

The Situation Room

How do we get things done where the ground is contested, the interests are real and nobody can be ordered to cooperate – where the answer has to be built while we are already moving, and more of the deciding is handed to machines every month?

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Cite as: Katzmair, H. (2026). *The Situation Room*. Situation R · FAS Research, Vienna. · © FAS Research 2026

Keywords Situational Intelligence; Situation Rooms; Consequential Decisions; Stakeholder Engagement; Collective Intelligence; Human-Agent Collaboration; Coordinated Action

ABSTRACT

Almost nothing that matters is decided in a clean room anymore. The environments are contested, the interests are real, the picture is unclear, and the people you need are people you did not choose. This is a paper about a room: why we call it a Situational Intelligence Platform, where it came from, how it runs, and when it is the wrong instrument.

1 HOW DO WE GET THINGS DONE?

Look at what is actually on your desk. The plant restructuring that needs three works councils, a regulator and two joint-venture partners. The transformation that needs four functions who are measured against each other. The coalition you have to build with an organization you have spent five years competing with. The regulation you cannot change but cannot ignore.

None of it is yours to solve. None of it is theirs either. Everyone holds a piece and nobody holds the picture, and the consequences of getting it wrong are not abstract.

The world has been given plenty of names for this – VUCA, BANI, the polycrisis, and, most usefully, Rittel and Webber's *wicked problems*: questions with no definitive formulation, no stopping rule, no test of a solution, and no second attempt, because every attempt changes the thing (Rittel & Webber, 1973). We name them here for completeness and then get on with it. Naming a condition is not the same as having an instrument for it, and the naming has run a long way ahead of the tooling.

And the people you need are not the people you would have picked. You do not agree with them. You may not like them. You certainly do not fully trust them. Adam Kahane, who has spent thirty years in rooms like this, titled his book on the subject exactly that: *Collaborating with the Enemy: How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust* (Kahane, 2017). That is not a provocation. For most consequential work today it is simply the job description.

Inside your own organization it is not much better. Functions compete for the same budget and the same atten-

tion, and what looks from outside like one actor is, from inside, a small parliament with no speaker.

And now a third thing has arrived. Synthetic agents are starting to decide and to act – scoring, routing, drafting, recommending, executing. Very often they are good at it. But every one of them narrows, a little, the space in which a human being has to form a judgment.

So the question this paper is about is not academic. It is the question everybody in that position actually asks:

THE QUESTION

How do we get things done – in environments that are contested, conflicted, polarized and unclear, where the interests are real and nobody can be ordered to cooperate?

Underneath it sit two harder ones. The first is coordination: not how we come to agree, but how a set of parties who will not agree can still act in a way that adds up. The second is what to do with the friction itself – whether the differences and tensions between us can produce anything other than a fight.

There is a way of putting this that people recognize immediately. Most consequential rooms begin **face to face**: opposite each other, at a distance – sometimes because of mistrust, usually just because that is how meetings are arranged. What a situation room is for is getting to **side by side** – turned toward the same thing, so that the question becomes what it actually is, and difference turns into information instead of a threat. And when it really gets hard, when the situation is coming at all of us at once, the position you want is **back to back**: covering different directions, each watching what the others cannot see.

And there is a newer question, one that has only arrived in the last two years. Is there any agency left here at all — or are we handing it over to the algorithms, one workflow at a time?

Face to face, we ask who is right. Side by side, we ask what is going on. Almost everything depends on which of those two rooms you are in.

2 THE WAY WE DECIDE IS ARCHAIC

Set the technology aside for a moment and look at how a consequential decision actually gets made in a large organization.

Twelve people in a room. The most senior person speaks third, and everyone after them calibrates. The person with the highest reputation carries the argument, not the best argument. The two who know most say least — because they are junior, or because the last person who spoke up is no longer on the project.

Most of it was decided before anyone sat down. The pre-wire happened in three bilateral calls, and the meeting exists to ratify it. Everyone in the room can feel this. Nobody says it. And the energy in the room — which is a real thing, and the thing you actually came for — is gone by minute twenty.

Then the decision leaves the room and meets the organization. And this is where the cost really appears: in the *frictions of operations*, the months of grinding against each other in implementation, because the people who have to carry the thing were not part of making sense of it and do not own it. What looks like a communication problem is nearly always an ownership problem that was created in the room.

This is not a failure of manners. It is a decision technology that has not changed in a hundred years, being used on problems that have changed completely. We have rebuilt how we move goods, money, information and attention. We have not rebuilt how a group of people who disagree arrive at something they will all carry.

We have industrialized almost everything except the moment where several people who see it differently have to decide together.

3 A SITUATIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM

So before anything else, plainly: what is it?

