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Why Strategic Plans Fail to Adapt – and What to Do About It

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Failure to Adapt Is Not Theoretical



Organizations fail when they cannot anticipate change

Or respond fast enough when change arrives



Upstream Management Solutions

- ▶ Advisory support for professional regulators (Ontario-focused)
- ▶ **WE SPEAK REGULATOR**
Grounded in governance, operating realities, and public interest decision-making
20+ years inside Ontario's professional regulatory system



Perspective Behind this Analysis

- ▶ Direct observation across Ontario regulators
- ▶ Patterns emerging across strategy, governance, and performance
- ▶ Consistent challenges in adapting plans mid-cycle

- ▶ **This is not theoretical – it reflects how regulators are operating today**



Your Legislated Mandate

“...regulate the practice of _____ in the public interest...”

- ▶ What is changing (or likely to change) in:
 - ▶ Regulation (tools)?
 - ▶ Practice risks (business)?
 - ▶ Public interest (political/social/economic environment)?
- ▶ How positioned & capable are we to **identify, assess and respond** to these changes to remain relevant, in a timely manner?



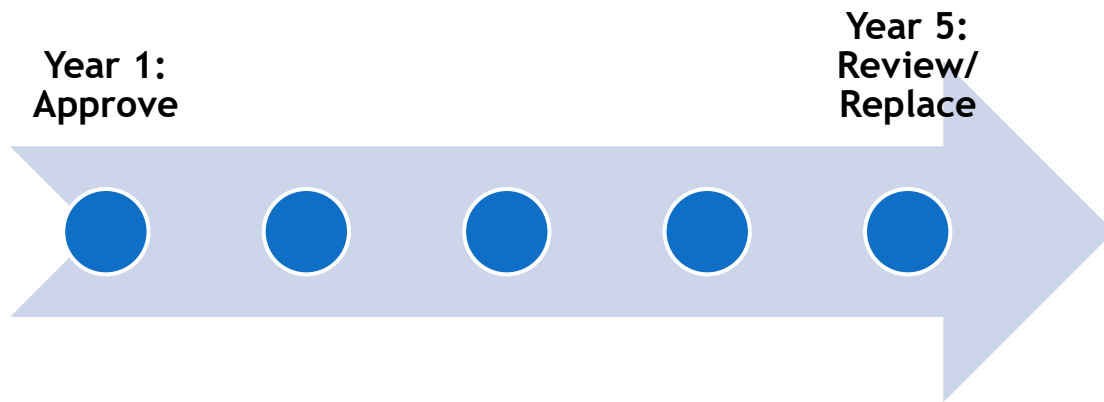
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The Strategic Balance Challenge





Your Typical Strategic Plan



3–5 year cycle

Fixed priorities

Periodic reporting

Assumes stable environment



Problem: Environment Is Changing Faster than Strategic Plan

- ↑↑ Technology reshaping practice (e.g. AI)
- ↑↑ Rising public expectations (e.g. sexual abuse)
- ↑↑ Increased oversight and scrutiny (e.g. OFC)



When Strategic Plans Fail to Adapt

Mid-cycle

- ▶ Government policy/legislative change
- ▶ Internal Financial pressures
- ▶ Council/Board/leadership turnover
- ▶ Multi-year project stalls

Crisis (anytime)

- ▶ Covid-19
- ▶ Budget deficit
- ▶ Catastrophic damage (e.g. fire, data loss)



Why Strategies Fail to Adapt

The issue isn't planning — it's the ability to adapt strategy in motion.



Strategic agility isn't about making plans more flexible.

It's about building the capacity to **detect, interpret, decide, and act—quickly.**



Strategy Is Not the Problem

Most regulators already have:

