when critical assumptions remain invisible until conditions have already changed.

Strategic reviews should ask:

- Which assumptions underpin growth, resilience and transformation plans?
- Which assumptions sit outside organizational control?
- Which assumptions would have the greatest impact if they weakened?
- What would justify revisiting a major decision?

Decision advantage in practice

Challenge: A ship management company recognized that FuelEU Maritime fundamentally changed one of its operating assumptions. The organization was no longer simply acting as an agent for ship owners. Under the new regime, it could become directly liable for regulatory penalties.

What changed: Rather than treating the issue as another compliance obligation, the organization reassessed its assumptions about liability, credit risk, contractual structures and financial exposure.

Decision: New credit-management procedures, revised contractual arrangements and an innovative insurance structure were implemented before the exposure became material.

Outcome: The organization reduced the risk of an unplanned balance-sheet exposure and created a clearer framework for managing owner credit risk, contractual liability and potential FuelEU penalties before the new regime took effect. [Learn more here.](#)

Leadership lesson: Emerging risks often become decision-relevant when a long-standing assumption stops being true. Decision advantage comes from identifying that shift before exposure becomes embedded.

Action 2. Identify shared dependencies and hidden concentration

Many strategic initiatives appear independent while relying on the same infrastructure, suppliers, technologies, specialist skills, institutions or sources of capital.

Hidden concentration can emerge even when individual risks appear diversified. A business may diversify suppliers while remaining dependent on the same logistics corridor, grid connection, cloud provider, talent pool or regulatory approval process.

Leadership teams should identify which capabilities are shared across multiple ambitions and where a single constraint could affect several objectives simultaneously.

The greatest vulnerabilities increasingly arise between strategies rather than within them. This is where dependencies become visible and where resilience investments can create value across multiple priorities.

Key questions include:

- Which initiatives depend on the same enabling systems?
- Where could scarcity create correlated exposure?
- Which interventions strengthen several priorities simultaneously?
- Where is concentration less visible than assumed?

The decision advantage

Decision advantage in practice

Challenge: A global semiconductor manufacturer depended on continuous power and water supply across critical production facilities. Individual risks were understood, but the interaction between utility resilience, natural hazards, operations and insurance outcomes was less visible.

What changed: The organization assessed utility infrastructure, backup systems, recovery capability, natural hazards and climate vulnerability as connected dependencies rather than isolated risks.

Decision: The resulting analysis informed resilience investments, site protocols and insurance strategy.

Outcome: An additional \$100 million of utility insurance capacity increased post-loss limits from \$150 million to \$250 million. [Learn more here.](#)

Leadership lesson: Critical constraints often emerge where multiple objectives depend on the same infrastructure, supplier, technology or resource.

Action 3. Evaluate value exposed and unrealized value

Many organizations assess what could be lost if assumptions fail. Fewer assess what may never be created if opportunities narrow, infrastructure becomes unavailable or competitors secure access first.

Leadership teams should evaluate both value exposed and value unrealized, comparing the implications of acting, waiting and not acting. The cost of delay is often measured in loss and in opportunities that remain attractive while becoming inaccessible.

Assessment should consider:

- What could be lost, weakened or delayed?
- What may never be realized if action comes too late?
- How does waiting change the economics of the decision?
- Where does timing influence access to capability, capital or capacity?

Decision advantage in practice

Challenge: Following a major merger, a healthcare provider needed to optimize coverage across multiple insurance programs while remaining within agreed risk tolerances.

What changed: More than five million portfolio strategies were evaluated, allowing risks and insurance decisions to be assessed as a single portfolio rather than line by line.

Decision: The organization compared options across property, liability, cyber and medical stoploss programs, identifying where costs could be reduced and where exposure should be retained.

Outcome: Expected costs were reduced by \$1.79 million while remaining aligned with operational requirements and risk tolerance. [Learn more here.](#)

Leadership lesson: Quantification should reveal what could be lost and where value can be preserved, released or reallocated.

Action 4. Align resilience, capability and capital

Workforce capability, resilience investment, capital allocation and risk financing are often managed separately. Increasingly they represent different ways of securing the conditions required for future performance.

Leadership teams should evaluate how these investments interact and whether a single intervention could strengthen several objectives simultaneously. The objective is not simply to reduce exposure. It is to improve delivery, adaptability and long-term value creation.

Important considerations include:

- Which investments strengthen resilience across multiple objectives?
- Which exposures should be prevented, reduced, transferred or retained?
- How do resilience investments affect financing, capital and insurability?
- Where can one intervention strengthen multiple systems?