Situation R is a **Situational Intelligence Platform**. It is not a workshop and not a facilitation format with a new name. It is software — an agent-supported environment that carries a group through the three acts of \$9: it holds the question, collects what every participant enters, runs the analysis, brings the absent parties in as synthetic actors, and keeps the record of what was agreed, what was not, and who took what.

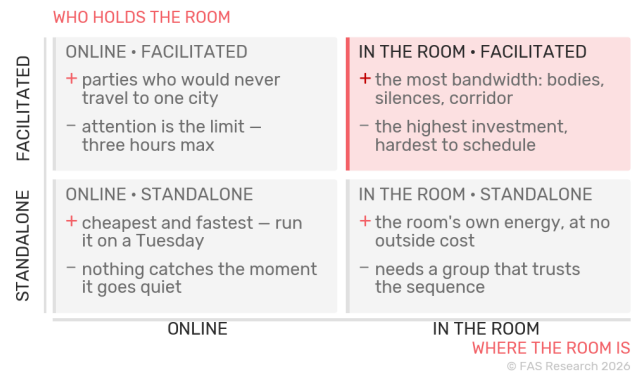


Figure 1. The four settings. The diagonal is a trade between bandwidth and investment. What does not change anywhere on the grid is the sequence.

WHAT KIND OF THING THIS IS

It belongs to a genre we would call **coordination technology**: tools whose job is to let several parties who are not under one authority act together. That is a different category from the ones it gets mistaken for.

A decision-support or BI platform gives you better numbers. It assumes the question is settled and the parties are one actor.

A workshop or facilitation format gives you a good conversation. It treats the room as the unit and usually leaves nothing behind that outlives it.

A collaboration or project tool coordinates work that has already been agreed. It starts after the hard part.

A stakeholder map or network study tells you who matters. It stops exactly where *and now what do we do with these people?* begins.

Situation R is the instrument for the gap between the last two.

It runs in four settings, and they are not interchangeable (Figure 1). The room can be a real one or a screen, and it can be held by a trained facilitator or by the platform itself. The best of the four is also the highest investment. The other three exist so that a session happens at all — and one that happens beats the perfect one that never gets into anybody's calendar.

Why that name, and not another one.

Intelligence here does not mean IQ, and it does not mean artificial intelligence. It is the older and plainer sense of the word: the capacity to take in what is going on and act well in it. And we mean it first of all as a property of a group rather than of a single person — what a set of people can see and do together, which is routinely far less, and occasionally far more, than what the cleverest of them could manage alone.

Situational is the constraint that makes it hard. This capacity is not general and it does not transfer. It is bound to this configuration, these actors, this exposure, this quarter. What works here will not work there, and most of the intelligence consists in telling the difference. That is why the word cannot be dropped: a general method that ignores the particular situation is exactly the constellation

logic of \$5 – a path laid out in advance – wearing a better suit.

So: **Situational Intelligence is the capacity of a group to read the specific configuration it is in, and to act from it, together and in time.** Working Paper 01/2026 states it more formally, and the two definitions below are the ones the rest of this paper leans on.

FROM WORKING PAPER 01/2026

A situation is a temporally bounded and consequential configuration of actors, relationships, interests, knowledge, values, forces and constraints, organized around a focal question or possibility, in which one actor's moves alter the possibilities of others. It is not given whole: its boundary, focal concern, time horizon and relevant positions are analytical choices that must be declared and remain open to revision.

Situational Intelligence is the capability of an actor – or of actors acting in a shared situation – to read an evolving relational field, identify a viable strategic opening, mobilize appropriately governed action across difference, and update the reading from consequences.

Katzmair (2026), *What Is Situational Intelligence?*

And a *platform* rather than a practice, because the point is to make that capacity repeatable: not dependent on whether the one person who can read a room happens to be free that week.

What it is for, in three words. *Read* the situation – the forces, actors, relationships and perspectives that shape the outcome. *Relate* it to what this group can actually move – who we need for what, where a door is open, where our room to maneuver really is. *Respond* with a mandate, owned commitments and coordinated action with less friction.

The instrument is not the room and not the facilitator. It is the sequence – and software is what makes a sequence hold when the people in the room would rather it didn't.

4 WHERE THIS CAME FROM

Two things produced this instrument, and neither of them was a business plan.

The practical half

For most of the 1990s and 2000s FAS Research mapped fields for a living. Who are the actors, who is connected to whom, where does influence sit as against where the org chart says it sits, which relations carry the load. The maps were good and clients valued them. And after every presentation, somebody asked the same question:

And now what do we do with these people?

Knowing who matters does not tell you how to move anything. That question has no analytical answer. It has a *convening* answer.

So from around 2009 we started building the step after the map: from a picture of the field to a **table**. Network analysis is unusually good at showing where the tables already are and who sits at them. What it shows more often is that the table this problem would need does not exist – and that nobody convenes it, because it belongs to no one. Building that table turned out to be the product.

