

COGPLEXITI · SYSTEMS & DECISION ANALYSIS

NOBODY'S JOB

A Position Architecture for
Strategic Capability in Incident
Management

JAYSON COIL

COGPLEXITI · SYSTEMS & DECISION ANALYSIS
WHITE PAPER

Nobody's Job

*A Position Architecture for Strategic Capability in Incident Management***JAYSON COIL***July 2026*

How to read this document. This white paper belongs to the Cogplexiti Systems & Decision Analysis line. It follows the line's five-part structure — the argument, the challenge to it, the credible alternative, and the recommendation — so a reader can weigh the case rather than receive it. It is analysis, not doctrine. Its central subject is not a position but a property: the congruence and durability of an incident strategy through its whole lifecycle. Ends are chosen with those whose values define them. Ways are screened against context and constraints. Means are sufficient and committed. Risk is priced against what it buys. And the whole is carried intact across operational periods and transitions. The position arrives at the end, as the conclusion the property forces. The Incident Strategic Alignment Process is discussed by name, credited first and accurately, and critiqued only through its own current literature, cited by version and date. Section 2.2 is a composite assembled from field observation at the pattern level; no incident, team, or unit is depicted. Operational descriptions reflect current complex-team practice as observed from the author's seats — the division of labor among field operations, planning operations, and strategic operations — and are noted where practice differs from doctrine as written. The author's implication is declared where it occurs: the position drafts in the source base are the author's, and the field observations are from seats the author occupies. The field memo quoted in Sections 1 and 2.5 is the author's, recorded 20 July 2026, and cited in the references.

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ISBN 979-8-9970824-5-1

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EDITION INFORMATION

July 2026. Published by Cogplexiti LLC, Flagstaff, Arizona · jayson@cogplexiti.com · www.cogplexiti.com

Part of the Cogplexiti Analysis line (Systems & Decision Analysis), alongside *The System Tier*, *The Incident Tier*, *Sustaining Decision Performance*, and *The Reveal*.

DISCLAIMER

The views, frameworks, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Sedona Fire District, Southwest Incident Management Team 1, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, the U.S. Forest Service, or any other agency or organization. This document is not doctrine. It is a professional analysis informed by operational experience, research, and study.

CONTENTS

1 · Executive Summary	4
2 · Support and Analysis.....	5
2.1 What Exists, and What Is Missing	5
2.2 One Strategy, Traced.....	6
2.3 Whose Values — and What Critical Means	8
2.4 Alternatives That Survive Contact	9
2.5 Means, and the Cascade	11
2.6 Responder Risk, Priced	13
2.7 Durability Through the Lifecycle	14
2.8 The Custodian	15
2.9 The Theory of Action, and the Criteria for Success.....	16
3 · Red Team Assessment	16
4 · Dissenting Alternative.....	18
5 · Recommended Course of Action	19
References.....	20

1 • Executive Summary

An incident strategy is a single thread of coherence, and it either runs the whole length of the incident or it is not a strategy. The thread has stations. Ends are set with the owners of the values at stake, under a working definition of what critical means. Ways — including every fallback — are screened against the context and constraints actually present. Means are examined, committed, and cascaded so the field executes the strategy rather than improvising beside it. Responder risk is priced against the specific values the exposure buys. And the whole is held durable through condition changes, team rotations, and administrator transitions, because on long-duration incidents no single team outlives the strategy it adopts. The enterprise has built real machinery at the head of this thread. The Incident Strategic Alignment Process gave administrators, teams, and responders a common language and a values-first conversation that, by the community's own account, often did not exist before. Its guide draws the full cascade, from critical values through strategic actions to work assignments and daily risk sheets, on a continuous feedback loop. The thread is in the drawings. This paper is about what happens to it after the meeting ends — and who, on the current organizational chart, is responsible for keeping it whole. The answer, at every station, is no one.

Section 2.2 traces one composite strategy from its best moment to its transition, with the process performing exactly as designed, and shows the thread parting between decisions rather than at them. The values list speaks for owners who were never in a room. “Critical” is applied without a threshold, so a campground, a timber stand, and a subdivision compete on salience. The alternatives set holds one option that could actually be built, so the choice was made by whoever assembled the set. The fallback is defined by a pre-season POD boundary that no available workforce could staff or complete, kept on the map as reassurance. Means fields are asked and unbound, so the strategy's success rests — in the words of the field memo — not on the strategy but on the collective ability of individual pieces of the organization to assess and resource their own ground. The strategy carries no stated bounds, so no condition can ever falsify it — only defer it. Responder risk is rated action by action while the whole effort's cumulative exposure — the miles of line, the weeks of mop-up under the canopy — goes uncounted. Risk declined in one place is silently re-accepted, larger, in another. A strategic operations seat is rostered on the team for exactly this work, filled from the only formation pipeline that exists and consumed by the season. And a fourteen-day transition hands the next team the plan but not the theory — not why this way was chosen, not what would have flipped the choice, not which assumptions are already dead. Every participant does their assigned job well. The strategy dissolves anyway, and the consequence is paid in the currencies that matter. Exposure without proportional purpose. Values lost by omission. Money spent against a schedule rather than an effect. And a fire that outlives three teams' worth of strategies. And if the season ends badly, the record will show the process was followed — accurately, and explaining nothing.

