



## Global Strategic Planning

Strategy planning season is coming to a close. It's a time filled with off-sites, white boards, PowerPoints, and blue sky discussions. The company's best thinkers gather in rooms, pore over data, make projections, and debate the future. Whether or not strategy-planning sessions are ultimately effective — vision is one thing, execution is another — they provide a good opportunity to consider your place in the changing environment.

It can be tempting to focus less on identifying emerging trends and long-term opportunities in favor of more focused, data-driven discussions designed to create budgets and financial forecasts. This is short sighted, though, and will not help build a real strategy, let alone sustainable competitive advantage.

LIMRA surveyed executives around the globe to see what they've been thinking about as they look to the future. While the companies and countries they represent are very different, common themes emerge. The two "Ts" — talent management and technology — top the list of business challenges, with 43 and 41 percent of executives citing them as their primary challenge. They are followed by challenges in distribution and regulation.

It shouldn't be surprising that talent management is at the top. Any company planning for the future needs to have an effective talent management strategy. Finding, selecting, hiring, and retaining the best employees does more than give a company a competitive edge. It can make or break a company.

But talent isn't the only strategic consideration. As anyone looking at back-office administrative systems and cybersecurity will tell you, technology and distribution also have the power to make or break a company. Everyone wants to know how to increase productivity and get the most out of digital selling. This challenge is often compounded by an aging sales force.

Regulation also keeps many executives up at night, and is something companies have little control over. Regulation is more global than ever, even for companies based in the United States. Our research found that executives in China are particularly concerned with regulation, which has been

increasing in that market. No matter where you're located, though, compliance requires a lot of internal preparation, expense, and expertise.

When we asked executives what they see as critical factors for future success, technology was the common answer. Technology is a broad term, though. Executives are often unsure which technologies are worth their time and resources. They told us they believe technology will have a big impact on IT, customer service, new business, distribution and sales, marketing, and product in the next 3 years. A significant number (about 1 in 4) also believe technology will have a significant impact on compliance and administration. Basically, technology will touch all areas of the company.

Companies are soliciting input from all areas of the company to identify and prioritize their next steps with technology investment. Many are investing in systems to support technology improvements. This modernization may include updates to existing legacy systems, or replacement systems. Many companies are also working with partners to address gaps in technology. One company told us they are functioning as integrators rather than developers. They are accelerating value creation by giving more agile companies certain parts of their technology development. A Latin American company says it is contracting with worldwide startups, hiring skills associated with digital experience, and incorporating new agile methodologies. Other global companies report similar activities (see "Which Tech and Why?" on page 50). There is a lot to consider and a lot of technology from which to choose.

While sometime onerous, strategic planning remains a critical component of business success. It helps make choices easier. Without a clear idea of where to go, companies either wander aimlessly or pursue a series of disjointed goals. Employees will question their work and purpose. Technology decisions will be haphazard and myopic. However, if done well, a good strategic plan provides direction, meaning, business longevity, profitability, and market share. It's the difference between creating the future and having the future happen to you. 🌐