EA IGNITE FALL 2026 · ADVANCED LAB

Risk Intelligence

Risk Awareness in the Executive Office



Meg Steinschauer
Founder, Connected Assistants

Renaissance Nashville Hotel
Tuesday 3 November 2026

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YOUR FACILITATOR

Meg Steinschauer

Here to guide the discussion and make risk thinking practical.

Founder, Connected Assistants, an accredited training provider

MBA
Business administration

Organisational and Business Psychology
Postgraduate study in progress

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

A practical session, built around better decisions

- Notice early signals before they become problems.
- Map exposure across the organisation and raise concerns usefully.
- Leave with a strategic risk brief you can use.

> You bring the context. I'll bring the structure.

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NINETY MINUTES · FIVE PHASES

Session Roadmap

01	The Risks Nobody Labels	10 min	PRESENTATION
02	The Case Study: Ashworth Partners	20 min + work	GROUP WORK
03	Organisational Exposure Mapping	20 min + work	GROUP WORK
04	Surfacing Risk in Leadership Conversations	15 min	PRESENTATION
05	The Strategic Risk Brief + Debrief	25 min	GROUP WORK

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BEFORE WE START

Laptops open. One per group.

Open The Exposure Map now. The Ashworth signals are already loaded. It is the tool you will build your brief in, and it is yours to keep.

connectedassistants.com/ea-ignite-2026-exposure-map

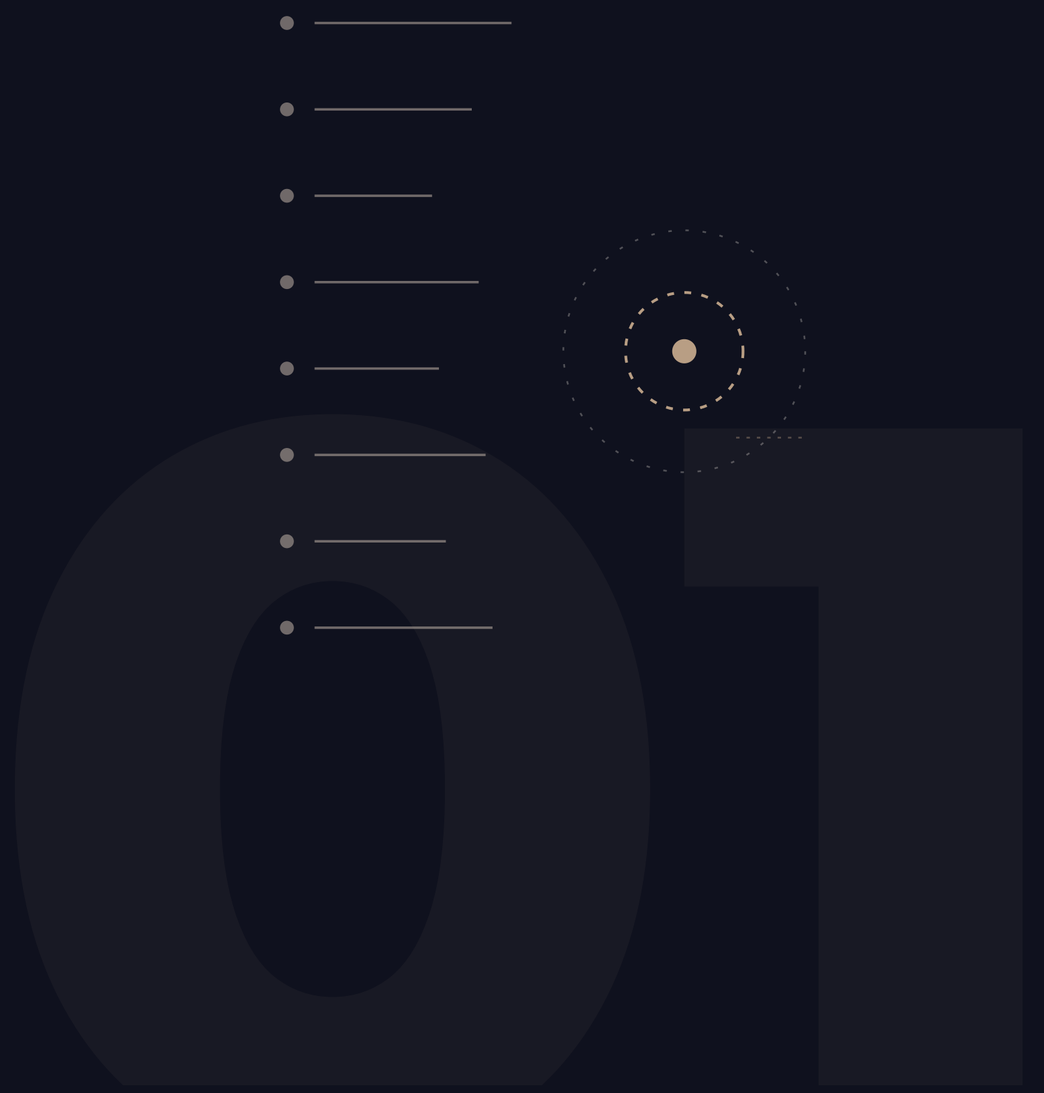
Phones work. Laptops are better. Paper is on your table if the Wi-Fi gives up.