The other half

The rest came from a set of questions we could not answer with a map and could not stop asking.

François Jullien's *The Propensity of Things* (1995) was the one that started it. His argument, reconstructed from classical Chinese strategy, is that every configuration is already leaning somewhere before anybody plans anything – and that the skill is to feel the lean and move along it rather than push against it. Anyone who has watched a very good practitioner work recognizes this immediately, and also recognizes that they cannot explain how they do it. Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) – *Kunst des Handelns* – gave us the other half: the art of acting well inside a place you do not own, watching for the moment that has to be seized on the wing. And behind both of them the Greeks, with two words we still have no substitute for – *phronesis*, knowing what to do in this case when no rule covers it, and *kairos*, the right moment as distinct from mere elapsed time.

German has three more, and they are the ones people in these rooms actually use: *Fingerspitzengefühl*, the feeling in the fingertips for what a relationship will bear; *Urteilskraft*, the power to judge a case no rule reaches; *Augenmaß*, the sense of proportion. None of the three survives a purely KPI-driven system. None of them survives a room where the only game being played is conflict.

So the questions were these. What do we do with experiential knowledge – tacit knowledge, the knowledge that cannot be codified and walks out of the building at six o'clock? What do we do with anticipatory awareness, the gut feeling that arrives before the evidence does? How does a group *metabolize* any of that, rather than discharging it as a premature decision?

And then the largest one. How does a group build a shared picture of its situation – a common *Lagebild* – at all? Not a compromise, not an average: a picture several parties can look at together and still read differently. That has never been easy. It is harder now, in a world where reality is not merely unclear but bent on purpose, where warping the picture is a technique people deploy deliberately and at scale.

THE CONVICTION UNDERNEATH ALL OF IT

Leadership is a capacity for reality. Not vision, not charisma, not decisiveness. The capacity to stay in contact with what is actually the case – including the parts that are inconvenient, and the parts somebody is working hard to distort. The question that follows is the one this whole instrument exists to answer: how does a team, a group, an organization stay *reality-capable*?

Everything in this paper is what we learned trying to answer that: that the parties have to help build the picture or they will not carry the result; that difference has to be kept rather than smoothed; that the room needs a rhythm; that unsharp comes before sharp; and that it all has to end in mandates or it was theater.

The agentic layer is the newest part, and it is what made the step from practice to platform possible. It lets the absent party into the room, it holds more of the field than seven people can, and it finds the blind spot. It is also, deliberately, a demonstration: the default use of these systems shrinks the space in which people judge. Used this way they widen it. We would rather show that than argue about it.

The analysis tells you where the tables are. More often it tells you the one you need does not exist. Then you build it, and that is the product.

5 SITUATION, OR CONSTELLATION

There are two ways to be in front of a hard question, and the difference decides everything that follows (Figure 2).

In the first, the path is already laid out. Guidelines, scoring models, approval gates, dashboards and now agentic systems have mapped it in advance. Your job is to carry it out. There is one legitimate reading, the criteria were set somewhere else at an earlier time, and difference is friction to be removed. Hartmut Rosa has recently given this its sharpest description: what used to be situation-sensitive deliberation becomes a logic of execution, and as the room to move disappears, so does the energy for action itself (Rosa, 2026). He calls that condition a *constellation*, and the word is good, because a constellation is a set of positions you cannot alter — you can only read off your place in it.

In the second, you are in a *situation*. Nobody has laid out the path. There are several legitimate readings and they conflict. The criteria are still open, which means the people in the room can write them. And difference is not friction — it is the material you have to work with, because each party can see a part of the field the others cannot.

Both are real, and most working life is a mixture. But the drift runs one way, and it accelerates. Every workflow that removes an occasion for judgment makes the next one easier to remove.

So the fork is this. Do we stay fragmented, at odds and isolated — each optimizing our own part, grinding against each other in the frictions of operations, with the constellation quietly deciding for all of us? Or do we find a way to make the differences productive, accept the connected necessities and the sharp edges, and act together anyway?

That is what a situation room is for. Not to make everyone agree. To turn a constellation, at the points where it is still open, back into a situation somebody can act from.

A constellation tells you where you stand. A situation asks you what you are going to do about it.

6 THE TRIANGLE

What has to come into the room, and what has to come out of it?

Three things come in, and they are not versions of each other (Figure 3).

Experience. What we have learned and cannot fully explain. Intuition — the sense that something is wrong before you can say why. Wisdom, which is mostly knowing what happened the last time somebody tried this. Anticipation, which is not forecasting: it is the capacity to feel where a configuration is heading before the indicators move. And the ability to see unsharply, which is about. These are the things that distinguish us from the machines, and they are exactly the things a constellation has no place for.

