The Choice Nobody Made

Four questions to ask before resources are committed

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What did the data and AI spend get us?

80%

say AI made their people more productive

37%

can find it in earnings

Same as a year ago.

Source: McKinsey, The state of AI, Aug 25, 2026, 1,719 respondents.

Here is what nobody did.



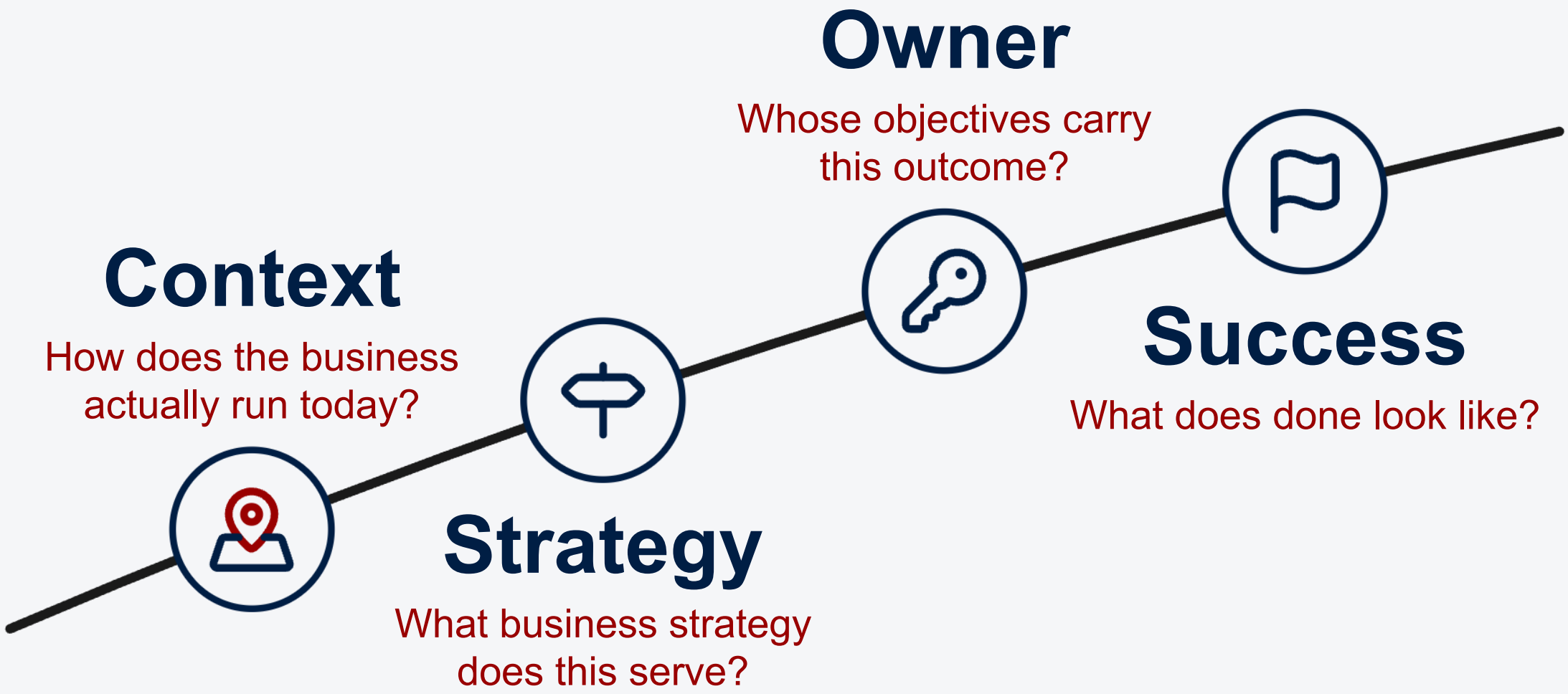
Nobody asked
how HR actually ran.

Nobody asked
what strategy it served.

Nobody asked
who would own the outcome.

Nobody asked
what done would look like.

Four questions, before resources are committed.



A design, not an accident.



Sponsors

safe, and easy to collect



Owner

one name on the hook

By default.


Context
the source systems
Strategy
the roadmap
Owner
my team
Success
data in one place

How many people work in engineering?