The sections that follow walk the stations and state, at each, what a reality-consistent strategy requires. Owner-sourced value definitions, without surrendering decision authority. A stated basis for criticality, so priorities can survive comparison. A feasibility screen and a latest-commitment point for every alternative, because an unstaffable

fallback is a drawing, not a branch, and a set with one buildable option is a ratification, not a choice. Stated bounds and pre-decided abandonment conditions, because a strategy that cannot fail cannot be managed. The means gate and the cascade disciplines that keep tactical priorities expressing the strategy instead of replacing it. A responder-risk framing that is proportional, cumulative, comparative, and specific — the whole effort's exposure counted, and every risk transfer acknowledged as one. And a durable handoff built on the strategy's theory of action — assumptions, indicators, bounds, revision triggers — rather than its notes. Then the paper draws the conclusion the stations force. Each requirement is knowledge the enterprise already possesses and no chair is chartered to apply. The process community's own guide concedes the capability is untrained, and its task group has already improvised the answer as a voluntary coaching function, unchartered and one deep. The close designs the chair: four duties spanning the stations, one pattern at two echelons, an exemption clause that is the capability, and a staffing ladder honest about the workforce arithmetic this line has published. It closes with a pilot — the chartered version of what the community already started — scored against pre-registered criteria for success, timed to the open NWCG standardization window. The insurance crisis this line examined had no villain. The thread has no custodian. Nobody's villain; nobody's job.

2 · Support and Analysis

2.1 What Exists, and What Is Missing

The diagnosis is already in print, at five tiers. The Operational Leader's Field Guide opens its strategic-thinking chapter with a refusal — “This chapter will not make you a strategist” — honest about what a book can do. *The Second Skill* showed the qualification system certifying recognition and leaving the auditing discipline “distributed by chance.” *The Reveal* priced the command-and-general-staff pipeline as stock-and-flow insolvency, “arithmetic with a date.” *The System Tier's* W-3 found no development pathway now produces officials formed in both fire operations and land management judgment. The Army Research Institute's synthesis found the relevant capabilities converge across research programs and are “poorly understood and undervalued” by the leaders who control development (Grome et al. 2020). And the fifth finding comes from inside the process community: the ISAP User Guide states that “currently there is no formal strategy training in our wildland fire curriculum. But beware: ‘doing’ the ISAP is not the same as engaging strategically.”

What has been built deserves equal precision. ISAP solved the problem NMAC named in 2017 — incompatible team methods for capturing and communicating strategic risk — and the community's own voices carry the credit. An operations chief asked his safety officer when they had last discussed the risks of their strategy, and heard “never.” An incident commander credits “a common language to talk about difficult things in an easier way.” The design reaches further than most discussion notices. The guide ties the strategic risk view to the daily 215, strategic actions to incident objectives and the ICS-204, and strategy to transitions, all on a drawn feedback loop among administrators, team, and field. Strategic alignment was never designed to operate separately from tactical decisions

and priorities. The thread exists in the drawings, the conversations at its head are real, and the guide is candid about the boundary: completing the process yields the beginning of a strategy. What follows is about everything after the beginning.

2.2 One Strategy, Traced

A composite, assembled from field observation at the pattern level; no incident is depicted, and nothing in it requires anyone to do their job badly.

Day two. The values conversation happens, and it is the process working as designed. Administrators name what matters; the community on the north bank and the municipal watershed top the list. Severities are rated, the map fills, and alignment — real alignment — is reached. Day three. Operations articulates the strategy: hold the fire west of the river, indirect line to protect the community and the watershed; the eastern POD boundary from the pre-season planning is noted as the fallback. The worksheet is completed — resources required entered against available today, duration estimated, probability of success discussed with candor — and the room concludes with the sense, shared in good faith, of a strategy adopted. Nothing in this paragraph went wrong.

Now watch the thread. The alternatives recorded were three: the indirect hold, the POD fallback, and a direct option everyone in the room privately knew the season would not permit. The comparison had one buildable entry, and the choice was made by whoever assembled the set. The means fields recorded twelve crews and eight engines required against six crews present, with national fill status poor; the number was captured and nothing turned on it — the process asks, and nothing binds. The strategy left the room with no stated bounds: no resource floor, weather envelope, or date past which it stops being the strategy — nothing that could ever falsify it, only defer it.

The watershed's owners — the utility, the downstream towns — were never in a room. "Protect the watershed" means, to them, treatment capacity and turbidity, which is not what the line placement protects, and no one present knew to say so. The fallback POD requires five days of preparation by resources the incident does not have and cannot get. It stays on the map as reassurance — and because a fallback is believed to exist, no one searches for one that could actually be built. "Critical" has meanwhile stretched to cover a campground, a merchantable timber stand, and a subdivision, with no stated basis for comparing them, so tomorrow's allocation argument will be settled by salience and seat volume.

Execution runs the way complex teams actually run it. Field ops owns the day and the work on the ground. Planning ops, back at camp with the resource unit leaders, builds the 204s, consolidates the division requests, places the orders, and briefs arriving resources before they go to the line. Doctrine assigns the consolidation to the planning section; in practice this is where it lives.

Each division builds tomorrow from its own piece of ground and requests accordingly. Planning ops consolidates what arrives from below, because nothing arrives from above — no phases, no priorities, no success indicators to build the requests into. Within a week

the aggregate ordering profile is the incident's real strategy, pointing different directions on different days. The team's roster carries a strategic operations position for exactly this work. Its occupant, formed the only way the pipeline forms anyone — on the line — is absorbed by the season into the work the formation did prepare them for.

Day nine. The line will be done Thursday; then Friday; then Sunday — each deferral individually reasonable, no one stating what resource level would make which date true.

Day twelve. The wind event arrives; the strategy needs revision; there are no stated assumptions, indicators, or triggers to revise against, so the room relitigates from first principles at incident tempo.

Day fourteen. Transition. The incoming team inherits the worksheet, the map, and the notes — the plan, but not the theory. Not why west-of-river beat the POD line. Not what would have flipped the choice. Not which assumptions the last twelve days already killed. They will, correctly, hold their own values conversation and begin again.

