

Exclusive Breakfast Briefing

SUMMARY

Strategic Decision-Making in an Uncertain World

September 2026
National Liberal Club, London

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STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

The Breakfast Briefing brought together senior leaders from across risk, resilience, security and business to examine how organisations make decisions under uncertainty and what strengthens resilience in practice. The discussion focused not only on frameworks and governance, but on the realities of judgement, communication, preparedness, culture, trust and collaboration.

Through the panel conversation and participant discussion, the morning explored how risk professionals can communicate more effectively with the business, how leaders can be better prepared to make decisions under pressure and how organisations can build resilience that is practical rather than theoretical.

A RECURRING MESSAGE

"Risk management needs to move from administration to management."

HOW PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK WAS CAPTURED

At the close of the session, participants were asked two simple questions:

1. **WHAT DID YOU LEARN TODAY?** A reflection on an idea, insight or challenge that stood out during the morning.	2. **WHAT MESSAGE WILL YOU SHARE?** One point participants felt should travel beyond the room and into their organisations or networks.

The findings in this report are drawn directly from those responses. Themes that appeared repeatedly are presented as recurring findings; individual or more provocative observations are retained as participant perspectives rather than treated as consensus.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strongest finding from the morning was not about a new framework or emerging technology. It was about the role of risk itself. Participants repeatedly argued that risk management must become more relevant to the decisions the organisation is trying to make — using business language, challenging assumptions and recognising opportunity as well as downside.

Training and exercising also featured prominently. Scenario planning, decision-making practice, real-world exposure and repeated testing were seen as essential to reducing uncertainty when disruption occurs. Participants stressed that preparedness is relational as well as technical: trusted networks, clear command structures and shared understanding need to exist before they are tested in a crisis.

The discussion repeatedly returned to the human element. Culture, trust, ownership, challenge and communication cannot be engineered away. Frameworks can guide decisions, but they do not remove the need for a person to take responsibility and make the call.

Five themes emerged most clearly from the participant cards:

1 Risk has a communication problem

Specialist language and process can distance risk from business decisions.

2 Preparation must be tested, not assumed

Scenario planning, training and exercising build decision capability.

3 The human element remains decisive

Culture, trust, ownership and command structures shape outcomes.

4 Resilience is collaborative

Networks, cross-sector perspectives and shared learning strengthen preparedness.

5 Risk can enable rather than simply constrain

Effective risk management supports opportunity, reputation and informed risk-taking.

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAY

“Frameworks support decisions, but ultimately people make the call.”

1. FROM RISK ADMINISTRATION TO RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk communication was one of the clearest recurring themes. Participants repeatedly referred to the difficulty of communicating risk to people outside specialist functions and to the need to translate technical concepts into the language of business choices, priorities and consequences.

Several responses challenged the assumption that risk should be presented primarily as something negative. Instead, the conversation emphasised the need to discuss risk in the context of opportunity, reputation, strategic objectives and the choices an organisation is prepared to make.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LEARNED

“Importance of how we communicate risk to non-risk people.”

WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL SHARE

“The risk function needs to focus on management, not administration.”

What this means in practice:

1. Use business language rather than relying on specialist terminology.
2. Make assumptions explicit so they can be challenged before they shape a poor decision.
3. Connect risk to the organisation’s objectives, reputation, customers and opportunities.
4. Recognise that every business operates in a different environment; context matters more than generic risk language.
5. Shift the value proposition of the risk function from administering process to improving management decisions.

FROM A PARTICIPANT CARD

“Risk can be a dirty word — accept that and ask which assumptions we can change.”

2. PREPARATION MUST BE TESTED, NOT ASSUMED

Training, exercising and scenario planning came through more strongly than almost any other operational theme. Participants highlighted the importance of practising decisions under pressure, testing assumptions repeatedly and exposing leaders to real-world experience before they face a genuine disruption.