Interests. The hard ones — mine, and every stakeholder's. What each party stands to win and what it stands to lose, what it is exposed to, what it will and will not carry. This is not a softer kind of evidence, and it is not a version of experience. Experience tells you what a situation is like. Interests tell you what people are actually going to do, because people act on their own exposure and not on your analysis.

Agents. Synthetic actors with readings of their own. The party who is not in the room and never will be: the regulator, the competitor, the community, the successor. The counter-case nobody present has the standing to make. And most valuable of all, the **blind spot** — the reading nobody in the room can produce, precisely because everyone in the room is standing somewhere.

Facts, numbers and analysis are not a fourth corner. They are the floor this stands on. You need them, and having them has never once been sufficient.

Out of the triangle comes one reading of the configuration. And from that reading, three things a group can actually use: the **options** this configuration will bear, **where a door is opening** and where one is closing, and the **mandate** — who carries what, and who answers for it.

Not data against judgment. Not humans against machines. Three kinds of knowing, none of which can stand in for another, in one room, on one question.

7 THE COURAGE TO SEE UNSHARPLY

Here is something a camera teaches you.

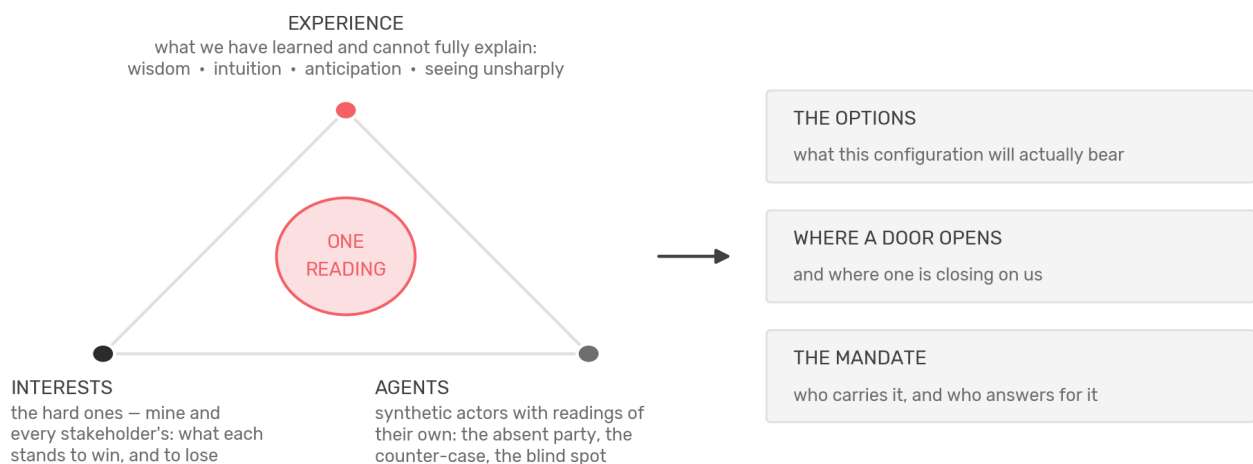
To find out whether a picture is composed, you take the sharpness away (Figure 4). Squint, defocus, drop the color. What is left is the distribution of weight, and that is what you were trying to see. The detail was in the way.

Put fifty actors and every relationship between them in front of a group at full resolution and you know exactly

	CONSTELLATION	SITUATION
The path	is already laid out	has to be found
What is asked of you	carry it out	judge it
Legitimate readings	one	several, and they conflict
Who sets the criteria	somebody else, earlier	the people in the room, now
Difference is	friction to be removed	the material you work with
What grows	throughput	the capacity to act

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Figure 2. The fork. Most organizational life is a mixture of the two, and most of the drift runs from right to left. A situation room is an attempt to run it the other way for a few hours at a time.

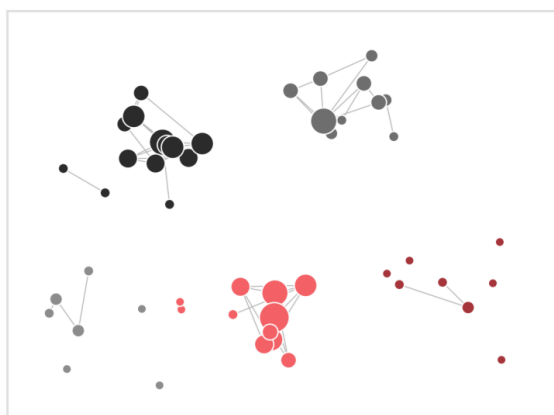


Facts, numbers and analysis are the floor this stands on — not the room.

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Figure 3. The triangle the platform is built on. Not data *versus* judgment, and not humans *versus* agents. Three kinds of knowing that none of the others can replace, worked into one reading of the configuration — and from there into options, openings and mandates.

SHARP



Fifty actors and every tie between them.
Everybody finds the one node they want to argue about.