Decision advantage in practice

Challenge: A critical infrastructure organization wanted confidence that its insurance program, retained-risk strategy and financial-protection arrangements remained appropriate for future conditions.

What changed: Climate exposure, retained risk, insurance structures and financial outcomes were assessed together rather than separately.

Decision: Several assumptions about coverage levels, retained risk and insurance value were challenged and tested against broader resilience objectives.

Outcome: The analysis identified an immediate 14% cost-reduction opportunity while improving transparency around future climate-related exposure and financial resilience. [Learn more here.](#)

Leadership lesson: Resilience, capital allocation and risk financing represent different ways of managing the same exposure.

Action 5. Define triggers before options narrow

Opportunities rarely disappear overnight. More often, options narrow gradually as infrastructure becomes constrained, suppliers reach capacity, financing conditions change, workforce capability becomes scarce or regulation evolves.

Leadership teams should define in advance which decisions may be required, what evidence would support them and when action should be accelerated, redesigned, paused or abandoned.

Key questions include:

- What trigger makes this issue decision-relevant?
- Which choices remain available today?
- What could make those choices harder tomorrow?
- Who owns the decision and when should it be reviewed?

Decision advantage in practice

Challenge: A [global carve-out](#) required benefits implementation for 1,500 employees across 35 countries within five months.

What changed: The program revealed how delays in trust-building, local engagement, vendor onboarding and dependency management compressed decision windows and created rework. Early involvement repeatedly exposed issues while options remained available.

Decision: Implementation teams began identifying dependencies, escalation points and local requirements earlier and more systematically. [Learn more here.](#)

Leadership lesson: Strategic flexibility rarely disappears overnight. It narrows gradually as decisions are delayed, dependencies emerge and implementation windows close.

Questions every leadership team should ask

Leadership teams should ask:

- What has changed, and which strategic assumption or shared dependency does it test?
- What downside threshold or opportunity trigger makes the issue decision-relevant?
- How would acting, waiting and not acting affect the four value-at-stake lenses?
- What could be lost, preserved, created or left unrealized?
- Which options remain credible, and when could they narrow?
- Which exposures can be prevented, redesigned, financed, transferred or retained?
- Who owns the decision, what evidence is required and when should the issue return for review?

For boards, the objective is not to oversee a growing inventory of emerging risks. It is to understand whether changing assumptions are affecting the organization's most important decisions and whether management is acting before strategic options become constrained. This includes oversight of strategic choices, resilience investments, capital allocation, risk financing and the conditions under which action may need to be accelerated, redesigned or deferred. Good governance supports accountability for those decisions while preserving optionality as conditions change.

Looking ahead: The next 20 years

The next 20 years are unlikely to be defined by a single technology, risk or disruption. They are more likely to be shaped by interactions across systems that increasingly compete for the same infrastructure, resources, skills, institutions and capital.

The research challenge is therefore changing too: from understanding individual hazards in greater detail to understanding how consequences propagate, where constraints accumulate and which interventions create resilience or opportunity across several objectives at once.

For organizations, adaptability, optionality and resilience will carry increasing strategic value where critical systems are concentrated or capacity constrained. For research, this means richer scenarios that connect technology, physical systems, people, geopolitics, nature and finance; models that reveal dependency and concentration as well as event probability; and evidence that translates emerging change into operational and financial consequences early enough to influence decisions.

Quantification should reveal what could be lost and where value can be preserved, released or reallocated. That requires multidisciplinary research, multiple regional perspectives and stronger feedback loops between models, market evidence and real decisions — including what was prevented, what was preserved, what value was created and which assumptions proved wrong.

Rich scenarios matter because leaders rarely make consequential decisions with complete information. Playing out plausible futures across interacting systems can reveal where a strategy is robust, where it depends on fragile assumptions and where an apparently costly action today may preserve a much larger opportunity tomorrow. The objective is not certainty; it is to improve the quality and timing of choices while options still exist.

A question for the next 20 years: If the signals were visible, the dependencies were understood and credible alternatives were still available, what would we choose to do differently — before the future made the choice for us?

Lucy Stanbrough

Head of Emerging Risks, Willis Research Network



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At WTW (NASDAQ: WTW), we provide data-driven, insight-led solutions in the areas of people, risk and capital. Leveraging the global view and local expertise of our colleagues serving 140 countries and markets, we help you sharpen your strategy, enhance organisational resilience, motivate your workforce and maximise performance. Working shoulder to shoulder with you, we uncover opportunities for sustainable success — and provide perspective that moves you. Learn more at wtwco.com.



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