The emphasis was not simply on validating plans. The cards pointed to a deeper requirement: build the judgement, confidence and relationships that allow people to act when the scenario does not match the document.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LEARNED

"Test, test and test again."

WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL SHARE

"When a crisis occurs, this is not the time to swap business cards."

Preparation is both technical and relational.

- Use scenario planning to surface hidden assumptions and expose weak decision points.
- Exercise command structures and decision rights, not only recovery plans and procedures.
- Invest in decision-making training across the organisation, not just within specialist teams.
- Create exposure to realistic pressure so leaders can practise working with incomplete information.
- Build networks and trusted relationships before a disruption makes them urgent.

FROM A PARTICIPANT CARD

"Commanders shouldn't underestimate the value of training and exercising."

3. THE HUMAN ELEMENT CANNOT BE ENGINEERED AWAY

Culture, trust, challenge, ownership, communication and command structures appeared repeatedly across the feedback. The consistent message was that resilience ultimately depends on people: how they interpret information, whether they feel able to challenge assumptions, how clearly ownership is understood and whether someone is prepared to make a decision when certainty is unavailable.

Technology, controls and governance can support this process, but they cannot remove the human responsibility at the centre of strategic decision-making.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LEARNED

"Test, test and test again."

WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL SHARE

"When a crisis occurs, this is not the time to swap business cards."

Capabilities that repeatedly surfaced.

1. A culture that embraces constructive challenge rather than rewarding agreement.
2. Clarity over who owns the decision and when escalation is required.
3. Trust that allows difficult information to move quickly through the organisation.
4. Communication that is clear enough to support action under pressure.
5. Leaders who can make decisions without waiting for perfect information.

FROM A PARTICIPANT CARD

"Don't make assumptions."

4. RESILIENCE IS COLLABORATIVE

Participants repeatedly emphasised the value of networking, exchanging ideas and hearing perspectives beyond their immediate discipline. This was more than a positive reflection on the event itself. It pointed to collaboration as an operational resilience capability.

Complex disruption rarely respects organisational boundaries. The ability to draw on trusted relationships, compare different perspectives and learn from other sectors can expose blind spots and improve coordination when an incident escalates.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LEARNED

"The value of sharing multiple perspectives on a common problem."

WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL SHARE

"Share and collaborate."

Why networks matter.

1. Different disciplines see different parts of the same problem.
2. Trusted networks provide access to knowledge and capability that no organisation holds alone.
3. Cross-sector exchange helps challenge assumptions formed inside a single operating environment.
4. Relationships created before a crisis improve the speed and quality of coordination during one.
5. Professional communities create space to test thinking before it becomes a live decision.

FROM A PARTICIPANT CARD

"The importance of working together and exchanging ideas."

5. RISK CAN ENABLE, NOT SIMPLY CONSTRAIN

Several participants explicitly reframed risk as an opportunity rather than purely a downside to be avoided. The discussion recognised that risk is inherent in business and that an effective risk function should help the organisation understand what it is prepared to take on, what value it is seeking and how to protect what matters while pursuing opportunity.

This connects risk management directly to strategy and risk appetite. It moves the conversation away from control for its own sake and towards informed trade-offs, flexibility and confidence in decision-making.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS LEARNED

“Risk management can be positioned as an opportunity rather than a cost.”

WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL SHARE

“Don’t view risk management as avoidance of downside, but as opportunities to protect company reputation.”

A different risk conversation.

- Ask what value the organisation is trying to create, not only what it is trying to avoid.
- Use risk appetite and tolerance to support informed flexibility rather than unnecessary constraint.
- Frame risk management as a way to protect reputation, customers and strategic options.
- Recognise that opportunity and downside often sit within the same decision.
- Treat uncertainty as something to manage intelligently rather than something that can be eliminated.

FROM A PARTICIPANT CARD

“Risk is opportunity … to reduce adverse impacts.”

PARTICIPANT VOICE

What did you learn today? What message will you share?

