

These questions dig into strategic learning, organizational health, and leverage points—all areas where an Anticipatory COO sees the system, not just the symptoms. They also reinforce that integration of strategy, change, risk, and *capabilities* is what separates levels of maturity.

Where are we on the Q3 strategic initiatives?

- Reactive COO: Let me pull the status report.
- Responsive COO: 7 of 9 on track, 2 are at risk due to resource constraints.
- Anticipatory COO: 7 advancing, 2 stalled -- here's the interdependency creating the bottleneck, the capability gap it's exposing, and how we're re-sequencing while building what's missing.

How do we know if our strategy is actually working?

- Reactive COO: We're tracking our KPIs monthly.
- Responsive COO: Here are the leading and lagging indicators—two are off-trend.
- Anticipatory COO: Here's what the data is telling us about our theory of change, where our assumptions are holding versus breaking, and the strategic adjustments we're testing now before the lag indicators confirm it.

How aligned are strategy and execution across the organization?

- Reactive COO: Pretty well aligned overall.
- Responsive COO: Strategy is clear at the top, execution fragmented at the middle.
- Anticipatory COO: Here's where translation breaks down -- middle managers understand the *what* but lack the capability to architect the *how*. Here's the pattern causing it, the decision-making and planning capabilities we're building, and how we're bridging the gap.

Why is the change initiative meeting resistance?

- Reactive COO: People don't like change.
- Responsive COO: Our middle management lacks clarity on their role in the new model.
- Anticipatory COO: We're seeing friction at three points -- leaders have the will but lack the skill to lead through ambiguity. Here's what capabilities they need, what people need to let go of, and the learning journey that bridges both.

What's our biggest operational risk right now?

- Reactive COO: I'd need to review with the team.
- Responsive COO: Key person dependency in our delivery model.
- Anticipatory COO: Here's the risk, the capability that's trapped in individuals rather than embedded in the system, the early warning signals we're monitoring, and how we're transferring that knowledge while building organizational muscle.

What happens if we accelerate our market entry timeline by 6 months?

- Reactive COO: We'd need to move faster.
- Responsive COO: We'd face capability gaps in two critical areas.
- Anticipatory COO: Here's the readiness assessment. We have the technical capability but lack the integration and speed-to-execution muscles. Here's what we can build, what we need to buy or partner for, the

organizational capacity to absorb this change, and how we sequence capability development to match the timeline.

Are our people ready for what's coming next?

- Reactive COO: We have good people.
- Responsive COO: We have skills gaps in emerging areas.
- Anticipatory COO: Here's the capability map -- where we're strong, where we're brittle, what we're building versus buying, and how we're creating the conditions for people to develop faster than the strategy demands.

What's the hidden cost of the pace we're running at?

- Reactive COO: People are working hard, but they're committed.
- Responsive COO: We're seeing increased turnover in three key roles and declining engagement scores.
- Anticipatory COO: Here's the pattern. Our top performers are absorbing complexity faster than we're building capability. We're at 18 months before burnout becomes attrition. Here's how we're rebalancing load, building bench strength, and protecting our core talent.

If you could only fix one thing in the next 90 days to unlock the next level of performance, what would it be?

- Reactive COO: We have several priorities competing for attention.
- Responsive COO: Decision-making speed -- too many decisions are bottlenecked at the top.
- Anticipatory COO: Decision-making architecture. Here's the constraint: we've scaled revenue but not decision rights. I'd push five decision categories down one level, build the capability to make them well, and create feedback loops so we learn fast. That unlocks speed, develops leaders, and frees executive capacity for what only we can do.

What keeps you up at night about our execution right now?

- Reactive COO: I sleep fine -- things are manageable.
- Responsive COO: The gap between what we've committed to and our current capacity to deliver.
- Anticipatory COO: The invisible trade-offs we're making. Every yes to new initiatives is a hidden no to something else -- recovery time, innovation capacity, or organizational learning. Here's where I see us mortgaging future capability for current delivery, the early signs it's unsustainable, and how we're creating the space to build while we run.

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Why this test matters:

- Instant context = integrated thinking
- Capability awareness trumps activity tracking
- Building capacity beats borrowing **time**

Run this test quarterly. The COO should increasingly connect strategy, capabilities, change, and risk because execution lives at their intersection.

If the COO only borders on 'Responsive', you now know where your next development edge needs to be.