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PHASE ONE · 10 MINUTES

The Risks Nobody Labels

The dangerous risks are rarely the ones on the register. They are the ones nobody has named yet.



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THE OPENING PREMISE

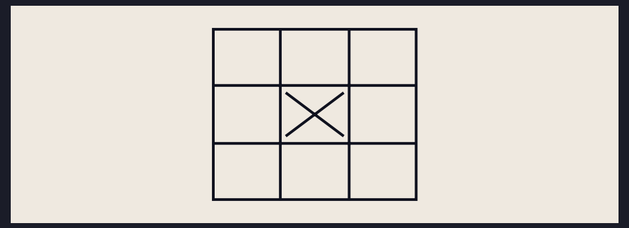
The most dangerous risks in an executive office are not the ones on the risk register. They are the ones nobody has named yet.

This session is about the risks that sit in the spaces between. Political dynamics, unspoken disagreements, strategic misalignment, sponsor fatigue, cultural erosion, and the slow accumulation of small signals that individually mean nothing but collectively point to something significant.

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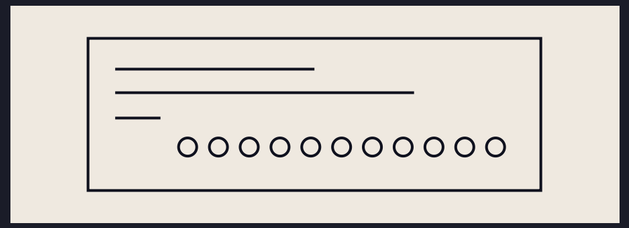
LESS VISIBLE THAN THE REGISTER SUGGESTS

Three Categories of Risk



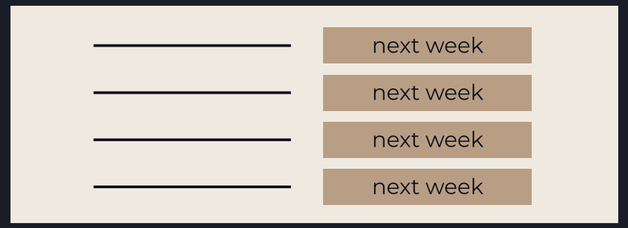
Strategic drift

The organisation says one thing but decisions, resources, and behaviour point elsewhere. Visible in diary patterns, shifting attendees, and projects that quietly lose sponsorship.



Relationship erosion

Key relationships deteriorate beneath a professional surface. Visible in emails that used to be direct now copied widely, informal meetings turning formal, and the executive who stops asking for updates.



Decision fatigue

Leadership defers decisions rather than making them. Visible in rescheduled one-to-ones, approval bottlenecks, and a backlog of items “to be discussed next week” that never are.

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WHY YOU SEE IT FIRST

You see the patterns because you manage the infrastructure of decision-making.

