

The crash course

Adjusting to growing uncertainties



TOPICS DISCUSSED IN THIS COURSE

RISK MANAGEMENT

What are the threats you face and how to go about handling them

SCENARIO DRAFTING

How to build realistic scenarios that help you think through contingencies

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

What kind of tools can help with mitigating uncertainties



THE COURSE'S OUTLINE

- **INTRODUCTION** Contingency planning is a myth
- **YOUR NEEDS** Pool your experiences, to learn from them
- **SCENARIO DRAFTING** The five-point methodology
- **ROLE PLAYING** Synaps as a case study of what could go wrong
- **REUSABLE TOOLS** Sharing what works for Synaps
- **BREAKOUT BRAINSTORMS** Give yourselves a scare
- **WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS** Manage what you never planned for
- **REFERENCES** Some reading for inspiration
- **CONCLUSION** Contingency planning is a must



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CONTINGENCY PLANNING AS A MYTH

Does your organization
have **formal processes** for:

- Reviewing risks?
- Planning contingencies?
- Drafting scenarios?

1

Please take the poll

2

Answer yes or no

3

Give an example or two



CONTINGENCY PLANNING AS A MYTH

Events witnessed:

- Airstrikes, wars, civil wars, uprisings
- Arrests, threats, assault, kidnapping
- Lawsuits, reputational attacks
- Funding gaps, financial breakdown
- Interpersonal conflicts, etc.

Trends observed:

- Log frames risks & mitigation
- Ad hoc personal security protocols
- Pro forma security & first aid training
- Little to no legal cover or competence
- Rare financial projections or flexibility



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YOUR NEEDS

POOLING EXPERIENCES

1

Types of problems

What unexpected set of events threatened your organization the most, under your watch?

2

Measures taken

What stands out as the two most notable measures you took to mitigate the effects of these threats?

3

Lessons learned

In hindsight, what do you think you should have done differently, either before or during the crisis?



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SCENARIO DRAFTING METHODOLOGY

BRAINSTORM THE CURRENT SITUATION to list the actors, assess the trends, and imagine turning points

DECIDE ON THREE FUTURE SITUATIONS depending on what concerns you want to think through

DETAIL THE LEAD-UP TO EACH SITUATION picturing the sequence of events that shapes that scenario

DETAIL THE FALLOUT OF EACH SITUATION projecting further into the future to look at plausible consequences

DRAW LESSONS FROM THE EXERCISE that will prompt you to take practical measures now



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ROLE PLAYING BRAINSTORM

Physical insecurity

Mental breakdown

Key staff leave

Family concerns

Legal status and mobility

Contracts discontinued

Managerial conflict

Priorities shifting

Burnout

Payments delayed

Impossible transactions

Political threats

Covid case at the office

Traumatic event



ROLE PLAYING BRAINSTORM

HEALTH

Burnout

Mental breakdown

Covid case at the office

COHESION

Traumatic event

Key staff leave

Family concerns

Managerial conflict

PROHIBITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Legal status and mobility

Impossible transactions

Political threats

Physical insecurity

BUSINESS MODEL

Contracts discontinued

Payments delayed

Priorities shifting



ROLE PLAYING SCENARIOS

Methodology:

- Bundling the brainstorm items
- Pulling out three themes
- Formulating essential questions

Scenario 1 **AN UNLIVABLE ENVIRONMENT**

What would be our breaking point?

Scenario 2 **MAJOR FUNDING CRISIS**

How could we realistically adjust?

Scenario 3 **CRITICAL STAFF SHORTAGE**

Where would be the most harmful gaps?