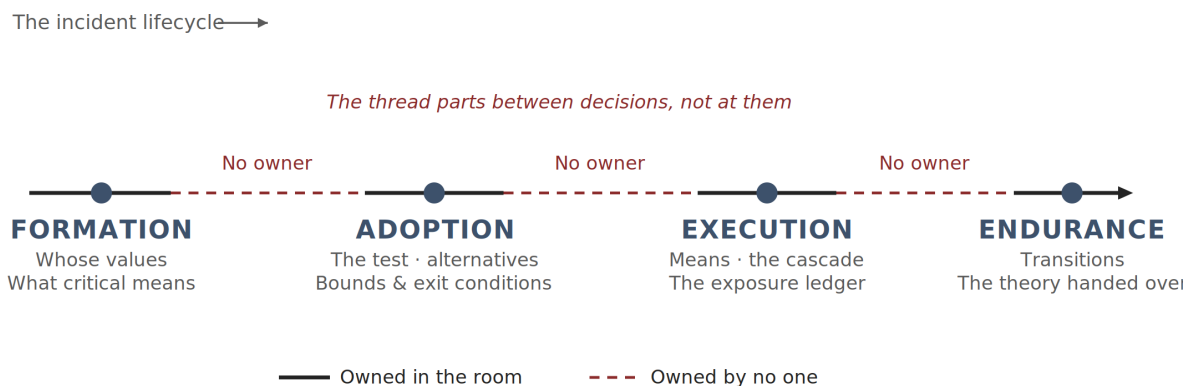
The consequence of a strategy without ends, ways, and means — and of a field operating independent of the strategy and its theory of action — is not a dramatic failure at a decision point. It is this: dissolution between decisions, in the custody gaps between stations. It is paid for in exposure without proportional purpose, values lost by omission while everyone agrees they are the highest priority, money spent against a schedule rather than an effect, and a fire that outlives every fourteen-day strategy written at it. The plan walked out of the room inconsistent with reality, and reality collected.

And when it does, the account is already written: a values conversation was held, alternatives were considered, risk was rated, everyone did all they could — the process was followed. The record will be accurate. It will also be the one document that cannot show whether the comparison was real, whether the means were ever there, or whether the risk declined in one place was quietly re-accepted, larger, in another. The stations follow, each with what consistency requires (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

The congruent thread

The stations are owned in their rooms; the thread between them is owned by no one. Section 2.2 is this figure, walked.



The thread parts between decisions, not at them.

2.3 Whose Values — and What Critical Means

The room. Pillar 1 is, by design, a conversation between agency administrators and the team — a high-trust container, and the guide is right to protect it. The cost of the container arrives when the strategy's components are the protection of assets the administrators do not own: the community, the watershed, the utility corridor, the private timber. Then the values register is a proxy elicitation — the administrator speaking for absent owners — and the research is blunt that the proxy runs narrow. The public values at risk from fire and its management are consistently broader than what risk management processes consider (Williams et al. 2018). The predictable product is the one the field already recognizes: a strategy that addresses the administrators' concerns and is largely absent the others'. This holds even while everyone in the room agrees the community or the watershed is the highest priority on the incident. What consistency requires is owner-sourced value definitions — what makes this asset critical, in the owner's terms, and what "protection" actually means to them — gathered through liaison before or alongside the container conversation. Not one inch of decision authority moves: the administrators still rate, still prioritize, still decide. Completeness of input is not expansion of authority, and Section 4.4 takes the objection seriously.

The threshold. The guide defines a critical value as one responders will be asked to accept elevated risk to protect, and its own prompts ask the right question — "Can everything be catastrophic? How can we prioritize?" — without supplying a method. In practice "critical" inflates, and the register fills with entries that cannot be compared: a campground worth a million dollars, a stand of merchantable timber, a subdivision.

Severity words do not commensurate across value types, and a priority ranking without a stated basis is an advocacy ranking. What consistency requires is not a pretense that everything reduces to dollars — lives and communities do not. It is a defined threshold and a stated basis. What must a value be, or be worth, to clear the bar the guide's own definition implies — worth elevated responder exposure? On what dimensions does the comparison run — replacement value, service loss, irreversibility, life safety? With those stated, when the campground, the timber, and the subdivision compete for the same crews, the ranking can be defended in terms other than who spoke last. "Risk a lot to save a lot" is the enterprise's own maxim; it is unusable until someone states what "a lot" is on both sides. That statement is strategist's work, and most of it can be done before the smoke: the values landscape, priced and thresholded in the appreciation, is what makes the day-two conversation fast and real instead of fast and hollow.

2.4 Alternatives That Survive Contact

Before a strategy is adopted it should pass a stated test, and most of the test is already in the enterprise's literature: ends clarity, ways viability, means sufficiency, risk acknowledged at the right level, and the explicit decision about what the effort will not do. Long duration adds the intertemporal questions: who implements, under what assumed means and weather, with what stated assumptions, indicators, and revision triggers. The addition this section makes is that the test applies to every alternative, not only the selection. An alternative is a claim — if the primary fails, we can do this instead — and a claim about the future carries the same burden as the plan. Context: does the terrain, the season, the fuels, the organization support it? Constraints: can we staff it and complete it in the time the fire will allow? The pre-season POD boundary is the honest hard case. The drawing exists, the analytics support it, and its existence creates the feeling of a fallback. But a boundary that requires five days of preparation by crews the incident cannot obtain is not a viable alternative; it is a map feature. Worse than no fallback, in one specific way: the believed fallback suppresses the search for a real one, so the organization runs without a branch while certain it has one. And inside every unexamined fallback runs the same assumption this line has already priced — that ordered resources arrive — operating unexamined exactly where its failure is least survivable.