Diaries, inboxes, meeting dynamics, document flow. That is not administrative work. That is intelligence.

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The evidence backs your instinct

> Strategic surprises announce themselves early, as weak and ambiguous signals. The skill is reading them before they are loud. (Ansoff, 1975.)

> We read a near miss as reassurance rather than warning, so the early signal gets filed as a win. (Dillon and Tinsley, 2008.)

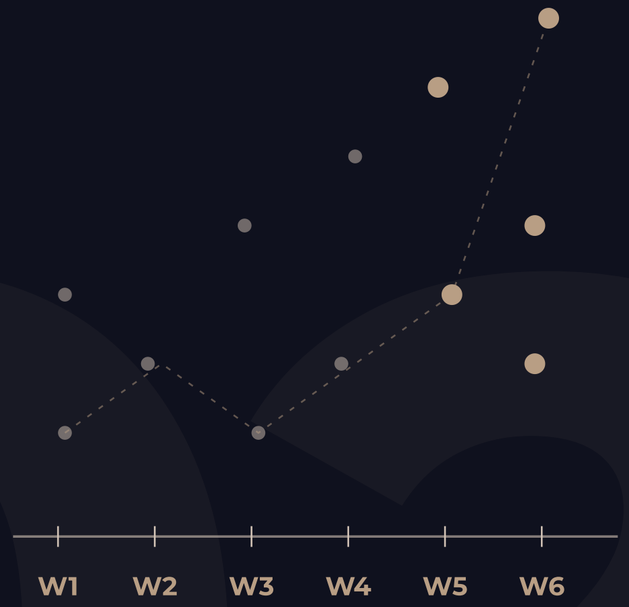
> Imagine the plan has already failed and work backwards, and people find sharper reasons than when asked what might go wrong. (Klein, the pre-mortem.)

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PHASE TWO · 20 MINUTES PLUS GROUP WORK

The Case Study: Ashworth Partners

A deliberately complex scenario. The signals are ambiguous and the risks are interconnected.



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THE SCENARIO

Ashworth Partners

- Global consulting firm. 1,200 employees across four offices in London, New York, Singapore, and Dubai.
- A new Managing Partner was recently promoted, an internal appointment that remains controversial among some senior partners.
- A high-profile client engagement in Dubai is behind schedule and over budget.
- The firm is preparing for a partnership vote on a major strategic pivot: moving from generalist consulting to specialised advisory in three sectors.

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YOUR SEAT IN THE ROOM

You are the EA to the Chief Operating Officer.

The COO is responsible for operational readiness for the pivot and reports to the Managing Partner. You sit at the centre of the information flow, and the signals are about to start arriving.

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The Signals Timeline

WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3
The new Managing Partner cancels two standing meetings with regional heads	Three associates in Singapore ask HR about internal transfer policies	The Dubai client's General Counsel contacts your office directly, bypassing the project lead
The Dubai project lead requests a private call with the COO	The Managing Partner's diary shifts to back-to-back one-to-ones with individual partners	The partnership vote is postponed from Q3 to later in the year
A senior partner in New York starts copying legal on routine client correspondence	The COO asks you to pull two years of partner billing data, quietly	Two senior partners publish thought leadership contradicting the proposed direction

Three of these are noise. Find them.

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SIX WEEKS AT ASHWORTH · PART TWO

The Signals Timeline

WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
A board observer requests the last three quarterly financial reviews	A recruiter contacts two of the firm's most senior associates	The CFO requests a confidential meeting with the COO
The COO begins holding meetings off-site	The New York office cancels its annual strategy offsite	The Managing Partner asks you to prepare a briefing on partnership governance procedures
The Managing Partner's EA tells you, informally, that things are tense	The Dubai project brings in an external specialist without informing the project lead	Three client contracts due for renewal are sitting unsigned

Some of these are noise. Say which, and why.