- ▶ Strategic plans
- ▶ Reporting frameworks
- ▶ Defined priorities

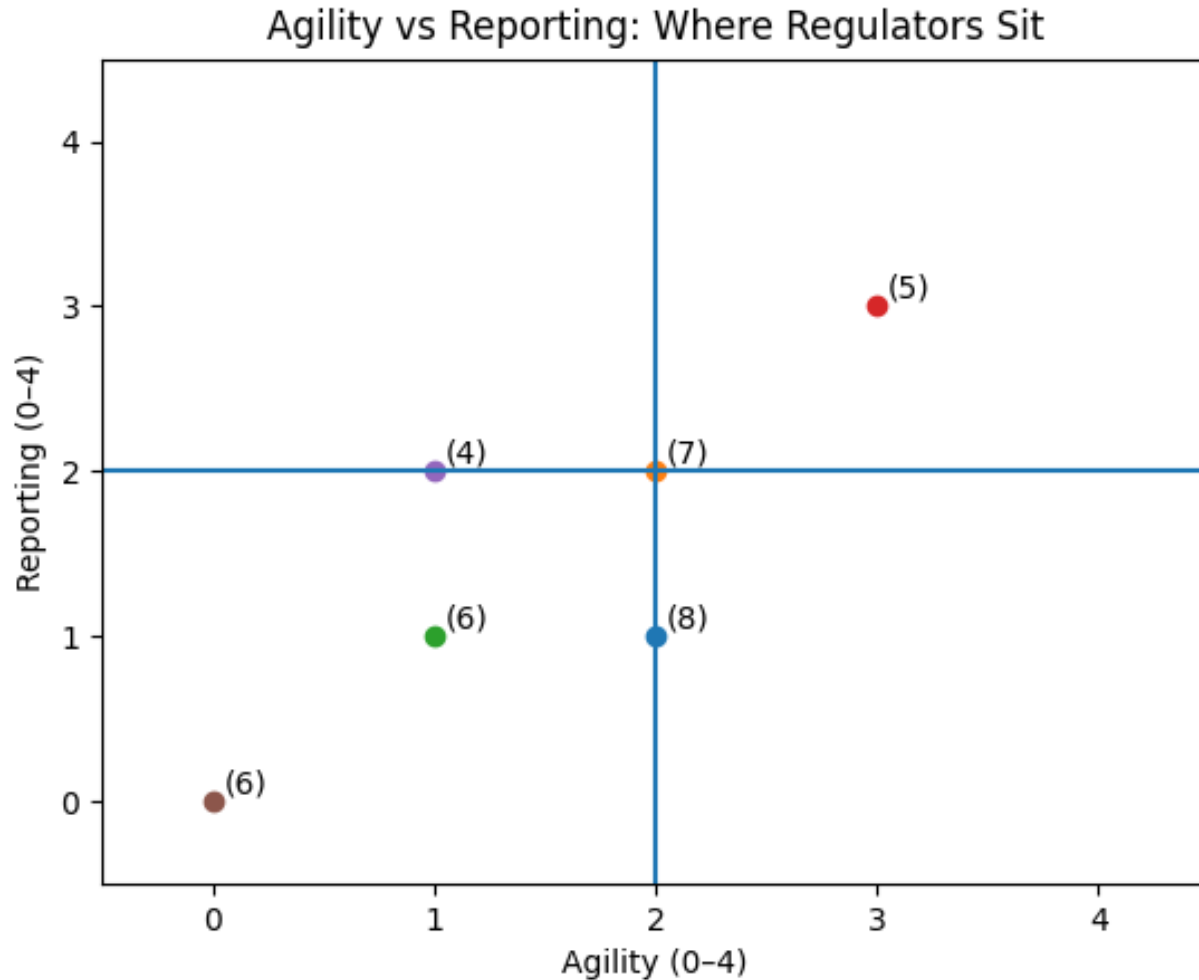
But very few have:

- ▶ Clear mechanisms to adapt strategy mid-cycle
- ▶ Fast decision-making pathways
- ▶ The ability to shift work in practice

This is a gap between planning—and adaptability.



Agility vs Reporting (Cluster with Counts)

