

The Five Dials on one page

Every consequential room runs on five settings that nobody in it remembers choosing. They decide how far ahead the room looks, whose reading of the problem counts, what gets resolved too early, what could change the frame, and who can stop the decision. The dials make those settings visible, so that they become a choice.



DIAL	SET NARROW, THE ROOM...	SET WIDE, THE ROOM...
Horizon	decides for the next report or the current mandate. The longer future is mentioned and does not alter the choice.	writes down which future governs the decision, and checks whether a longer horizon would have changed it.
Perspective	works inside one framing of the problem, usually the one that arrived with the paper. Other readings are heard as objections.	lets no recommendation advance until a materially different reading of the problem has been in the room.
Integration	resolves the tension early. One demand wins, the other becomes a risk to manage, and the design carries only the winner.	states both demands in their strongest form before any synthesis, and keeps both alive in what gets built.
Feedback	measures performance inside the frame. The indicators improve; the question of whether the frame is right never comes up.	records what evidence would make it reconsider the frame itself, and sets a date to look at that evidence.
Standing	consults widely and decides narrowly. People are asked for input and hold no authority over the outcome.	knows, on one page, whose judgement and which knowledge can alter or stop the decision, and whose can only advise.

Not every dial belongs wide. A board monitoring a clinical trial is right to hold Standing narrow: the statistician's read of interim data should outweigh the sponsor's investment and the patient's hope. The settings are context-dependent. The failure the dials catch is the setting held in place by habit, long after anyone could say why.

TABLE 9.1 · THE COMPASS FOR ONE LIVE DECISION

Run one decision down the rows

Take one live decision and run it down the rows. If the answer in the last column is no, you probably changed the conversation, not the architecture.

DIAL	THE QUESTION IT ASKS	THE MINIMUM MOVE	THE TEST OF CONSEQUENCE
Horizon	What future actually changes this choice?	Write down which horizon governed the decision	Did the longer horizon alter the choice?
Perspective	Which materially different reading of the problem is absent?	No recommendation advances in a single framing	Did the second frame change how the problem was defined?
Integration	What are we trying to resolve that may need to stay in tension?	Both demands written in strongest form before synthesis	Did both demands survive into the design?
Feedback	What evidence would make us reconsider the frame itself?	Record the disconfirming evidence and a review date	Could the governing frame itself have changed?
Standing	Whose judgement, and which knowledge, can alter the outcome, and which can only advise?	One page of decision rights, objection, consent, and dissent handling	Could this knowledge have changed or blocked the decision?

Three probes, from any seat

None of these needs authority over the room. Each returns something the room could not otherwise see.

PROBE 1 Open one meeting with the question the agenda is built to avoid: what are people carrying today? It returns what the agenda would have buried.	PROBE 2 Map one live decision through the Five Dials. It returns whose incentives hold the current setting.	PROBE 3 Find one forum where someone is asked for input but holds no authority over the outcome, and ask what it would take to give them standing. It returns what a sponsor would have to pay.
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Two questions to carry

What is possible given how the dial is set, and what would it take to turn it? Underneath it: who benefits from the current setting? The sign: nobody in the room remembers setting it.

What is this room asking one person to carry that the architecture should be carrying? The sign: the same person translating, meeting after meeting.

The dials are a compass. They will not tell you what to do next. The book sets out what a room built on purpose is made of, and how to tell one from a costume.