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15:00

GROUP ACTIVITY

In your groups · 15 minutes

Map the Signals

01 Open The Exposure Map, step 1. Categorise every signal. Mark the noise.

02 Step 2. Build at least two patterns. Tap the signals that belong together and name what each one points to.

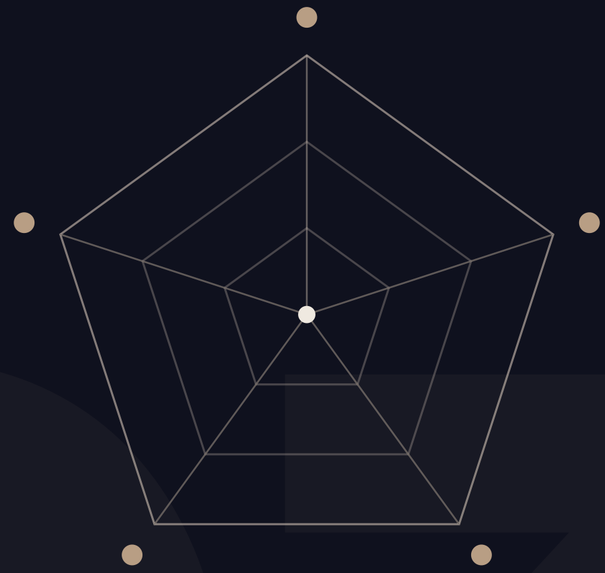
03 Rank your patterns by gut. You will test that ranking next.

04 Write the one risk the COO cannot see from their seat.

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PHASE THREE · 20 MINUTES PLUS GROUP WORK

Organisational Exposure Mapping



Likelihood and impact stop being enough. The question becomes how far, and how fast, a risk can travel.

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SHARE-BACK

Discussion

Let us hear the patterns you found, and the biggest risk the COO cannot yet see.

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BEYOND THE TWO-BY-TWO

At this level, likelihood and impact are not enough. You need to assess exposure.

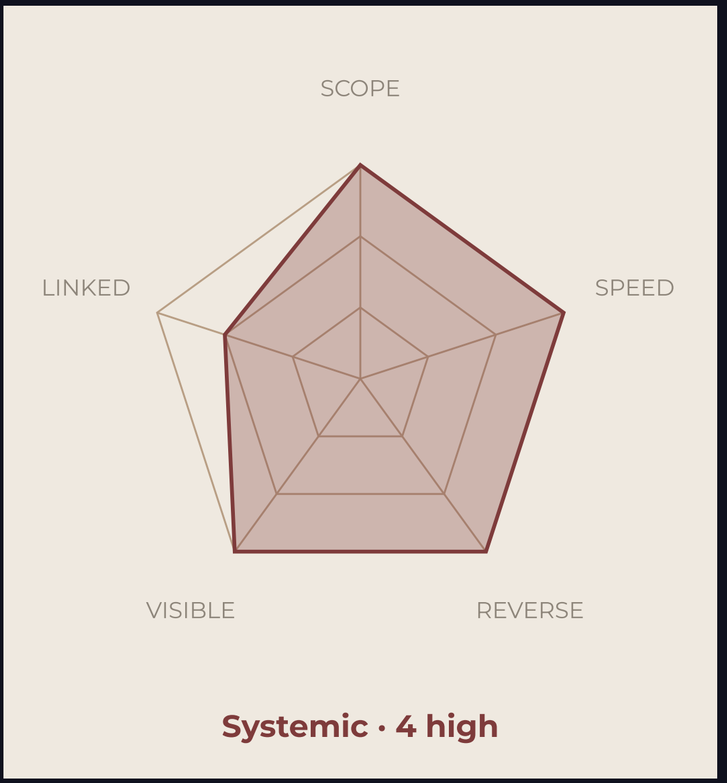
How many parts of the organisation does this risk touch, and how quickly could it cascade? Exposure is what separates an isolated problem from a systemic one.

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FIVE DIMENSIONS · LOW / MEDIUM / HIGH

The Organisational Exposure Framework

Scope	Is this contained to one team or office, or does it cross boundaries?
Velocity	How fast is this moving? Weeks, days, or already in motion?
Reversibility	If this materialises, can we recover, or is the damage structural?
Visibility	Does leadership know about this, partially know, or have no idea?
Interdependency	Does this risk compound other known risks?