UNSHARP



Five groups and their weight, at a glance.
Usually that is the thing you needed to know.

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Figure 4. The same field, twice. On the right is the left, out of focus. Photographers learn this early: take away the color and the detail and the weights appear. Most of the time the second picture is the one you needed.

what happens: everybody finds the one node they want to argue about, and the next two hours belong to it. Blur the same picture and five groups appear, with their weights and their positions relative to one another. Nobody has to squint at names. In a glance, without any of the detail, you have the structure — and that, almost always, was the thing you needed to know.

This is not sloppiness. Precision applied too early is a way of not seeing. It is also the standard way a room gets lost: the group that is arguing about decimal places is a group that has stopped arguing about the situation.

So the discipline is to stay coarse while the question is *what kind of situation are we in*, and to become precise only once the question is *what exactly do we do on Monday*. Anticipation works the same way. You do not sense where a field is heading by resolving it further. You sense it by stepping back until the shape appears.

Blur is not the absence of rigor. It is what you do when you want to see the weights instead of the pixels.

8 NOT WHO IS RIGHT. WHEN

Now the hard part. If several readings are legitimate, how does a group get anywhere?

Not by deciding who is right. That is the move that kills these rooms, and it kills them whether the vote goes your way or not, because the losing reading leaves the room with its holder and comes back six weeks later as resistance.

This is where *plural rationalities* earn their place, and they are not a figure of speech. Michael Thompson and his colleagues showed that a small number of ways of seeing recur everywhere, because each is a coherent package of social relations and beliefs about how the world behaves: hierarchy, which sees rules that need enforcing; individualism, which sees incentives that need freeing; egalitarianism, which sees the affected who were never asked; and fatalism, which sees a world too capricious to plan for at all. Each has its own picture of nature — tolerant within limits, benign and forgiving, fragile, or random — and each is right about something the others miss. Arrangements that draw on all of them they call *clumsy*; the alternative, the elegant answer, is internally consistent because it comes from one way of seeing, and fails for exactly that reason (Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky, 1990; Verweij & Thompson, 2006).

So we work by a different rule, and it is the most portable thing in this paper:

THE WORKING RULE

The question is never *who is right*. It is **under what conditions is each of us right?** Every serious position in the room is true of some part of the field, under some conditions. Name the conditions and you have something to work with. Declare a winner and you have a decision nobody will carry.

This is a kind of pragmatic realism, and it has a practical payoff that sounds abstract until you have watched it happen. When people stop defending whether they are right and start specifying *when* they are right, the temperature drops, and something new appears: the conditions themselves become the object. Now you can ask which conditions actually hold, which ones you could change, and which ones you are betting on.

A version of the same logic governs who is in the room: different people are right about different phases, the way different rationalities are right about different parts of the field. Development needs a whole cycle — building, consolidating, letting go, starting again — and each phase is carried by different kinds of people (Holling, 1986, 2001). A group made only of the people who are good at the phase you are currently in cannot get out of that phase. You need the consolidator and you need the person who wants to burn it down. In practice these are the people who are difficult in meetings, and that is not a coincidence.

And what you are aiming at is not the conventional consensus — the statement everyone can live with, which is usually the statement nobody is moved by. It is an **unconventional consensus**: a convergence that often forms around something nobody said at the start, and that holds without the differences having to be pushed out of the room first.

This is also, concretely, how a room turns face to face into side by side (Figure 5). As long as the question is who is right, we are opposite each other and one of us has to lose. The moment the question becomes under what conditions each of us is right, we are both looking at the same object — the conditions — and the difference between us has become the most useful thing in the room. And once you know who covers which conditions, you know who can stand back to back with whom when the situation turns.

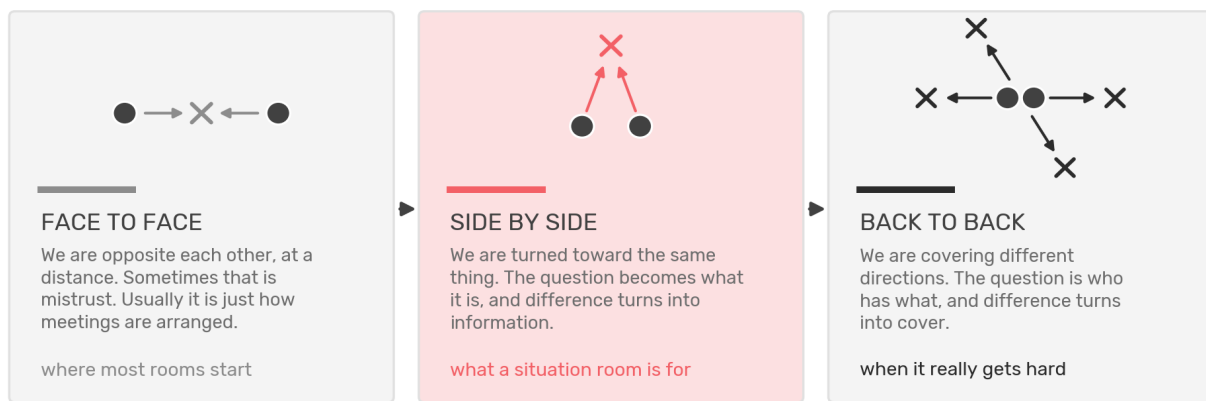
You do not have to like them. You do not have to agree with them. You only have to be turned toward the same situation.

