ECSS 2026 Strategy Workshop Highlights

The workshop brought together participants to explore how academic Computer Science departments can develop and execute effective strategies. It started by establishing a shared understanding of what strategy means in an academic context, highlighting the distinction between strategy and operational planning. A central message was that departments already make strategic choices through decisions about recruitment, research investments, educational programmes, infrastructure and partnerships. When these decisions are made independently, they nevertheless create an implicit strategy, which may not necessarily reflect a shared ambition.

The discussions subsequently focused on the challenges of translating strategic ambitions into concrete choices. Particular attention was paid to the interdependencies between strategic priorities, the availability of shared resources and capabilities, and the trade-offs involved in pursuing different initiatives. Participants explored how to identify and leverage existing strengths, develop new collective capabilities, and recognise contextual constraints that influence what departments can realistically achieve.

An interactive discussion using participant input also examined the barriers to strategy execution. Feedback from the participants highlighted several recurring challenges: limited resources and staff capacity, lack of strategic clarity, organisational culture and motivation, leadership, governance and autonomy, and the complexity of the university environment.

The workshop also addressed the role of leadership in turning strategy into action. This requires more than defining a direction: it involves engaging people, making choices, mobilising resources, assigning responsibilities and continuously monitoring and adapting initiatives.

Overall, the workshop provided a framework for thinking about strategy as an ongoing collective process rather than a static document. It highlighted the importance of connecting strategic ambition to concrete priorities, recognising constraints and interdependencies, and establishing the leadership and organisational conditions needed to translate strategic choices into sustained action.

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