MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGERS

Win in the short term... or build in the long term?

Frédéric Le Pennec · 18 February 2026

The short term becomes dangerous when it accumulates without a framework, until it silently redefines the company's strategy. To preserve the long term, decisions must be made visible, temporary, and controlled.

The short term is not the enemy of strategy. It becomes one when each urgency dictates its decision, without anyone measuring what it will cost tomorrow.

In many ESNs and consulting firms, no one officially decides to sacrifice the long term. No executive committee puts on the agenda: "How to weaken our position in six months to secure this month's figures?"

Trade-offs are made more discreetly. A deal is accepted despite an ill-defined scope because it allows the target to be met. A fragile project is pushed to avoid an intercontract. A recruitment is accelerated because a client is waiting for a response. Prospecting is intensified without taking the time to review the offer, targeting, or positioning.

Individually, each of these choices can be defended. It responds to a real, sometimes urgent constraint. A company must pay its wages, protect its cash flow, keep its consultants busy, and seize opportunities when they arise.

The problem, therefore, does not come from the short term. It comes from its silent accumulation.

A short-term decision can be rational. A succession of short-term decisions eventually becomes a strategy — even if no one has chosen it.

The short term is not a management fault

Opposing the short term to the long term often produces a somewhat artificial debate. A company does not build anything if it does not survive the next quarter. And a three-year vision does not protect against a cash shortfall next month.

A leader can, therefore, accept a less profitable project to open an account deemed important. A manager can propose an imperfect mission to a consultant in intercontract to prevent the situation from dragging on. A Business Manager can quickly respond to an incomplete need to keep the chance to get in the game.

These choices are not necessarily bad. They become so when presented as normal decisions, without a specific goal, without a duration, and without exit conditions.

Accepting a low margin for three months to enter a client can make sense if the company knows what it wants to build next: a reference, access to other departments, an increase in value, or a tariff rebalancing. Permanently accepting all weak deals in the name of figures eventually starts installing a weak model.

The difference lies less in the decision itself than in the awareness with which it is made.

An urgency resolved today can become a debt tomorrow

Each trade-off in favor of the short term potentially creates a debt. Not an accounting debt, but a commercial, managerial, or organizational debt that will have to be repaid later.

An ill-scoped project produces misunderstandings with the client, additional requests, and an eroded margin. A mission proposed too quickly to a consultant may avoid a few weeks of intercontract, then lead to demotivation, a request for exit, or departure. A discount granted for a quick signature becomes the new reference point for the next negotiation.

At the moment, the benefit is visible. The revenue comes in, the intercontract disappears, the client signs. The cost, however, spreads over time. It will appear in unbilled hours, operational tensions, difficult renegotiations, loss of trust, or turnover.

For example, a Business Manager agrees to start a project before the consultant's role, deliverables, and governance are truly clarified. He immediately secures several months of revenue. Two months later, the client believes some tasks were included, while the consultant finds they are out of scope, and the manager spends hours resolving a dispute that could have been avoided.

The short term immediately benefits from the decision. The long term often receives the bill.

When urgency becomes the only compass

An organization rarely shifts to short-termism by explicit decision. It happens because urgencies follow one another, and each seems to justify an exception.

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This month, the focus is on securing figures. Next month, reducing intercontract time. Then, catching up on commercial delays. Then preparing the quarter-end closing. At each stage, the need to build is postponed to a calmer period that never comes.

The offer remains imprecise because teams do not have time to refine it. Accounts are prospected according to immediate needs rather than following a roadmap. Business Managers are supported for their immediate results, but rarely for their ability to develop an account, advance a consultant, or build a lasting client relationship.

The official message continues to promote vision, quality, and long-term relationships. Daily decisions mostly reward speed, availability, and the month's result.

Teams then hear two contradictory messages. They are asked to build, but evaluated mainly on their immediate output. They are asked to qualify, but the first to quickly send a profile is praised. They are asked to protect client relationships, then criticized for refusing a poorly initiated project.