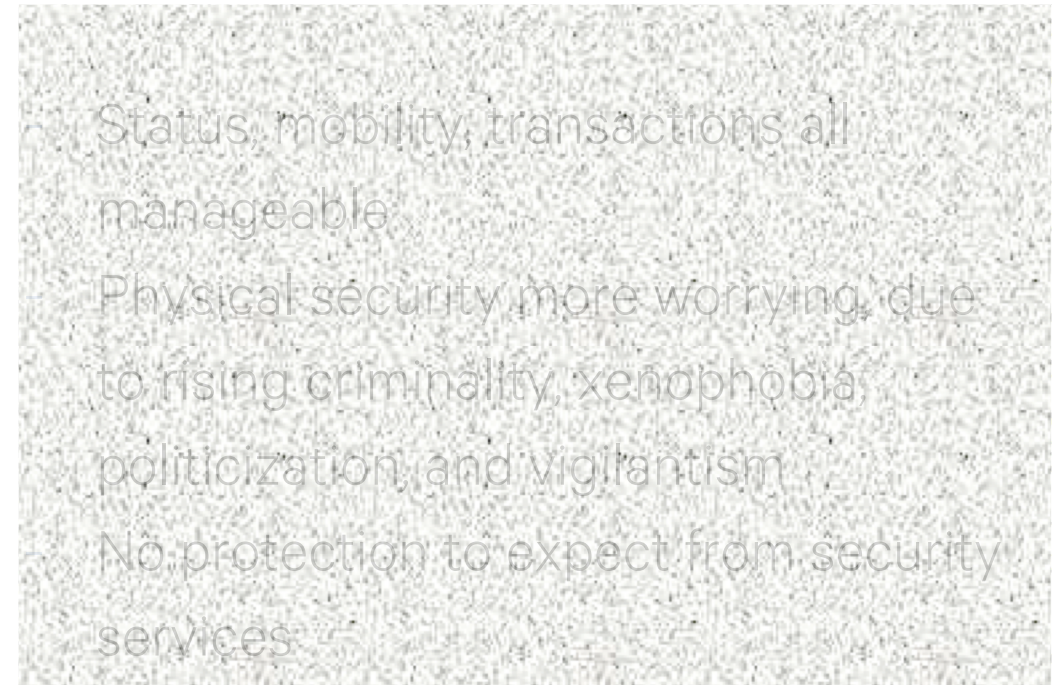
ROLE PLAYING LEAD-UP

Methodology:

- Dive into detail & sequence of events
- Exclude the least relevant dynamics
- Home in on what is most relevant

Scenario 1 **AN UNLIVABLE ENVIRONMENT**

What would be our breaking point?