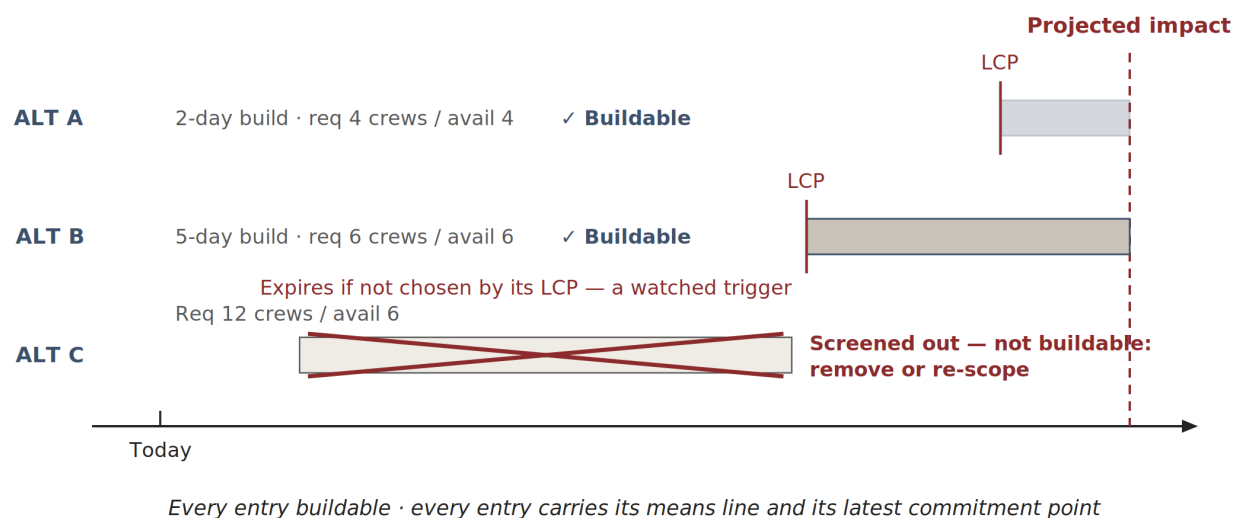
What consistency requires: every alternative carried into a strategy meeting arrives with its own means line — resources and time required against realistically available. It also arrives with its own latest commitment point: the last moment at which choosing it still leaves enough time to build it. Alternatives expire; a fallback needing five days is viable only while five days remain, and the expiration is a trigger the strategy must watch. An alternative that cannot be staffed and completed is re-scoped until it can be, or removed — stated in the record as removed and why, so the next team does not inherit the reassurance without the arithmetic. This is the difference between alternatives as tradeoffs, which the process already frames well, and alternatives as commitments the organization could actually keep, which is what a decision maker is owed (Figure 2).

The decoy set. The screen matters most for the failure it prevents. An alternatives set of one viable option and two unrealistic ones is not a decision — it is a ratification, and the choice was made before the meeting by whoever assembled the set. No one builds decoys deliberately. Infeasible entries survive because generating genuinely different, buildable alternatives is the hardest work in strategy — the strategic-alternatives weakness the field already names — and because a form that asks for alternatives will be given alternatives, screened or not. The community's own pitfalls catalog warns against pre-determined outcomes and meetings held to justify actions already underway. The feasibility screen is what makes the warning enforceable, because a set whose every entry could actually be built is a set that can genuinely lose an argument. And the screen protects the winner too. When the set collapses to one predetermined option, even that option enters execution untested — its means, coordination, and time never examined, because nothing real was ever compared against it. When it fails, the account is already written: alternatives were considered, the process was followed. A real screen is the difference between a record of a choice and a record of a ceremony.

FIGURE 2

The alternatives screen

Every entry carries its means line and latest commitment point; unbuildable entries leave the set; expirations are watched triggers.



A set whose every entry could be built can genuinely lose an argument.

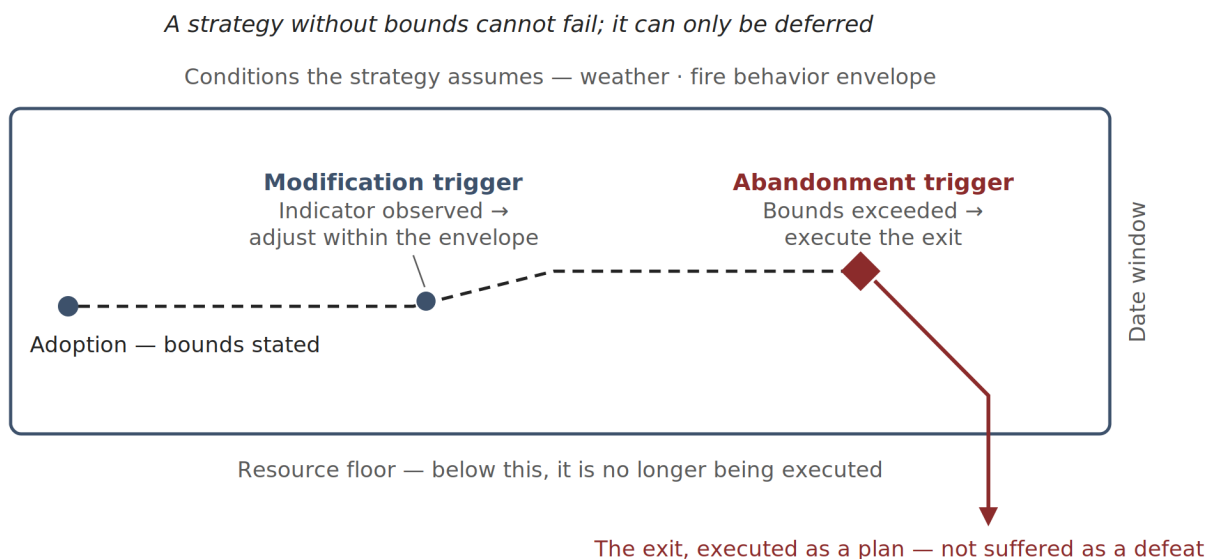
Bounds and exit conditions. One requirement of the adoption test deserves its own name (Figure 3), because its absence is what makes every other failure permanent. Every adopted strategy carries its bounds — the envelope it was built for: the resource floor beneath which it is no longer being executed, the weather and fire-behavior conditions it assumes, the date by which its phases must land. It carries its exit conditions too: the pre-decided observations that trigger modification, and the ones that trigger

abandonment. Stated in daylight, at adoption, while abandonment is still cheap to imagine. A strategy without bounds cannot fail; it can only be deferred — every contrary signal absorbed as implementation difficulty, every slipped date as one more day — and a strategy that cannot fail cannot be managed, audited, or learned from. This is falsifiability made operational: not a philosophical nicety but the difference between abandonment executed as a plan and abandonment suffered as a defeat, three weeks late, at the cost of the values the bounds would have protected. The bounds travel with the strategy — Section 2.7 returns to them at the handoff.