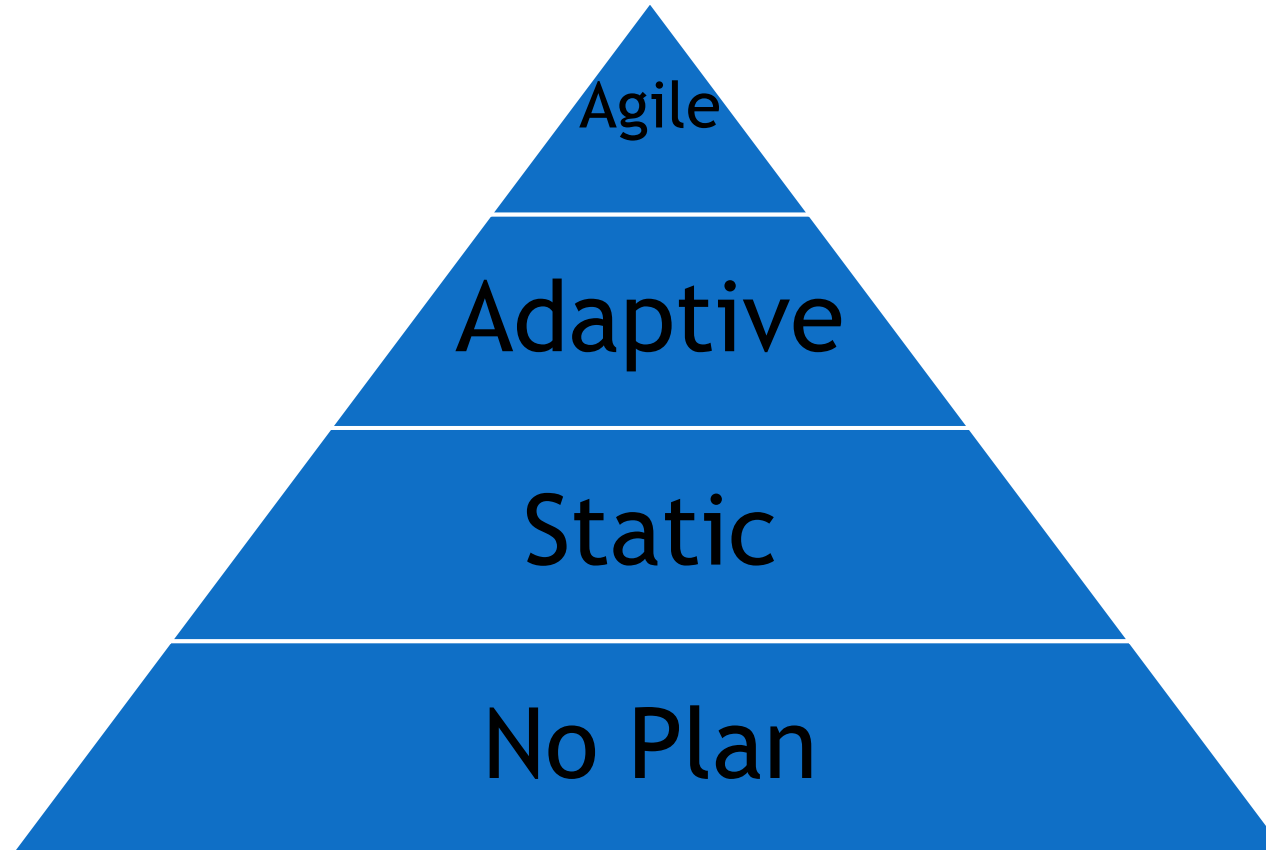


Most regulators demonstrate moderate agility—but lack structured, decision-linked reporting.



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Strategic Maturity Pyramid





Is Your Strategic Plan Built to Adapt?

Strategic Plan Agility - Quick Check

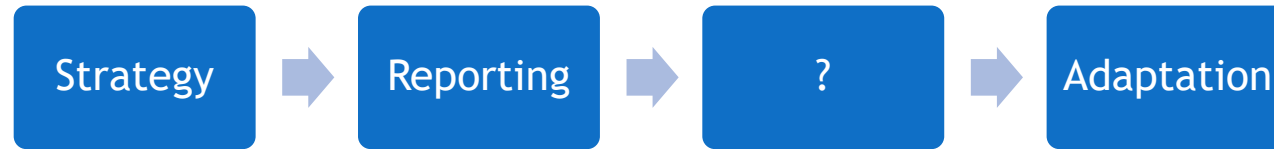
- ▶ 1. Defined points for review or adjustment?
- ▶ 2. Clear triggers for reassessment?
- ▶ 3. Strategy discussions include possible changes?
- ▶ 4. Can priorities shift without full plan reset?
- ▶ 5. Data used to adjust strategy (not just report)?

Scoring:

- ▶ 4-5 Yes = Strong agility
- ▶ 2-3 Yes = Partial
- ▶ 0-1 Yes = Likely static



From Reporting to Adaptation



What Most Regulators do:

