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Turn Threats into Disruptive Capabilities

How leading companies rebuild their edge through capability design

5 min read · Just now



Gunnar Östberg



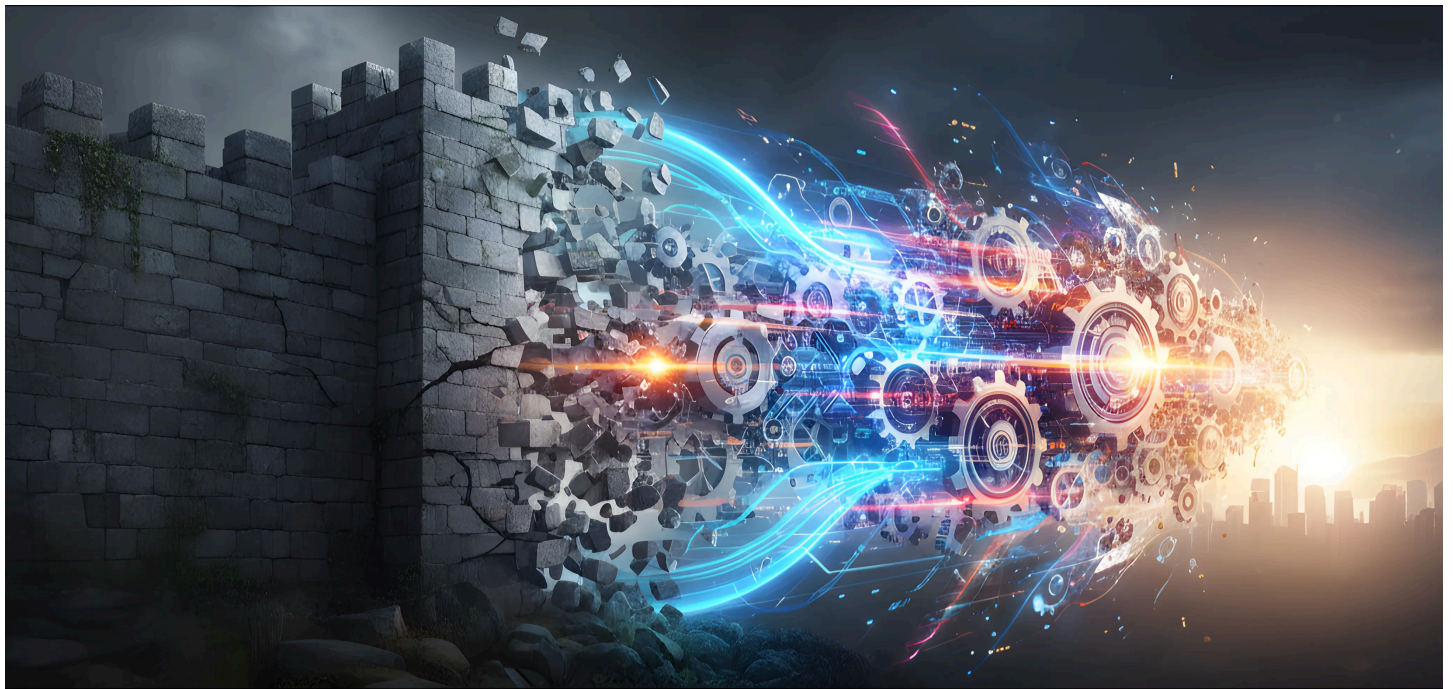
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Dissolve the fortress.
Build strategic power.
Attack with energy.

If your company is a long-established major player in your market, what approach is best to stay in control?

To build a fortress?

No.

It is not.

It is better to be proactive than reactive or passive.

It is better to be a disruptor than to be disrupted.

It is better to go on the attack than to hide behind defense.

The answer is strategy. Every company needs regular strategy reviews, and most do.

But most only make marginal changes. They don't adapt as they should. Too often, they spend too little time on analysis, and the strategy becomes weak. There is nothing to execute on. I've seen this many times when facilitating strategic visioning workshops or working with corporate strategy processes.

They fear losing what they have, or failing in a breakthrough attempt, more than being disrupted. They overestimate the risk of change and underestimate the risk of standing still.

That's why disruptors win.

The reason companies act this way

It's not irrational. It's structural.

Large, established companies have too much to lose. Their internal reward systems punish mistakes more than they reward breakthroughs. I've observed and lived this. Even without punishment, employees still fear. And breakthrough attempts are rarely praised or rewarded enough.

Company culture values predictability over adaptability. And their leaders are promoted for stability, not for change.

So they play defense. Until it's too late.

How to take strategy seriously

Taking strategy seriously means treating it as capability design, not as annual planning. Strategy isn't a document. It's a process. It's not something you do once a year. It's how you stay alive.

Every threat hides an opportunity. Every capability starts with one. A good strategy process turns threats into capabilities. When you identify what could disrupt you, you also identify what you must learn to master.

To take strategy seriously means building the capability to face external threats and turn them into internal strength, into competitive power.

Building those capabilities isn't done by PowerPoint. It's done through capability design, a structured process that makes transformation tangible. A good start is through facilitator-led workshops where cross-functional teams explore, frame, and design responses.

How to Turn Threats into Capabilities. A Proven, Iterative Approach.

In today's fast-moving markets, new technologies, regulations, or customer shifts can erode an advantage fast.

But you can turn those same forces into strengths.

This framework helps teams identify, dissect, and build capabilities from threats.

It combines SWOT/SPOT analysis with agile execution.

The real value isn't in listing threats.