FIGURE 3

Bounds and exit conditions

The strategy is valid inside a stated envelope — conditions, resources, dates — with pre-decided triggers for modification and abandonment.



Falsifiability made operational: the exit is executed as a plan.

2.5 Means, and the Cascade

The second anchor of the field record shows the downstream station, and it is worth naming the architecture as it actually runs on complex teams (Figure 4), because the doctrine-versus-practice gap is itself the paper's theme in miniature. Doctrine assigns consolidation of resource requests and ordering to the planning section. In practice the work lives with planning operations. An operations chief back at camp, with one or more resource unit leaders, builds the 204s, consolidates what the divisions send up, places the orders, and briefs arriving resources before they go to the line. Field operations owns the day and the work on the ground. And a strategic operations seat, where the team rosters

one, is meant to own the longer view. The division of labor is sound. What the field memo records is what flows through it. Divisions receive ground, build containment plans and resource lists, and push both up. Planning ops consolidates from below because nothing arrives from above — no phases, no priorities, no success indicators to build the requests into. In the memo's words, the success of the strategy "isn't based on the strategy — it's based on the collective ability of the individual divisions to assess and then resource their equipment." The Field Guide states the counter-discipline at Step 6 of its line-of-effort sequence: resource commitments aligned to each line of effort, making competition explicit and forcing prioritization. It also names the failure class: leaders planning one operational period at a time are fighting a new war every day. In print; inert. No villain, again: every division building its own list is doing its job well; planning ops consolidating what it receives is doing its job well. The cascade the process drew runs in reverse because the seat that would give it direction — the strategy layer above the 204 build — is unformed where it exists and absent where it does not.

FIGURE 4

The cascade as drawn and as run

Direction is designed to flow down from the strategy layer; in practice that layer is unformed where it exists.



The seat that would give the cascade its direction is unformed where it exists and absent where it does not

The aggregate of upward requests becomes the operative strategy.

What consistency requires, downward: the strategy states phases, priorities, and success indicators, and subordinate requirements are built into them. It expects a fully-resourced plan and a degraded-resourcing plan, so shortage triggers concentration against named priorities instead of equal deficit everywhere. And it runs a reporting discipline of conditional commitments — with this, done Thursday; with that, Sunday; as resourced,

the following week, unless the requirement itself changes — so strategy-critical slippage surfaces while it is correctable instead of arriving one deferral at a time. Upward, the same thread carries field reality back into the strategy — the feedback loop the guide diagrams, given a direction and an owner. The specific formats belong to the Field Guide's instrument tradition; the duty — that someone requires them, both directions, all the way down the line — is the subject of Section 2.8.

2.6 Responder Risk, Priced

Pillar 3 asks the right question — *should* we do it — and the current framing cannot answer it, because a severity-times-probability rating of a single action, in six prefilled categories, states no relation to anything. Four properties make responder risk meaningful. Proportional: exposure is justified by the specific value it protects and that value's defined priority. This is why this section cannot work without Section 2.3's threshold — “risk a lot to save a lot” is a ratio, and the current instrument rates only one side of it. Cumulative: the unit of account is the whole effort — every phase, everyone it touches, for as long as it takes — not the initial engagement. Comparative: the decision-relevant quantity is the difference in *whole-effort* exposure between buildable alternatives for the same protection — a “high” rating on the chosen action informs nothing a decision maker can use. Specific: exposure stated as who, doing what, for how long, with the influencer labels unpacked into this incident's content — “human factors” as the fatigue curve at day twelve and the mid-action transition, not a checked category. And the price moves: risk accepted at adoption is not the risk at day twenty, so the framing carries a re-pricing rhythm tied to the strategy's indicators.