9 HOW A SITUATION ROOM RUNS

This is the instrument. It has a shape, and the shape is the point (Figure 6). One sitting, two to three hours, three acts.

Before the clock starts, the room is convened: who calls it and what is actually at stake, who has to be there for the answer to be worth anything, what documents, data, reports and prior analysis go in, and which of the parties who will never attend get built as agents.

Act 1 — Read. Question, cast, factors. First the question, and only the question: everyone proposes how it should really be put, the Situation Room moderator agent merges and sharpens and puts the candidates back, and the room chooses the one it will work on. *Then* the cast — who else do we need in this room to answer that? The parties we want at that table but cannot have are built as participant



The crosses are where the attention lands. You only have to be looking at the same thing, not liking each other.

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Figure 5. Three positions a group can be in. The crosses mark where the attention lands. Face to face it crosses in the middle – we are each other's focus. Side by side it falls on one thing outside us. Back to back it covers four directions at once. None of the three requires anybody to agree.

Where the thinking comes from	The idea	What it does in the room
Adam Kahane (2017)	Stretch collaboration: give up harmony, certainty and compliance	How to work with people you don't agree with, like or trust
Rittel & Webber (1973)	Wicked problems: no stopping rule, no test, every attempt counts	Why the aim is to stay able to act rather than to solve
Hartmut Rosa (2026)	Situation vs. constellation; the disappearance of room to move	What is at stake when the path is laid out in advance
François Jullien (1995, 2004)	Shi: acting from the propensity already in a configuration	Why you read the slope of a field instead of imposing a plan
Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky (1990); Verweij & Thompson (2006)	Plural rationalities; clumsy versus elegant arrangements	Why difference is kept, and why elegant answers fail
C. S. Holling (1986, 2001)	The adaptive cycle; the rigidity trap	Why every phase's people belong at the table, including the awkward ones
Wilfred Bion (1961, 1962)	Basic assumptions; the container	Why a room must be able to hold what it cannot yet think
Amy Edmondson (1999)	Psychological safety as a shared team belief	Everyone contributes, in writing or aloud, before the room converges
Frederic Vester (1999)	Sensitivitätsmodell: active, reactive, critical, buffering factors	Which factors drive the system and which only report on it
Thomas Saaty (1996)	Analytic Network Process	Structured judgment over criteria that depend on one another
Lempert, Popper & Bankes (2003)	Robust decision making under deep uncertainty	Options that hold across many futures instead of one forecast
Michel de Certeau (1984)	Strategy and tactic; the opportunity seized on the wing	Acting well inside a field you do not own
Akerlof & Kranton (2000, 2010)	Identity economics: norms enter the utility function	Why a group that writes its own criteria acts differently