The cards below retain the direct language of participants. They are intentionally concise and anonymous, reflecting what individuals chose to take away from the morning and what they felt was important enough to share beyond the room.

WHAT I LEARNED	WHAT I WILL SHARE
Importance of how we communicate risk to non-risk people.	Risk is opportunity … to reduce adverse impacts.
Exposure to real-world experience helps decision-making.	Building networks in order to prepare for any untrained incident.
The value of trust, clear structures and training in supporting decision-making and resilience.	Commanders shouldn't underestimate the value of training and exercising.
The need to create a culture that embraces challenge is widely understood and shared.	The risk function needs to focus on management, not administration.
We are all concerned about culture; there is no discounting the human element.	Training and exercising are key.
Clarity and communication are key.	Opportunity to network and learn.
The value of sharing multiple perspectives on a common problem.	Share and collaborate.
How many organisations do not invest in training their people in decision-making.	How important training for decision-making is.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS & PROVOCATIONS

Not every comment appeared often enough to be treated as a recurring theme, but several individual observations added useful challenge or highlighted areas for further discussion. They are captured here as participant perspectives rather than collective conclusions.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

- Every business has a different operating environment, making simple commonality difficult.
- The third sector needs to be better prepared for crises.
- Scale itself can become a resilience problem.
- Flexibility can be understood through the lens of risk tolerance.
- There are many good people thinking about these difficult issues.

PROVOCATIONS TO EXPLORE

- "Fragmented systems are more resilient!"
- "Don't let government lead on this."
- How much decision-making capability is actually trained across organisations?
- What assumptions are embedded in centralised systems and structures?
- Where should responsibility sit when public, private and third-sector interests intersect?

FROM A PARTICIPANT CARD

"This is a subject that is difficult, but not insuperable."

These comments reinforce the value of keeping the conversation open. Strategic resilience is not a problem with a single owner or universal answer; it requires judgement, context and a willingness to test competing ideas.

WHAT EVERY LEADER SHOULD HEAR

Taken together, the participant feedback points to a small number of messages that leadership teams can act on now:

- Move risk management closer to management decisions and further away from process administration.
- Communicate risk in the language of business priorities, choices, opportunity and consequence.
- Train decision-making under uncertainty — do not wait for a crisis to discover whether leaders can make the call.
- Exercise relationships, command structures and escalation routes as well as plans.
- Create cultures where challenge is expected, assumptions can be questioned and difficult information moves quickly.
- Build trusted networks before they are needed and seek perspectives beyond the immediate discipline.
- Use risk appetite to enable informed action, not simply to restrict it.

Leadership reflections.

- Can our risk function explain material exposures in language the business can act on?
- Have we tested decision rights and command structures under realistic pressure?
- Do our exercises develop judgement, or mainly validate documents?
- What relationships would we need tomorrow that we have not built today?
- Are people encouraged to challenge assumptions before those assumptions become vulnerabilities?
- Does our approach to risk help the organisation pursue opportunity responsibly?

SYNTHESISED LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

“Preparation is not just having a plan. It is having people, relationships and judgement ready before certainty disappears.”



CLOSING REFLECTION

The September Breakfast Briefing reinforced that strategic decision-making under uncertainty cannot be solved by process alone. Resilient organisations need risk functions that communicate in business terms, leaders who are trained to decide under pressure, cultures that support challenge and clear ownership, and networks that allow people to collaborate when disruption crosses organisational boundaries.

The most repeated message was also the simplest: risk management needs to move from administration to management. In practice, that means making risk relevant to the decisions the organisation is trying to take and building the capability to act before certainty arrives.

A MESSAGE REPEATED ACROSS THE ROOM

“We need to move away from risk admin to risk management.”

GUEST SPEAKERS

STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD



Tania Carvalho
Founder
Powerhouse Consulting



Rina Singh
Head of Business Resilience
Smart DCCT



Patrick Parker
UK Country Manager
Clew



Richard Brooks
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