> **When three or more dimensions score High, the risk is systemic, not isolated. That changes how you communicate it.**

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10:00

GROUP ACTIVITY

In your groups · 10 minutes

Map the Exposure

01 Open step 3. Score every pattern on all five dimensions.

02 Read the verdict under each fingerprint. Which is systemic?

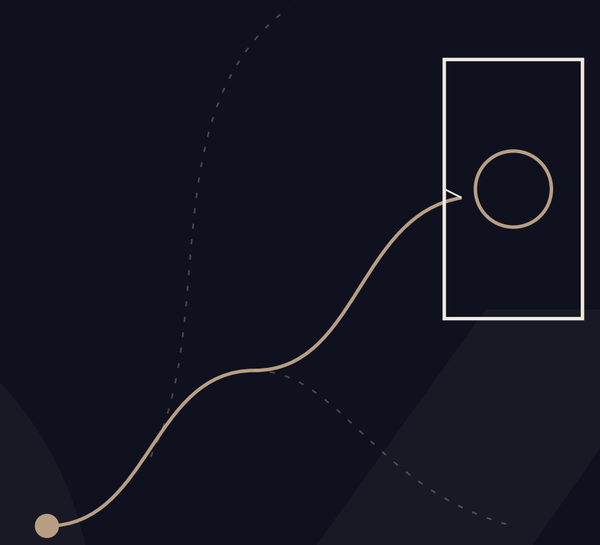
03 Read the re-ranking check at the bottom. Did your gut ranking survive?

04 Be ready to say what moved, and why.

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PHASE FOUR · 15 MINUTES

Surfacing Risk in Leadership Conversations



At this level, how you raise a concern matters as much as the concern itself.

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THE ADVANCED COMMUNICATION CHALLENGE

The risk is not that your leader will not listen.

It is that the timing, framing, or channel you choose will determine whether they can act on what you are telling them.

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HOW RISK LANDS IN LEADERSHIP ENVIRONMENTS

Four Dynamics

Trust capital

A well-founded concern builds trust. Noise spends it. Be strategic about when you spend.

Timing and context

The same risk before and after a board meeting produces completely different responses. Read the moment.

Framing for action

Leaders do not need more problems. They need problems shaped as decision points with options.

Knowing when to go around

Sometimes the risk is your own leader’s blind spot. Choosing a different channel is a senior skill.

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Four dynamics, four choices

TRUST CAPITAL

How many concerns have you raised this month?

TIMING

What is the next moment that changes how this lands?

CHANNEL

Direct, written first, or via another leader?

BLIND SPOT

Is the risk in the business, or in your leader?

Step 4 in the tool. Two minutes, before you write the brief.

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ADVANCED VERSION · SIX PARTS

The Strategic Risk Brief

SIGNAL

What you observed, specific, factual, and sourced.

PATTERN

How this connects to other signals, the bigger picture.

EXPOSURE

Scope, velocity, and reversibility, drawn from the framework.

OPTIONS

Two or three possible responses, with their trade-offs.

RECOMMENDATION

What you would do, and why.

TIMING

When this needs a decision, and what happens if it does not get one.

The tool reads each part as you type and tells you when a sceptic would wave it away.

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WORKED EXAMPLE · ASHWORTH PARTNERS