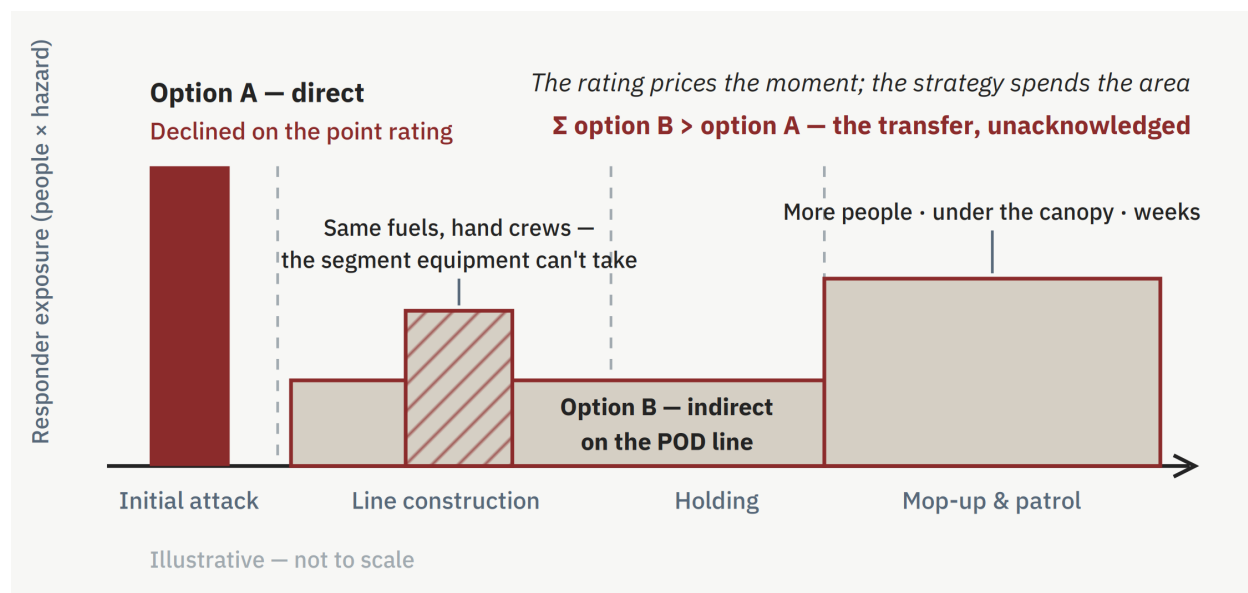
The cumulative property is where current practice fails most quietly, and a pattern-level example carries it (Figure 5). It is easy to decline the initial attack — no crew into the snag patch for a lightning strike; the point-in-time rating is honest and the decision is right on its own terms. It is equally easy to select the fallback — favorable terrain adjacent to the values, miles of mechanized line along the pre-season POD boundary. What is never captured is the whole effort the fallback commits. The boundary follows roads for most of its length, and the portion that does not runs through the same fuels just judged too dangerous to attack — ground unsuitable for equipment, so it will be hand crews in exactly the conditions the first decision refused. And holding the line, once built, means mop-up: more people, under the canopy among the same snags, for weeks instead of days. Summed honestly, the “safer” strategy can carry more exposure than the effort it replaced: more person-days, in comparable fuels, over longer duration, distributed across phases the rating never priced. The risk was not declined. It was transferred — relocated in space, deferred in time, spread across more people — and taken on without anyone acknowledging that it was taken. A meaningful framing makes the transfer visible. When an option is dismissed on responder risk, the exposure of what replaces it is computed on the same ledger, whole effort against whole effort — and the decision maker signs for the difference, whichever direction it runs. Sometimes the indirect strategy still wins — often it should — but it wins an argument that was actually held. Framed this way, Pillar 3 stops being a rating exercise and becomes what its own

question implies: the strategy's exposure ledger, kept against the values ledger, both current, both cumulative.

FIGURE 5

The exposure ledger (illustrative)

Point-in-time ratings price the moment of engagement; the strategy spends the area.



Risk declined at one decision can be re-accepted, larger, across the phases of what replaces it.

2.7 Durability Through the Lifecycle

On long-duration incidents the strategy must outlive its authors — the guide says so, and sets its transfer test as whether an incoming team can understand the plan from the record. The deeper test is whether they inherit the theory of action — not just what the plan is. Why was this way chosen over the alternatives that were live? What assumptions does the choice rest on, and which indicators would show those assumptions failing? What are the strategy's bounds, and how much of the envelope did the last twelve days consume? What are the pre-decided modification and abandonment conditions — and which alternatives have expired since adoption? A team that inherits the plan without the theory does the only responsible thing available — starts over — and the incident pays the restart cost at every fourteen-day boundary. A team that inherits the theory can disagree with it intelligently in an afternoon. Durability is not the notes surviving. It is the strategy carrying its own logic, its own tests, and its own expiration terms forward through every transition, administrator rotation, and condition change — the thread, handed over intact, with the splice points visible. That artifact does not maintain itself, which is the point of the next section.

2.8 The Custodian

Walk back through the stations and notice the common property. Owner-sourced values and a criticality threshold. A feasibility-screened alternative set with commitment points. The adoption test applied against a room's momentum. The cascade held in both directions. The exposure ledger kept against the values ledger. The theory of action maintained and handed over. Every one is knowledge the enterprise possesses, largely in its own publications — and none is any chair's job in practice. The Planning Section Chief has custody of the process, and process custody is not theory custody. Planning operations owns the build — the 204s, the consolidation, the ordering — and the build consumes exactly the attention the strategy layer requires. The deputy is defined by availability, and a position defined by availability cannot be defined by exemption. The analysts produce input without standing. And then there is the chair the enterprise already built for the function. Complex teams roster a strategic operations position, meant to hold the longer view — the right idea, sitting on the org chart — and the formation behind it does not exist. There is no curriculum, by the process literature's own admission; no development pathway, by the System Tier's W-3; distribution by chance, by *The Second Skill's* finding. So the seat is filled from the only pipeline the enterprise runs — the operational one — and the season converts its occupant into what the pipeline formed: another field operator, absorbed into the day. The empty chair is not missing from the roster. It is on the roster, staffed, and unformed — which is this paper's finding in its purest form: the enterprise bought the seat and never built the person, the charter, or the protection that would make the seat real. The process itself, meanwhile, convenes, structures, and standardizes. It cannot impose criteria against momentum, reason about an implementing team that is not present, or withhold the sense of completion its own conclusion produces. The community appears to agree, having written the warnings, coached the pitfalls for four seasons, and quietly improvised the answer: a coaching and surge-capacity function that puts an experienced hand in the room by request — voluntary, unchartered, unfunded, one deep by goodwill. The fire service has solved this class of problem before. *The Second Skill* named the pattern: the lookout, “institutionalized meta-recognition — a person structurally exempted from the operating frame's workload, positioned to notice what the frame is explaining away.” What the lookout is to a division, the strategist is to the strategy: the person paid to hold the thread everyone else is inside.