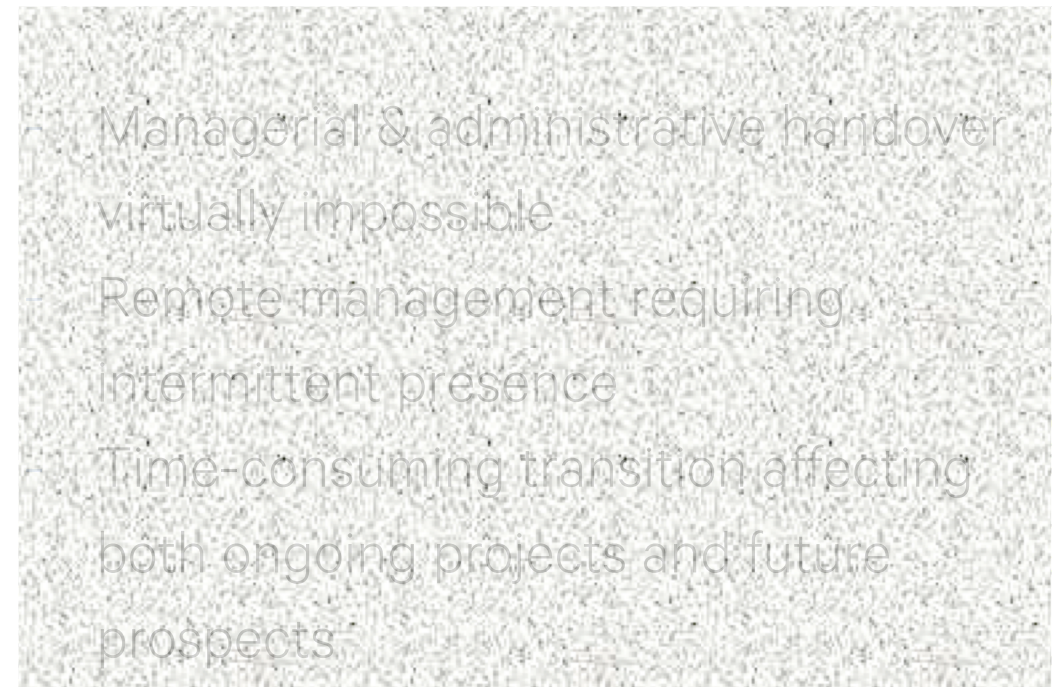
ROLE PLAYING FALLOUT

Methodology:

- Dive into detail & sequence of events
- List problems likely to occur
- Imagine their consequences

Scenario 1 **AN UNLIVABLE ENVIRONMENT**

What would be our breaking point?



ROLE PLAYING

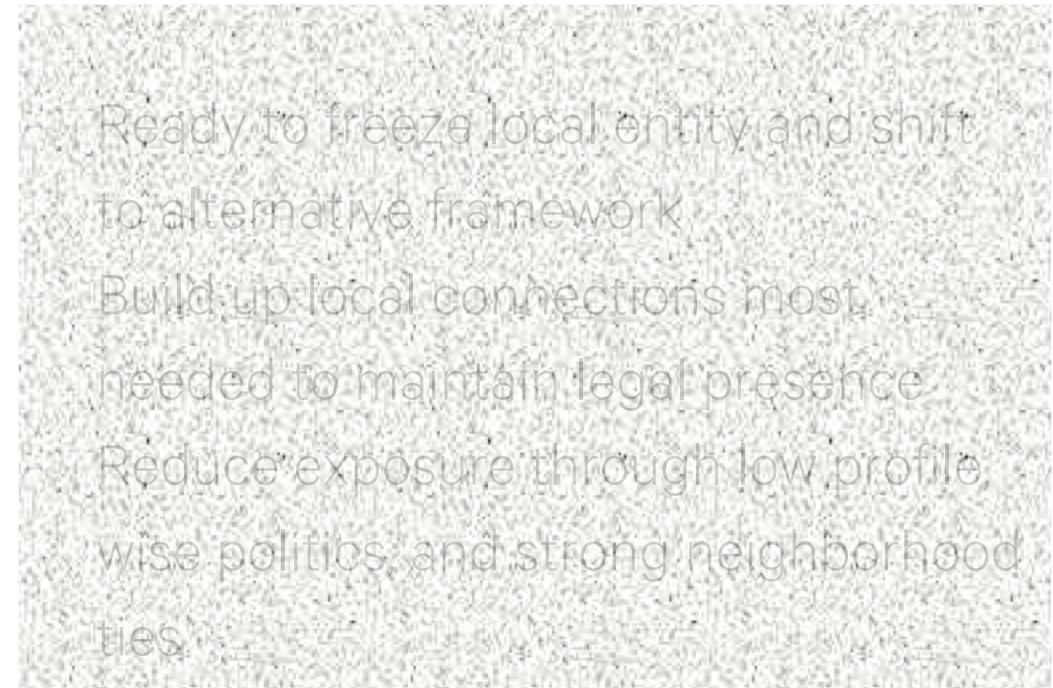
LESSONS LEARNED

Methodology:

- Take each problem separately
- Determine how they can be solved
- Decide on precautionary measures

Scenario 1 **AN UNLIVABLE ENVIRONMENT**

What would be our breaking point?