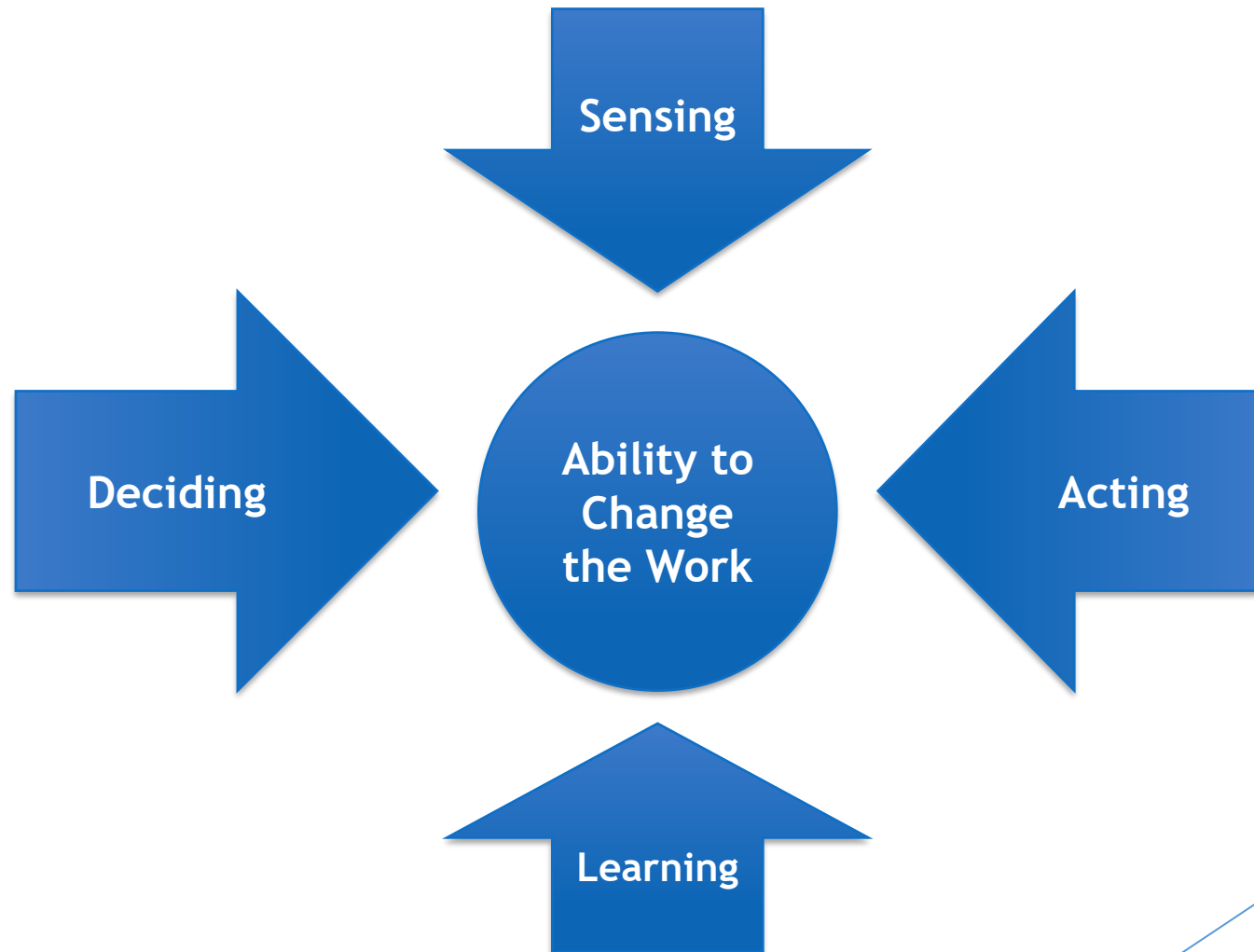
- ▶ KPI dashboards
- ▶ CEO updates
- ▶ Environmental scans

What's missing:

- ▶ Reprioritization decisions
- ▶ Strategy resets
- ▶ Board-led course correction



Strategic Agility Operates as a System





What Strong Regulators Do

In practice, stronger regulators do four things consistently:

 Anticipate

 Adjust

 Test

 Learn

Build agility into how your organization operates—not just into your Strategic Plan



Where This Becomes Practical

- ▶ Most organizations don't need a new strategy
- ▶ They need the ability to **adapt the one they have**



A Structured Way to Assess Strategic Agility

Strategic Agility Diagnostic Index (SADI)

- ▶ designed to assess the three core failure points we see across regulators: strategy, decision-making, & execution
- ▶ 5 dimensions
- ▶ 23 criteria
- ▶ Evidence-based scoring



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The 5 SADI Dimensions



Environmental Intelligence



Strategic Responsiveness



Governance Agility



Operational Flexibility



Learning & Adaptation



Typical Starting Points

- ▶ Quick diagnostic (where are we today?)
- ▶ Board/leadership session (what does agility mean here?)
- ▶ Targeted capacity building (close the gaps)



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If this is a current or emerging priority, I'd be glad to compare notes.