Active FTEs

the HR system



Budgeted positions, filled or not

Finance



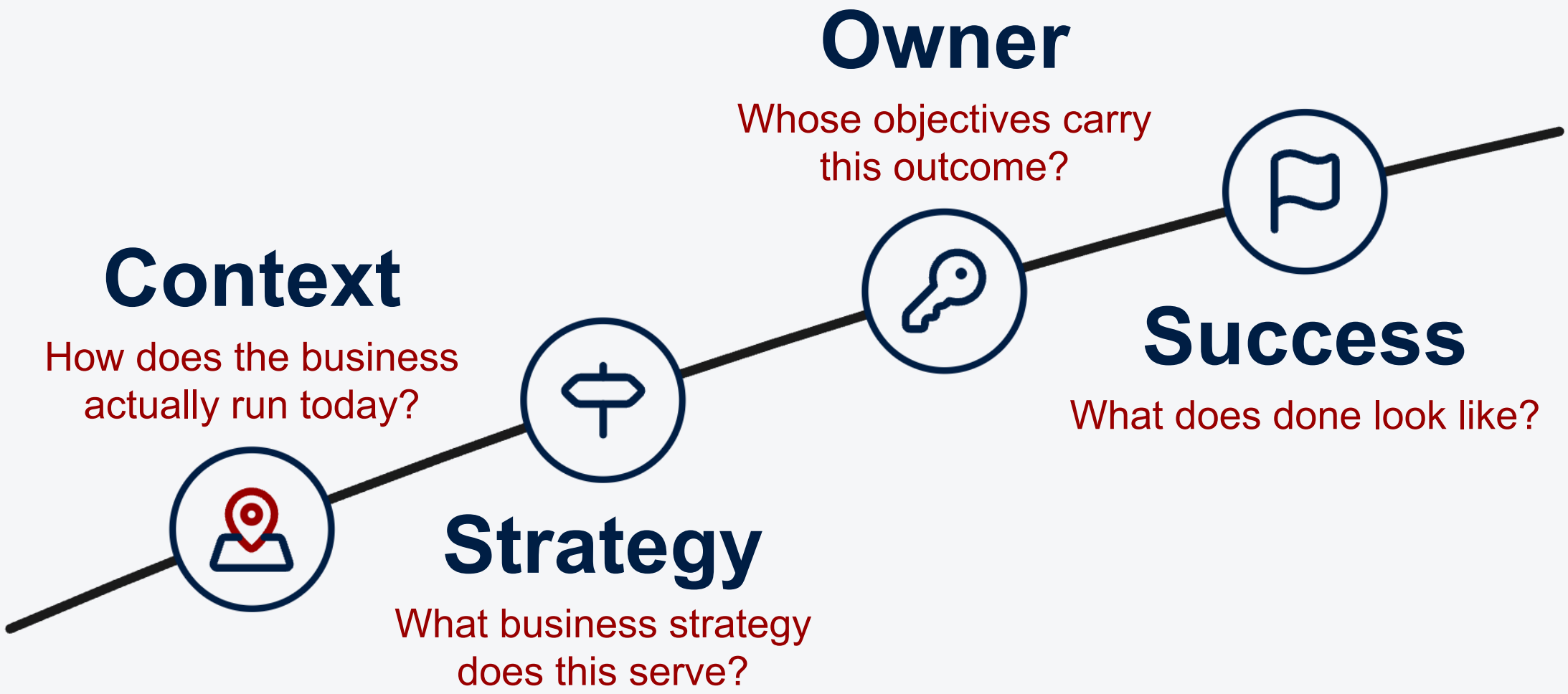
Everyone doing the work

the engineering leader

Each one is correct.
The AI picked one and did not tell you which.

Multiple versions of the truth: DalleMule and Davenport, "What's Your Data Strategy?", Harvard Business Review, 2017.

Four questions, before resources are committed.



The difference was four decisions.

HR		Procurement
the source systems	 **Context**	how buying actually happened, in three companies
the roadmap	 **Strategy**	buy as one company, not three
my team	 **Owner**	the CPO
data in one place	 **Success**	three conversations with Microsoft became one

HR got a warehouse. Procurement got a number.

Ask the four questions, before resources are committed.

- Context. Do we understand how the business runs today, and do we have common definitions for what it measures?
- Strategy. What business strategy does this serve?
- Owner. Whose objectives carry this outcome?
- Success. What does done look like?

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