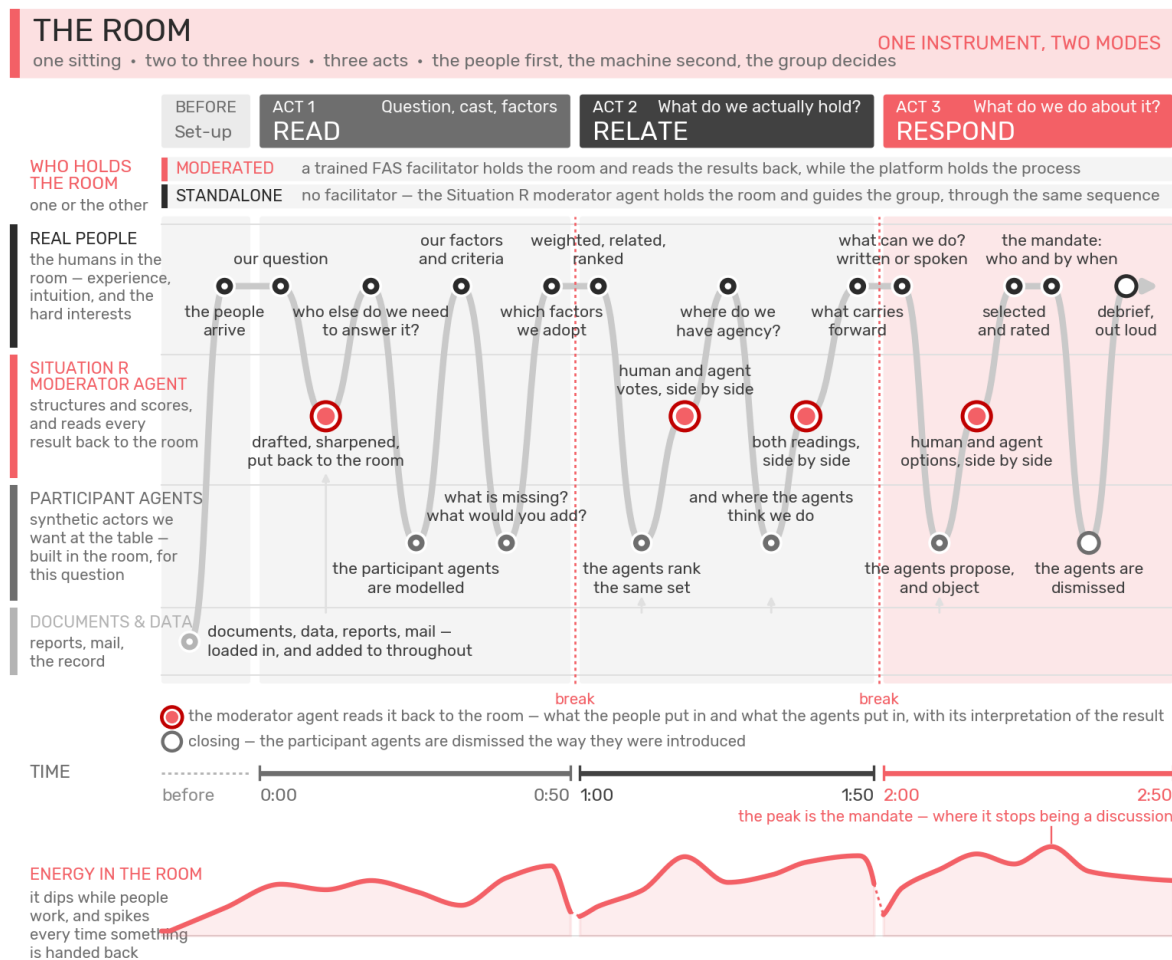
Table 1. Thirteen sources, one instrument. Working Paper 01/2026 sets out the category they assemble into.

agents at this point and not before, modelled out loud, in front of everybody, so that all of us see what went into them. An agent built before the question is an oracle; an agent built for this question, by this room, is an argument. Then the factors and the criteria: everyone enters their own, in writing or aloud, and only afterward are the agents asked the same thing – what is missing, what would you add. The room decides which factors it adopts.

Act 2 – Relate. What do we actually hold? Now the factors are put into relation: weighted, ranked, and scored against each other – by the people first, and by the agents independently on the same set. Both readings come back together, side by side, with the Situation R moderator agent's own interpretation of what the picture says. Then

the question that decides whether any of this becomes action: of everything that matters here, where do we actually have agency? The people answer first. Then the agents answer, out of the documents, the correspondence and the record they were built on – which is exactly why their answer is worth having: it is the view from the written evidence rather than from the table. Both readings come back together. The act closes on what carries forward, and the divergences are not resolved but kept, named, and attributed to somebody.

Act 3 – Respond. What do we do about it? What can we do, in writing or spoken. The agents propose in parallel, and object. Both sets are shown together, then selected and rated on what actually decides whether anything hap-



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Figure 6. The session as a flow. Time runs left to right; each lane is one kind of participant. The grey line is the session itself, and every crossing is a hand-over. Note the order in the first act: the question is settled before the participant agents are built, so that they are built for *this* question. The four ringed points are where the moderator agent reads a result back to the room – what the people put in and what the agents put in, side by side, with its interpretation of the result.

pens – how hard is it, what can we build on, how much energy is really behind it, and in what order. Then the mandate: who takes what, by when, from whom that mandate comes, and who answers for it afterward.

And then a closing, which is not decoration. The participant agents are dismissed from the room the way they were introduced – out loud, by name – so that nobody leaves with a synthetic voice still in their head. And a debrief: what this was like, said in front of the group.

The beat that repeats

Each act runs the same four beats, and the order is the method. **Enter** – everyone puts something in, in writing or aloud, before anybody converges; writing is what stops the session from becoming a transcript of whoever is most comfortable talking. **Compute** – the participant agents are asked the same question, and answer it independently, without seeing what the people said. **Read back** – the moderator agent puts both in front of the room, side by side, together with its interpretation of the result (the ringed points in Figure 6). This is the beat that is easiest to miss and the one that does the most work: the

platform does not only produce a matrix, it reads the matrix back – what is driving this, and where the human and the synthetic reading pull apart. That is a claim, made by a machine, and it goes on the table as a claim. It also comes now and not earlier: put in front of people before they have committed to their own reading, it would not inform the room, it would anchor it. **Decide** – the group takes it, drops it, or argues with it. Nothing the platform produces enters the record because the platform produced it.