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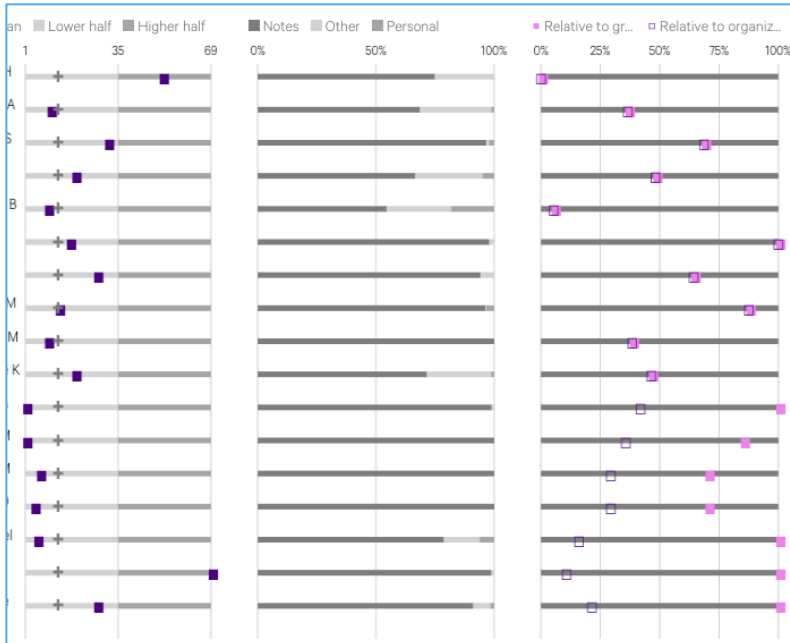
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REUSABLE TOOLS

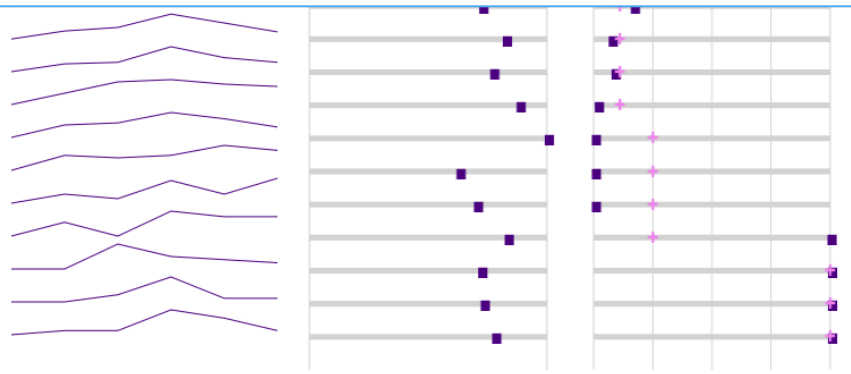
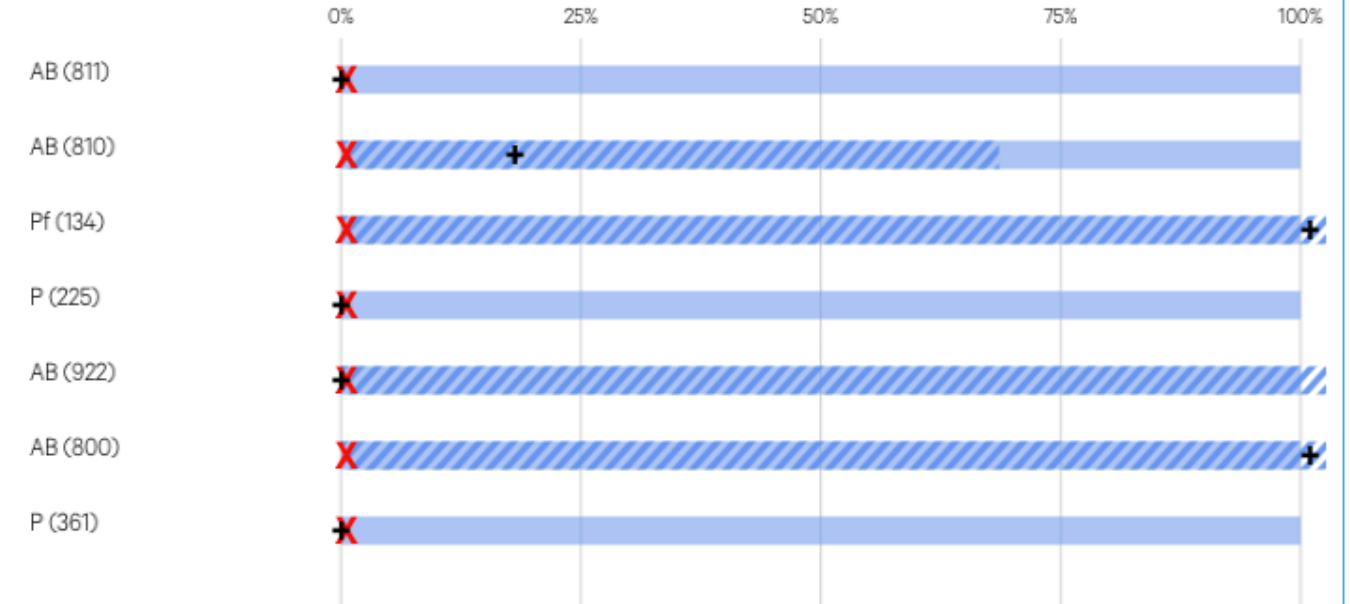
FINANCIAL