This contradiction eventually blurs the benchmarks. Employees do not know what is truly expected: to apply the stated principles or understand the implicit rules revealed by trade-offs.

Stating that one chooses the short term already changes the decision

Naming the trade-off does not eliminate the constraint. It simply requires facing it.

Saying "we accept this project to protect this quarter's figures" is more useful than explaining it as a great entry point if no one truly believes it. The phrasing immediately prompts the right questions: what risk are we accepting? Until when? What maximum cost are we willing to bear? What must we achieve for this compromise to remain relevant?

The same reasoning applies to a fragile project proposed to a consultant in intercontract. The manager can decide that the immediate priority is to get the person back to work. But he must then schedule an early check-in with the consultant, clarify the likely duration of the project, and keep an eye out for more coherent options with his career path.

Thus, the trade-off becomes temporary and managed. It ceases to disguise itself as a general best practice.

An assumed decision can also be explained to the teams. A Business Manager more easily understands that an exception is requested for a tense period if he knows why, for how long, and by what criteria the organization will return to its normal operation.

An exception without limits eventually becomes a habit. A repeated habit eventually redefines the company's model.

Building long-term requires reserving capacity

Long-term is not built with time left after all urgencies are addressed. Generally, none is left.

If an organization wants to develop accounts rather than just respond to incoming needs, time must be reserved for mapping, understanding programs, and creating relationships outside calls for tenders. If it wants to improve its positioning, it must devote energy to clarifying its offers, proofs, and specific problems it knows how to solve.

If it wants to advance its Business Managers, it must maintain coaching times even when commercial pressure increases. For example, a monthly account review should not disappear as soon as a quarter becomes tense. It is precisely in these periods that it helps avoid dispersion and randomly made decisions.

Reserving this capacity may seem costly. A Business Manager working two hours on an account strategy does not immediately produce a meeting or a proposal. Yet, he can identify a new direction, prepare a more relevant approach, and avoid weeks of generic prospecting.

The long term often starts with activities whose immediate return is difficult to show. That is why they disappear first under pressure — and why they must be protected deliberately.

Arbitrating with three horizons rather than with two camps

The right question is not: should we choose the short term or the long term? It consists of knowing which horizon dominates the decision and how the others remain protected.

On a weekly scale, the company must address urgencies, secure startups, and solve intercontract situations. On a quarterly scale, it must improve commercial transformation, develop certain accounts, and advance skills. On a yearly scale, it must consolidate its positioning, portfolio quality, and loyalty of both clients and consultants.

A short-term decision becomes dangerous when it systematically degrades the other two horizons. Conversely, a long-term project becomes sterile if it ignores the company's immediate constraints.

Take a temporary price reduction to enter an account. In the short term, it facilitates signing. In the medium term, it should allow obtaining a reference, opening to other contacts, or expanding the scope. In the long term, it should not lock the company into a low-cost supplier image. If these three perspectives cannot be reconciled, the deal likely deserves reconsideration.

The correct trade-off is not the one that avoids all concessions. It is the one that knows what it protects today without losing sight of what it wants to enable tomorrow.

References disappear before results

An organization can live long with incoherent decisions before its results openly degrade. Revenue sometimes continues to flow. Most consultants remain in projects. Teams compensate with their energy and adaptability.

What deteriorates first is less visible: the understanding of priorities. Business Managers hesitate between protecting margins and signing quickly. Managers no longer know if they should encourage initiative or enforce rules. Leaders defend a long-term vision while intervening weekly to impose a different urgency.

Over time, everyone arbitrates according to their own understanding. Decisions seem opportunistic, managerial messages lose their impact, and strategy becomes a discourse detached from actual activity.

Building long-term does not mean refusing the short term. It requires making choices visible, recognizing their cost, and protecting some decisions from being renegotiated at each urgency.

A company does not need to choose permanently between winning today and building tomorrow. It simply needs to avoid winning today in a way that prevents it from building tomorrow.

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