The position, compactly. Four duties, mapped to the stations. The adoption gate: the strategy test and the intertemporal assessment applied before adoption, alternatives screened and stamped with commitment points, inside the conversations the process already convenes. Cascade custody: phases, priorities, and indicators stated downward into requirements and the 204 layer, conditional commitments and concentration required of the system, field reality carried back up. Convened challenge: premortem, assumptions check, competing hypotheses convened against the strategy the position stewards, and never monopolized. And the standing appreciation: the values landscape thresholded, the theory-of-action stock maintained between incidents, so the five minutes at adoption are backed by months. One pattern at two echelons. The incident-adjacent strategist works at the administrator-team interface — which in current structure means forming, chartering, and protecting the strategic operations seat teams already roster,

with the task group's coaching function as its chartered surge and interim. The organizational strategist works at the department or agency echelon, owner of the appreciation and the pipeline — the seat no roster carries at all. The exemption clause is written and is the capability: a strategist who attends everything sees nothing; the lookout who digs line is not a lookout. Name, formation, and evaluation. The working candidate is Disaster Strategist, with the decision reserved for the pilot charter. Formation draws on the converged KSA base (Grome et al. 2020) through the Field Guide's own disciplines, with selection instruments (Düpmann and Foster 2018; Srivastava and D'Souza 2021) held as candidates pending pilot evidence. Evaluation is by the criteria below, never by product count — a strategist measured by memos becomes a memo mill.

2.9 The Theory of Action, and the Criteria for Success

If the position exists with its properties intact — exemption held, access sanctioned, consumer obligated — the host should observe, within two evaluation cycles, movement grouped by station. Formation: critical values carrying owner-sourced definitions where owners exist, and a stated criticality basis on the register. Adoption: strategies passing the test — assumptions, indicators, revision triggers stated — with bounds and abandonment conditions on the record. Alternative sets carry feasibility screens and latest-commitment points, every entry buildable. And alternatives are compared on whole-effort cumulative exposure, risk transfers acknowledged in the record. Execution: work assignments and daily priorities traceable to named strategic actions and phases; resource requests referencing them; serial deferral declining as conditional commitments replace it. Endurance: structured challenge convened before every consequential commitment, and transitions handing over the theory, not only the plan. These are the criteria for success — behaviors of the decision system, not outputs of the chair. The causal claim is that they follow from assignment, protection, and consumption — not from training, exhortation, or process revision, all of which the record shows already tried. The falsification condition is equally stated: position present, protections intact, criteria unmoved. Section 5 pre-registers both.

3 · Red Team Assessment

The instrument this line uses on other people's programs applies to its own recommendation. It is 2031 and the strategist program failed. Nine mechanisms, in rough order of probability.

3.1 Staffed with the available — or renamed without rebuilding. Two versions of the same death. Every collateral duty in a strained workforce is staffed with whoever can be spared, and the strained workforce is this paper's own Section 2.1; the first incumbent set the position's reputation: another meeting. Or cheaper still: the pilot pointed at the strategic operations seat already on the roster, changed its title, changed nothing else — same formation, same season, same absorption — and declared the recommendation implemented. Mitigation: the pilot is the formation, the charter, and the signed

exemption, not the label; the selection bar travels with the charter; an unfilled pilot is reported unfilled, and a relabeled seat is reported as no pilot at all.

3.2 The exemption died in the first hard season. The season arrived, every chair flexed, and the strategist flexed too — helpfully, visibly, fatally. This is the most probable death and the reason the exemption is written, signed, and the pilot's primary protected variable: when it goes, the pilot has ended, whatever the calendar says.

3.3 Goodhart capture. Asked what it produced, the position produced documents, and was soon evaluated by its artifact stream. Mitigation is structural: the criteria are behaviors of the decision system, and pilot reporting is against them only.

3.4 The advocate drift. The strategist became the chief's case-maker and forfeited the outside position that made it useful — comfortable for everyone, which is what makes it lethal. The convened-challenge duty is the tripwire, and the obligated consumer's obligation runs both ways.

3.5 The fusion failure. Where challenge and stewardship fused in one chair, the strategy's author graded the strategy's homework. The earlier draft specifications in this paper's source base carry this embedding; the premortem is why this design separates the functions — convene, not monopolize.

3.6 The charter ate the org chart. Given custody of the whole thread, the position accreted the stations themselves — rating the values, writing the alternatives, running the meetings — until it was a shadow incident commander with a theory. The boundary is in the verbs: the strategist requires, screens, convenes, and audits; owners own. A charter of custody that becomes a charter of command has failed, and the audit question at each cycle is whether the stations' owners still own them.

3.7 One deep. The program was one person, the person transferred, and the capability left in a truck — the single-point pattern *The Incident Tier* inventoried, already visible in the volunteer function the community runs today. Mitigations: the ladder's shared rung, and the appreciation as a maintained artifact rather than a resident memory, chartered from day one.

3.8 Read as an attack. The paper named a process with committed and deserved followership; a reader skimmed the accounting; the community closed ranks, and the position died as collateral in a fight the paper never picked. Mitigation is structural. The accounting leads and is genuine. Every critical sentence about the process is quoted from its current literature by version and date. The trace in 2.2 shows the process succeeding. And the recommendation strengthens the community's own hand — chartering what its stewards improvised, inside the standards window they opened. If the paper cannot be read as completing the tasking, the fix is drafting, not retreat.

3.9 The author's chairs. The position drafts are the author's; the observations are from seats the author occupies; the composite in 2.2 was assembled by the person proposing the cure. Declared, not argued away. Mitigations: pattern-level handling with no incident depicted; process claims grounded in the process's documentation rather than

recollection; criteria registered before results exist and not scored by the author alone; and a falsification condition written before the pilot began.

4 · Dissenting Alternative

Six credible cases, in ascending order of strength.

4.1 Distribute the capability instead. Train every command-and-general-staff officer. The answer is *The Second Skill* relocated: distribution by training alone is distribution by chance — and the curriculum that would even attempt it does not exist, by the process literature's own account. Do both; substitute neither.

4.2 The deputy or chief of staff absorbs it. A hat, not a chair. A position defined by availability cannot be defined by exemption, and the record of hard seasons is the record of hats coming off. The dissent survives as the ladder's bottom rung — where the function starts, not where it ends.

