

THE ARCHITECTURE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE · AN AUDIT OF HUMAN NATURE™ SERIES
COMPANION TOOL · ARTICLE 1

The Governance Observability Check

Seven questions to test whether your organization can still see itself clearly

Companion tool to Article 1 of The Architecture of Good Governance — An Audit of Human Nature™ Series

Organizations rarely become blind because they lack information.

They become blind when important signals are filtered, normalized, fragmented, or prevented from reaching the people with the authority to act.

The Governance Observability Check is a short reflection tool for boards, executives, internal auditors, risk leaders, and governance professionals.

For each question, consider not what your policies say should happen, but what actually happens.

THE SEVEN QUESTIONS

1

Can bad news travel upward intact?

When uncomfortable information moves from operations toward senior leadership or the Board, does it arrive with its significance and context intact?

ASK: *Where could information be softened, delayed, summarized away, or filtered before reaching decision-makers?*

2

Can frontline reality challenge executive narrative?

When operating experience contradicts what leadership believes about the organization, which one tends to prevail?

ASK: *When was the last time information from deeper in the organization materially changed a leadership assumption?*

3

Are exceptions still treated as exceptions?

Repeated workarounds, extensions, overrides, and risk acceptances can gradually redefine what the organization considers acceptable.

ASK: *What has become normal here that would have concerned us two years ago?*

4

Do our metrics reveal reality—or merely describe performance?*A dashboard can be technically accurate while providing an incomplete picture of organizational health.***ASK:** *What important condition could deteriorate significantly without appearing in our current metrics?*

5

Can people safely challenge what leadership wants to believe?*Observability depends on more than information systems. It depends on whether people believe uncomfortable truths can be raised without disproportionate personal cost.***ASK:** *What information might employees hesitate to tell senior leadership today?*

6

Do we connect weak signals across organizational boundaries?*Important patterns often appear first as seemingly unrelated issues across functions, geographies, projects, or reporting periods.***ASK:** *Who is responsible for connecting signals that individually appear insignificant but collectively may indicate drift?*

7

Does seeing lead to examination?*Visibility has little governance value if uncomfortable information is acknowledged but repeatedly rationalized, deferred, or accepted without challenge.***ASK:** *When evidence contradicts our assumptions, do we investigate the assumption—or explain away the evidence?***THE GROUND TRUTH QUESTION***After considering all seven areas, ask one final question:***What could be happening inside our organization today that our current governance system would struggle to show us?****Do not answer this question quickly.***The difficulty of answering it may itself tell you something about the organization's observability.***HOW TO USE THIS TOOL**

This is not intended as a compliance scorecard.

Use the seven questions as prompts for discussion among a board, executive team, audit committee, risk function, or internal audit team.

Rather than immediately assigning ratings, ask participants to provide specific examples supporting their answers.

Differences in perception may be more informative than agreement.

If senior leaders believe bad news travels freely while people closer to operations believe otherwise, that gap is itself a governance signal.

Good governance begins with seeing.

The Governance Observability Check is part of The Architecture of Good Governance, an Audit of Human Nature™ series by Roger Ngong.

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