Why promising growth plans can be hard to back

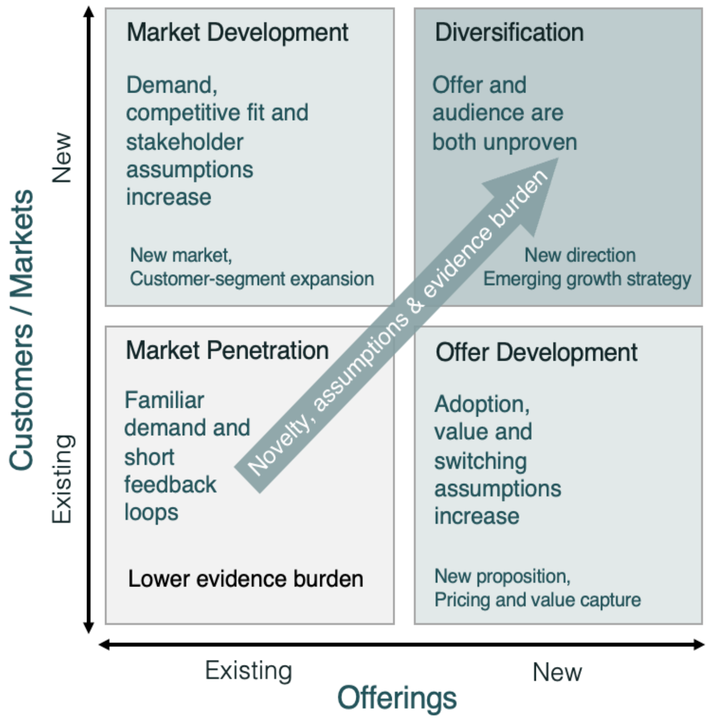
The evidence gap between growth ambition and responsible commitment

A DecideGuide Executive Briefing | July 2026

Summary: Growth plans ask organisations to exchange certain costs today for uncertain revenue tomorrow. Careful scrutiny is therefore rational, not resistant. Yet even plans supported by research, market data and expert judgement can lack critical evidence about likely customer and stakeholder choices, particularly when confidential, aimed at niche audiences or dependent on multiple stakeholders. This can bias organisations towards opportunities that are easiest to evidence rather than those with the greatest potential. New evidential capabilities, combined with senior growth expertise, can provide quantitative evidence to validate a defined plan, compare alternatives or advance an emerging direction.

Most well-run companies have promising growth plans that struggle to move forward. This is not necessarily a failure of ambition or leadership. It is often evidence that the organisation's checks and balances are working.

The strategic logic is familiar. Growth from existing offers and customers is usually the most knowable. Performance can be observed, tested and optimised through established data and short feedback loops. This helps explain why many companies prioritise incremental growth. It is familiar, measurable and comparatively easy to defend.



Greater novelty may open larger sources of growth, but it also replaces more knowns with assumptions.

Moving into a new market or introducing a new offer can create greater potential rewards, but each replaces knowns with assumptions about demand, adoption, value, competition and the organisation's ability to win. Pursuing both simultaneously compounds those assumptions. It may offer the greatest upside, but it also creates the largest growth bet because neither the offer nor the audience has been proven in context.

As uncertainty accumulates, organisations rationally moderate not only how much they invest, but also the scale, ambition and nature of the opportunities they are prepared to consider. The result can be an understandable bias towards *incremental growth*, where the evidence is most familiar and the risk easiest to defend.

> **"When only easily evidenced opportunities survive scrutiny, *evidence* constraints quietly become *strategy* constraints and, potentially, *growth* constraints.**

This creates an important duality. Growth leaders are expected to pursue opportunity. Boards, finance leaders and investment sponsors are expected to protect resources. Growth plans ask them to exchange certain costs today for revenues that may arrive tomorrow. Careful scrutiny is therefore rational, not resistant. And the more ambitious the growth plan, the more consequential the questions it must answer.

Nine questions before backing a growth plan

Strategic Grounding	What must be true for the plan to succeed?
	What do we know and what are assumptions?
	Which alternative has the strongest evidential grounding?
Customer & Stakeholder Choices	Will customers choose, adopt or switch rather than merely express interest?
	How will partners and other stakeholders affect adoption?
	Which assumptions most influence the outcome?
Decision Basis	Where is risk concentrated?
	Which known unknowns can be resolved, and what might we be overlooking?
	What evidence would materially change the decision?

Where conventional validation reaches its limits

Qualitative and quantitative research, historical data, forecasting, financial modelling, and pilots all remain valuable. But limitations quickly arise when plans are:

- dependent on the response of hard-to-reach audiences;
- dependent on customer choices and behaviours rather than simply attitudes;
- shaped by interacting stakeholders - buying groups, partners or ecosystems;
- difficult or unsafe to test in market;
- missing or limited relevant historical data;
- confidential or emergent and still taking shape;
- based on a variety of assumptions

What can now be examined earlier

Defined customer and stakeholder populations can be modelled under alternative scenarios, making their likely choices, behavioural drivers and sensitivities measurable before implementation. This complements existing evidence; it does not eliminate uncertainty, yet it makes important assumptions *explicit*, testable and open to challenge. Aspects of likely customer and stakeholder choice that previously remained hidden until implementation, can now be examined and measured earlier.

> **Better evidence doesn't just prevent weak commitments. It gives more ambitious plans a responsible basis for consideration.**

What becomes visible and testable

- Assumptions, alternatives, and populations, including niche populations, made explicit and testable at scale
- Likely customer and stakeholder choices evaluated
- Drivers of choice examined across relevant audiences
- Quantitative evidence, implications, and guidance
- Plan viability, comparative strength and strategic direction assessed

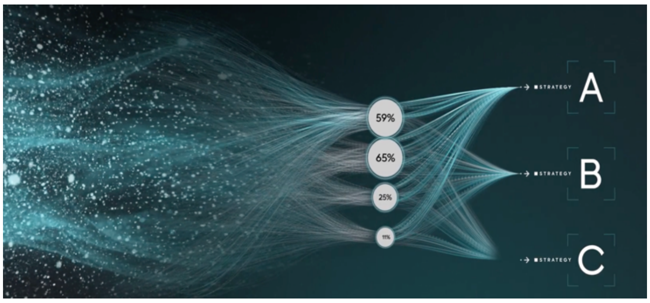
Three different jobs, often confused

Research provides customer and market understanding through bespoke enquiries or established frameworks, measures, and outputs. It may answer a defined question or reveal observations that shape one.

Population simulation examines how varied populations may choose under specified circumstances and alternatives.

Independent plan validation starts with the organisation's growth plan, tests the assumptions on which it depends and applies senior judgement to what the evidence means. DecideGuide provides this independent validation by integrating population simulation with senior growth expertise.

- Starts with the organisation's plan and unresolved questions.
- Evaluates independently rather than advocating a preferred answer.
- Senior-led from framing through evidence to decision guidance



Better evidence helps leaders avoid taking forward a weaker plan without missing the stronger one. More than that, it broadens what they can responsibly consider and makes greater ambition investable.

Methodological context
Research indicates that language-model-based agents can reproduce selected human response patterns under defined conditions. [1] [2] Results remain context-specific and require explicit assumptions, sensitivity testing and transparent limitations.

[1] Argyle et al. (2023), "Out of One, Many," *Political Analysis*.
[2] Aher, Arriaga & Kalai (2023), "Using Large Language Models to Simulate Multiple Humans," *ICML*.