4.3 The standing red team covers it. Challenge is episodic and adversarial by design; appreciation-stewardship is continuous and constructive. A red team can say the strategy is incoherent; it is not chartered to have maintained, for eighteen months, the appreciation from which a coherent one could be built by Thursday. Complements, not substitutes.

4.4 Widening the values room breaks the container. The strongest objection to Section 2.3: Pillar 1 works because it is a high-trust container — administrators cannot candidly rank the subdivision above the timber sale with the timber company at the table, and stakeholders are not decision makers. The objection is right about the room and wrong about the remedy. The requirement is completeness of input, not expansion of the table. Owner-sourced value definitions are gathered through liaison — the interview, not the seat — and feed the container conversation, where the administrators still rate, rank, and decide, now about the owners' actual values instead of a proxy sketch. The container survives; the proxy problem does not.

4.5 Better process practice covers it. Workshops, task-group coaching, and the pending NWCG publication will raise the floor — partially right, fully compatible, and adopted as sequencing in Section 5. It fails as a complete answer on the community's own evidence. The pitfalls catalog is the fidelity experiment's running result. The guide locates the cause in an untrained capability no workshop supplies. And the coaching function is the fidelity answer already operating, as an unfunded improvisation of exactly this chair. Chartering it is not a rejection of the fidelity case. It is the fidelity case, resourced.

4.6 The pipeline cannot afford it. The strongest case, from this line's own findings: *The Reveal* proved the pipeline insolvent, and a paper answering insolvency with a new position has not read its own line. Two answers. The ladder is the arithmetic's: collateral duty costs a protected fraction of an existing officer; shared and regional rungs spread one position across many organizations; the dedicated chair is the argued destination, reached when a host's arithmetic permits. And the position is the insolvency's answer, not its casualty: an enterprise draining its strategic stock is precisely the one that cannot

afford to leave the remainder personality-resident and succession-invisible. The chair is how a shrinking stock is husbanded; declining to build it spends the remainder faster.

5 · Recommended Course of Action

Pilot, not program — and pilot what the community started. One organizational instantiation at a host department or agency, and one season of incident-adjacent attachments at the administrator-team interface. The latter is framed, deliberately, as the chartered and protected version of the coaching-and-surge function the ISAP task group already operates: same rooms, same conversations, with the exemption signed, the duties chartered, and the results measured. Entry rung matched to the host's workforce arithmetic: collateral or shared to start. Duration: two evaluation cycles. Timing: the NWCG standardization of the process is in review now, and a measured pilot lands differently inside that window than after it closes.

The criteria for success, pre-registered — scored each cycle by host and incumbent jointly, against baseline, grouped by station. Formation: owner-sourced definitions present for stakeholder-owned critical values (share); criticality basis stated on the register (completeness). Adoption: strategies passing the Section 2.4 test (count and completeness); alternative sets carrying feasibility screens and latest-commitment points (share). Execution: 204-layer work assignments and daily priorities traceable to named strategic actions and phases (share); serial-deferral incidence (trend); resource requests referencing phases and priorities (share). Endurance: consequential strategies receiving convened challenge before commitment (count); transitions handing over the theory of action — assumptions, indicators, triggers, expired alternatives — verified by the incoming team (per transition). Plus the pilot's primary protected variable: the exemption's integrity. Falsification: position present, exemption intact across both cycles, station criteria unmoved. If that is the result, the design is wrong, the paper says so in its follow-up, and the enterprise has purchased the knowledge for a fraction of one officer — the modest-charter logic of *Sustaining Decision Performance*, applied.

Decisions inside the pilot charter. The position's public name — the working candidate is Disaster Strategist, and the name will shape the politics. The reconciliation of the earlier draft specification with this architecture, the red-team embedding in particular. And the selection-instrument question, deferred to pilot evidence rather than asserted in advance.

What this asks of the enterprise. One host's protected fraction of one officer, and the discipline to score the result against criteria written before the result existed. The tasking that created the standards effort asked the enterprise to ensure strategic thought process is occurring throughout the duration of an incident — the whole duration, all the way down the line. The process community delivered the alignment machinery, drew the cascade, and documented what a process alone could not close. The recommendation is the other half of the tasking: that the thread — from whose values, through what test, into whose hands, across every transition — briefly and measurably, become somebody's job.

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“An incident strategy is a single thread of coherence, and it either runs the whole length of the incident or it is not a strategy.”

Organizations build real machinery for choosing a strategy — and none for keeping one whole. Values are set in a room, alternatives are screened, risk is rated, a direction is adopted. Then the meeting ends. Conditions change, teams rotate, administrators transition, and the strategy that was aligned on day two is executed in fragments by week three, with every fragment defensible and the whole no longer anyone’s to defend.

At every station where the thread could part, the answer to “who keeps the strategy whole” is the same: no one.

Nobody’s Job traces one composite strategy from its best moment to its transition — with the alignment process performing exactly as designed — and shows the thread parting between decisions rather than at them. Values that speak for owners who were never in the room. Alternatives sets holding one buildable option. Fallbacks no workforce could staff, kept on the map as reassurance. Risk rated action by action while cumulative exposure goes uncounted. A fourteen-day transition that hands the next team the plan but not the theory. The paper then designs the chair: charter, placement, protection, pipeline, and evaluation for a strategic operations position — with a theory of action that makes the design testable, a premortem run against its own recommendation, and pre-registered criteria stating in advance what failure would look like.

For incident commanders, agency administrators, command and general staff, and the enterprise bodies that own position architecture — and for any organization whose strategic capability currently lives in people instead of positions.

A deliberate sibling of Nobody’s Villain: that paper found a crisis no actor caused; this one finds a function no position owns. Part of the Cogplexiti Systems & Decision Analysis line, alongside The System Tier, The Incident Tier, and The Reveal.

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