PREVISIONS



Cash Burn

X Spent this month + Spent this month Average Monthly Expenses



REUSABLE TOOLS

RISK MATRIX FOR PROJECT VIABILITY

Additional questions:

- Factors of success
- Factors of failure
- The problem begging to be solved

How time consuming is it?	What is the cost/benefit balance?	What is the size of the project?	How relevant to our mandate is it?	What are future prospects?	Total score
Medium	Profitable	Large	Maximum	Positive	10
Medium	Profitable	Medium	Maximum	Neutral	7
Low	Neutral	Medium	Medium	Neutral	6
High	Neutral	Large	Maximum	Positive	6
High	Neutral	Medium	Maximum	Neutral	3
Medium	Profitable	Small	Maximum	Positive	8
High	Neutral	Small	Maximum	Positive	4
High	Profitable	Small	Medium	Neutral	3
Low	Costly	Small	Medium	Negative	1
Medium	Profitable	Small	Maximum	Neutral	6
Medium	Neutral	Small	Maximum	Neutral	4
Low	Profitable	Small	Maximum	Neutral	8
High	Costly	Small	Maximum	Neutral	0
High	Costly	Medium	Maximum	Negative	-1
High	Costly	Small	Maximum	Neutral	0
High	Costly	Medium	Maximum	Neutral	1
High	Costly	Medium	Medium	Neutral	0
High	Costly	Small	Medium	Negative	-3
High	Costly	Large	Maximum	Neutral	2



REUSABLE TOOLS THEMATIC CHECKLISTS

Also visit a service like “Google my activity” to get a sense of how much is being logged by default.

Browser choices

- ☐ Settle on a browser that meets your requirements without raising unnecessary risks. Internet Explorer, for example, is particularly vulnerable. Chrome poses privacy issues. Firefox, meanwhile, is currently a good all-rounder. Search for “safe and private browser” for comparators reviewing all available options.
- ☐ Review your browser settings to switch off any unnecessary sharing of data. Search for “browser security settings” for advice and tutorials.
- ☐ Check email and website addresses whenever their content seems unusual or wrong. Never click links unless you have ascertained their genuine character. That includes downloads shared across messaging apps.
- ☐ Opt out of your web browser’s built-in password management function.

Password management

- ☐ Create your own system to generate strong, long, evolving, and memorable passwords, by following the advice in the paragraph below.
- ☐ Write out by hand the hints you need to remember your system and the passwords it generates. Keep these hints in two

The screenshot shows a web dashboard with a dark blue sidebar on the left and a white main content area on the right. The sidebar contains a search bar at the top, followed by a list of menu items: Culture, Communication, Commitments, Equipment, Security, Digital, In the field, First aid, Benefits, Finance, Hiring, Style, and Q & A. The 'In the field' item is highlighted. The main content area has a search bar at the top, followed by the heading 'In the field'. Below the heading, there is a paragraph of text, followed by a blue link 'What are the worst-case scenarios?'. Below the link, there is another paragraph of text, followed by a blue link 'Which is the best narrative?'. Below the link, there is another paragraph of text, followed by a blue link 'How do we check in?'. Below the link, there is a final paragraph of text.