A Strategic Risk Brief in Practice

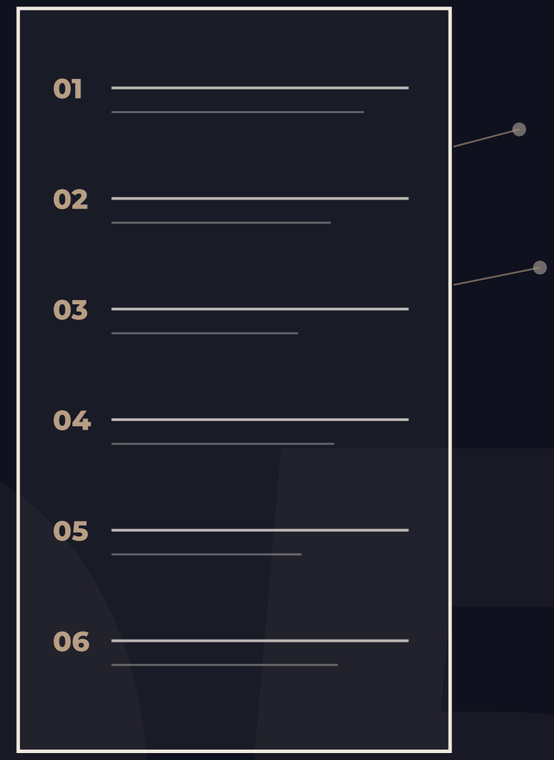
SIGNAL	Three senior associates have been contacted by recruiters, and the New York strategy offsite has been cancelled.
PATTERN	Combined with the postponed vote and the contradictory thought leadership, this suggests growing internal opposition to the pivot. Senior people may be hedging.
EXPOSURE	Scope: cross-office. Velocity: accelerating. Reversibility: moderate now, low if key partners leave. Visibility: the COO is partially aware but may not see the connections.
OPTIONS	(1) A confidential sounding-board session with three trusted regional heads this week. (2) A brief, anonymous pulse survey of senior associates. (3) Recommend the Managing Partner addresses the postponement directly with the partnership.
RECOMMENDATION	Option 1 first. It is low-risk, high-information, and can be positioned as routine.
TIMING	Before the CFO's confidential meeting. If the CFO is raising the same concerns, the COO needs to have already started gathering intelligence.

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PHASE FIVE · 25 MINUTES

The Strategic Risk Brief + Debrief

Take everything from the session and turn it into a brief you would put in front of the COO.



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15:00

GROUP ACTIVITY

In your groups · 15 minutes

Build Your Strategic Risk Brief

01 Open step 5. Write the six parts. Keep going until each one passes.

02 Use Draft from my scores for the Exposure line, then make it sound like you.

03 Write the one thing you want the COO to do.

04 Open step 6. Your Strategic Risk Brief is built. Read it as the COO would.

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2:00

Swap laptops. You are the COO.

Pass your laptop to the next table.

Two minutes. Read their Strategic Risk Brief as the COO.

Answer two questions on paper: would you say yes to the ask, and what would you need to know first.

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Save it. It is yours.

Print to PDF, download the brief, or copy it as text. It saves in your browser, so it will be there on Monday.

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DEBRIEF AND REFLECTION

What Shifted in Your Thinking

- What changed between the first exercise and the last?
- Where does risk intelligence sit in your role going forward?

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THE VALUE YOU BRING

It is not that you have all the answers. It is that you see the signals early enough for your leader to still have choices.

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WHAT CHANGES FROM HERE

Five Shifts

Isolated signals	→	**Connected patterns**
Likelihood and impact	→	**Organisational exposure**
Raising concerns	→	**Shaping decision points**
Reactive reporting	→	**Strategic intelligence**
Supporting decisions	→	**Strengthening the quality of decisions**

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FROM THE ROOM TO THE DESK

What To Do On Monday Morning

01

Look at your executive’s diary for the next two weeks. What patterns do you see that they might not?

02

Pick one risk you have been noticing but have not named. Write a one-paragraph Strategic Risk Brief.

03

Have one conversation this month where you surface a concern using the signal, pattern, options format.

04

Open The Exposure Map on your own executive's last six weeks. Score one pattern. Brief it.

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WHAT YOU TAKE WITH YOU

Key Takeaways

- The most consequential risks are often the ones nobody has named yet.
- Individual signals mean little. Patterns across categories mean everything.
- Organisational exposure tells you when a risk is systemic rather than isolated.
- Timing, framing, and channel decide whether a leader can act on what you surface.
- The Strategic Risk Brief turns instinct into a decision your leader can make.

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RISK INTELLIGENCE LAB

Thank you

See the signals early enough for your leader to still have choices.



Meg Steinschauer
Founder, Connected Assistants

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HOW WAS YOUR SESSION?

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Sources for weak signals, near-miss learning and the pre-mortem. Select a title to open its source.

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