

CYNEFIN

NOT EVERY PROBLEM IS THE SAME

DIFFERENT SITUATIONS DEMAND DIFFERENT THINKING AND DIFFERENT RESPONSES.

COMPLEX

CAUSE AND EFFECT
ARE UNCERTAIN
AND EMERGENT



CLEAR

CAUSE AND EFFECT
ARE EVIDENT



COMPLICATED

CAUSE AND EFFECT
EXIST BUT REQUIRE
EXPERT ANALYSIS
TO DETERMINE



THE CYNEFIN FRAMEWORK



CHAOTIC

NO OBVIOUS
CAUSE AND EFFECT
IN THE MOMENT



CONFUSION

UNCLEAR WHICH
DOMAIN APPLIES



UNDERSTAND
THE NATURE OF
THE SITUATION



CHOOSE THE RIGHT
APPROACH FOR THE
RIGHT CONTEXT



IMPROVE DECISIONS,
OUTCOMES AND
RESILIENCE



ADAPT TO CHANGE,
UNCERTAINTY AND
SURPRISE



Not every problem is the same

Different situations require different ways of thinking and acting.



For professional discussion and reflection • Illustrative, not prescriptive • Cynefin supports contextual understanding and decision-making and should be applied alongside appropriate organisational, operational and risk-management processes.



What is the Cynefin Framework?

A sense-making framework for choosing an appropriate response to different situations.

Complicated

Knowable cause and effect. Requires expert analysis and specialist knowledge.

Confusion

Unclear which domain applies. Diagnose the situation before choosing a response.

Developed by **Dave Snowden**

Cynefin is a sense-making framework for understanding different types of situations and selecting an appropriate response.

Clear

Known cause and effect. Follow established procedures.

Complex

Cause and effect are uncertain and emergent. Explore, learn and adapt through experimentation.

Chaotic

No clear cause and effect. Act immediately to establish stability, then make sense.

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The five domains of the Cynefin Framework

Different decision environments require different responses.

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Clear

Known cause and effect. Follow established procedures.

Key characteristics

-  Known cause and effect
-  Established procedures
-  Repeatable and predictable
-  Managed through standard processes



Sense

Identify the situation using established information and procedures.

Categorise

Recognise and categorise the situation using known criteria.

Respond

Apply the established procedure or control measure.

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Complicated

Knowable cause and effect. Requires expert analysis and specialist knowledge.

Key characteristics



Cause and effect is knowable



Requires expert analysis and specialist knowledge



Often multiple interacting factors



Requires time, resources and data



Sense

Gather and review relevant information, data and expert input.



Analyse

Use specialist knowledge and analysis to understand the situation.



Respond

Implement the most appropriate and proportionate response based on the analysis.

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Chaotic

No clear cause and effect. Act immediately to establish stability, then make sense.

Key characteristics

-  No clear cause and effect
-  High urgency and uncertainty
-  Immediate action required
-  Situation can change rapidly



Act

Take immediate action to establish stability and contain the situation.

Sense

Gather information as the situation stabilises and begins to clarify.

Respond

Implement a more structured response as understanding improves.

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Confusion

You do not yet know which domain you are in. Diagnose before deciding.



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Applying Cynefin

Match the situation to the domain and use the appropriate approach.



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Aviation security examples

Different situations require different approaches.

Clear

- Routine passenger screening
- Following standard operating procedures
- Known risks with proven controls

Apply best practice and standard procedures.



Complicated

- Insider threat investigation
- Coordinating a major event
- Technical system failure analysis

Use expert analysis and detailed planning.

Complex

- Evolving threat networks
- Changing geopolitical environment
- Interdependent stakeholders

Explore, learn and adapt through experimentation.

Chaotic

- Active security incident or attack
- Sudden major disruption
- Loss of key systems or communications

Act immediately to establish stability.

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Decision-making in practice

Match the situation, choose the right approach and be ready to shift as conditions change.



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Continuous learning and adaptation

Use experience to improve understanding and decision-making over time.



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Key takeaways

Use Cynefin to make better, more informed security decisions.



Understand the context

Identify which domain you are in before deciding.



Use the right approach

Apply proportionate methods for each domain.



Expect movement

Situations can shift between domains.



Be prepared for the unexpected

Build flexibility, resilience and contingency plans.



Integrate multiple perspectives

Combine operational insight, expert analysis and collaboration.



Learn and improve

Use experience and feedback to strengthen future decisions.

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