Search Dashboard

Search

Culture

Communication

Commitments

Equipment

Security

Digital

In the field

First aid

Benefits

Finance

Hiring

Style

Q & A

In the field

Our general advice on building a security system is published on our website, under the title “... must read this memo, even if they are not directly involved in fieldwork in sensitive environments. All managers must also have a thorough discussion with their staff to provide detailed answers to the following questions:

What are the worst-case scenarios?

The starting point for designing an appropriate response is to list the threats we may face. They are specific to the person and context. They also change over time. This conversation must therefore be held frequently, and in response to any change in the surrounding dynamics.

Which is the best narrative?

Our first defense is a narrative that makes sense in worst-case scenarios. How do you present yourself? How do you describe your work? These questions apply to border crossings, as well as to the following detention or even at the office or on the street.

Your narrative will only hold up if it comes close to the truth or if it is supported by facts. Pictures, recordings, conversations, and documents found on you, in your luggage, in your computer and smartphone can either shore up or undermine your claims.

How do we check in?

Managers and their staff must establish a mechanism to maintain a secure line of communication.



REUSABLE TOOLS COMMUNICATION ROUTINES

DEDICATED CHANNELS where the team shares very practical information or forward-looking analysis

PURPOSEFUL TRANSPARENCY regarding problems we encounter or foresee, pulling in staff only when needed

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE in the sense that we frequently tap our team to use all networks and skills optimally

FORMALIZED OUTCOMES taking the shape of memos or policies that turn discussions into guidance and commitments

DISTRIBUTED RESPONSIBILITY among staff who must either solve problems or raise them, never ignore them



REUSABLE TOOLS CRISIS-RELATED INVESTMENTS

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT that goes beyond current contracts, to increase our agility

SPECIALIZED TRAINING in areas such as first aid or cybersecurity, where inhouse competence is insufficient

EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT to deal with accidents, power shortages, communication breakdown, etc.

FINANCIAL “RESERVES” which must never be used to maintain the status quo, but to facilitate a transition

OUR IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT which provides the only true guarantees of security



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Arrest of a colleague

During a protest or riot, a colleague is swept up by the police and held incommunicado at the police station. All you know is that he suffers from a preexisting health condition that could endanger his life.

- What could lead to such a situation?
- What exact shape could this situation take?
- In what ways would it affect your organization?
- What would be the sequence of your reactions?
- How would these reactions plausibly play out?
- What can you learn from the exercise?



Critical funding gap

Your biggest donor or client is eager to renew your contract on an ongoing project. But, due to bureaucratic hurdles, they take six months to do so, leaving the project unfunded in the interim.

- What could lead to such a situation?
- What exact shape could this situation take?
- In what ways would it affect your organization?
- What would be the sequence of your reactions?
- How would these reactions plausibly play out?
- What can you learn from the exercise?



Slander campaign

The director of an NGO you have interacted with seems to loose his mind, publicly and repeatedly accusing your organization of being corrupt, subverted by foreign powers, and abusive with its staff.

- What could lead to such a situation?
- What exact shape could this situation take?
- In what ways would it affect your organization?
- What would be the sequence of your reactions?
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- What can you learn from the exercise?

