Where could serious organisational harm develop, persist and escalate?

HOW TO USE Score independently first. Discuss the largest disagreements and the connections between vulnerabilities - not simply the total.

Scoring key. Circle one score (0-4) for each prompt. Use evidence, not instinct. Red does not mean failure is likely.

0-1 Green: resilient or minor vulnerability	**2** Amber: mixed evidence or potential vulnerability	**3-4** Red: significant or serious vulnerability requiring attention

Internal (f)actors

People, power, culture and internal systems

		CIRCLE SCORE
1	Power is concentrated in people who can override normal challenge or controls.	0 1 2 3 4
2	Bad news is filtered, softened or delayed as it moves upwards.	0 1 2 3 4
3	People may face personal or career costs for challenging successful or powerful colleagues.	0 1 2 3 4
4	Performance pressure or incentives could encourage unacceptable shortcuts or risk-taking.	0 1 2 3 4
5	There are areas where a serious problem could remain hidden from senior management.	0 1 2 3 4

KEY QUESTION **Who can make something happen even when others think it is a bad idea?**

External (f)actors

Customers, investors, advisers, partners and market pressures

		CIRCLE SCORE
1	Important external stakeholders benefit from us continuing to appear successful.	0 1 2 3 4
2	We depend heavily on customers, investors, lenders, suppliers or partners who can shape decisions.	0 1 2 3 4
3	External advisers may be economically or reputationally invested in our existing direction.	0 1 2 3 4
4	We tend to discount critics, former employees, journalists or other uncomfortable external voices.	0 1 2 3 4
5	Industry norms, competition or market expectations could normalise behaviour we would otherwise question.	0 1 2 3 4

KEY QUESTION **Who outside the organisation benefits from us continuing to believe things are going well?**

Regulatory (f)actors

Boards, assurance, compliance, auditors and formal regulators

		CIRCLE SCORE
1	Those expected to stop harmful activity may lack information, independence or authority.	0 1 2 3 4
2	Commercial priorities can override or dilute risk, legal, compliance or professional concerns.	0 1 2 3 4
3	Oversight bodies rely heavily on information selected or interpreted by management.	0 1 2 3 4
4	Responsibility for a key risk is fragmented, making it easy to assume someone else is dealing with it.	0 1 2 3 4
5	We could comply with formal rules while still creating significant harm.	0 1 2 3 4

KEY QUESTION **Who has both the information and the authority to say "stop" - and why might they fail?**

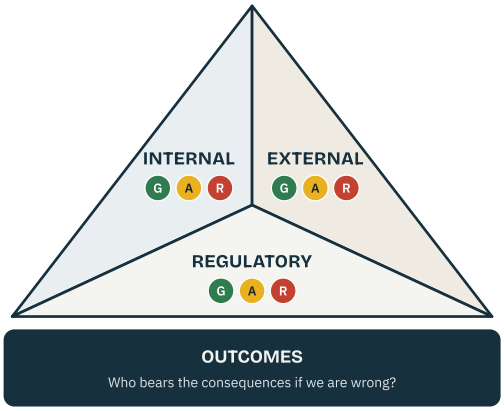
Based on Stephenson, Bolden & Witzel (2026), The Dark Pyramid, *British Journal of Management*. doi:10.1111/1467-8551.70057. Scores indicate areas for inquiry, not a validated probability of failure.

INTERPRET THE PATTERN - NOT THE TOTAL

Look for what reinforces what

The Dark Pyramid is designed to reveal relationships and reinforcing conditions, not to produce a single probability score.

> Do not average away disagreement. A cluster of amber/red vulnerabilities that reinforce one another across different faces of the pyramid can be more important than a high total score.



> **ON THE PYRAMID** Circle G / A / R on each face using judgement, not a mechanical average.

What to look for

- Where are amber/red scores clustered?
- Which vulnerabilities reinforce one another across faces?
- Where do executives disagree most - and why?
- Who would score this differently if they were in the room?
- Which safeguard should stop a harmful pathway - and why might it fail?
- Who receives the benefit, and who bears the consequences?

ACTION PLAN (REPEAT AS NECESSARY)

Choose a vulnerability and trace how it could develop through the system.

Trigger	**What starts it?**
↓	
Enables	**What allows it to continue?**
↓	
Reinforces	**Who or what benefits, legitimises or amplifies it?**
↓	
Fails to stop	**Which safeguard might not work - and why?**
↓	
Harm	**Who bears the consequences if we are wrong?**

Action to break the pathway

Action _____ **Owner** _____

Evidence of change _____ **Review date** _____

Do not ask only: "Where are the red flags?"
Ask: "How could these (f)actors combine and reinforce one another?"

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