THE STRATEGY BENEATH THE STRATEGY

Our strategy workshop is planned.

Who is in the room will shape it more than its goals.

Senior people, careful preparation, a full agenda. And still, the outcome depends on who prepares it, who attends, and what each of us brings.

SWIPE →

THE WORKSHOP AS PLANNED

Every strategy cycle, the leadership team sets time aside to decide where the whole business goes next.

It asks each of us to look beyond our own function, and beyond any single activity.

On paper, everything is in place for that. In practice, many things have to come together, and each of them varies.

WHAT HAS TO COME TOGETHER

The preparation. The people in the room. What each of us brings. How ready we are to decide, on the day. Together, they shape what the session produces.

WHO PREPARES IT

The material is prepared by a group: usually a strategy manager, with experts from different disciplines.

Each sees the business, and what is strategic, from where they work.

So the material is put together from several views, not thought through as one.

WHY IT VARIES

This is how the work is usually organised, and the people doing it are good at their jobs.
As the group changes, so do the content and its depth.

WHO ARRIVES

A strategic conversation needs people who can look beyond any single activity. The invitation goes to the leadership team.

Then leaders bring the experts they rely on, and others come along. Eight people invited become fifteen or twenty in the room.

And the conversation turns tactical, quickly.

WHAT FOLLOWS

Each person has a good reason to be there. Together, they change the session: detail takes over from direction, the loudest voices carry, and each area speaks for its own agenda.

WHAT ARRIVES

Each area brings its own material, at its own level of detail.

Project lists, improvement initiatives, broad headers, and actions with the solution already written into the title.

Some areas that need attention are missing.

WHAT IS HARD TO EXPLAIN

Why an area that is already green gets new objectives, while a known red is left out.

HOW READY WE ARE TO DECIDE

The workshop is usually seen as a review. Some of us arrive ready to decide anyway.

Some agree or disagree on the spot. Some want more added. Some prefer to take it away, think, and talk it through with their teams.

Each is a reasonable way to work. In one session, they do not add up to a shared direction.

ON THE DAY

Where the relationships between leaders stand that week, and whatever is most pressing at the time, shape what is said and what is left for later.

WHAT IT COSTS

Each part varies on its own. The strategy carries the result.

With a different group, on a different day, the same business could leave with a different strategy.

And there is no way to know which one the business needed.

WHAT WE HEAR

"We discussed this last year." With nothing prepared to show what happened since, the point is noted and the session moves on.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A good strategy workshop does not depend on a good day.

The material arrives thought through for the whole business, and the conversation stays at that level.

What it produces would hold with a different group.

WHAT CHANGES

Different views are worked through, not left to the loudest voice. The session ends with a shared direction for the next few years, towards our long-term goal. It is specific enough to hold later, even where complex questions are given more time.

WHY IT IS COMPLEX

The workshop is one of the few places where the whole business is in one room.

Each leader sees the whole business through their own part of it.

Bringing those views up to the level of the whole business, and keeping them coherent, is complex work.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

This season's workshops are being planned now. Much of what decides their outcome, the material and who is invited, is settled before the session starts.

THE TAKEAWAY

A strategy workshop is more than a meeting in the calendar.

What it produces should come from where the business aims to be, not from how the day went.

As this season's workshops are planned, it is worth looking at ours with that in mind. Who is preparing the material? Who will be in the room? And what will we leave with: a shared direction, or another list of activities and post-it notes?

IF THIS RESONATED

→ **Follow Anna Plekhanova** for more on strategy, leadership and transformation.

→ **Save this** for your next strategy workshop.

→ **Recognise this room?** Leave a comment.

→ **A strategy workshop that does not depend on a good day** is part of the work I do with leadership teams. More at annaplekhanova.com.