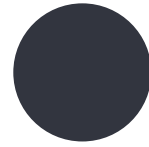
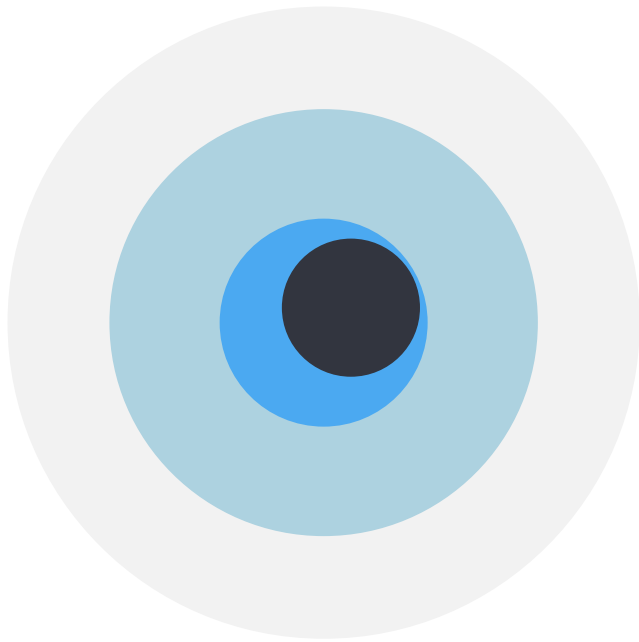


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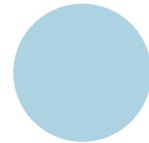
WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, IMPROVISATION



Keep up: build your information system, in ways that ensure it does not function like an echo-chamber



Keep steady: develop a process, to sift information, reduce stress, and guarantee decision-making



Keep ahead: anticipate the worst, reallocate resources, make investments, and communicate relentlessly



Keep safe: cash in on the above, by making security-related decisions that are informed and resourced

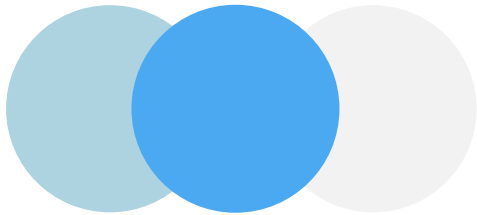


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REFERENCES FOR INSPIRATION



Detailed memos immediately relevant to this course: Drafting scenarios, Crisis management, Fieldwork under threat

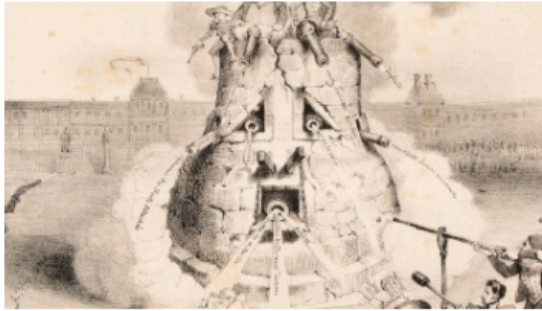
Interviews with experienced professionals from the region: Wrestling with Egypt, Treading the Iraqi minefield, That tremor called trauma

Memos filling important, related gaps: Cybersecurity for non-nerds, Forging consensus, Crisis reporting





TOOL KIT



Crisis reporting

Analytical skills

Tool kit Information feed Analysis Crisis management



Crisis management

Management skills

Tool kit Communication Security system Crisis management



Long-distance interviews

Research skills

Tool kit Fieldwork Interviews Networking



That tremor called trauma

Fieldwork skills



Cybersecurity for non-nerds

Communication skills



Chiseling words: writing like sculp...

Communication skills



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CONCLUSION

WHY PLAN FOR THE WORST

What difference does it make?



CONCLUSION

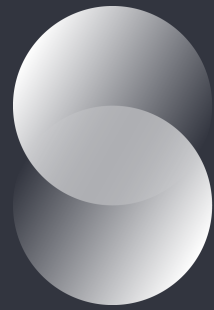
WHY PLAN FOR THE WORST

Chaos
Squandering
Distraction
Survival
Stress
Disunity
Damage
Nostalgia

Liabilities
Investing
Focus
Relevance
Relief
Cohesion
Consolidation
Presence



For the sake of clarity
Less and better information.



synaps