The agent that interprets is also the one that can hold the room. That is the only difference between the two modes: facilitated, a trained facilitator holds the room and reads the results back while the platform holds the process; standalone, the moderator agent does both. The sequence does not change.

That is also the rhythm of the day: discuss, analyze, discuss. Open the field, then close it, then open it again. Analysis without discussion produces a matrix nobody believes; discussion without analysis produces a mood. The room breathes.

Two things run underneath all three acts, and without them none of the beats work.

The first is that the room has to be able to hold what it cannot yet think. Wilfred Bion described what a group does when it cannot: it does not go quiet, it gets busy — with dependency on whoever will supply the answer, with fight or flight, with the hope that some future pairing will save everybody (Bion, 1961). A room that cannot hold the works council's anger, or the exposure of the person whose division would be cut, will discharge it — as a premature decision, as a delegation to a working group, as agreement.

The second is that everybody has to be able to put something in. Amy Edmondson's psychological safety — the shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999) — is a property of the team rather than of the people in it, which means it is built by design and not by temperament. That is what the first beat of every act is for, and why nobody is embarrassed for having read the situation differently.

Behind all of this sits a toolkit, most of which we did not invent and all of which we have been assembling for the better part of two decades: Vester's Sensitivitätsmodell (1999) for telling drivers from indicators, Saaty's Analytic Network Process (1996) for structured judgment over criteria that depend on each other, robust decision making (Lempert, Popper & Bankes, 2003) for options that hold across many futures rather than one forecast, and our own network models for exposure, dependence and load. What they have in common is that they turn plural, non-comparable judgments into a shared picture *without flattening them into an average*. Table 1 sets out the whole lineage, and what each part of it does in the room.

The third act is the only one that leaves the room. The first two are what let it survive the trip.

10 MANDATE, AND WHO ANSWERS FOR IT

Now the part that is easy to skip and is the whole point.

A reading that does not end in a mandate is a commentary. And a mandate is not a task. It is an answer to two questions that most meetings never ask out loud.

From whom do I have a mandate? If I am going to negotiate with the regulator, on whose behalf am I speaking, and what am I allowed to trade? If I cannot say, then I am not negotiating; I am carrying messages, and everyone on the other side of the table already knows it.

Who answers for this? Not who is responsible in the sense of the project plan — who will stand up, in six months, and say *that was mine*. Accountability is not a box on a slide. It is a person who has accepted, in front of the others, that this one belongs to them.

Most implementation failure is a mandate failure that happened weeks earlier, in a room: people were assigned things they had no authority to carry, or no part in shaping, or both. Nothing was refused. It simply did not happen.

So the room ends where meetings usually trail off. Named commitments, read back aloud as one list so that everyone hears what everyone else has taken on. What each

person needs from whom, and by when, agreed out loud in the room. And the disagreements that survived, written down together with what would settle them — so that the person who read it differently has a dated way back rather than a grievance.

One thing belongs to that last act and is the easiest of all to leave out. A group that has settled who carries what usually also works out, late in the day, what it wants to be measured by — what would count, for us, as having done this well, and what we will not do even if it scores. That is not a soft ending. Akerlof and Kranton's identity economics shows why: what people do depends on who they take themselves to be and on the norms of the category they identify with, so a criterion a group has authored behaves quite differently from one handed to it (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000, 2010). A key performance indicator is a criterion set somewhere else, at an earlier time, by people who are not in the situation. The ones a room writes for itself are the only ones it fully owns.

Coordination does not fail inside tasks. It fails at the handovers, and it fails because somebody was carrying something they never had a mandate for.

11 WHEN IT IS THE WRONG INSTRUMENT

A method that only reports its successes is a workshop, so here is the other side.

There are three situations in which you should not run one. When the decision has already been taken and the room is there to ratify it — that is consultation, which is legitimate and should be called by its name. When the party who can veto the outcome will not come. And when whoever convened it cannot accept an answer they did not want.

Then there is what no room can do at all. It cannot dismantle a constellation: the KPI calendar, the reporting line, the budget cycle and the contract do not attend the session, and everyone walks back out into them. What a room produces are things that re-enter and rewrite it where it is still open — a mandate with a named owner, a register of what was disagreed, a table that did not exist before. The honest test is whether, two months later, anything outside the room is different.

The energy in a room is not a mood. It is what happens when people discover that what they say in the next two hours will actually change something.

SITUATION R · THE SITUATIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM

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The companion paper

Katzmair, H. (2026). *What Is Situational Intelligence?* FAS Research Working Paper 01/2026 — the formal statement of the category this instrument belongs to.

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Leadership is a capacity for reality.