It's in analyzing them, and converting them into concrete opportunities.

The same method also works for internal weaknesses.

Turn them into strengths just as effectively.

Turning Threats into Capabilities

A proven, iterative approach to convert threats into competitive advantages



STEP 1 Identify the external threat

SWOT/SPOT workshop with cross-functional teams

Output:

A clear threat statement

Example: "Rising AI adoption challenges our manual data analysis processes"



STEP 2 Decompose the threat

Analyze through four lenses

Knowledge

Process

Technology

Behavior

Output:

Hidden opportunities uncovered



STEP 3 Translate into capability hypothesis

Reframe the threat as an opportunity

Output:

2-3 testable capability statements

Example: "Mastering AI-driven analytics would give us predictive customer insights faster than competitors"



STEP 4 Design the target capability

Define requirements and enablers

Product management

Data & technology

Cross-functional teams

Learning loops

Leadership

Output:

Prioritized roadmap



STEP 5 Run capability sprints

2-4 week sprints with rapid iteration

Output:

Proven capability ready for integration

Example: 20% faster threat-response time after three sprints



Close the loop

Revisit Step 1 each quarter to scan for new threats and feed insights back into your capability portfolio.

Result:

This loop builds a resilient, opportunity-hunting culture. Teams stop merely filling SWOT grids. They start driving real transformation.



Iterative

Each step builds on the previous

**Agile**

Fast sprints and continuous learning

**Transformative**

From threats to competitive advantages

How leading companies transform threats into strengths — one capability at a time.

Follow these five connected steps, each building on the previous, to create momentum.

1. Identify the external threat

Start in a SWOT/SPOT workshop during your strategy review.

Involve cross-functional teams: strategy leads, product experts, and frontline operators. Make sure participants represent multiple perspectives — market, product, operations, and technology.

The goal: understand what's truly driving the threat.

Is it technology, regulation, customer behavior, or a new business model?

Dig deeper.

What's really fueling it: disruptive tech, regulatory shifts, changing customer needs, or emerging business models?

Key question: Which assumptions in our current operations does this challenge?

Use collaborative tools like assumption-mapping canvases to surface insights.

Output: A clear threat statement, e.g. *“Rising AI adoption challenges our manual data analysis processes.”*

2. Decompose the threat

Break it down to uncover hidden opportunities; missing knowledge, weak processes, tech gaps, or behavior shifts.

Checklist:

- Knowledge: What skills or insight are we missing?
- Process: Where do workflows break down?
- Technology: What tools could neutralize this?
- Behavior: How must teams or customers adapt?

Example: For an AI threat, decompose into “*skill shortages in machine learning*” (knowledge) and “*fragmented data silos*” (process).

This breakdown feeds directly into the next step. Designing the counter-capability.

3. Translate the threat into a capability hypothesis

Reframe the threat as a challenge.

Ask: “*If we mastered this, what unique capability would it give us?*”

Turn each decomposed layer into a hypothesis, e.g.

“*Mastering AI-driven analytics would give us predictive customer insights faster than competitors.*”

Vote as a team on the most promising ideas to align efforts.

Output: 2–3 testable capability statements.

4. Design the target capability

With your hypothesis defined, outline the capability and its key enablers.

Bring in diverse roles: product managers for vision, tech leads for feasibility.

Core Requirements:

- Product management excellence: clear roadmaps tied to threat metrics
- Data and technology integration: scalable, flexible stacks
- Empowered cross-functional teams: autonomous squads with clear charters
- Learning and experimentation loops: built-in testing and retrospectives
- Leadership and governance: risk-tolerant policies with ethical guardrails

Risk check: Prioritize builds with a simple 2×2 matrix (Impact vs. Feasibility).

5. Run capability sprints and leverage for disruption

Start small. Build fast.

Prototype iteratively.

Run 2–4-week sprints to test new processes, roles, or tools against the threat.

Track progress with clear metrics such as adoption rate, threat-mitigation score, then debrief, learn, and iterate fast.

Skip the vague pilots.

Aim for tangible shifts that move the organization.

Success example: 20% faster threat-response time after three sprints.

Once proven, integrate into core operations.

Then go bold. Launch a threat-derived product and disrupt your market.

Close the loop

Revisit Step 1 each quarter to scan for new threats and feed insights back into your capability portfolio.

This loop builds a resilient, opportunity-hunting culture.

Teams stop merely filling SWOT grids.

They start driving real transformation.

Final thought

Most companies don't fail because they didn't see change coming, but because they didn't act.

They waited for certainty.

They waited for permission.

They waited until it was safe.

But strategy isn't about safety. It's about movement.

It's about choosing direction before others do.

So stop protecting what you have.

Start building what will *replace* it.

That's what real strategy is.

That's how you stay in control: by being the one who changes first.

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About the Author



Gunnar Östberg, Business Transformation Architect, CEO, Business Clarity.

Gunnar Östberg is a Business Transformation Architect and CEO of Business Clarity. He holds an M.Sc. in computer engineering and brings 40 years of experience in **business and IT-driven transformation**. Gunnar has worked with global giants like Ericsson and Scania, as well as agile high-tech firms. Passionate about sound architectural principles and systems thinking, he writes to broaden perspectives and deepen insights. Through his consultancy, Gunnar helps organizations turn ideas into sustainable systems and products, transforming businesses through structured, principle-based innovation. His focus areas include pragmatic architecture, business modeling, and delivering real impact.

Business Strategy

Leadership

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Disruption

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Written by Gunnar Östberg

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